

# **OFF SEASON**

by  
Glenn Gers

FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

[writingforscreens.com](http://writingforscreens.com)

EXT. BLUE GROTTO HOTEL - RAINY NIGHT

It's raining in paradise.

The Blue Grotto: a swanky late-1950s-pastel-tropical-mondo-Jet-Set Florida hotel, now gone to seed.

Rain stipples the glowing turquoise water of the pool. Palm branches flutter in the storm, lit from below by garish outdoor lights: watermelon and lemon and violet, reflected in a thousand glittering wiggles on the wet driveway.

A car slashes up to the front doors. Waits. The horn honks. No luck.

The trunk pops.

MILTON - balding and middle-aged - gets out, holding a raincoat over his head and cursing.

INT. BLUE GROTTO - LOBBY - DIRECTLY AFTER

Dripping wet, Milton lugs his bags across the empty lobby to the front desk.

As he splatters past, we see JACKSON MAYHEW, age 10, lying on the carpet, observing from behind a sofa.

There is no one at the desk. A small TV is tuned to local news: ASHLEY MANSON, 30ish perky TV reporter, is wearing a yellow slicker and shouting over the storm.

Milton rings the bell.

Jackson comes out of hiding, walks around behind the desk, turns down the TV. He is barely visible there.

JACKSON

Can I help you?

MILTON

(Hesitantly)

I have a reservation. Milton Loomis.

JACKSON

Welcome to the Blue Grotto Hotel.

Jackson tries to reach a stack of registration cards on the counter but can't. He looks around for something to stand on.

MILTON  
Are you supposed to be doing this?

JACKSON  
I own this hotel.

MILTON  
Ah. Nice place.

JACKSON  
Thank you.

MONA SANCHEZ, the Cuban-American desk clerk, comes out of the office, flustered. She's near 40, shy, sweet, often nervous.

MONA  
I'm sorry - I didn't think anyone -  
was - thank you, Jackson, I'll take  
it from here. Good evening.

JACKSON  
Reservation under Loomis.

MILTON  
(At the same time)  
Reservation under...um - Loomis.

MONA  
Please fill that out, Mr. Loomis.

Jackson leans against a wall to watch Milton fill out a registration card. Milton tries to ignore him.

MILTON  
Hell of a night, huh?

MONA  
They say it'll blow over by  
tomorrow.

Jackson keeps staring at Milton. Milton panics, opens a suitcase and takes out something in a plastic bag.

MILTON  
Hey, want to see something really  
neat? Got something here I bet  
you'll like.

Milton unveils a toy car, still in its box. He pulls the car out, switches on the motor, and kneels to send it zooming toward Jackson.

The car rolls past Jackson's feet and smashes into the wall, flipping over. Jackson stands looking down at it with a frozen, stoic expression.

Mona hastily comes around the counter to pick up the car and return it to Milton, giving Jackson a shove as she passes.

MONA

Go find your aunt, honey.

He does. Milton looks after the little kid walking out through the big empty lobby. Turns back to Mona:

MILTON

What? I don't understand.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE – SOON AFTER

A bar with gaudy plastic "Polynesian theme" decor. There are no patrons.

Behind the bar, PATTY WHEELER, mid-30s, is making a drink in a cocktail shaker, pouring it into a glass. She looks down.

PATTY

Cherry?

Jackson, sitting on the floor near her feet, holds up two fingers.

Patty raises her eyebrows, drops in two maraschinos and hands him the drink with a napkin. He sips it.

JACKSON

I think we've got a guy who launders drug money checking in.

PATTY

You think so.

JACKSON

Yeah. But I think he's in big trouble.

PATTY

Too much fabric softener?

JACKSON

I think he's been double-crossing his bosses down in South America, and they found out. So they kidnapped his family, and sent him

(MORE)

JACKSON (cont'd)  
 one of his children's ears as a  
 warning.

PATTY  
 (Studies him a moment)  
 You're not watching Nickelodeon  
 that much any more, are you?

Milton comes in, stops. Looks around.

MILTON  
 You open?

PATTY  
 Absolutely. It's just been a  
 little slow since the Rat Pack  
 broke up.

MILTON  
 Hell of a night, huh? Scotch,  
 rocks.

Jackson indicates this is the guy he was talking about,  
 making a snipping gesture on his own ear.

Patty gestures for Jackson to lie low and stay cool as she  
 pours Milton's drink, which he sips and swirls, relishing  
 gratefully.

MILTON  
 Mmm.

PATTY  
 Rough day?

MILTON  
 I get stuck waiting five hours in  
 the Chicago airport. Not a whole  
 lot to do there after you eat the  
 really bad nine-dollar hot dogs. I  
 finally make it down here: I'm in  
 the middle of a monsoon.

PATTY  
 It's supposed to blow over by  
 tomorrow morning.

MILTON  
 Then - there's this kid at the  
 front desk.

PATTY  
 (Uneasy)  
 Did he do something?

Jackson is shaking his head no.

MILTON

No. He just looks a little down in the dumps. So I figure: my kid already has way too many toys, I'll give this one the motorized car I bought at the airport...

PATTY

Oh, no.

MILTON

Oh yes.

PATTY

What happened?

MILTON

Nothing. I just feel terrible. You want to make a kid happy, you tear his psychology open. Jesus.

Patty checks Jackson, who is avoiding her eye. He's got that frozen, stoic look on his face again.

PATTY

I'm sure it's all right.

MILTON

His aunt or something works around here?

PATTY

Yeah.

MILTON

Tell her I feel terrible.

Patty forces a reassuring smile while, sitting near her feet, Jackson stares at the bottles.

INT. PATTY'S ROOM - AFTER MIDNIGHT THAT NIGHT

Jackson's in pajamas, on Patty's bed (but not under the covers) watching TV with the lights out, volume low.

VOICES ON TV

"How can we ever thank you?"  
 "You don't have to. I'm...an  
 angel."

He changes channels and we hear machine-gun fire, explosions. Patty's key rattles in the lock.

Jackson hastily offs the TV, leaping from her bed into his motel cot, which is turned-down so he can dive directly under the covers and pretend to sleep.

Patty lets herself in and leaves the hall door open until she can switch on the bathroom light.

PATTY

You're not fooling anyone.

Lit only by the bathroom light, Patty gets ready for bed: taking off shoes and jewelry, brushing out her hair, collecting her nightclothes. This continues during:

JACKSON

That guy in the bar tonight?

PATTY

What guy?

JACKSON

You had one customer all night.

PATTY

What about him?

JACKSON

I was wrong about that drug thing.

PATTY

You think?

JACKSON

Yeah. But I figured out the truth.

PATTY

Don't tell me.

JACKSON

Escaped mental patient.

PATTY

I asked you not to tell me.

JACKSON

I thought you ought to know. So you can be on your guard.

PATTY

It's late, Jackson. Go to sleep.

JACKSON  
Don't let him near any small cute  
animals.

PATTY  
Sleep.

JACKSON  
He does terrible things to little  
fuzzy animals.

PATTY  
(Warning now)  
Jackson.

Pause. Jackson lies, facing away from her, eyes open.

In the self-conscious silence, Patty removes her make-up in the bathroom. She glances at Jackson, in bed. Begins to sing quietly to herself.

After a moment:

JACKSON  
Can you do the other one?

PATTY  
What other one?

JACKSON  
The one Mom liked.

Patty hesitates then, sweet and sad, sings as she continues her routine:

PATTY  
*I remember you  
You're the one who made my dreams  
come true  
A few kisses ago  
I remember you  
You're the one who said I love you  
too  
I do, didn't you know?*

Jackson settles under the covers, shuts his eyes.

INT. MEL'S OFFICE – THE NEXT DAY

MEL BRESKIN, 40ish, sits behind a desk cluttered with piles of mail, broken objects waiting to be fixed, accounting printouts. Patty sits across from him, determined.



PATTY

You told me I could sing in the lounge if I worked the bar, and now you won't let me. That makes you a liar.

MEL

No - it makes me a coward. The lying is just a side-effect.

PATTY

What have you got to be scared of? I'm the one who's maybe making a fool of herself.

Mel gets up and closes the door. Confidentially:

MEL

That fella who checked in last night? He's from the HCA Corporation, which owns this hotel. He's inspecting us. If I don't figure out some way to bring in more guests, they're closing us down. Redecorating didn't work. So whatever we do with the lounge, it has to be some sort of...attraction.

PATTY

Thank you, Mel.

MEL

I'm just saying -

PATTY

I only took this job so I could sing.

MEL

The free room had nothing to do with it.

PATTY

Mel: I can't eat a room. I can't buy gasoline with a room. I can't -

MEL

I understand. There are many things in life you can't do with a room. But you keep all your tips.

PATTY

There are no tips. Nobody comes in the bar.

MEL

So there would be no one to sing to.

PATTY

Exactly - that was the idea: I can work up an act under minimum pressure, and you get a bartender you don't have to pay.

MEL

And her ten-year-old nephew.

PATTY

(A slightly dangerous pause)

That happened. We're all dealing with it.

MEL

I only meant that since you're supporting someone now, a rent-free room is very valuable to you.

Pause.

PATTY

You know what I'm famous for, Mel?

MEL

Nothing.

PATTY

In situations of adversity - when I'm in a really bad position and somebody thinks they've "got" me - I do self-destructive stuff, like quit jobs.

MEL

You're bluffing.

PATTY

You think so?

She gets up, angry and terrified in equal measure. Goes to the door.

MEL

So long.

PATTY

You're bluffing. Mona told me nobody else wanted this job. I heard you had alcoholics turn it down.

Pause. Mel remains poker-faced. Patty waits. Nothing.

She shrugs, turns and opens the door.

MEL

Okay, wait.

PATTY

(Immensely relieved)  
You won't be sorry.

MEL

But you cannot do karaoke and I'm not paying musicians.

PATTY

Gotcha. Deal.

CLOSE UP – ENVELOPES AND PHOTOS – A FEW DAYS LATER

Patty's hands, opening a thick stack of 9x12 envelopes, removing:

x 10 glossy photos with resumes on the backs, and audio cassettes for bands of all descriptions: country, polka, brass ensembles, grunge, dixieland, funk...

EXT. BLUE GROTTO – POOL – THE SAME TIME

A sparse handful of GUESTS and a few palm branches torn off by the storm sit around the pool.

Patty's on a deck chair, sorting through the photos.

On the next deck chair over, Jackson is lying with his head where the feet should be and his feet where the head should be. Taking photos as she sets them aside, examining them.

JACKSON

These are all from one classified ad?

PATTY

There's a lot of people out there desperate to make it in show business.

JACKSON

Yeah. Good thing you're not one of them.

Patty gives Jackson a look; he shrugs.

Milton comes out of the hotel, puts his suntan lotion and towel on a chair, takes off his robe, goes self-consciously to the diving board.

He takes a step and a hop and cannonballs in.

SAM

Hey! You moron.

The resulting wave has swamped SAM CLAUSNER as he swims, knocking his big straw sun-hat off.

*[During the course of the movie Sam wears a variety of hats, sporty but not silly. No fez or solar topee.]*

Sam is a rotund white-haired senior citizen swimming in Bermuda trunks and a Hawaiian shirt. He dog-paddles after the hat.

Milton emerges spluttering at a wall, which he clings to, gasping. When Milton clears his eyes of water, he finds himself face-to-face with Jackson.

Milton lets go of the side, panicky, pushing into a sloppy backstroke. He collides with Sam, de-hatting him again.

SAM

Jesus: don't tell me - when you're not on vacation, you're an air traffic controller.

Jackson and Patty glance briefly at the fuss in the water, then Jackson takes a new handful of photos from Patty's pile.

PATTY

Why don't you go for a swim?

JACKSON

I'm afraid of the dead body.

PATTY

What dead body?

JACKSON

The one Mel put under the drain.

She sets aside her work. He's staring through the chlorinated water at the wavering black square of drain-grate at the bottom.

PATTY

Mel? The hotel manager?

JACKSON

He killed the bartender before you and put her in the pool drain.

PATTY

You don't really believe that, do you?

JACKSON

I don't know.

PATTY

Mel is a jerk, but he can't even fire anybody, let alone kill them.

JACKSON

That's why he killed the last bartender. Because he couldn't fire her.

PATTY

Why do you always make up such horrible things about people?

JACKSON

I don't.

PATTY

You do. Name me one thing you think about people that isn't creepy.

Slight pause. Jackson looks around.

JACKSON

That guy over there. In the hat?

PATTY

Mr. Clausner?

JACKSON

He's really Santa Claus.

PATTY

Santa Claus.

JACKSON

Right. He's on vacation. This is his off-season, you know.

PATTY

He doesn't have a big white beard.

JACKSON

He doesn't want everyone to know who he is. That's why he's staying here, too, instead of a good hotel.

PATTY

Makes sense.

(Studying Sam:)

Where's Mrs. Claus? And don't say she's dead.

JACKSON

No. She's alive.

(Beat)

But they're talking about getting a divorce.

PATTY

You are a very disturbed little boy.

(Awkward silence)

I'm sorry.

Jackson watches Sam across the pool:

JACKSON

He started drinking and he hit her. So they're on separate vacations. She went to Paris. She's spending all his money. He's afraid she's gonna fool around with some young French guy.

PATTY

All right - just cut it out. I'm going inside. I want you to concentrate on telling pretty lies that make people happy, like everyone else does.

JACKSON

Okay.

INT. PATTY'S ROOM - DAY - A DAY OR TWO LATER

Patty puts the finishing touches on getting dressed up. Jackson is channel-surfing on Patty's bed. The room has 8x10s and cassettes piled all over.

PATTY

(Sits on the bed, mutes  
the TV)

Okay, here's the deal. I've got to go out for a few hours, and meet with some people who might be able to put together a band for me.

JACKSON

What kind of band?

PATTY

That's what we're going to talk about.

JACKSON

Make sure it's not heavy metal.

PATTY

Good thinking.

JACKSON

Heavy metal bands put secret messages in their music that make you worship Satan and drink blood and kill yourself.

Patty is staring at him.

JACKSON

I saw it on the news.

(Beat)

You think there really is a "Satan"?

PATTY

Yeah. He's the guy in charge of the TV news.

(Hands him a slip of  
paper)

This is who I'm meeting and where and when. Did you notice the Murchison family when they checked in yesterday?

JACKSON

The ones who came here from another galaxy in human form to destroy the planet Earth?

PATTY

Yeah. Them. I set up a play date for you and the Murchison kids while I'm out.

JACKSON

A "play date"?

PATTY

That's what it's called, isn't it?

JACKSON

I haven't been on a "play date" since I was five.

PATTY

Hey - gimme a break.

JACKSON

Sometimes it's really obvious that you don't have kids.

PATTY

I do have a kid. I have you. You don't want to admit you're a kid - fine. I set up a Childhood Anonymous Group meeting for you and the Murchison children this afternoon.

EXT. BLUE GROTTO - POOL - LATER THAT DAY

Jackson sits with ZACHARY, 12, and IRMA, 7. Zachary reads a violent comic book and broods. Irma plays with a bedraggled, formerly-glamorous doll. Jackson, on good behavior, is bored.

They are all pretending not to hear MR. and MRS. MURCHISON, sitting not far away, arguing loudly:

MR. MURCHISON

- it's not a bargain to spend fifty-three dollars a person to go to a theme park -

MRS. MURCHISON

It's ten percent off with the discount coupons -



MR. MURCHISON  
We can't afford it! End of  
discussion!

IRMA  
Your Mom is really pretty.

JACKSON  
She's not my Mom.

ZACHARY  
My Mom says your parents are dead.

JACKSON  
Yeah.

Thoughtful kid silence.

IRMA  
Dead means they've gone away and  
they're not coming back, right?

JACKSON  
Right.

IRMA  
Sometimes I wish mine were dead.

JACKSON  
No, you don't.

IRMA  
They fight all the time.

Irma is restless and sad. Jackson watches her, glances at  
the parents. Then:

JACKSON  
You see that old man out there? In  
the hat?

They look across the pool. Sitting at a table under an  
umbrella, reading a newspaper, is Sam Clausner.

IRMA  
Yeah.

ZACHARY  
What about him?

JACKSON  
That's Santa Claus.

IRMA

Really?

ZACHARY

(Studying Sam, skeptical)

He's too skinny.

(Realizing what that  
implies:)

And there is no Santa Claus.

JACKSON

He's on vacation.

Zachary and Irma study Sam, in some awe.

A few COLLEGE KIDS playing with a spongy football miss a throw and it comes to rest at Sam's feet.

Sam kicks it into the pool, where it sinks.

INT. BLUE GROTTO - LOBBY - A DAY OR TWO LATER

Sam comes in the front doors, checks in at the desk.

SAM

Any messages?

MONA

(Checks)

Nothing today, Mr. Clausner.

Sam turns to go to the elevators and finds Irma Murchison standing behind him.

She holds out a folded sheet of paper.

IRMA

Here's a list of the presents we want.

SAM

(Takes the list)

What am I supposed to do with it?

IRMA

Take it back with you to the North Pole.

SAM

The North Pole.

Sam gives Mona a look. She finds this adorable. Sam doesn't.

IRMA  
He told us you were Santa Claus.

SAM  
Who did?

EXT. BLUE GROTTO - FRONT STEPS - THAT AFTERNOON

ASHLEY MANSON the TV reporter, fully coiffed and dressed to report, is storming away from the hotel steps, toward her CAMERA CREW - who are by the TV van, annoyed, putting away equipment. Mel follows:

MEL  
I'd just like you to consider -

MANSON  
(turns, furious)  
Don't even bother! I'm not interested, and in fact I may tell the police you called in a fraudulent report -

MEL  
I didn't say "hostage"! I said "hotel"! We have a major hotel situation developing.

MANSON  
We tape incoming calls, Mr. Breskin. I can check what you said.

Beat.

MEL  
You do?

Manson walks to the truck, pulling off her ear-piece.

MANSON  
Call the office, tell them the truth - and they'll send an intern.

Mel watches, frustrated.

Just then Patty comes out of the hotel, hurrying past.

MEL  
Patty!

PATTY  
 (Stops, reluctant)  
 Hey, Mel - listen, I'm running late  
 -

MEL  
 Patty - you notice anything?

PATTY  
 Yeah, Mel, they're great new steps  
 -

MEL  
 (Indicating truck)  
 No - that's Ashley Manson! The TV  
 reporter!

PATTY  
 (Takes a look)  
 Oh. Yeah, I didn't recognize her  
 without that "Breaking News" thing  
 in front of her.

MEL  
 We're trying to get the hotel some  
 publicity.

PATTY  
 Good, Mel, but I gotta run -

MEL  
 It's going to be impossible to get  
 that good publicity if all our  
 guests are complaining that your  
 nephew is making up cockamamie lies  
 about them.

PATTY  
 (Shocked)  
 What?

INT. BLUE GROTTO - LOBBY - SOON AFTER

Patty hurries back in, upset, heading for the elevators.

All of a sudden, she stops and thinks. She goes back to the  
 sofa Jackson tends to lie behind.

Kneels on it, looks down over the back. There he is.

JACKSON  
 Hi.

PATTY  
Did you tell the Murchison kids  
that Mr. Clausner is Santa Claus?

JACKSON  
Kind of.

PATTY  
Look, you can't go around telling  
stories about people.

JACKSON  
Are you mad?

PATTY  
No. I'm not mad. But Mel is. Mr.  
Clausner complained. The little  
girl was bothering him about  
presents.

JACKSON  
I'm sorry. I didn't think she'd do  
that.

PATTY  
What did you think?

JACKSON  
I don't know. They were sad. You  
know: they're just kids. They need  
stuff like that to believe in.

Pause. She studies him, concerned.

PATTY  
Yeah. Those crazy kids, huh?

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE SAM'S ROOM - DAY

Patty comes to Sam's door. Uncertain. Gets up her nerve,  
knocks.

SAM  
(Through door)  
One minute.

He opens the door. We can see inside: several hats are  
visible on the dresser, the chair.

SAM  
What can I do for you?

PATTY  
My name is Patty Wheeler. I work  
here, in the bar.

SAM  
The one with the kid.

PATTY  
Yeah. I wanted to apologize.  
He'll stop making up stuff about  
you, I promise.

SAM  
No harm done.

PATTY  
Thank you. I appreciate it.

SAM  
(Holds up a palm)  
Over and out.

She nods, but doesn't say goodbye. Or anything. He waits,  
polite and confused.

SAM  
Is there something else?

PATTY  
I don't know.

SAM  
Well. I don't know, either. One  
of us should know. Otherwise, I  
could go back inside.

PATTY  
Okay, there is. Something else.

Sam waits.

PATTY  
I was wondering...if you might be  
willing to do me a favor.

SAM  
I'm listening.

PATTY  
Jackson lost his parents in a car  
crash a few months ago.

SAM  
They told me at the office.

PATTY

I'm not really sure how to handle it. But I think these stories he makes up are some way - I don't know how - that he's dealing with it.

SAM

I'm with you so far. What's the favor?

PATTY

Well, since he seems to have chosen you for some reason - I was hoping you could just be - kind of - available.

SAM

You're not asking me to pretend to be Santa Claus, are you?

PATTY

I don't know if "pretend" is the -

SAM

Miss. I work hard eleven and a half months out of the year. During my lousy two weeks off, I don't think I need to take on a job the Salvation Army otherwise gives to bums and winos. Even for some tragic kid.

PATTY

So you're...really not Santa Claus, are you?

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE - THE NEXT DAY

Jackson is at a table in the corner, piling up an elaborate structure of plastic ashtrays taken from all the other tables.

Across the room, at the bar, Patty is discussing Lounge Operations with Milton and Mel. We can't really hear what they're saying, but we get the idea Milton is inspecting. He jots notes on a pad.

Jackson gingerly tries to set another ashtray on the top of the pile.

The entire thing collapses, ashtrays clattering all over the floor.

Jackson winces. He looks over at the three adults. Patty gives him a head-tilt, suggesting he scam.

INT. BLUE GROTTO - LOBBY - SOON AFTER

Sam is walking toward the elevators when he passes a set of glass doors to the pool - notices Jackson sitting out there, all by himself.

Sam stops and observes the solitary little boy.

He mulls it over.

Decides to move on, keeps walking toward the elevators.

After a few steps, he hesitates. Looks back at the small lonely figure outside.

EXT. BLUE GROTTO - POOL - DIRECTLY AFTER

Sam comes out, seemingly casual. Sits near Jackson. Jackson pretends not to notice.

They sit in silence a moment, watching the Murchison kids playing in the shallow end. Irma has on water wings. The parents are arguing.

SAM

Did you have anything you wanted to talk to me about?

Jackson turns and looks at him. Sam waits.

JACKSON

I was wondering. About the elves.

SAM

What about them?

JACKSON

I was wondering if they really were elves.

SAM

What else would they be?

JACKSON

Children, who were stolen from their families so you could take them to the North Pole and use them as slave labor.



Sam looks at him, shocked.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE - THAT EVENING

No customers. Patty's cleaning glasses. Sam comes in, sits at the bar.

SAM

What do you think about baseball caps?

PATTY

Baseball caps?

SAM

You think a baseball cap is a hat?

PATTY

I don't know. I never thought about it. I guess so.

SAM

I don't. I think a baseball cap is a novelty item. A promotional giveaway. Unless you're an actual baseball player. You wear a hat, it signifies something. That's where the expression, "He wears a lot of different hats" comes from. You're a fireman, an Indian chief, you wear a certain hat.

Patty, trying to be a good bartender but having no idea of the point, nods. Sam looks at her looking at him.

SAM

I'll have a Manhattan.

As Patty makes the drink, Sam continues:

SAM

I make hats.

He shows her the label inside his hat brim:

SAM

Clausner Hat Company of New Jersey. My grandfather started it in 1912. I took over about forty years ago. Right away, we get the sixties. Hats are out. Okay. We weather the storm. I keep us in business during the worst two decades in the

(MORE)

SAM (cont'd)

history of hats. What do I get as a reward? The hat apocalypse: baseball caps. All of sudden, everybody is putting something on their head, and it's not a hat.

She serves him the drink.

SAM

Could I get an extra cherry in this?

(as she drops one in:)

So all right: it's a fad, like

(gestures)

those Klik-Klak toys or The Contract With America. Ten years go by. The baseball cap is crossing gender lines, it's erasing class distinctions. It's like some kind of monstrous international conspiracy to put me out of business.

PATTY

Why don't you just make them?

SAM

Because it's wrong. You can't sell something just because people will buy it. That's how we ended up with drug abuse. Junk bonds. The Domino Theory.

(Sips his drink.)

I'll tell you something else, if I was manufacturing beards, I wouldn't make those little goatees, either.

Sam broods. Patty is silent, polite.

SAM

The point is, I make hats - not house calls. That little boy has serious problems. I don't know what to do with that. I'm not good with kids. This one had a horrible loss - you can't fix it with a fedora.

Sam gets off his barstool, takes out his wallet and finds a slip of paper.

SAM

I called some people I know in New York, got some names for down here. This man is a psychologist who specializes in children. That's the address.

He hands her the paper, then puts a \$20 on the bar.

PATTY

I appreciate your going to all this trouble. But I can't really afford anything like this right now.

SAM

I already paid for it. A couple sessions. See how it goes.

PATTY

That's very kind of you. But I can't accept. I'll figure out something.

SAM

I'll get my office to figure out some way to make it a tax write-off.

He finishes his drink, and heads for the door. After him:

PATTY

Well...thank you.

SAM

Think of it as an early Christmas present.

INT. PATTY'S CAR - DAY - A DAY OR TWO LATER

Patty is driving. Jackson sulks and shifts in the passenger seat.

JACKSON

I really don't need to see a doctor.

PATTY

He's a doctor you just talk to. It makes you feel better.

JACKSON

I feel fine.

PATTY

There's nothing bothering you?

JACKSON

Of course something is bothering me.

PATTY

Well - you can talk to him about it.

JACKSON

What's bothering me is having to talk to him.

INT. DR. ZIMMER'S OFFICE - SOON AFTER

It features a good number of children's artworks, and toys for revealing play: puppets, dolls, blocks.

Dr. Zimmer, a mild man in his late 30s, sits behind his desk. Jackson is in a chair, clammed up, avoiding the doctor's gentle gaze.

ZIMMER

I hear you like to make up stories.

No response from Jackson.

ZIMMER

Would you like to tell me some of the stories you make up?

Still nothing.

ZIMMER

Why don't you make up a story about me?

This gets Jackson interested. There's a dangerous look in his eye. But he keeps his mouth shut.

ZIMMER

Okay. I tell you what. I'll go first. I'll make up a story about you.

Jackson looks at him, challenging: you're gonna play on my turf?

ZIMMER

A story about Jackson.

Dr. Zimmer can't think of a damn thing. Jackson is getting some fun out of this.

ZIMMER  
A story. Um.

The phone rings.

ZIMMER  
Saved by the bell. I'm going to get that - you think about your story for when it's your turn.  
(Picks up the phone)  
This is Dr. Zimmer. Oh. Margaret. No, I'm with a patient. I didn't want to let the machine pick up - okay. Yes. No. No, those kids are mine this weekend - I can't talk about this now - no - there is no fight - I have - later. Later. Yes.

He hangs up. Upset. Controls it. Smiles.

ZIMMER  
So. Your mom tells me -

JACKSON  
My aunt.

ZIMMER  
I'm sorry.

JACKSON  
Patty is my aunt. My mom and dad are dead. That's why I'm here.

ZIMMER  
Right. I'm sorry. That was a mistake.

Pause.

JACKSON  
Do you have kids?

ZIMMER  
Yes. I have two daughters.

JACKSON  
Maybe you were thinking about them.

ZIMMER  
Why do you think that?

JACKSON

Well - your wife just called, and she's the mom for your kids. So maybe you were thinking about them, and you called Patty my mom.

Dr. Zimmer is nonplussed by the insight.

INT. PATTY'S CAR - DRIVING HOME

They drive in silence a moment. Then:

PATTY

Did you like Dr. Zimmer?

Jackson shrugs.

PATTY

What did you talk about? You don't have to tell me.

JACKSON

Not much. He's divorced. His wife left him for a face-lift doctor, and she won't let him see the kids.

Patty abruptly pulls over. Jackson is shocked, even Patty hardly believes the uncontrollable anger that's suddenly coming out. She's trying really hard not to let it:

PATTY

I'm sorry. I just don't know what to do any more. You have to stop making up all this ugly stuff about people, Jackson. If you're unhappy - just tell me. Just say it. I'm a big girl - I can handle it. But we're in some serious trouble here, because I don't want you to be crazy, Jackson. I won't let that happen. So: what is this all about?! What are we supposed to do?!

Pause.

JACKSON

I didn't make it up. He got a phone call while I was in his office.

INT. DR. ZIMMER'S OFFICE - LATER

Dr. Zimmer is at his desk, idly playing with a puppet: watching it move on his hand, making the mouth open and shut. We get the sense of a man letting his inner child escape in a private moment.

The phone rings. He takes the puppet off his hand as if caught, picks up.

ZIMMER

This is Dr. Zimmer.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE - THE SAME TIME

Patty is on the phone behind the bar. Agitated.

PATTY

I'm sorry to bother you like this, but I need to know if you're having trouble with your marriage.

Pause.

ZIMMER

Who is this, calling?

PATTY

I'm sorry: Patty Wheeler. I brought my nephew Jackson to see you about an hour ago. In the car on the way home, he told me -

ZIMMER

- that my wife left me for a cosmetic surgeon. Yes. That's true.

Silence. Patty shakes her head, pours herself a drink as they talk, upset at herself:

PATTY

Damn it. Damn it - damn it! So dumb.

ZIMMER

Don't take it too hard. We probably shouldn't have gotten married in the first place.

PATTY

(Not even noticing his  
joke)

I just - I can't -

(Beat, then finally:)

Listen, I know you only talked to  
him once, but: do you think maybe I  
should give Jackson up and let  
somebody else raise him?

ZIMMER

Who?

PATTY

I don't know. I think even  
strangers would be better for him  
than I am.

ZIMMER

I don't think that's likely.

PATTY

You don't know me. I'm not  
entirely stable.

ZIMMER

No?

PATTY

Ask anyone I've ever had a relation-  
ship with.

(Beat)

Of course, that's mostly abusive,  
possessive, dishonest men - but  
they all tell me I'm not stable.

ZIMMER

Learning often makes one unstable.

PATTY

That's true.

ZIMMER

It's today's page on my Three-  
Hundred-And-Sixty-Five-  
Psychological-Insights-A-Year desk  
calendar.

PATTY

I ought to get one of those.

ZIMMER

They're not for sale to the general  
public.



PATTY

(Finally letting it out)  
I just wasn't prepared to have a  
traumatized ten year old boy  
dropped in my lap all of a sudden.

ZIMMER

Well, you should have been. I  
don't know what's wrong with you.

Patty smiles a bit, grateful for the gently mocking tone -  
but keeps confessing,

PATTY

I was always the "bad" sister, you  
know? Sandy - Jackson's mom - she  
went to college, and got a job and  
a husband and a house and a kid.  
Meanwhile, I get involved with some  
really faulty religions, and some  
less-than-perfect guys. And at  
some point I'd always look around  
at my motel room or my trailer home  
and think: well - now I've hit  
bottom and things can only get  
better. I won't make this mistake  
again. Which I never did. But you  
know what I discovered? There's  
always a new mistake you can make,  
and an unlimited number of  
alternative bottoms you can hit.

Dr. Zimmer listens, sympathetic, silent.

PATTY

And then just when I pull out of  
this endless tailspin and decide  
it's my last chance to go after my  
real dream - I get this phone  
call...

She drifts off into silence.

ZIMMER

What was it?

PATTY

My sister and her husband were  
dead! And there's a ten year old  
kid I have to take care of!

ZIMMER

I meant: what was your dream?

She won't go that far. The "therapy session" has helped, she's getting tough again:

PATTY

It's stupid. Dreams are really stupid.

ZIMMER

Yeah, I've always thought so.

PATTY

Are you going to charge me for this?

ZIMMER

No. I wasn't really listening.

PATTY

(Smiles)

Okay. Thank you.

INT. PATTY'S ROOM - SOON AFTER

Jackson is on Patty's bed, channel-surfing.

Patty lets herself in, sits on the bed and unexpectedly hugs Jackson. Tight.

He shuts off the TV with the remote then tosses it aside - without ever letting go of her.

INT. MEL'S OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY

Mel is working at his desk. There is a knock and Sam comes in.

Behind Sam, through the open door, we can see Milton at the front desk with Mona, examining records on the registration computer.

MEL

Mr. Clausner. Come on in.

Mel gets up, gestures for Sam to sit, shuts the door.

SAM

I got a note at the desk that you wanted to see me.

MEL

(Returning to his desk)

I heard that some people on the

(MORE)

MEL (cont'd)  
 staff were saying you were Santa  
 Claus.

SAM  
 Yeah.

MEL  
 I wanted to apologize.

Sam waves it off. Pause. Mel is nervous, fooling with the broken hardware on his desk, avoiding Sam's gaze.

MEL  
 Funny how much people want to  
 believe in things, isn't it?  
 (Pause)  
 I mean, even when everybody knows  
 there is no Santa Claus...some kid  
 makes up a crazy rumor, and even  
 the grown-ups start secretly  
 thinking: "Gee - you know...what  
 if?"

Sam waits, patient. Mel looks at Sam. Quietly:

MEL  
 You're not, are you?

SAM  
 Not what?

MEL  
 Santa Claus.

SAM  
 What if I was?

Mel looks uncomfortable. Sam studies him.

SAM  
 You want a present.

MEL  
 No.

SAM  
 You think I can give you something.

Pause. Mel hesitates, then goes for it:

MEL  
 I'm not much to look at. And I may  
 be a big fish here, but...  
 (Beat. Confessing:)  
 (MORE)

MEL (cont'd)

I don't know if you've noticed  
Mona. The woman who works at the  
front desk.

SAM

You want Santa Claus to give you a  
woman? Santa Claus is not an  
escort service!

As Sam, shaking his head, gets up and goes out:

MEL

No! I mean - of course not. I  
just had a crazy idea that...

Sam passes Milton and Mona, who look through the open door at  
Mel. Mel calls out to Sam's retreating back:

MEL

We'll take care of that...other  
...the light...bulb...thing. Right  
away!

INT. PATTY'S ROOM - SOON AFTER

Jackson is alone, watching TV. There's a brisk knock on the  
door. Jackson "mutes".

JACKSON

Who is it?

SAM

(Through door)

The ghost of Christmas Yet To Come.

Jackson shuts the TV off, hesitantly goes to open the door.  
Sam is standing in the hall.

SAM

May I come in?

Jackson lets him in. Sam looks at Jackson for a long moment.  
Then:

SAM

You ever hear of Katherine Hepburn?

JACKSON

No.

SAM

Movie star. Great cheekbones. She  
used to say about the newspapers:

(MORE)

SAM (cont'd)

"I don't care what they write about me, as long as it isn't true." You get the message?

JACKSON

No.

SAM

I need you to stop telling people I'm Santa Claus. Because I really am Santa Claus.

Pause.

JACKSON

You are?

SAM

Yes. So obviously - it's kind of awkward if you go around telling everybody.

JACKSON

You are not.

SAM

I am too.

JACKSON

Prove it.

SAM

How do you want me to prove it, with a driver's license?

JACKSON

Fly.

SAM

I'm not a superhero. I fly one night a year, in a sleigh with special reindeer. Otherwise, I'm mostly working behind a desk.

JACKSON

If you're Santa Claus, then why won't you give those kids some presents?

SAM

First of all: I'm on vacation.

JACKSON

You work one day a year.

SAM

I deliver one day a year. The rest of the time I'm manufacturing and doing inventory and making a list and checking it twice. Secondly: it's not Christmas. I can't go around giving people stuff every day. It'd be chaos. Thirdly: it's sort of your fault.

JACKSON

My fault?

SAM

Yeah. I'm here incognito. In disguise. You tell people who I am, they ask me to give them a gift. If they get it - that's a de facto admission that I am Santa Claus.

JACKSON

De facto?

SAM

My lawyers say it all the time. Means "in fact."

JACKSON

You have a lawyer?

SAM

I have a team of lawyers.

JACKSON

So those kids are not going to get their presents because you are Santa Claus. That seems kind of lousy.

SAM

Yes. It does. What are you going to do about it?

JACKSON

Me?

SAM

Well, I just got done explaining why I can't operate here and now. You, on the other hand, might be able to act as my representative.

JACKSON

Are you going to turn me into an elf?

SAM

No. Would you leave it alone about the elves? I'm offering you an opportunity here. An entry-level position to help people. You interested?

JACKSON

Yes.

SAM

Good.

(Takes out Irma's list)

This is the little girl's list -

JACKSON

Don't you have to swear me in or something?

SAM

What do you mean?

JACKSON

Isn't there some kind of - magic?

SAM

Magic?

Jackson waits. Sam gestures at him strangely.

SAM

Okay - you're done.

JACKSON

That's it? I don't feel any different.

SAM

I'm not in charge of how you feel.

JACKSON

Well - if I can't see it or hear it, how do I know it's there?

SAM

Most of the good magic is very quiet. There's less risk of fire. It's magic: you want it or not?

JACKSON

I want it.

SAM

Then you have it. Look, these kids are checking out tomorrow morning. We gotta get on the job.

JACKSON

What do we do?

INT. BIG TOY STORE - LATER

Sam is pushing a cart, with Jackson riding in it, checking Irma's list, glum.

SAM

What's the matter? You haven't said a word in a half-hour.

JACKSON

I'm a little disappointed.

SAM

Why?

JACKSON

We're in a toy store.

SAM

I was going to take you to the supermarket, but then I remembered that we need to get toys, not pork chops.

JACKSON

Anybody can just buy toys.

SAM

Anybody can. Not everybody does.

JACKSON

It doesn't make you Santa Claus.

SAM

Doesn't rule it out, either.

JACKSON

Don't you have a whole factory in the North Pole?

SAM

That's nine thousand miles away.



JACKSON  
What about magic?

SAM  
The magic is listening to people.  
The magic is wanting to give. The  
magic is that I don't get a hernia  
every winter.

JACKSON  
Stop - here's one.

Jackson points and Sam steers him to the shelf to take an  
item. Hands it to Sam.

SAM  
What is this?

JACKSON  
It's Commander Zero. He got caught  
in a neutron storm and turned into  
a mutant starfighter. He's on a TV  
show. He has chainsaw teeth.

SAM  
I noticed.

Sam tosses the toy in the cart and pushes Jackson again,  
scanning the shelves with dismay.

SAM  
Look at this. Weapons of mass  
annihilation - dolls that look like  
hookers - baseball caps -

JACKSON  
Why don't you stop it?

SAM  
How am I supposed to stop it?

JACKSON  
You're Santa Claus!

SAM  
Shh!

People are looking at them. Sam smiles, shrugs, moves along.

JACKSON  
Sorry.  
(Beat)  
What's wrong with baseball caps?

As he says this, Jackson idly grabs a baseball cap from a rack they're passing, and puts it on his head – backwards. He turns to Sam.

Sam stops the cart and studies him, grim. Jackson realizes he's done something wrong.

Sam takes the cap off Jackson's head and replaces it with his own hat: a spiffy Sinatra-esque porkpie, perhaps. It's a little too big for Jackson, settling low on his ears and at his eyebrows.

But Jackson stares at Sam from under it, aware of the solemnity of the moment.

SAM  
Feel the difference?

Jackson looks into the middle-distance, checking the "feel". A smile dawns and he sits up straighter.

JACKSON  
Yeah. I do.

Sam takes the hat off Jackson and puts it back on himself; as he frisbees the baseball cap away, disgusted, and begins to push the cart again:

SAM  
The hat makes the man. Caps are  
for dunces.

Pushing the cart down around a corner, disappearing from view, he launches into his lecture from the bar:

SAM (CONT'D)  
You wear a hat, it signifies  
something. That's where the  
expression...

INT. BIG TOY STORE - REGISTERS - SOON AFTER

Sam rolls them past the end of an aisle to a check-out area: a row of registers attended by uniformed CLERKS.

Sam hesitates, studying them.

JACKSON  
What is it?

SAM  
You wanted to see some magic. I'm  
figuring out which one. Stay here.

Sam leaves Jackson with the cart and goes to talk confidentially to a CLERK. They look over at Jackson.

Sam comes back, and wheels Jackson through the Clerk's register without paying. The Clerk gives Jackson a wink.

EXT. TOY STORE PARKING LOT - SOON AFTER

As they put the gifts into the trunk of Sam's car:

JACKSON  
What did you tell him?

SAM  
I told him the truth.

JACKSON  
Which truth?

SAM  
What do you mean, little Buddha?

JACKSON  
Did you tell him you were Santa Claus, or did you tell him I'm some pathetic kid we have to convince you're Santa Claus?

SAM  
Everybody asks for magic, but they don't treat it very well when they get it.

INT. SAM'S ROOM - THAT EVENING

Sam and Jackson are wrapping the gifts.

JACKSON  
I have a question.

SAM  
Shoot.

JACKSON  
Every Christmas, millions of kids get things they didn't ask for. Stuff they don't even want.

SAM  
Parents. They have no faith in me, so they go out and buy stuff.

JACKSON

(Nods)

Okay, here's another one:

SAM

What? Hold that.

JACKSON

Why isn't your wife here with you?

Long silence. Sam look at Jackson, steady.

SAM

I know what you're doing.

Sam goes to the phone, dials, hands it to Jackson.

JACKSON

(Into phone)

Hello? Is this...Mrs. Claus? How are you. Oh. Okay. Yes.

As Jackson listens, Sam gives him significant looks: see?

JACKSON

(Into phone)

Thank you. You, too. Yes, I will. Bye.

(Hangs up. To Sam:)

She says I'm supposed to remind you to -

SAM

(in unison)

- "put on sunscreen even if it seems cloudy." I know.

JACKSON

She was nice.

SAM

Yes, she is.

(Pause. Serious:)

Now, I know what happened to you, and I know why you make up stories. You're pushing all the ugly buttons until you get someone to tell you life isn't ugly.

Jackson won't meet his eye. He's got that stoic expression again, looking down.

SAM

Well, life is life. It's not ugly and it's not pretty. It just is. You know what's ugly? People. And you know what's good? People. You have to decide if you're going to spend your time adding to the weight of ugly in the world, or the weight of joy. I'm in the joy business. You want to help – or you want to keep putting me to the test?

INT. BLUE GROTTO – CORRIDOR – SOON AFTER

The elevator opens. Sam holds the door open as Jackson steps out carrying wrapped presents.

Sam stays in the elevator.

SAM

Okay: deliver. 227.

JACKSON

Me?

Sam holds the elevator door, which tries to close.

SAM

Of course you. I told you, I need plausible deniability.

JACKSON

But I don't know what to do.

SAM

You ring the doorbell. Ho-ho-ho. You leave.

JACKSON

What if they want to know where I got this stuff?

The elevator is buzzing, doors closing.

SAM

Just don't tell them about me.

JACKSON

What do I tell them?

SAM

I don't know. Think of something.

JACKSON

Sam!

Sam waves goodbye as the doors close.

Jackson reluctantly turns and carries the gifts down the hall.

As he approaches Room 227, the sound of Mr. and Mrs. Murchison fighting can be heard through the door.

Jackson knocks, the fighting stops. Mr. Murchison opens the door, angry. In the background, Mrs. Murchison is packing.

MR. MURCHISON

What?

Jackson looks at him over the presents, trying to think fast.

INT. BLUE GROTTO - LOBBY - THE NEXT MORNING

Mona is at the front desk. Mel is there too - partly because he likes to be near her, and partly because Milton is working at Mel's desk.

[Though we see him now and then through the open door, Milton pays no attention to the following scene.]

The Murchisons come to the front desk with their luggage. They kids carry their gifts.

MR. MURCHISON

You kids go put your stuff in the car.

MONA

(Preparing the bill)

We hope you enjoyed your stay, Mr. Murchison.

MR. MURCHISON

We did, thank you. Sorry about all the noise.

(Checks the kids are gone)

Mr. Breskin, I just wanted to thank you personally. I told the boy to tell you, but I had to say it myself, too.

MEL

(No idea what he's talking about)

That's fine.

MR. MURCHISON

You didn't have to go and buy my kids those presents.

Mona looks at Mel, considerably surprised.

MEL

No. Well. Um - we thought...

MR. MURCHISON

I wish we could pay you back or something. Those are expensive toys. And my kids just can't get over - you know: how Santa gave them what they wanted. Really made me think.

Mel glances at Mona, who is clearly impressed.

MEL

Well...we like to think of the Blue Grotto as more than just a hotel. It's also...

(Groping:)

Christmas. All year long.

Murchison signs the bill. As he hands it to Mona:

MR. MURCHISON

You've got a helluva boss here.

(Shaking Mel's hand:)

If there's anything I can do for you - just say the word. I mean that.

Murchison shakes Mel's hand vigorously, heads for the front doors. Mel watches him go, thinking...

Then he turns to see Mona, regarding him with new eyes. Awkwardly:

MEL

I guess maybe I don't let anyone at work see the - whole Mel Breskin.

MONA

Guess you don't.

MEL

(Distracted)

Excuse me.

EXT. BLUE GROTTO — FRONT DOORS — DIRECTLY AFTER

Mel hurries to catch Murchison at his car, getting a business card out of his wallet.

MEL

Mr. Murchison? Actually — there is something you can do for the hotel.

(Hands him card:)

This woman is a local TV reporter. She might want to hear about "Santa".

MURCHISON

I read ya. Will do.

Pleased, Mel turns and heads back inside.

INT. LOCAL TV NEWS OFFICE — THE NEXT DAY

The NEWS DIRECTOR is working at his desk. Ashley Manson hurries in carrying a videotape. She goes to his VCR and cues up the tape as they talk:

MANSON

I just did a satellite interview you're gonna love.

NEWS DIRECTOR

A satellite interview?

MANSON

With a family in Ohio. They were here a couple days ago on vacation. At that place where the Manager is always busting me to do a puff piece? They say Santa Claus is staying there.

NEWS DIRECTOR

Are they nuts?

MANSON

Who cares?! It's cute, it's local, and it's exclusive. We can lead with it on the six.

Manson pushes "Play": on the TV, we see the Murchison Family in an Ohio TV studio, stiff and awkward:

MURCHISON

...and then all these gifts were delivered to our room the night

(MORE)



MURCHISON (cont'd)  
before we checked out. It was like  
a...miracle.

The News Director looks at Manson, impressed. Manson nods.

CLOSE-UP - TV SCREEN

Ashley Manson reporting in front of the Blue Grotto:

MANSON  
Here's a question I bet you never  
thought of asking: where does Santa  
Claus go on his summer vacation?  
Well, according to one Ohio family,  
when Kris Kringle wants to get away  
from the North Pole for a couple of  
weeks of fun in the sun - he comes  
down to America's vacation capital,  
southern Florida! And he stays  
here, at the Blue Grotto Hotel.

INT. MEL'S OFFICE - THE SAME TIME

Mel, Mona and Milton are all watching the little portable TV,  
rapt.

CLOSE-UP - MEL'S PORTABLE TV SCREEN

Ashley Manson holding out the mike to interview Mel in the  
lobby, who is all stiff and phoney.

MEL  
Well - Ashley - I can't really  
comment on the identity of any of  
our guests. But I will say that  
some of them are very jolly.

Telephoto shots of Sam at the pool - obviously taken without  
his knowledge.

ASHLEY MANSON (V.O.)  
The Murchison family, who recently  
stayed at the Blue Grotto, called  
me at WFLA to say this man -  
reportedly a hat manufacturer from  
New Jersey - is actually a  
surprisingly slim Saint Nicholas -  
and that even though he's supposed  
to be resting up during the off-  
season, he took some time out to  
spread a little Christmas cheer!

INT. SAM'S ROOM - THE SAME TIME

Sam watching the report, dismayed.

MURCHISON (V.O.)  
 ...and then all these gifts were  
 delivered to our room the night  
 before we checked out. It was like  
 a...miracle.

CLOSE-UP - SAM'S HOTEL ROOM TV SCREEN

Customers interviewed outside the toy store:

CUSTOMER #1  
 I heard he always went to  
 Disneyworld on vacation. Doesn't  
 he work for them?

CUSTOMER #2  
 Oh yeah - Santa's a party animal!  
 I saw him hitting the bars out by  
 the airport last week.

ASHLEY MANSON  
 Where do you think Santa goes for  
 his vacation?

CUSTOMER #3  
 (A very little kid)  
 The North Pole.

ASHLEY MANSON  
 No - where does he goes when he  
 isn't at the North Pole?

CUSTOMER #3  
 The North Pole.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE - THE SAME TIME

Patty and Jackson watching on the bar TV, horrified.

ASHLEY MANSON (V.O.)  
 And what does the man himself say?

CLOSE-UP - LOUNGE TV SCREEN

Sam comes out of the hotel lobby to find a mike and camera in  
 his face.

ASHLEY MANSON

We just want to ask if you really  
are Santa Claus -

SAM

What are you, crazy? Leave me  
alone.

Sam puts his hand over the lens.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE - THE SAME TIME

Jackson jumps off his bar-stool and runs out.

MANSON (V.O.)

Well, maybe he's...Claus-trophobic.  
Back to you, Carol and Jim!

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE SAM'S ROOM - SOON AFTER

Jackson knocks on Sam's door.

JACKSON

Sam?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SAM'S ROOM - THE SAME TIME

Sam is packing. This is painful; he can't look the kid in  
the eyes. They talk through the door:

SAM

I can't talk now, kid. Go away.

JACKSON

I'm sorry, Sam.

SAM

I know you are, kid.

Silence. Sam sighs. Opens the door and lets Jackson in.

Jackson sees the suitcase. Stunned. It hurts.

He watches Sam resume packing. After a moment:

JACKSON

Are you ever going to come back?

Sam hesitates, avoiding Jackson's eye - knowing he's hurting this little boy, not wanting to.

SAM

Sure.

Sam keeps packing, refusing to look at Jackson. Abruptly, with a vulnerability we haven't yet seen:

JACKSON

Can I come with you?

SAM

What? No.

JACKSON

I could help you out - like we did!

SAM

What about your aunt? Just gonna leave her?

JACKSON

She didn't really want me. I think I'm ruining her life.

Sam stops packing and looks at Jackson for the first time in the scene.

SAM

Hey. That woman loves you. You're a little kid and you don't know anything. Enjoy that - it doesn't last.

Jackson shrug-nods, looking down, struggling to keep away the tears, getting that frozen, stoic expression. Sam sees it. Uncomfortably:

SAM

Anyway...I'm going back to the North Pole.

Jackson looks away, as if Sam is embarrassing them both.

SAM

You don't have the right - boots, or...anything.

Jackson shakes his head, not looking at Sam, his tone implying, "Please - don't add insult to injury with lies":

JACKSON

Sam.

They stand there, across the room from each other, Jackson looking away, both of them in pain.

Sam sighs. He lifts his suitcase off the bed and turns it upside down, dumping the contents.

SAM

Okay! Fine. What the hell - I'll stick around a few more days.

Jackson looks up, stunned, as Sam gruffly begins putting his clothes back in the closet.

JACKSON

Really?

SAM

Yeah. Sure. I'll figure out some way to handle it.

(Beat. Trying to be cheery:)

How bad can it get?

INT. NATIONAL TV NEWS OFFICE - THAT DAY

The MANAGING EDITOR is at his desk. A REPORTER comes in carrying a sheet of paper.

REPORTER

Have you heard about this thing in Florida?

MANAGING EDITOR

What thing?

REPORTER

Local news. "Santa Claus" is taking his summer vacation at some third-rate hotel.

MANAGING EDITOR

What is it, Bob: we have no actual news today?

As the Managing Editor takes the paper and looks it over, skeptical:

REPORTER

Everybody who checks in tells this old guy their wishes and they get what they ask for. A hundred-dollar scooter, a trip to

(MORE)

REPORTER (cont'd)  
Yellowstone Park – I heard one  
woman supposedly got a '64 Mustang.

MANAGING EDITOR  
You don't really believe this crap,  
do you?

REPORTER  
People love miracles, Ray.

MANAGING EDITOR  
Especially when they involve  
consumer goods.  
(Hands the paper back)  
Give it sixty seconds before the  
sign-off.

INT. BLUE GROTTO – FRONT DESK – A DAY OR TWO LATER

A couple of TOURIST FAMILIES wait to check in. The phone is  
ringing constantly. Mel and Mona answer extensions:

MEL  
Yes – we have rooms available. I  
don't know if you'll meet Santa,  
but he's here. Please hold.  
(Pushes a button)  
Hello, Blue Grotto Hotel. No – you  
can't phone your gift list in to  
Santa.  
(Pushing button, to Mona:)  
We've had three toy companies and a  
fast-food chain wanting to tie in.

He turns and notices Jackson standing in the lobby. Jackson  
stares at Mel, level, accusing.

Mel hesitates, then turns his back on the kid.

MEL  
Hello – Blue Grotto Hotel. Yes.  
Forty-eight fifty a night. Yes, he  
is staying here.

EXT. HOTEL – FRONT DOORS – THE NEXT DAY

A banner hangs over the front doors: CHRISTMAS IN JULY!

Lots of cars, tourist families coming and going.

Amid all this bustle, RICHARD FRANCO is not moving: he's  
sitting in his beat-up old car, parked.

INT. RICHARD'S CAR - THE SAME TIME

Richard is 30ish, good-looking. Dressed in a slightly rumpled summer suit, with his tie loosened.

He takes a deep, cleansing breath. Gets a revolver and badge-wallet from the glove compartment. Puts them on his belt.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE - SOON AFTER

Busy with Tourist Families: noisy kids, parents in clothes that scream "vacation", video cameras.

Patty is working like mad. The bar has been re-stocked with snack foods, sodas and juices, pre-packaged sandwiches.

Jackson sits on a bar stool, grim, launching honey-roasted nuts at the tourists from a spoon when he thinks no one is looking.

PATTY

Jackson, cut it out. Be helpful.

JACKSON

I am. I'm helping get all these people to go away.

Richard comes in, receiving a cashew in the forehead.

JACKSON

Oops.

Patty, passing Jackson, snatches the spoon out of his hands. Then she turns to glance at the door -

Magic.

Despite the chaos around them, Richard and Patty lock eyes. They stare at each other for a moment.

Then they become self-conscious. Throughout the rest of the scene they both ride a current of overheated, blushing, stumbling awkwardness.

Richard "wakes" first. He can't think of what to do with himself, bends over and picks up the nut, brings it to the bar.

PATTY

I'm sorry about that.

RICHARD

It's okay.

Richard looks at the nut in his hand. He almost drops it on the bar, realizes that would be rude. Patty hastily looks around, gets a glass, holds it out. Richard drops the nut in the glass.

Jackson is watching them, puzzled.

PATTY

Can I get you something to drink?

RICHARD

Anything that doesn't have a bendy straw in it.

PATTY

Coffee.

(Pouring it)

Irish?

RICHARD

No. Italian. But, you know - we've been here since the 1920s. My grandfather...

She's looking at him strangely. He thinks it out.

RICHARD

You meant the coffee.

PATTY

(Handing it to him)

Yes. But - it was interesting.

He drinks, and does a form of "spit take" in pain: holds his mouthful of coffee open to let the steam out.

PATTY

Oh! Jeez!

She grabs up a handful of ice-cubes and holds them out. He takes one, puts it in his mouth. Slurps.

RICHARD

Little hot.

PATTY

I'm sorry.

As he takes another cube and plunks it in his coffee; she tosses the rest in the sink:

PATTY

I hope you weren't planning to use your tongue tonight.

(MORE)



PATTY (cont'd)

(Pause)

I can't believe I said that.

(To cover, perky:)

So! What brings you to our hotel?

RICHARD

I'm here to see Santa Claus.

Jackson gets wary, but Richard and Patty are too wrapped up in each other to notice.

PATTY

(Suddenly disappointed)

Oh God - you're not a reporter, are you?

RICHARD

No. I'm a...dentist.

He holds out his hand, she shakes it. The sparks flying between them are a fire hazard.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Richard Franco. From Albuquerque.  
New Mexico.

PATTY

Patty Wheeler. And this is Jackson  
Mayhew. My youthful ward.

RICHARD

Hiya. Did Old Kris Kringle give  
you any presents yet?

Jackson gives Patty a look: do I really have to answer this loser?

PATTY

(To Richard, warning)

We're not too thrilled with the  
Santa hullabaloo.

RICHARD

Ah. Gotcha.

(To Jackson)

Sorry.

Richard leans on the bar and his jacket falls open. Jackson sees the gun and the badge.

RICHARD

I guess all this must be pretty  
tough on the old guy. Do you  
two...know him pretty well?

Jackson frowns at the sight of the gun and badge. Looks at Richard's face, alert, suspicious.

JACKSON

Why?

PATTY

Jackson. The man is just trying to make conversation.

JACKSON

Why?

(To Richard)

What are you doing here?

RICHARD

I'm on vacation. I just checked in.

JACKSON

And you're a dentist.

Jackson looks at Patty, and with his eyes tries to get her to notice Richard's gun and badge. During:

RICHARD

Yes.

JACKSON

But you want to meet Santa Claus.

Patty, not getting Jackson's eyebrow-wiggling-and-eye-darting, gives a what-is-your-problem? look back.

RICHARD

Yeah, I thought it might be interesting.

JACKSON

Did you bring any of your dental equipment with you?

Jackson gives Patty an exasperated glare. She mock-glares back, baffled.

RICHARD

(Confused)

No - it's back in my office. In Albuquerque.

JACKSON

(Gives up. To Patty:)

I'm gonna go bring Sam his lunch - okay?

PATTY

That would be an enormous relief at this point. It's in the kitchen.

Jackson goes out, with another dark glance at Richard.

Patty gives Richard a "don't mind him" look. Slight awkward pause now that they're "alone" together.

PATTY

Sorry about that. He's very defensive about Sam. The poor man hasn't even been able to come out of his room in three days with all this.

She looks at the melee of Tourist Families. Richard follows her eye, thinking, distracted.

RICHARD

No, huh? Too bad. I really did kind of need to talk to him.

Silence. Richard realizes this sounds a little odd, looks at her, shrugs.

RICHARD

Just a kid at heart, I guess.

Patty nods. They both smile a little to assure each other that no matter how oddly they're behaving, they want this to keep going. Oh-so-casually:

PATTY

Do you have any? Kids.

RICHARD

No - I'm not married.

Patty tries to conceal what good news this is.

RICHARD

How about you?  
(re: Jackson)  
His father...?

PATTY

Jackson is my nephew. It's complicated.

RICHARD

I don't mind complicated.

She looks at him, surprised. It's the right reply.

INT. SAM'S ROOM — SOON AFTER

The drapes are closed to keep out prying eyes. Jackson broods, wrestling with an inner turmoil as Sam uncovers a tray and sets up lunch during:

JACKSON

Sam?

SAM

What?

JACKSON

When you're figuring out who's been naughty and who's been nice: are you watching everything all the time?

SAM

Yep. It's a good thing for all of you I'm jolly, not vengeful.

JACKSON

Then how come sometimes if we're nice - we still don't get what we ask for?

SAM

Well, there's a lot of complex issues between "naughty" and "nice". Like, there's a technicality on "nice". On the theory that someone who makes unreasonable requests is not nice. It took my people months to work that one out. For example: Mahatma Gandhi. Guy was incredibly nice, but every year he asks me for world peace. I felt terrible. But I'm not God. I'm just here to give you the basic idea. Like a prophet. Or a corporate matching fund. You people are supposed to keep it up the rest of the year. Nobody ever gets that.

JACKSON

So then how do you know when you're good or bad, if you don't always get what you deserve?

Sam stops in the middle of unfolding his napkin.

SAM  
What's bothering you, kid?

JACKSON  
Am I bad, Sam?

SAM  
No.

JACKSON  
Sometimes when bad things happen, I think I'm being punished.

SAM  
You're not that important.  
(Pause)  
I mean that in a good way.

JACKSON  
I feel like this is all my fault.  
All these people coming here – and bothering you –

SAM  
Listen: okay: it's about twenty-six percent your fault. But that leaves seventy-four percent to blame on a bunch of greedy, narcissistic, selfish grown-ups.

Jackson shrugs. Pause. Jackson gets to it, scared, urgent:

JACKSON  
There's a guy here, asking questions about you. I think he's a policeman. He says he's a dentist, but he has a gun and a badge. If you want, I can help you get away.

SAM  
"Get away"?

JACKSON  
Yeah.

SAM  
What do you think I did that I have to get away?

JACKSON  
I don't know. It doesn't matter.

SAM

It does matter. What am I doing here if it doesn't matter?

JACKSON

I mean I don't care. Who you are or what you did. I just don't want you to get into any trouble because of me.

SAM

Thank you. That's very lovely. And at the same time, insulting.

JACKSON

If there is any reason the police -

SAM

Who am I?

JACKSON

Sam -

SAM

If I am who I say I am, then I have nothing to worry about, correct?

JACKSON

But -

SAM

"But" means you don't believe I am who I say I am.

Pause.

JACKSON

Sam, you don't have to stay here to prove anything to me.

SAM

No?

A knock on the door. Jackson looks at it, frightened. Sam gives him a scolding look and goes to it -

JACKSON

Sam -

Sam opens the door. Mel's in the corridor, holding a rented "Santa Suit". Jackson relaxes.

MEL

Ho-ho-ho!

SAM  
Go to ho-ho-hell.

Sam shuts the door in his face.

EXT. HALL OUTSIDE OF SAM'S ROOM - DIRECTLY AFTER

Mel calls in through the closed door:

MEL  
I'd like to discuss a proposition.

SAM  
(Through door)  
I'm not interested.

MEL  
We're having a "Christmas In July"  
party. All week long in the  
lounge. We're going to decorate it  
- give away presents. If you'll  
attend and let the kids take a  
picture with you - your stay here  
is completely free.  
(No reply)  
Including telephone charges.

Nothing from inside.

INT. DR. ZIMMER'S OFFICE - LATER

Jackson is brooding silently. Dr. Zimmer waits.

JACKSON  
How do you tell if someone is  
crazy?

ZIMMER  
Jackson, you're not crazy.

JACKSON  
I know. I'm not talking about me.  
This old man...I thought he was  
pretending to be Santa Claus  
because he felt sorry for me. But  
I'm beginning to think he really  
believes he is Santa Claus.

ZIMMER  
So?

JACKSON

So, maybe I got him started.  
Pushed him over the edge or  
something.

ZIMMER

Or maybe he really is Santa Claus.

Jackson looks at Zimmer for a moment. Scornfully:

JACKSON

And maybe you're really an elf.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE – THAT NIGHT – CLOSING TIME

Most of the lights are out, the chairs are upended on the tables, and Patty is standing in a cleared section of the floor with a broom.

But she's not sweeping. She's shut her eyes, and begins to sing, a capella...

PATTY

Have yourself a merry little  
Christmas

May your yule be bright...

She doesn't notice when Richard quietly steps in the doors. He watches her, appreciative, as she really gets into it –

Until she opens her eyes, sees him and stops, flustered. Starts sweeping.

RICHARD

I thought it was ix-nay on the  
Istmas-Chray.

PATTY

I was rehearsing. We're having  
this big "Christmas In July" party,  
and the manager told me I can sing  
in it. He's even hiring a backup  
trio.

RICHARD

No kidding? That's great.

PATTY

Yeah. Of course, in exchange I'm  
supposed to try and convince Sam to  
be Santa.



RICHARD  
But you're not going to.

PATTY  
Nope.  
(Amused)  
Got me all figured out already,  
huh?

RICHARD  
Far from it. But I think I would  
enjoy spending the rest of my life  
trying.  
(Stunned pause)  
Wow. Did I really say that out  
loud?

PATTY  
Say what?

Richard hesitates, confused. Patty smiles.

PATTY  
Just kidding.

RICHARD  
Right.  
(Trying for safer ground:)  
Well - now, when you're a big-time  
famous singer, I can tell people I  
heard you first in this little club  
in Florida.

PATTY  
I don't think I could handle being  
a big-time famous singer. I'm a  
gal with modest ambitious. Little  
dreams.

RICHARD  
Like what?

Patty looks at him, deciding.

PATTY  
Okay: but don't laugh, okay?

He nods. Pause.

PATTY  
I always wanted to find some place,  
where...like, you know in those old  
movies, there's some dame who runs  
a nightclub, and every once in  
(MORE)

PATTY (cont'd)  
while she gets up and sings with  
the band? That's my dream. Just  
some little joint to sing in.

She waits, self-conscious.

RICHARD  
This is me, not laughing.

PATTY  
Okay then – what about you: what's  
your secret dream?

RICHARD  
Are we still in a laughter-free  
zone?

PATTY  
Within reason.

His turn to hesitate. Then:

RICHARD  
A date with you.

PATTY  
You're gonna waste your secret  
dream on that?

RICHARD  
I don't think it would be a waste.

Pause.

PATTY  
What's wrong with you?

RICHARD  
Do you agree there's a little bit  
of a self-esteem problem hiding  
behind that question?

PATTY  
No: I mean it. You can't be this  
perfect.

RICHARD  
I'm not. I promise.

PATTY  
Right. So let's have it. What's  
wrong with you?

RICHARD

I'm sure you'll find out soon enough. In the meantime, I want to try and get some of the good stuff on the books, too.

Patty hesitates.

RICHARD

Okay, here's something: I don't have a lot of evenings free. There's a - dental...conference - I have to go to. I only have Monday nights off.

PATTY

That's tomorrow.

Richard nods.

INT. PATTY'S ROOM - THE NEXT EVENING

Patty is getting ready to go out on her date: quite "done up", quite nervous.

JACKSON

I'm telling you: I don't think he's a dentist.

PATTY

No?

JACKSON

He's some kind of a cop or something!

PATTY

You're slipping, Jackson. I figured at least you'd make him an escaped Nazi or a vampire.

JACKSON

No - I'm serious this time. Didn't you see it? He had a badge on his belt. And a gun.

PATTY

So why did he tell us he's a dentist?

JACKSON

I think he's after Sam.

PATTY  
Why would a policeman be after Sam?

JACKSON  
I don't know! What do we even know about Sam? Why is he even pretending to be Santa?

PATTY  
(Startled)  
You don't think Sam is Santa?

JACKSON  
(Scornful)  
Patty: how old are you?  
(Making his case:)  
This guy Richard lies about who he is - he has a gun and a badge - and he keeps asking to meet Santa Claus. The only reason you don't think he's after Sam is because you're blinded by love.

PATTY  
I am not in "love". I just met the guy.

JACKSON  
You got all googly when you talked to him.

PATTY  
I was completely un-googly, thank you.

Does one final check in the mirror, ready to go. Then she sits on the bed and looks at Jackson, because she thinks she's "figured it out":

PATTY  
All right: I was somewhat googly. And I don't even know why. There's just something about this guy. He seems...decent. Which would be a first for me.  
(Intent, serious:)  
But it's just a date. But I'm not going to marry him or anything. He's not going take me away from you.

Jackson flings himself back on the bed in frustration.

JACKSON

Aaargh! You are so missing the point.

Patty shrugs, nods, and gets up to go. Jackson lies staring at the ceiling. She kisses him on the forehead. He won't look at her.

PATTY

Don't stay up watching TV all night, okay?

As she goes out -

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PATTY'S ROOM - LATE THAT NIGHT

Jackson is in his PJs, watching TV all night. The lights are off, the sound is low.

He frowns:

There's a banging noise, coming through the floor.

Jackson mutes the TV.

A definite banging noise. Like hammering.

INT. BLUE GROTTO - LOBBY - ELEVATORS - SOON AFTER

Jackson steps off the elevators (still in PJs) and stops, stunned. The lobby is half-smothered in tacky holiday junk already, and more waits in boxes.

A WORKMAN is stringing garlands of plastic icicles from the ceiling, hammering in little nails.

JACKSON

Oh no.

Across the lobby, Mel, inordinately merry, unpacks ornaments and hands them to Mona, who hangs them on a fake tree.

INT. LOBBY - BY THE TREE - DIRECTLY AFTER

Mel opens a box of plastic mistletoe. Just the thing. He glances toward Mona, removes a sprig, sprays his mouth with breath freshener.

When he turns, he's facing Jackson:

JACKSON  
You can't do this to Sam.

Mel hastily changes demeanor from Casanova to Manager, tucking the plastic mistletoe in his pocket. He puts a hand on Jackson's shoulder in a fatherly way and strolls him through the winter wonderland:

MEL  
Jackson - I'm glad you're here.

JACKSON  
I'm serious. You have to stop this. We're calling too much attention to Sam!

MEL  
Well, if Sam didn't like it, he could always leave, couldn't he?

JACKSON  
No - he can't. He's trying to prove to me that he's Santa.

MEL  
Ah! Well then: what better way would there be to do that, than to be Santa at our Gala Christmas In July Party?

JACKSON  
Are you on drugs?

Mel kneels down to Jackson, eye-to-eye, ready to deal.

MEL  
We need this, Jackson. The TV people are coming. You help me out here - and I'll buy you any toy you like. Any toy. Just between you and me, okay?

Mel gives Jackson a conspiratorial wink.

Jackson backs away from him, warily, turns and runs.

Past the glass doors to the pool.

He slows. Outside, looking up at the stars, is Sam.

EXT. BLUE GROTTO - POOL - SOON AFTER

Jackson comes out of the lobby, nervous.

JACKSON

Sam...

SAM

What are you doing up so late?

JACKSON

Do you really think you should be out here where people can see you?

SAM

Only time I can get any fresh air is two o'clock in the morning. I'm going to be the only guy in the world who comes back from a Florida vacation paler than when he left.

(Looking into lobby)

Isn't that your aunt?

Jackson turns to look:

Through the glass doors we see Patty and Richard coming back from their date. They don't notice Jackson and Sam.

SAM

Got herself a nice-looking fella.

JACKSON

That's the guy I was telling you about - the one who's after you.

Patty and Richard kiss. A lingering passionate goodnight kiss.

SAM

Well - he doesn't seem to be after me now.

(Beat)

Which reminds me.

(Turns to look at Jackson)

You never did answer my question.

Jackson nervously glances through the glass doors:

Patty and Richard say goodnight. As Patty walks off toward the elevators, Richard turns and sees them.

JACKSON

Sam, please.

SAM

Do you believe I am who I say I am?

Jackson watches, agitated, as Richard goes to the glass doors, pulls on one. No good. He pushes. No, it's locked -

JACKSON

Yes. I do. Will you go inside now?

Sam hesitates, not buying it. But then he glances at Richard, who moves to the next door over -

SAM

Yeah. Maybe that's not a bad idea.

JACKSON

Right - go -

Richard comes through the glass doors to the pool -

SAM

Okay. Goodnight, kid.

Jackson exhales in relief as Sam turns and heads for the exit at the other end of the pool.

RICHARD

Hey - you! Hold up a minute.

JACKSON

No - let him go -

Sam disappears through the gate at the far end -

RICHARD

Mister - hey! Stop.

Jackson watches Richard jog after Sam -

JACKSON

No - don't -

Desperate to stop him, Jackson throws himself into the pool.

Richard hears the splash and turns.

JACKSON

Help!

Jackson thrashes in the water, pretending to drown.

RICHARD

Oh God -

JACKSON

HELP! HELP!



Richard runs to the edge of the pool, looks around, up at the windows - yells -

RICHARD  
Somebody - hello?! The kid's in the -

Jackson thrashes vigorously. Richard realizes he has no choice -

RICHARD  
Oh, hell -

Richard jumps in the pool.

Jackson's thrashing slows as he watches:

Richard's flailing and thrashing even worse than Jackson did. Gaspig, choking -

JACKSON  
Uh-oh.

Richard is drowning.

Jackson swims over, grabs him by the collar and pulls him toward the ladder at the side of the pool.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE - LATER

Jackson and Richard are both wrapped in towels. Richard is sipping a cup of hot coffee. Patty is toweling off Jackson's hair.

JACKSON  
How was I supposed to know he couldn't swim?!

PATTY  
Even if he could swim, Jackson -

JACKSON  
I just wanted Sam to get away.

PATTY  
Okay, let's get this over with once and for all. Richard: is Sam in some kind of trouble?

RICHARD  
I really don't know anything about Sam.

Patty gives Jackson a significant glance. Jackson rolls his eyes, frustrated.

PATTY  
(To Richard:)  
Are you a police officer?

RICHARD  
No.

JACKSON  
Then why does he have a gun?! And a badge?!

RICHARD  
I don't.

PATTY  
Jackson - don't you think there's something you ought to say to Richard?

JACKSON  
He's lying.

PATTY  
I was thinking more along the lines of "I'm sorry."

JACKSON  
(To Richard)  
I'm sorry you're lying.

PATTY  
Very nice.  
(To Richard)  
I'm sorry.  
(To Jackson)  
- and you, mister, are in a fair amount of trouble.

JACKSON  
Patty - he's LYING! He's after Sam! And he found Sam because of US! And Mel's bringing the TV people to this big party - so even MORE people are gonna know about Sam - and something BAD is going to happen! And it's going to be OUR FAULT!

Patty and Richard look at him, unconvinced. Furious, frustrated, Jackson runs out of the Lounge.

INT. BLUE GROTTO - LOBBY - DIRECTLY AFTER

Jackson runs into the lobby, with its yards of gaudy tinsel, piles of styrofoam snowballs, motorized plastic elves.

Mel turns and sees Jackson. Mel is wearing a baseball cap, embroidered: Blue Grotto Hotel - Xmas in July. He gives Jackson an elaborate, conspiratorial wink and offers Jackson a baseball cap from a box full of them.

With a yell of wordless fury, Jackson attacks the decorations, pulling down garlands, beheading snowmen, trashing everything -

MEL

Patty!

Patty and Richard run in from the Lounge to a scene of candy-cane carnage: mechanical toy soldiers writhing on the floor, Jackson smashing decorations -

RICHARD

Hey - whoa!

Richard grabs Jackson, who struggles wildly, still trying to wreck the place.

PATTY

Jackson - take it easy -  
(To Richard)  
Thank you -

Jackson doesn't stop kicking and screaming even as Richard slings him over a shoulder and follows Patty to the elevator.

INT. MEL'S OFFICE - THE NEXT AFTERNOON

Mel is at his desk, writing. Patty comes in, nervous.

PATTY

I'm sorry about last night. I think the big nutcracker is a total loss. We'll pay for it.

MEL

I was thinking that Jackson might enjoy going away to camp for the rest of the summer. Spend more time with other kids. Play tennis and stuff. I picked one out. He could leave tomorrow. And the hotel will cover the cost.

Mel holds out a colorful camp brochure. Patty takes a deep breath, appraises Mel. She takes the brochure.

PATTY

Let me think about it.

MEL

This Christmas-In-July promotion is a big opportunity for all of us.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE PATTY'S ROOM - SOON AFTER

She comes along the corridor, but stops outside her door. Looks down at the camp brochure in her hand.

She thinks a moment, then gets her key.

INT. PATTY'S ROOM - DIRECTLY AFTER

Patty lets herself in. The room is empty.

PATTY

Jackson?

EXT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

A run-down row of cheapo-tropicale stucco apartments.

Richard's car pulls up. Richard locks The Club on his steering wheel, gets out.

As Richard goes to open his mailbox, we see Jackson's face appear in the back-seat side window of the car.

Jackson watches Richard take his mail into his apartment.

Jackson gets out and sneaks over to Richard's window. He peeks in.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - DIRECTLY AFTER

On a desk near the window Jackson's peeking into are the gun and badge-wallet.

Richard sorts the mail: bills, marked Overdue, Third Notice, collection agency notices.

And a big envelope. He tears it open, pulls out several battered, dog-eared file folders. He glances at the cover note, then opens them:

They are police files. Mug-shots of Sam, arrest records, reports, fingerprints. Evidence that Sam is some kind of criminal.

Richard sighs. Not happy. He brings the files to the phone, dials a number from the cover note.

RICHARD

Hi. Yeah, I just got them. I was wondering if maybe we could hold off a while. Or do it somewhere else.

(Listens)

No, it's just - this kid, and his aunt -

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(Listens)

Yeah, maybe I do. All right: yes, I like her. But -

(Listens, grim.)

No. No, I understand. I can do it. It's my job, I'll do it.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE - LATER

It is dusk; rehearsals were due to begin for the party entertainment, but Jackson's disappearance has brought all activity to a halt.

A small cluster of employees and friends wait and worry. Patty paces, near-frantic. Dr. Zimmer sits at the bar, concerned.

The BACK-UP TRIO is set up and bored, noodling with their instruments. Mel is decorating the Lounge with the same overkill as the Lobby.

MEL

Patty? Since the band is here, and I'm paying them - maybe you could rehearse - just to...keep everybody's spirits up...

Patty crumples up the camp brochure and throws it at Mel. It bounces off his forehead. Mel looks at Mona.

MEL

That only seemed to be insensitive. From the outside.

The doors open. Everyone looks. Sam comes in, very worried.

SAM

I drove all over - I didn't see him.

ZIMMER

Patty? I'm sure he's all right, but maybe we ought to call the police.

Patty hesitates. She looks to Sam. He nods.

INT. RICHARD'S CAR - OUTSIDE HIS APT - LATER

Richard gets into his car, in a bad mood. He unlocks The Club and tosses it in the back seat.

JACKSON (O.S.)

Ow!

Richard jumps, accidentally honking the horn; Jackson sits up in the back seat, setting The Club aside.

RICHARD

You scared the bejesus out of me.

JACKSON

Who are you?

RICHARD

Does Patty know where you are?

JACKSON

What do want from Sam?

Pause.

RICHARD

I can't tell you right now. I'm sorry about that. I really am.

JACKSON

Are you going to arrest him?

RICHARD

Jackson - people aren't always what they seem to be. Stuff gets very complicated when you grow up.

JACKSON

That's what grown-ups always say when they're doing something terrible.

Richard sighs, starts the car.

RICHARD

I know.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE – LATER THAT EVENING

Silence. Tension. Everyone lost in thought, avoiding each other's eyes, glancing at watches.

Zimmer takes one of the large plastic elves and stands it up at the microphone, adjusts the elf and mike so the toy appears to be "dipping" the mike at an angle.

Satisfied, he turns and realizes everyone is staring at him. He shrugs.

ZIMMER

Elf Presley.

Everyone looks at him like he's crazy. He sits down.

Sam has gone behind the bar to make himself a drink. Quietly, to Patty, who's on a bar stool:

SAM

Listen - Patty. I'm sorry.

PATTY

It's not your fault, Sam.

SAM

Well, in a way it is.

She looks at him, confused. Sam is working himself up to say more when -

The doors open. Jackson comes in.

Patty runs to him. The Band strikes up an impromptu, cynical "Auld Lang Syne" as Patty hugs Jackson tight.

PATTY

You scared me to death.

JACKSON

I'm sorry.

Richard enters behind them, carrying the police files. Richard looks at Sam. Sam meets Richard's gaze evenly.

PATTY

Where did you go?

RICHARD

He was hiding in my car.

JACKSON

Patty, he's not from New Mexico, he lives here! And he's got some kind of papers about Sam! He's been lying to you all the time - ask him!

Patty looks at Richard. Her eyes flick down to the files. Then back to Richard's face. His expression puts steel in Patty's voice:

PATTY

Mona - would you take Jackson up to our room?

JACKSON

No! I want to stay.

Patty hesitates. Then, to Richard:

PATTY

Was it all lies?

RICHARD

No. No.

(Then, grim, hands her files)

But - this is evidence that the guy you call Sam is wanted in four states for fraud, grand theft, and forgery. I'm sorry. He's a con man. A crook.

Everyone turns to where Sam was standing.

His drink is on the bar - but he is gone.

Patty glances at the files, then hands them to Jackson. During the rest of the scene, they're passed around.

PATTY

Why didn't you tell us?

RICHARD

I wanted to. I wasn't allowed. Look, I have to do my job. I didn't want to do it here. I tried to get around that. I know how much he



RICHARD (CONT'D)  
 means to Jackson. And I like you.  
 Both. A lot.

Patty shakes her head, bitterly.

RICHARD  
 I just wanted to figure out – some  
 way not to be the bad guy here.

PATTY  
 Yeah. Too bad you couldn't figure  
 that one out, huh?

She puts her hand on Jackson's shoulder and walks him out of  
 the bar.

INT. PATTY'S ROOM – THAT NIGHT

Jackson is in his bed, awake. Patty's brushing her hair.  
 Silence.

After a moment, a gentle knock on the door. Jackson turns.

Patty goes to answer it.

Sam is standing in the corridor.

JACKSON  
 (Starts to get out of bed)  
 Sam!

PATTY  
 Jackson – no! Stay here.

JACKSON  
 But –

Patty looks him in the eyes, warning, more serious than we've  
 ever seen her. Pause. Jackson nods. Patty goes out.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE PATTY'S ROOM – DIRECTLY AFTER

Patty walks down the hall to where Jackson won't hear through  
 the door; Sam follows. She turns on him, barely able to  
 control her fury.

PATTY  
 You have to get out of here.  
 Tonight.

SAM

I know. I'm packed. I was just waiting to say goodbye to the kid.

PATTY

You're gonna be waiting a long time. Like forever.

SAM

I think I can tell him something that will make a difference when I'm gone.

PATTY

We trusted you! That little boy needed something - aside from another semester in the school of hard knocks. He's only ten years old!

SAM

I know. I told you I'm not very good with kids. I never had any. All I knew about children was: you give 'em stuff and it makes 'em happy. But I never actually spent any time with one. So I never realized what... little people they are, you know? Complete with serious things inside that you have to take seriously. Jackson taught me that. I owe him one. So I want you tell him something for me -

PATTY

I'm not telling him anything from you! I'm not going to give him any reason to hold on to what happened here. I made a mistake letting you get this far into our lives. But that's over. And if you want to do something for Jackson - you'll get lost, and stay that way. So he can start to forget.

Patty goes back to her room, leaving Sam in the hall alone.

INT. PATTY'S ROOM - DIRECTLY AFTER

Jackson watches Patty come back in and shut the door. She looks at him. He can see it in her eyes.

PATTY

I'm sorry.

Jackson turns around and lies down, facing away from her.

PATTY

I know you wanted to talk to him.

He won't answer. She watches his back.

PATTY

Are you never speaking to me again  
in our lifetimes?

Jackson doesn't answer. Patty nods. Goes about her business.

After a moment, very gently, she begins to sing.

JACKSON

Would you please not do that?

Stung, Patty stops. She goes about her night routine in silence.

He stares at the wall, his back to her.

Music begins: a piano-bass-drum Trio playing jazz Christmas music...it continues under the next few scenes.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE – THE NEXT AFTERNOON

The Trio (in tuxedos and white-fur-trimmed-red-Santa-hats) is playing as the Christmas-In-July party gets under way.

A boozy HIRED SANTA sits in a crummy rented "throne". TOURIST FAMILIES line up to put their kids in his lap for a Polaroid; the small children have the bewildered look of all kids during this ritual – wondering where the magic is – while the parents have expressions of fake wonder plastered on their faces, as if lying hard enough will do the trick.

Mel is schmoozing the LOCAL PRESS, including Ashley Manson and CREW, while Mona supervises the CATERING STAFF. They both wear Blue Grotto baseball caps.

Milton stands by the front doors, with a small "counting-clicker", clicking away as TOURISTS come in.

Richard leans on the bar, next to punch-bowls of egg-nog and trays of gingerbread cookies. He looks like he hasn't slept – or if he did, it was in his suit.

He's watching Patty, who is across the room by the Trio, nervously preparing to "go on." She's wearing a glitzy sparkly dress, her hair a bit overdone.

She heads toward the lobby doors.

Richard moves to intercept her. As he gets near -

PATTY  
(Without looking at him)  
Don't even think about it.

Patty walks past him. Richard watches her go.

INT. BLUE GROTTO - LOBBY - THE SAME TIME

Jackson is lying behind the sofa, glum, watching the Tourists go past.

Patty comes out of the Lounge. Somewhat awkwardly, she sits on the floor next to him.

PATTY  
So. You gonna come hear me sing?

He looks away. It hurts, but Patty nods. Pause.

PATTY  
You're going to have to talk to me eventually. When you graduate college, or something.

Jackson ignores her.

PATTY  
What do you want me to do, Jackson?  
I'm doing the best I know how. You don't want me to sing? I won't.

Patty waits. Nothing. She nods, gets to her feet.

PATTY  
Okay. Well, this is important to me. So I'm gonna go do it. And I'm sorry about what happened with Sam - but I had to do what I thought was best.  
(Beat)  
That's what a mom should do.

Jackson is startled by this last phrase.

He watches Patty as she goes toward the Lounge, thoughtful.

EXT. BLUE GROTTO – FRONT STEPS – THE SAME TIME

Sam sits behind the wheel of a well-kept vintage 1960s Cadillac. Bright red, with white interior.

After a moment, he gets out of the car.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE – DIRECTLY AFTER

Mel and Mona ballroom-dance past:

Richard, at the bar. He quietly takes a pair of handcuffs from his jacket, makes sure they work, and tucks them into his belt.

Near the Trio, Dr. Zimmer pins a corsage of holly and little red berries on Patty's dress; it adds a final perfect touch.

ZIMMER

For luck. Not that you'll need it.

PATTY

Wow. Where did you even get this, in summer?

Before Zimmer can answer, the music ends and Mel steps to the mike, taps it for attention:

MEL

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Blue Grotto Hotel's first annual Christmas-In-July week. It's time

MEL (CONT'D)

now to present for your listening pleasure - our featured vocalist, in her debut performance: our own Ms. Patty Wheeler!

Mild scattered applause as Patty goes to the mike.

People are talking, dishes clinking. She's nervous. Trembling.

She sees Richard in the crowd, looking right into her eyes. He nods encouragement.

She quickly looks away - but it helped her get past the panic. She leans into the mike:

PATTY

Hi.

Feedback. Everyone – including Patty – winces.

The Trio starts the first number: an overly-bright Christmas tune like “The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year”.

Patty is awkward, tentative-voiced, glancing around distracted and turning from the mike, becoming inaudible. It’s bad.

INT. BLUE GROTTO – LOBBY – THE SAME TIME

The Hired Santa stumbles out of the Lounge, leaving the doors open.

Patty’s fumbling Christmas song filters out.

Jackson, grim, watches the Hired Santa pull a flask from his ill-fitting outfit, take a swig. The Hired Santa notices Jackson, staggers slightly coming over. Leans down.

HIRED SANTA

Ain’t you gonna come in an’ tell  
Santa Claus what you want fer  
Chrismus?

JACKSON

(Bitter)  
You’re not Santa Claus.

HIRED SANTA

Course I am!

Jackson just stares at him, scornful.

Uneasy, the Hired Santa straightens up. Looks at Jackson, who’s spoiling for a fight.

Beat. All false-jolly cheer gone:

HIRED SANTA

Kid: there is no Santa Claus.

The Hired Santa sourly weaves his way through the empty lobby looking for a men's room.

Jackson watches him go.

Patty’s shaky Christmas song drifts from the Lounge.

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE – THE SAME TIME

Patty's losing it. She fumbles some lyrics – gets lost – tries to pick it up. Despairing, she stops, stares at her feet, silent.

The Trio trails off. Nothing left but the uneasy murmur of the crowd.

Patty looks up at them. Thinks.

She turns and asks the Trio a question we can't hear. They nod.

She turns back to the audience. Into the mike:

PATTY

Um...I know this is a Christmas party, but I think I want to do a number now that's not a Christmas song. It's a very special song for me. And I'd like to do it for somebody who...whether he believes it or not...means everything to me.

She cues the Trio. Sings – softly, but well:

PATTY

*Was it in Tahiti?  
Were we on the Nile?  
Long long ago  
Say an hour or so  
I recall that I saw your smile  
I remember you...*

INT. LOBBY – THE SAME TIME

Jackson's expression changes as he recognizes the dim song drifting out of the lounge.

PATTY (O.S.)

*You're the one who made my dreams  
come true  
A few kisses ago*

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE – THE SAME TIME

PATTY

*I remember you  
You're the one who said I love you  
too  
I do, didn't you know?*

As she sings, Patty sees Jackson come in the open Lobby doors. Their eyes meet.

He smiles, a bit. She smiles, relieved.

PATTY  
*I remember, too  
 A distant bell and stars that fell  
 And rain  
 Out of the blue*

Patty sings, surer with every note; she and Jackson have their eyes locked on each other across the room.

The quiet magic takes everyone. Ashley Manson nudges her cameraman to get some footage of this...

PATTY  
*When my life is through  
 And the angels ask me to recall  
 The thrill of them all  
 Then I shall tell them  
 I...remember...*

She lets it drift out to him...and very softly:

JACKSON  
 ...you.

The song ends. Big applause. Patty grins, tearful, and starts to come down off the stage toward Jackson -

until Jackson's smile suddenly fades. He's looking over at the side doors to the Lounge - shocked.

Patty turns:

Sam is standing there.

JACKSON  
 No. Run away. Go! Get away!

Sam does not run.

Richard pushes through the crowd - Sam holds out his wrists for the cuffs. Richard turns him around and snaps them on.

RICHARD  
 You have the right to remain silent  
 -

SAM  
 Yeah, okay. You mind if I take a minute with the kid?



Richard checks with Patty, who nods.

Sam kneels in front of Jackson, hands cuffed behind his back.

JACKSON

You could have gotten away.

SAM

I'm too much of a sucker for big, sentimental moments. Dickens and

SAM (CONT'D)

Capra got all their best ideas from me.

(Beat)

You have no idea what I'm talking about, right?

Jackson shrugs, shakes his head. Intently:

SAM

Okay. So listen: no matter who I am or who people think I am - what I was trying to do here was give you a gift. Sometimes the gifts we get are not the gifts we ask for. But the important thing in life is to take the gifts we're given - and learn what to do with them. Will you try and remember that?

Jackson nods, sniffing. Everyone watches. Jackson suddenly gives Sam a hug.

Sam is startled, at first. Then he kisses Jackson on the cheek.

Richard helps Sam stand, and the crowd parts, silent.

Richard meets Patty's eyes as he does, but she looks away, hugs Jackson to her side.

Richard, resigned, walks Sam through the crowd and out of the room.

Everyone begins talking at once. Mel nervously signals the band to play. As they do, he turns to confront the glaring lights of Ashley Manson's TV crew:

ASHLEY MANSON

Mr. Breskin - can you comment on the arrest of Santa Claus at your hotel?

MEL

Well - he obviously wasn't Santa Claus. I mean, fine: he bought some kids some presents. That doesn't mean our society can relax our vigilance for a second. And I think this all...just...proves that.

Manson nods. The lights go off, the crew moves away.

MONA

He bought those kids the presents?

MEL

What?

MONA

You said he bought those kids some presents. The ones you told me you bought?

MEL

Well - yes - he more or less - in a -

MONA

And you made a big publicity deal out of it and got the man arrested?

MEL

Well, obviously the point of the publicity was not to get the man arrested. In fact it kind of ruins most of our -

Mona throws her cup of egg-nog in Mel's face.

Many people in the crowd burst into applause.

Mel stands there, dripping with egg-nog. Mona hurries out.

He sees Milton shake his head grimly, look at the impressive number on the clicking-counter, then toss in a nearby trash can on his way out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GROTTO LOUNGE - A FEW DAYS LATER

It's empty again, like it used to be, and all the Christmas decorations have been taken down.

Patty is behind the bar, circling HELP WANTED ads in the newspaper. Looks up as Dr. Zimmer steps in the doors.

PATTY

Oh! Hi.

ZIMMER

Jackson didn't come by for his appointment this week.

PATTY

Yeah. He said he didn't want to. I'm not going to push it.

ZIMMER

How's he doing?

Patty picks up the front page section of the paper, points to a picture of a man in a suit.

PATTY

I showed him this picture, and said make up a story about this guy. He said it's the city council president, who was having an affair with a local florist, spent all this money on flowers, got indicted, and flew to Algeria with a quarter of a million dollars in public-school funds.

ZIMMER

Well, that sounds like a normal response for Jackson.

PATTY

No - you don't get it: this is the city council president, who really did all that stuff I just said. He's not making things up any more.

ZIMMER

He's mourning, Patty. Not just the loss of Sam, but the other loss as well. He's finally letting himself feel it. It's all right.

Patty nods, sad. Pause. A bit uncomfortably:

ZIMMER

Do you ever go out in the evenings, and have someone else watch Jackson?

PATTY

Why – is it messing him up in some way?

ZIMMER

No. Of course not. It's fine – I was just asking because I have two tickets to a show tonight. It's a dinner theater production of Streetcar Named Desire so I don't know how good it could possibly be...

PATTY

Dr. Zimmer, are you asking me out on a date?

ZIMMER

Well: when you ask me that starting with "Dr. Zimmer," it doesn't sound as snazzy as I thought it would, but...yeah. Yes. I am asking you out on a date.

INT. PATTY'S ROOM – THE NEXT NIGHT

She's getting ready to go out on her date. Jackson's watching TV, rather listless and blue.

PATTY

You sure this is okay with you?

JACKSON

Well, if one of us has to see the guy, it's better if it's you.

Jackson watches Patty do the finishing touches.

JACKSON

You're trying to get over Richard, aren't you?

Pause.

PATTY

I guess you and I both wanted some magic a little too much, huh?

Jackson shrug-nods. Looks down. Sympathetically:

PATTY

We'll get over it.

INT. DINNER THEATER – NIGHT

It's rather plush, somewhat retro...and almost empty. A handful of AUDIENCE MEMBERS, including Patty and Zimmer, are scattered among rows of vacant tables.

ZIMMER

...but the commemoratives are essentially a consumer gimmick. It's the accidentals that really make me feel like a collector, rather than a hobbyist.

(Beat)

And then I ate a gigantic blue frog and flew, like a balloon, to France.

Patty is toying with her food, absently. She realizes he's stopped and looks up, feigning interest.

PATTY

Mmm-hmm.

He just looks at her. Awkward pause.

PATTY

You said something for which that's an inappropriate response, didn't you?

Zimmer nods and then they both break into embarrassed smiles. She shakes her head, looking down.

ZIMMER

In your defense: I was talking about a stamp collection. You did well, considering.

PATTY

I'm sorry. It's not you.

Just then, the house lights begin to dim.

ZIMMER

Ah – well, hopefully, this will prove more interesting.

Bluesy music plays on the speakers; lights come up on a sketchy New Orleans stage set.

"Stanley" walks out on stage with "Mitch", wearing a dirty tank top and carrying a package of meat.

Not only is "Stanley" over-acting – he's Richard.

RICHARD  
 (Bellowing)  
 Hey there! Stella, baby!

At her table, Patty's eyes widen, and she gasps.

PATTY  
 I don't believe it.

Unthinking, Patty stands up, as "Stella" enters:

PATTY  
 Richard?!

Richard, shocked, turns and squints into the lights.  
 "Stella" is slightly thrown, but then says her line:

"STELLA"  
 Don't holler at me like that. Hi,  
 Mitch.

It's Richard's cue, but he's trying to see -

PATTY  
 (Coming toward the stage)  
 You're an actor?!

RICHARD  
 (Low)  
 Oh my God.

"STELLA"  
 (To Richard, cueing:)  
 Don't holler at me like that. Hi -  
 hey!

This because Patty is climbing up on the stage -

"MITCH" AND "STELLA"  
 Whoa - hold on - what do you think  
 you're -

"Mitch" and "Stella" try to grab Patty, who shakes them off  
 violently, going toward Richard -

- others ACTORS - hurrying on stage, out of character, due to  
 the commotion - grab Patty -

She struggles against them wildly -

PATTY  
 - lemme go - Richard - hey -

Richard just stands staring at Patty, dumbstruck.

PATTY

You think you and I maybe ought to talk?!

Everyone looks at Richard. He runs off stage.

INT. DRESSING ROOM – SOON AFTER

Richard is at a make-up table, shocked, staring into space. Patty, slightly breathless, enters.

Behind her, seen through the open door, several Actors approach. Richard stands and shuts the door gently but firmly in their faces.

He turns to Patty. Pause.

RICHARD

I love you.

She considers this for a moment.

PATTY

All right: it's unexpected. I'll give you points for that. But –

RICHARD

Do you believe me?

PATTY

Maybe. Why?

RICHARD

Because I'm not really a very good actor.

PATTY

I don't know: you made a pretty believable "dentist" and "cop".

RICHARD

Not really. I thought so too, for a while. I was amazed. But then I realized that whole hotel was just full of crazy people who would believe in anything.

This is not winning her over. Sincerely:

RICHARD

The point is: when I tell you that I love you, that you and Jackson make me want stuff that I've never

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)

even wanted before – when I tell you that I would never have done any of it if I knew how much it would hurt you two...if any of that is at all convincing – remember that must mean I really feel it. Because I truly cannot act my way out of a paper bag.

PATTY

When do we get to the part where you actually explain?

Richard sighs. Fair enough. Plunges in:

RICHARD

After I got thrown out of my...  
(Counts in his head)  
...fourth acting school, I was going to give it up. But then my father died, about five years ago, and I inherited this place. He built it, back in the fifties, as a nightclub. I turned it into a theater – so I could finally get some decent roles. Of course, we immediately started losing money. Since then, I've basically run the place into the ground. I was broke. Nearly bankrupt.

PATTY

(Putting it together:)  
Sam hired you.

RICHARD

(Nods)  
He set the whole thing up. He sent me those police files. They're all fake. He came backstage after a show last week and said he would pay me a lot of money to check into the hotel, pretend I'm a cop for a couple of days, and then arrest him.

(Beat)

A lot of money. And the deal was: I couldn't tell anyone. Especially not you and Jackson.

PATTY

So then...who is Sam – really?



RICHARD

I don't know! I tried to find out.  
I thought maybe I could make it up  
to you after – tell you the truth.  
But there's no record of the guy,  
anywhere. I mean, like none.

Awkward pause. Ashamed, looks at the floor and shakes his head.

RICHARD

Another brilliant plan. I had it  
all worked out. I was going to  
tell you the whole story, and beg  
you to give me another chance.

(Pause. Sadly:)

Didn't have the guts.

(Looks at her)

You want to know the worst part?  
When you told me your dream? About  
a little joint like in the old  
movies, where every once in a while  
you could sing with the band? All  
I kept thinking was: oh my God –  
this place would be perfect for  
that.

Patty is startled. She realizes:

PATTY

Wow. It really would.

RICHARD

I know! We could have turned it  
back into a nightclub together. It  
used to be pretty popular.

(Upset)

It was driving me nuts! It was so  
unfair: I finally meet someone who  
shows me what I want to do with my  
life – I finally fall in love, and  
I can make her dreams come true –  
but I can't ask her.

PATTY

But you could have.

RICHARD

No. I couldn't. Because you would  
always wonder if I was just trying  
to buy your forgiveness.

PATTY

No, I wouldn't.

RICHARD  
Somewhere inside.

PATTY  
No, I would believe you.

RICHARD  
(Uncertain)  
Because...you love me too?

PATTY  
Maybe.  
(Beat)  
But mostly because now I've seen  
you act. And you're right. You're  
terrible.

But she's smiling. He smiles too, rueful. They're looking at each other like they did that first time in the bar...but a little wiser.

INT. PATTY'S ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Jackson is sitting up in bed. The lights are on. Patty, still dressed for the theater, is sitting on the edge of his bed.

JACKSON  
So: Richard's not a cop and he  
didn't arrest Sam. Sam just hired  
Richard to pretend to arrest him.  
Richard's an actor. Except he's  
giving up acting and turning his  
dinner theater into a nightclub for  
you to sing in.

Patty gives a slight wince at the preposterousness of it, but nods.

PATTY  
Right.

Pause. Jackson's thinking it out. Puzzling.

Slowly, it dawns on him. We see it growing in his mind, spreading across his face. Astonishment. Awe.

JACKSON  
Sam is Santa.

PATTY  
No, Sam is not Santa.

JACKSON

You just said -

PATTY

I said he didn't get arrested. We don't know who he was. We can't figure it out. There is no Sam Clausner or Clausner Hat Company in New Jersey.

JACKSON

Because he was Santa.

PATTY

Jackson, you don't even believe in Santa.

JACKSON

That's why he had to do all this!  
To make me believe in him.

PATTY

Why would Sam go to all that trouble to make everyone think he's not Santa if you're supposed to end up believing he is?

JACKSON

Katherine Hepburn!

PATTY

What?

JACKSON

She said: I don't care what the newspapers say about me, as long as it's not true.

(Patiently)

He had to give us all gifts, but he didn't want to get caught doing it. Remember, when he left? He said sometimes the gifts we ask for are not the gifts we get. And the important thing is to take the gifts we get - and learn what to do with them.

PATTY

Yeah, but -

JACKSON

He worked it all out. You get to sing - and Richard gets you, and -

PATTY

Technically, Dr. Zimmer worked that all out.

(Suddenly:)

Oh my God. That poor man. I just left him there at the theater.

JACKSON

Patty? Who sent us to Dr. Zimmer?

PATTY

Huh.

JACKSON

(Jumps up, goes to dress)

We have to go talk to Dr. Zimmer.

PATTY

Slow down. It's the middle of the night.

JACKSON

Then tomorrow.

PATTY

Okay, tomorrow.

JACKSON

Morning.

PATTY

Yes - okay. Tomorrow morning.

JACKSON

Early.

INT. LOBBY - EARLY THE NEXT MORNING

As Patty, hurrying to catch up with Jackson, passes the front desk.

Mona, wearing a nice new blazer, looks up from her paperwork.

MONA

Hey - did you hear?

(Proudly points to plastic name-

tag)

I'm the new Manager!

PATTY  
Mona, that's great!  
(Beat)  
What happened to Mel?

MONA  
That's the best part.

Mona hits the desk bell. A door marked BELLBOY opens and Mel, in uniform, steps out. He sees them all looking, realizes, and goes back in, annoyed.

Mona gives them a huge grin. Patty smiles back, as Jackson pulls her toward the doors.

JACKSON  
See? Everybody's getting presents.

Patty rolls her eyes. They head out. Richard is waiting by his car in the driveway.

EXT. DR ZIMMER'S OFFICE - LATER THAT MORNING

Richard's car pulls up outside. Jackson jumps out of the back seat and runs ahead toward the door.

Patty and Richard get out of the front:

PATTY  
Jackson, hold on. Don't just go  
barging in -

Too late. Jackson disappears inside.

INT. DR. ZIMMER'S WAITING ROOM - DIRECTLY AFTER

Jackson stands in the middle of the empty room.

No furniture, nothing on the walls. Some stray trash.

The door to the inner office is ajar: we can see that it, too, is totally empty.

Patty and Richard come in, and stop dead, looking around.

PATTY  
Wow.

RICHARD  
Huh. What do you know?

JACKSON

I told you.

RICHARD

Kid, I don't want to bust your bubble, but this could just be proof that Sam conned us.

JACKSON

But con-men con you to take your money. He didn't take anything. Why would a con-man stay around when it was so dangerous and help everybody get what they wanted?

Patty kneels to him. Very gently:

PATTY

He did it for you, honey. He did it because he liked you.

Jackson has no argument. Because...it makes sense.

PATTY

I'm sorry.

Jackson nods. Disappointed. Walks away, poking into the empty inner office.

Patty looks at Richard, who shrugs, helpless.

INT. DR. ZIMMER'S OFFICE - DIRECTLY AFTER

Jackson walks in, looks around. A few toys and psychiatric journals are on the floor.

The closet door is open.

Inside, hanging on a hook, is one of Sam's hats.

PATTY (O.S.)

Jackson - let's get out of here, okay?

JACKSON

Okay, just a second.

He reaches in and takes the hat off the hook

INT. DR. ZIMMER'S WAITING ROOM - DIRECTLY AFTER

Jackson comes from the inner office, holding the hat, thoughtful. Patty and Richard wait by the open front door.

PATTY  
You ready to go?

JACKSON  
Yep.

PATTY  
Kinda weird, huh?

JACKSON  
It's magic.

PATTY  
(Sighs, looks around.)  
It is, huh?

Jackson nods, and puts on the hat. It fits.

JACKSON  
Most of the good magic is very quiet. There's less risk of fire.

PATTY  
I'd rather have the kind of magic where you understand what the hell's going on.

JACKSON  
You can't be so choosy. It's magic: you want it, or not?

Pause. She nods, adjusts his hat, giving it a slight rakish tilt. She smiles.

PATTY  
All right...why not? I'll take it.

The three of them walk out of the office, out to their new lives, leaving the empty office and the few discarded toys.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - CANADA - THE SAME TIME

A lonely strip of two-lane road that disappears up ahead into pine-forested hills.

Beyond them rise majestic, eternally-snow-covered mountains.

Sam's bright-red Cadillac suddenly roars past us, going fast.  
Heading North.

- THE END -