NEGOTIATING CHRISTMAS

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS -- NIGHT

Legend reads: **Christmas Eve, 33 Years Ago, Beverly Hills**

Swanky Beverly Hills is swathed in Christmas lights, with trees glowing in windows. From the cars, etc., it looks to be circa mid-1980s. All is peaceful and bright, until we ZOOM IN ON one HOUSE. It looks like all the others, but from the angry voices echoing from it, this is no silent night.

INT. UPSCALE LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

A WOMAN, late 20s, curvaceous, pretty in an obvious way, teased hair, mascara streaked from crying, towing a designer suitcase, enters a well-appointed living room, decked out with tasteful Christmas decorations. She approaches a four-year-old BOY sitting next to the Christmas tree, amid professionally wrapped presents. Teary-eyed, he clutches a stuffed LION (a high-end one, like a Steiff). She kneels down next to the boy, who recoils slightly, paining her.

WOMAN
Robbie, Daddy is upstairs on the phone. So, Mommy has to go on a little trip. But I'll be back for you, I promise.

BOY
You goin' with Mr. Carter?

WOMAN
What do you know about that?

BOY
Daddy said you're for sale.

Anger flashes across the woman's face, but then a car honks outside. The woman winces, then anxiously glances toward the upstairs.

WOMAN
I gotta go now. You be a good boy, mind Nanny. I'll be back for you.

BOY
No, you won't.

The woman leans into give the boy a kiss on the cheek, causing him to scoot back under the tree. Unable to wait, she grabs the suitcase and hustles out of the room.

Then there's the sound of a car door slamming, more muffled yelling, and an engine roaring off. Underneath the tree, the boy, lion in hand, curls into a tight ball.

EXT. MARINA DEL REY CONDO TOWER -- DAY

Legend reads: **Today, the Day Before the Day Before Christmas, Marina Del Rey, Los Angeles**

Establishing shot of a tall condo building next to a marina filled with bobbing boats sporting Christmas decorations.

INT. ROBERT'S CONDO, BEDROOM -- DAY

ROBERT WEST, 37, tall, athletic, handsome but scruffy (it's morning) rolls over in bed to respond to a TEXT on his phone. It's from CURTIS, has airplane, skiing and champagne-bottle emojis and says, "Robert! Telluride for (Christmas-tree emoji)! I'll send the jet." He's puzzled. He dictates a text.

ROBERT
I've been your lawyer for ten years. What part of "I spend Christmas alone *every year*" has suddenly become unclear to you?

He sends. Text from Curtis comes back, "Boring. Come party!" followed by fireworks, balloon, party-hat smiley face, etc. emojis. Robert dictates a reply.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
No. And stop using so many emojis. You're over the age of fourteen.

INT. ROBERT'S CONDO, BATHROOM -- DAY

Robert is shaving when another text arrives, from RAHEEM, saying, "Xtra rm in Stowe ski lodge. U know U (heart) VT at XMas!" Robert is even more puzzled. He dictates a reply.

ROBERT
Thank you, Raheem, but no. And if you spent less time in Vermont and more time delivering your latest album, your label would stop calling us threatening to sue.

INT. ROBERT'S CONDO, LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Robert, now in a white shirt and dress pants, downs the last of his coffee in his living room -- furnished only with a black leather sectional and a large TV, no Christmas decor -- when the phone in his pocket boops again. This text, from BOB, says "Park City! Heli-skiing on me for Xmas."

ROBERT
Seriously? What is going on?

He texts back "Thanks, Bob, but going to Mammoth for Xmas. As always." A beat. Bob texts back, "Yeah, but your sis said you might be up for a change this year." Robert growls.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Oh, did she?

He texts back, "Have a great holiday. C U at Sundance."

EXT. DIAZ HOME -- DAY

Legend reads: **San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles**

A well-tended family home sits on a tree-lined street. There are roses and a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe out front.

INT. DIAZ HOME, ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM -- DAY

DR. ELIZABETH DIAZ, 30s, attractive and also athletic, is asleep in bed when a small hand jostles her awake. She looks up to see her adorable son, GABRIEL DIAZ, 5, wearing a way-too-big white LAB COAT (with DR. ELIZABETH DIAZ, M.D., DERMATOLOGY stitched onto it) and a toy stethoscope, with a STUFFED LAMB, Lambkin, under his arm. There are dots of toothpaste on his face. Elizabeth gives him a warm smile.

GABRIEL
Good morning, Dr. Mama Diaz. I'm ready to go to the office with you.

ELIZABETH
Good morning, Dr. Gabriel Diaz.
(pointing at his face)
Are you also a patient?

GABRIEL
Yes. I have moles on my face.

He holds up the lamb, which sports a large dot of toothpaste.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
Lambkin might have a cyst.

ELIZABETH
That could call for surgery.

GABRIEL
Yes. I'll need to go scrub.

He exits, the coat trailing behind him.

ELIZABETH
What do you want for breakfast?

His voice echoes back.

GABRIEL
Papi made me oatmeal before he went to the hospital to see Nana.

ELIZABETH
Now down two grandparents. I guess you are coming to the office.

Gabriel pops his head back around the door.

GABRIEL
Mama, are we still going to the snow place tomorrow?

ELIZABETH
Yes. Mammoth Mountain.

GABRIEL
Can we build a snowman, like Frosty?

ELIZABETH
Absolutely.

GABRIEL
Yay!

He bounces off. She rolls over onto her back.

ELIZABETH
Dear Lord, let *him* not be there. And if he is, give me strength.

INT. ROBERT'S CAR -- DAY

Robert, in an Italian suit, drives a sleek sedan. He stops at a red light and looks up to see a huge BILLBOARD wishing "Merry Christmas" from a TV show called "The Three Kings."

It shows beautiful triplet sisters (half-Filipina), 20, in sparkly (but not skimpy) dresses, with their names in script lettering across them: Mariana, in green; Gloriana, in purple; and Bettina, in gold (the colors they always wear). They're posed around a huge Christmas tree, decorated in the same colors, holding wrapped gifts. Robert rolls his eyes. Then his car screen announces he has another text.

ROBERT
Not again.

He taps a button, and the car reads a text from SAMANTHA.

CAR VOICE
Morning, Robbie. Word of warning, my sisters are coming in today.

ROBERT
Great.

EXT. CENTURY CITY SKYSCRAPER -- DAY

Establishing shot of a skyscraper.

Legend reads: **West & West Law Firm, Century City, Los Angeles**

INT. WEST & WEST LAW FIRM, LOBBY -- DAY

Robert exits an elevator and strides through the entrance of, as it says on the etched-glass doors, West & West, Entertainment Law, where there's a huge yet tasteful Christmas tree in the elegantly appointed lobby. There's another glass door on the other side of the desk. The left one has a large etched S; the right one has an R. Behind the desk, receptionist PENELOPE, 20s, smiles.

PENELOPE
(British accent)
Good morning, Mr. West.

ROBERT
Penelope.

PENELOPE
Miss West said the Three Kings are coming in today! I love that show!

Robert forces himself to just react with a nod.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)
Oh, and, Mr. West. Thank you again for my parents' tickets. It means everything to us that they can come for the baby's first Christmas. They flew out of Heathrow today.

Robert gives a nod and a tight smile.

ROBERT
Of course. First Christmases only come once.

PENELOPE
First class! And I've only been here a few months...

ROBERT
Don't mention it. And I mean that.

A little chastened, Penelope nods and sits. Robert gives her another curt nod and starts for the office then backs up.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Ask my sister to come see me, please.

PENELOPE
Which one?

ROBERT
I only have one. Samantha. The Kings are her sisters, not mine.

PENELOPE
Oh, sorry. It is a bit confusing.

ROBERT
She's my half-sister. They're her half-sisters. We have the same father; they have the same mother.

PENELOPE
Oh, right. Of course. Sorry.

INT. WEST & WEST LAW FIRM, ROBERT'S OUTER OFFICE -- DAY

Robert enters his outer office, where he finds his assistant, MRS. DODGE, 50s, motherly and yet chic.

ROBERT
Good morning, Mrs. Dodge.

MRS. DODGE
Robert, Merry Day Before the Day Before Christmas!

ROBERT
Jingle, jingle.

She indicates a champagne/chocolate gift basket on her desk.

MRS. DODGE
Dom Perignon -- you shouldn't have.

ROBERT
You don't really mean that.

MRS. DODGE
Samantha said the Kings are coming in. I have them at ten.

He starts to go, then stops and backs up.

ROBERT
Is Mariana bringing her boyfriend?

MRS. DODGE
Dwayne? I don't think so. Why do you dislike him so much?

ROBERT
You mean, the Reverend?

MRS. DODGE
No matter what you think, he's not judging you. He's just a sincere young man.

ROBERT
Sincerely annoying. Besides, if he's all BFF with the Almighty, how come they lost last Sunday?

MRS. DODGE
That's not how it works. And he does lead the division in quarterback sacks.

ROBERT
How do you know these things?

MRS. DODGE
Football wife.

ROBERT
Marcus retired from the Seahawks twenty years ago.

MRS. DODGE
It never ends.

Robert finally cracks a slight smile and heads into his office. Mrs. Dodge looks after him, concerned.

INT. WEST & WEST LAW FIRM, ROBERT'S OFFICE -- DAY

Robert’s at the desk in his office (which has windows that look out on a field of cubicles) when SAMANTHA WEST, 27, half-Filipina, elegant in tailored slacks and a silk blouse, with a little gold crucifix, comes in. She drops into a chair.

SAMANTHA
Here, as summoned, big bro. Don’t start on me about my sisters. It’s a real business thing.

ROBERT
Sama, I had interesting chats with Curtis, Raheem and Bob this morning.

SAMANTHA
Two clients and an actual friend. You’re improving.

ROBERT
All of whom invited me on a Christmas ski holiday.

SAMANTHA
Really? How nice.

Robert just stares at her. She squirms. He keeps staring. She fidgets. He stares harder.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
OK. But I don’t think brooding by yourself in an empty ski cabin in Mammoth is the best idea this particular Christmas.

ROBERT
From the woman who hates Hawaii but goes there every Christmas with a stepfather who spends all his time on the phone, a mother who ignores her, and three half-sisters who drive her nuts.

SAMANTHA
A, taking up snowboarding on the Big Island helped with that, and B, they're family.

ROBERT
How nice for you.

SAMANTHA
We're also family. I'd trade it all for your guest room.

ROBERT
No.

SAMANTHA
You wouldn't even have to talk to me until the twenty-sixth.

ROBERT
No.

SAMANTHA
You don't have to hate Christmas forever.

ROBERT
I don't hate it. I avoid it.

SAMANTHA
Because you hate it. Besides, you've been extra miserable for months, ever since the breakup.

ROBERT
I'm fine.

SAMANTHA
That's what you say when you're anything but.

ROBERT
I have calls to make. See you at ten.

Defeated, Samantha sighs. As she rises...

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Appreciate the thought, but stop trying to set up play dates for me.

SAMANTHA
Could have been heli-skiing with Bob. Just sayin'.

INT. WEST & WEST LAW FIRM, ROBERT'S OUTER OFFICE -- DAY

On her way out, Samantha pauses at Mrs. Dodge's desk.

SAMANTHA
Hurricane making landfall at ten.

Mrs. Dodge chuckles.

MRS. DODGE
Christmas is always a little bumpy. But I have hope.

SAMANTHA
Don't know why he's bent out of shape about not having a mom. After all, he has you.

She winks at Mrs. Dodge, who smiles.

INT. WEST & WEST LAW OFFICE, LOBBY -- DAY

Samantha is at the elevator when the doors open to reveal the KING SISTERS -- MARIANA, GLORIANA and BETTINA -- the triplets from the billboard, all in snug but modest jumpsuits in their regular colors. They kiss in greeting. Penelope stands up and waves. Mariana waves back, and Penelope beams.

SAMANTHA
Ready for Hawaii?

BETTINA
Oh, we're not going...

MARIANA
To Hawaii this year. Daddy...

GLORIANA
And Mom are in Tokyo until February doing a deal, so...

BETTINA
He bought us a house, so we can...

MARIANA
Tape stuff for a holiday special...

BETTINA
At that place where Robert skis. I forget the name.

SAMANTHA
Mammoth?

BETTINA
Yeah, that’s it.

Samantha looks dismayed.

INT. WEST & WEST LAW FIRM, ROBERT’S OFFICE -- DAY

Robert sits at his desk, head in hands. Muffled women’s voices engage in rapid-fire chatter. Finally he looks up.

ROBERT
Enough!

Silence falls. Sitting across from Robert are the King sisters. Samantha sits off to one side.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Now, one at a time, explain why you’re invading my ski resort.

BETTINA
The producers called a meeting and said they want us to do...

GLORIANA
A live special on Epiphany...

MARIANA
The Feast of the Three Kings...

BETTINA
So, we’re filming insert segments from Christmas to New Year’s at the new house...

MARIANA
For the special, which the producers hope...

BETTINA
Will help our ratings, which aren’t good enough yet...

GLORIANA
To get us on the streaming service.

Robert does a slow, gazed blink.

ROBERT
That thing you do, the serial talking, makes me dizzy. Forget one at a time. Bettina, you continue.

GLORIANA
Why does she get to talk?

MARIANA
To be fair, Gloriana, she was actually at the meeting.

GLORIANA
So what, Mariana? I had a manicure!

Robert slams his hand on the desk, and they all jump. Collecting himself, he looks at Bettina.

ROBERT
Bettina?

BETTINA
We also have to revamp our image. TikTok says we're too bougie.

ROBERT
Bougie?

BETTINA
You know, rich, fancy.

ROBERT
But, I thought being rich was part of your brand.

BETTINA
Bougie's out. Basic is too far, but the producers think an injection of normcore will help.

ROBERT
(to Samantha)
Samantha. English, please?

SAMANTHA
Not so fancy, but not entirely not fancy. More like an intentional unpretentiousness, to reconnect them to the core audience.

Robert gives up and turns back to Bettina.

ROBERT
So, that's what the what-did-you-call-it special is for?

BETTINA
Epiphany, yes. So, we're inviting a few friends...

GLORIANA
We don't really know them.

MARIANA
Dwayne does. They're two teammates from his Bible study.

Robert gives them a sharp look, and they hunker down. He looks back to Bettina, who reaches down, and from her large bag, pulls out a poster. She unrolls it, and it shows the sisters, in ugly sweaters and ski boots, holding cocoa and cookies, romping in the snow, with snow-covered mountains in the background.

ROBERT
Ski boots? But you three don't ski.

BETTINA
Nobody wants to watch skiing. It's not the Olympics. We just need snow. Snow is très normie at Christmas.

MARIANA
Also, Dwayne may propose.

BETTINA
Dwayne better propose. I even got backup rings from Cartier.

MARIANA
Why?

BETTINA
What if the one he picks doesn't read on camera?

Robert rubs his face wearily.

ROBERT
OK, what else?

Samantha jumps in.

SAMANTHA
Since Mom and Gideon can't be on hand for the filming, Gideon wants you there. He said that's stipulated in their contract.

BETTINA
Especially on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. If you're not there, we can't film, and we have to get Dwayne's proposal.

ROBERT
Can't you just restage it later?

MARIANA
That would be fake.

ROBERT
Mariana, all reality TV is fake.

MARIANA
Not our show.

Bettina and Gloriana give her side-eye.

BETTINA
Come on, we're family.

ROBERT
We are not related.

MARIANA
Sure, we are. You're our half-sister's half-brother. It's the wrong half, but...

ROBERT
(to the trio)
Out. Wait in the lobby. Now. Go.

Gloriana starts to object, but Bettina waves her to be quiet. The three get up (Robert also rises) and exit: Gloriana in a huff, and Bettina looking irritated. Mariana scampers around the desk and gives Robert an incredibly awkward hug, which he stoically endures. With a smile and a wave, she leaves. Robert sits back down and looks at Samantha.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Let me get this straight: They took a meeting, without me or their parents, and then signed on to a live special, which is not in their contract. Did you know about this?

SAMANTHA
Just that they wanted to talk to you about something important. Didn't get details until they came in. And to be fair, it was mostly Bettina. She's got... ambitions.

ROBERT
I bet she does, but I'm going to have a little chat with the producers.

SAMANTHA
Please don't wreck this. I texted their agent. The ratings are shakier than they know.

ROBERT
Since when do you care whether or not they're TV stars?

SAMANTHA
I don't. But they do, and they're my sisters. Please.

ROBERT
And, you know how I feel about Christmas.

SAMANTHA
But they don't, not really. If you won't do it for them, do it for me.

He glares at her pleading look, then visibly relents.

ROBERT
The special isn't actually airing until sometime after New Year's, right?

She nods.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
So we can start filming the day after Christmas. No one will know the difference.

SAMANTHA
OK, but there is one more thing.

Robert looks at her with dread.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
Everyone’s going up together early tomorrow on a big party bus, and they really do have to film during the trip, so...

ROBERT
No. Absolutely not.

INT. WEST & WEST LAW FIRM, OUTSIDE ROBERT’S OFFICE -- DAY

Walking by Robert’s windows, Penelope glances in and sees Robert standing over his desk, reading the riot act into the speakerphone (the glass muffles his voice), as Mrs. Dodge takes notes. Before she’s seen watching, she scurries off.

INT. WEST & WEST LAW FIRM, ROBERT'S OFFICE -- DAY

Robert leans toward the speakerphone for one last volley.

ROBERT
Finally, if you ever try to go around me to talk to my clients again, I will make it very, very difficult for you or anyone at your company to talk to any of my other clients, especially the one you’d like to hire to host your new show. And if you have a single thought that I don’t mean it, remember that the King sisters are not just clients, they’re family... of family.

He hangs up with a flourish. He looks up at Mrs. Dodge, who gives him a little flurry of applause.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Don’t tell the Kings, or my sister, I said they’re family. Bettina already thinks she can get away with murder.

DORIS
Of course not. I want them to live as much in fear of you as ever.

Robert snorts.

ROBERT
Which is to say, not nearly enough.

Mrs. Dodge chuckles.

MRS. DODGE
You don't fool me, you know. You'd leap in front of an onrushing train, not just for Samantha, but for any of those girls.

Robert gives her a long look, not disagreeing but also not giving in to open agreement. Finally, he clears his throat...

ROBERT
Let's hope it never comes to that.

With a satisfied smile, Mrs. Dodge rises, but before she exits...

MRS. DODGE
Should I arrange a car to take you to the bus in the morning?

ROBERT
(sternly)
No. Absolutely not.

INT. ELIZABETH'S SUV -- NIGHT

As twilight fades, Elizabeth and Gabriel (in a booster seat in the back, and holding his stuffed lamb -- and both without toothpaste) are driving home. There's a small rosary hanging from the rearview mirror.

GABRIEL
What about Papi while we're away?

ELIZABETH
It was Papi's idea. He needs to focus on helping Nana get better after her hip surgery. Aren't you excited about making a snowman?

Gabriel sighs. Elizabeth gives him an apologetic look.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Hey, how about we drive around the Valley and look at Christmas lights before going home?

Gabriel grins and nods.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
We can grab chicken nuggets. You can share them with Lambkin.

GABRIEL
He doesn't have a mouth!

They laugh.

INT. WEST & WEST LAW FIRM, MAIN FLOOR -- NIGHT

The office is deserted, except for Mrs. Dodge, Her cellphone rings. At the other end is her husband MARCUS, 50s, still built like an athlete, standing on the back deck of a house.

INTERCUT BETWEEN MRS. DODGE AND MARCUS

MARCUS
So, babe, is our adopted third son coming? I've started the brisket.

MRS. DODGE
Don't know yet.

MARCUS
He always comes for the Day Before the Day Before Barbecue Blast.

MRS. DODGE
It's different this year. He hasn't been himself the last few months.

MARCUS
He should've lost his first true love at twelve. You bounce back better then. He's going to miss some kickin' brisket.

MRS. DODGE
You do realize I married you for your barbecue skills.

MARCUS
Thought it was my washboard abs.

MRS. DODGE
That was part of it.

INT. WEST & WEST LAW FIRM, ROBERT'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Mrs. Dodge enters. Robert has changed into workout gear.

MRS. DODGE
Marcus was asking if you're coming tonight. My boys are bringing their families. We're having brisket.

ROBERT
Appreciate it, but no. Hitting the gym and then home to pack.

MRS. DODGE
Early bus ride?

He just growls under his breath.

MRS. DODGE (CONT'D)
Will Elizabeth be at her condo across the street? Maybe you'll have to dig out her car again.

ROBERT
She said she never comes at Christmas. She spends it with her kid -- you, know, the one she didn't tell me about for three months' worth of dating.

MRS. DODGE
Is there no part of you that's hoping she'll be there?

ROBERT
No. Case closed. Besides, the Kings will keep me plenty busy.

MRS. DODGE
Not on Christmas.

He avoids her eyes and grabs a leather backpack.

MRS. DODGE (CONT'D)
Robert, this can't go on forever. What if things had been different, and Elizabeth was still in your life today? What then?

ROBERT
Guess we'll never know.

EXT. DIAZ HOME -- NIGHT

In front of the Diaz home, Gabriel hops out of Elizabeth's SUV, then she closes the door. As she walks toward the front door, he lingers, looking at a neighbor's Christmas Nativity display, which includes a yellow star with a long tail.

ELIZABETH
Come on, Gabriel. We're getting a late start on packing.

She turns just in time to join him in seeing a SHOOTING STAR.

GABRIEL
Mama, was that the Christmas star?

ELIZABETH
That was a shooting star. Make a wish.

Gabriel scrunches up his face.

GABRIEL
OK, I made a wish.

ELIZABETH
What is it?

GABRIEL
It’s a secret. Now it’s your turn.

Elizabeth just smiles, but with a tinge of sadness.

INT. ROBERT’S CONDO -- NIGHT

Bourbon in hand, Robert gazes out at the light-bedecked boats in the Marina. His phone rings in his pocket. He pulls it out, and it says GIDEON KING. He steels himself and answers.

ROBERT
Good morning Gideon, how’s Tokyo? ... Yes, I know. But Sama is also their lawyer, and she’ll be there on Christmas. ... Yes, I read the clause. I wrote the clause. ... There’s no need to raise your voice...

Robert holds the cell away from his ear, wincing. An unintelligible loud voice is heard. He takes a deep breath.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You’re free to do that whenever you want, but you know I always work in their best interest and always will. I was just exploring options. ... Understood. Have a great day.

He hangs up, and a general look of dejection comes over him.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Merry Christmas to me.

Shaking it off, he then places a call.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Hi. Sorry to bother you at home, but about that car...

He turns away, missing another shooting star.

EXT. KING SISTERS' PARTY BUS -- DAY

A black limo pulls up next to the huge luxury party bus. Robert exits the limo, unshaven and grumpy-looking, carrying a parka and a duffel. Samantha appears at the bus door. Robert comes up the steps.

ROBERT
This ride. That’s it. Nothing more until after Christmas. Understood?

SAMANTHA
Understood.

She enters. He hesitates a moment on the top step then looks genuinely pained before going inside.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. ELIZABETH'S SUV -- DAY

On Gabriel's face in the back seat, watching out the windows as the mountains roll by.

GABRIEL
If we're up high in the mountains, can Daddy see us easier?

ELIZABETH
Gabriel, you know Heaven is not actually in the sky. Your Daddy can see us fine, wherever we are.

GABRIEL
If he was here, he could teach me how to ski.

ELIZABETH
Actually, that would always be me. Daddy was good at many, many things, but skiing was not one of them. Mostly, he just fell down.

Gabriel ponders for a moment.

GABRIEL
Like when he fell down in the war when I was a baby?

ELIZABETH
Your father didn't fall down in the war. He's one of *the fallen*. He died saving other Marines.

GABRIEL
My Daddy was a 'Merican hero.

ELIZABETH
Yes, he was.

GABRIEL
Nana and Papi miss him.

ELIZABETH
We all do.

They exchange smiles in the rearview mirror.

INT. KING SISTERS' PARTY BUS -- DAY

Robert is making his way back from the bathroom, as the bus rumbles along. DWAYNE, hulking but sweet-faced, 20s, on his way there, loses his balance momentarily and bumps into him.

DWAYNE
Oh, I'm so sorry.

Robert evades Dwayne's attempt to help him right himself.

ROBERT
I'm fine, Dwayne.

DWAYNE
Mariana and I are so glad you came.

Robert nods. Dwayne keeps moving, and Robert looks after him for a moment and shakes his head. He then passes Samantha on his way back to his window seat. After a beat, Samantha gets up and settles into the seat next to her brother.

SAMANTHA
The whole night's gonna be blah-blah-blah about filming, unless Dwayne proposes, then it will be wah-wah-wah about not filming. Have mercy and let me stay with you.

ROBERT
You don't give up easy, do you?

SAMANTHA
The new lodge has its own Sno-Cat. If I drive it down, I can take myself home in the morning.

ROBERT
No.

SAMANTHA
Come on. It doesn't violate the terms of the deal.

ROBERT
For the last time, no.

SAMANTHA
You may not have a mother or a girlfriend anymore, but you do have a sister. Maybe one of these days, she'll stop asking.

With that, she exits. Robert grumbles to himself then pulls out his phone and scrolls idly through photos until he hits one of Elizabeth, in ski gear and wearing skis, looking up at him from her perch on a snowbank, smiling. He then scrolls to one where she's eating an ice-cream cone on Venice Beach. He lingers then shakes himself and looks out the window.

INT. DINER -- DAY

Elizabeth and Gabriel enter. She spies a door that says women's room. She starts to lead him there, but Gabriel points at the men's room.

GABRIEL
Mama, I'm not a baby. I'm five.

ELIZABETH
Can you manage getting your snow bib off and back on?

GABRIEL
Yes.

ELIZABETH
OK. Quickly, though, we need to grab a bite and get back on the road to beat the storm.

Gabriel goes in, giving a wave before he closes the door. Elizabeth sits in a nearby booth, pulls out her Android phone and sees a Google Photos memory notification.

INSERT: You have a new memory, 7 years ago

She clicks on it, and it shows PHOTOS of her with a handsome Marine, GABE DIAZ, 30: they're on the beach (she in a wetsuit with a surfboard, he in a USMC tee); she's showing off her engagement ring, with a sign that says, "Gabe asked!," and dancing at their wedding reception, with him in his dress uniform. She smiles, a bit sadly.

Then she flicks through the photos and lands upon a SELFIE of her and Robert on a ski slope, smiling, and another PHOTO showing them on the beach at sunset. She lingers, sighs, then closes the app. The bathroom door opens, and Gabriel comes out -- with his snow bib all askew. Elizabeth grins.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Gabriel, we may need to adjust that bib a bit.

EXT. KING SISTERS' PARTY BUS -- DAY

The bus rolls along through the foothills.

INT. KING SISTERS' PARTY BUS -- DAY

Robert stands at the front of the bus, watching filming at the back. A FIELD PRODUCER and CAMERAMAN hover as the sisters and two burly NFL PLAYERS chatter excitedly. Robert glances over at Samantha, a few seats away, with headphones on, dozing. Dwayne slides out of his seat and comes up to stand with Robert, who doesn’t appreciate the company.

DWAYNE
Hey, brother.

ROBERT
Dwayne.

DWAYNE
They're talking about the engagement. I'm supposed to be asleep, but I woke up. So, I came up here, so I don't hear any of it.

ROBERT
No faking, huh?

DWAYNE
You can't control when you wake up.

Robert looks away, but Dwayne persists.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
So, Mariana said you went to boarding school in Vermont.

ROBERT
Yeah.

DWAYNE
Like, high school?

ROBERT
Started at seven, the minimum age.

DWAYNE
Your father sent you away at seven?

ROBERT
Got tired of hiring nannies.

DWAYNE
Whoa. Well, Christmases must have been amazing. I mean, Vermont. I grew up in Florida, so it was still summer, only slightly cooler.

ROBERT
There was snow.

DWAYNE
But, you must have come back to L.A. for Christmas.

ROBERT
Nope.

DWAYNE
What did you do?

ROBERT
Ski.

DWAYNE
Ski?

ROBERT
The headmaster and the faculty and their families lived locally. So during Christmas break, I'd bounce around and ski with different families. Then, when I was old enough, I went on my own.

DWAYNE
But your father would visit, right?

ROBERT
As a specialist in international law, he was usually somewhere... international.

DWAYNE
Oh.

There’s an awkward pause, and Dwayne notices filming has stopped.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
I'd better get back. They're going to film me talking to Mariana.

Dwayne hesitates a beat then gives Robert an awkward hug, which he endures somewhat less stoically than Mariana’s. Dwayne then heads down the aisle.

ROBERT
(muttering)
What's it with those two and the hugging?

Then there's a commotion from the end of the bus.

BETTINA
It's snowing. Get the camera.

Everyone clusters at the windows, looking out at a flurry. Robert just shakes his head.

EXT. ELIZABETH'S MAMMOTH CONDO BUILDING -- DAY

Leaning into her SUV, Elizabeth unbuckles Gabriel from his car seat. He hops out, realizes he's standing in snow and grins at his mother. She looks past him across the street to Robert's SKI CABIN, an A-frame chalet with a walk that leads down to the road, where there are two lamp poles. A sudden snowball to Elizabeth's chest breaks the spell.

ELIZABETH
Where'd you learn to do that?

GABRIEL
Peppa Pig!

Elizabeth teaches Gabriel how to stick out his tongue and catch the falling snowflakes. He's delighted beyond measure.

ELIZABETH
Snowman tomorrow?

GABRIEL
Yes, please!

ELIZABETH
Right now, we have to get the luggage inside and have hot soup.

She looks up at the lowering sky.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Storm's rolling in.

INT. KING SISTERS' PARTY BUS -- DAY

Dwayne sits down next to Robert, who tries to ignore him, but Dwayne pokes him in the arm.

DWAYNE
Brother, it’s Dwayne.

ROBERT
Yes, I know.

Dwayne checks around him then furtively pulls out a ring box.

DWAYNE
I need your opinion.

He opens the box, revealing a large engagement ring.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
I know you’re not exactly the marrying kind, or at all monogamous...

Robert gives him a hard look.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
No judgment. We’re all sinners in need of grace. But is it true that you never date a woman more than twice?

ROBERT
Do you want my opinion on dating?

DWAYNE
No, sorry. Sorry. You have good taste, Samantha says, and you know what women like...

ROBERT
Uh-huh.

DWAYNE
I mean, in jewelry. Do you think Mariana will like this?

ROBERT
Will it read on camera?

DWAYNE
Of course. I shot video of it in the store to make sure.

ROBERT
Then, you’re good.

DWAYNE
But do you think she’ll like it?

ROBERT
It’s big and sparkly. What woman wouldn’t?

DWAYNE
Thank you, brother.

He tucks the ring away and slips back to his own seat. Robert attempts to shake all of this off and get back to his reading. After a beat, Dwayne reappears.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
Sorry. One other thing.

ROBERT
Yes?

DWAYNE
Samantha seemed upset earlier after talking to you. Mariana noticed and was worried. Is everything OK?

ROBERT
Yes, fine. Good.

DWAYNE
Good?

ROBERT
Good.

DWAYNE
OK. Thanks.

Dwayne disappears again. Robert thinks, absorbing this. Dwayne reappears, leaning in from the aisle.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
Sorry, but, is there anything I could do to get you come over tonight? Super Bowl tickets, maybe?

ROBERT
No.

DWAYNE
Luxury suite?

ROBERT
No.

DWAYNE
Sorry. Sama said you have issues. But it would mean so much to us.

Finally, Robert stands up and gets in his face.

ROBERT
(low but intense)
One more word, and we're going to have a problem. Is that clear?

Dwayne nods and backs away. Robert looks around, sees nobody is paying attention and drops back into his seat.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(to himself)
No retainer is worth this.

INT. KING SISTERS' PARTY BUS -- DAY

Robert wakes from dozing and looks out the bus window at the falling snow. He then smiles on seeing a sign that indicates they're entering the town of Mammoth Lakes. He thinks for a moment then gets up and goes over to sit next to Samantha, jostling her awake. She pulls off her headphones.

SAMANTHA
Are we there yet?

ROBERT
Almost. Just wanted to remind you that your ski gear is at my cabin.

SAMANTHA
Yeah. I know.

ROBERT
So, when they're not filming, after Christmas, maybe we hit the slopes.

SAMANTHA
I don't ski. You don't snowboard.

ROBERT
I could try.

SAMANTHA
You'd do that for me?

ROBERT
Sure, why not?

With that, he gets up and goes back to his seat, leaving Samantha happy but a bit perplexed. Then, Bettina plops down next to Samantha.

BETTINA
I just thought, with the snow, how are we going to get this bus up the hill to the house?

SAMANTHA
We're not. The caretaker will leave the Sno-Cat at the bottom, and I'll drive us up. We'll all fit. It seats eight.

Gloriana pops her head over the seat behind them.

GLORIANA
What's a Sno-Cat? Is that like a snow leopard? Do we have one of those?

SAMANTHA
It's like a truck, but on tank treads that go over snow.

GLORIANA
Oh. That's no fun.

She disappears.

BETTINA
And you can drive it?

SAMANTHA
I learned more than just French and chocolate fondue as an exchange student in the Alps.

BETTINA
Chocolate fondue? We're definitely going to film that.

The sisters laugh.

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN -- DAY

The bus pulls out to reveal Robert standing in front of his cabin, as snow falls heavily.

ROBERT
Home alone, at last.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- DAY

Robert moves through the vaulted great room, where his ski gear hangs on racks near the entrance. Next to the door is a sponge mop and a bucket (for melting snow). A large cluster of sheet-covered furniture sits at the far end, in front of a large, unused stone fireplace.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- DAY

He goes into a den with a smaller fireplace below a huge TV, furnished with a big leather sectional. It’s next to a kitchen, with two stools at an island, and a staircase leading up to a loft. He pulls off his parka and drops it on a stool. The toy LION, now worn as the Velveteen Rabbit, sits under a lamp.

INT. ELIZABETH'S CONDO, LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Elizabeth and Gabriel are on the couch in her living room, drinking soup from mugs. Gabriel suddenly sits up, alarmed.

GABRIEL
Mama, where’s Lambkin?

ELIZABETH
I’m sure he’s here somewhere.

GABRIEL
What if I left him at the diner?

ELIZABETH
Calm down. We’ll find him.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, LOFT BEDROOM -- DAY

Robert, showered and shaved, in sweatpants and a tee, emerges from the bathroom. He pulls on a Seahawks hoodie, steps into sheepskin slippers, then tucks his phone in his pocket. As he does, it boops, and he sees a text from CARETAKER: “Box from your office came to our place. Just dropped it off.”

Just as he heads downstairs, Elizabeth and Gabriel can be seen through the loft windows coming out of her building.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, DEN-KITCHEN -- DAY

At the base of the stairs, Robert looks around at his sparse, quiet cabin, drinks in the silence and solitude, heaves a great sigh of relief and heads to the front door for the box.

EXT. ELIZABETH'S CONDO BUILDING -- DAY

Gabriel waits impatiently as Elizabeth unlocks her SUV. She then watches while he scrambles around the interior. Finally, he emerges with Lambkin and hoists him happily in the air.

GABRIEL
Goooaaal!

ELIZABETH
See, I told you we'd find him.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- DAY

Robert glances across the street as he grabs the box from his doorstep. Elizabeth has her back to him, watching Gabriel hoisting Lambkin in the air. Then she turns -- and his jaw drops. He quickly steps inside and closes the door.

EXT. ELIZABETH'S CONDO BUILDING -- DAY

Elizabeth looks at Robert's cabin, but only sees a closed door. She turns back to Gabriel.

ELIZABETH
Come on, we can watch the snow falling from inside.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- DAY

Robert peeks through the sidelight next to the door and sees her and Gabriel go back inside. He hits a button next to the door and window shades descend. Panic spreads over his face.

ROBERT
Great.

Then, the lights go out. Robert stands for a moment in semi-darkness.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Every time it storms.

Then the lights flicker back on.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Gotta love a generator.

He peeks out the sidelight and sees the streetlights and outdoor Christmas lights are out as well.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN-KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Robert throws a couple extra logs onto the fire. He's next to a coffeetable on which is an elaborate chess set.

He then sprawls on the sectional. His phone boops. He reads a text from Mrs. Dodge: "Merry Christmas! Did this year's box arrive?" He texts back, "Yes. Thank you."

The opened box sits open at the other end of the sofa. Christmas decorations poke out. Mrs. Dodge then texts: "Is she there?" He texts back: "Gotta go. Enjoy Midnight Mass." He picks the box up and heads toward the garage.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GARAGE -- NIGHT

In the attached garage, Robert puts the box on some shelves, where it sits with a couple similar ones, and a larger one marked "prelit Christmas tree." They're pretty dusty. As he opens the garage door, he hears a loud, frantic knocking at his front door.

ROBERT
Boy, Sama, you really don't take no for an answer.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

At the front door, Robert peeks through the sidelight. On his doorstep, backed by the heavy snowstorm, is JOEY BAILEY, 20s.

Robert opens the door the length of the chain.

JOEY
Hi, sorry to bother you, but it's an emergency. My name's Joey Bailey, and my wife DeeDee is having a baby, like, now.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

At the door, Robert listens to Joey finish his explanation.

JOEY
We were trying to get to the hospital when we got stuck in the snow down the street.

ROBERT
Call Nine-One-One.

JOEY
We did. Nothing's moving. I'm scared the baby will come in the car, and it's so cold out. I know we should have stayed home, but I thought we could make it...

Robert unhooks the door and looks down his street.

EXT. ROBERT'S MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

A couple of dark houses away, there is indeed a SmartCar with the passenger side buried into a snowbank. Joey waves. The driver's door opens and a very pregnant WOMAN, DeeDee, also early 20s, stands up, waves back, then returns to the car.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert steps back inside the door.

JOEY
You're the only house with lights on.

Robert looks again, fighting with himself.

ROBERT
OK. Gimme a minute.

JOEY
Thank you, sir. You don't know what this means...

Robert closes the door on Joey's face.

ROBERT
Great.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, SPARE BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Robert, carrying DeeDee, enters a first-floor spare bedroom and puts her on the bed. Joey trails with bags.

JOEY
And, she's only eight months along.

ROBERT
What?

DEEDEE
Don't suppose there's a doctor around here.

Robert is about to say no, then remembers...

ROBERT
Actually, there is.

EXT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE ELIZABETH'S CONDO -- NIGHT

Standing the dark hall (only emergency lights), Robert knocks on the door, waits, then knocks harder.

ROBERT
Elizabeth, it's me. Open the door. I need your help... medical help.

INT. ELIZABETH'S CONDO -- NIGHT

She looks out the peephole, sees him and hesitates for a long beat, breathing hard.

ELIZABETH
Call Nine-One-One.

INTERCUT BETWEEN ROBERT AND ELIZABETH

ROBERT
Emergency services can't come through the storm. There's a woman in my place having a baby.

Inside, Elizabeth's eyes pop wide open.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
It’s not mine. There’s a couple in my house, and the wife’s in labor.

ELIZABETH
I’m a dermatologist.

ROBERT
I’m a lawyer. J.D., M.D.: you choose. And, she’s only eight months.

Hearing that, Elizabeth cracks open the door to the length of the chain. The sight of her throws Robert off. For a long moment, they’re lost for words. Finally...

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Hi.

ELIZABETH
Hi.

Another awkward pause.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Haven’t delivered a baby since internship.

ROBERT
One more than me.

ELIZABETH
In the dark and cold.

ROBERT
No, I have a generator.

She looks back at Gabriel, wrapped in a blanket.

ELIZABETH
Well...

EXT. ROBERT’S MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

Up on Robert’s back, Gabriel grins for all he’s worth as Robert and Elizabeth, carrying bags, sprint through the snowstorm.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert bursts through the door, a giggling Gabriel on his back, Elizabeth in tow. The three are covered in snow.

Robert shakes his onto the floor. Depositing Gabriel on his feet, he proceeds to roughly shake the snow off him, too.

GABRIEL
(to Elizabeth)
That was fun, Mama! Can we do it again?

ELIZABETH
The snow will melt all over the floor.

ROBERT
That's what the mop's for.

She scans the room, noting the shrouded furniture.

ELIZABETH
I thought you had this place for years.

ROBERT
Yeah. So?

She shrugs. Then, Joey emerges from the spare bedroom.

JOEY
This the doctor?

ELIZABETH
You must be Joey. I'm Dr. Elizabeth Diaz, and this is my son, Gabriel.

Joey waves, and Gabriel gives him a tentative wave back.

JOEY
My wife's in the bedroom.

ELIZABETH
OK, you go back to her. I'll be along in a moment.

Joey goes back in the bedroom. She turns to Robert.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Robert, look after Gabriel while I deal with my patient. What happens in there is nothing for him to see.

ROBERT
You want me to babysit? What do I know about kids? What do I know about *this* kid? And what if he needs to use the bathroom?

GABRIEL
I’m not a baby. I’m five.

ELIZABETH
This is non-negotiable. If you want my help, this is the deal.

ROBERT
Understood. Consider it handled.

She goes into the bedroom. Robert motions Gabriel to follow.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- NIGHT

When they get between the kitchen and the den, Gabriel gives the area a thorough once-over. Finally...

GABRIEL
Where’s your Christmas tree?

ROBERT
Back in my office.

Gabriel falls silent again. The two stare awkwardly at each other for a long beat. Robert looks around the room and spies Lion under the lamp. This sparks something.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(gesturing at the lamb)
What’s your buddy’s name?

GABRIEL
Lambkin.

Another long beat as Robert thinks.

ROBERT
He like hot chocolate?

GABRIEL
He doesn’t have a mouth.

ROBERT
Fair enough, but you do.

Robert smiles, and Gabriel gives him a little smile in return.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- NIGHT

Gabriel sips cocoa. Robert returns from the other room.

ROBERT
Well, all the water's mopped up. That should make your mother happy.

Trying to figure out a next move, Robert notes his hoodie.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Wifi's up, and I have some games on the cloud DVR. You like football?

GABRIEL
I love *fútbol!*

He thrusts Lambkin in the air.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
Goooaaal!

ROBERT
Right. That's not football.

GABRIEL
Yes, it is.

ROBERT
No, that's soccer.

GABRIEL
Papi calls it *fútbol*.

ROBERT
Look, kid, in America, football is another game entirely. Americans play football, other people play soccer.

GABRIEL
(upset)
My Daddy in Heaven played *fútbol*. I've seen video.

ROBERT
Well, some Americans like soccer.

GABRIEL
My Daddy was a 'Merican hero!

ROBERT
Sure, sure...

GABRIEL
You're mean. I want my Mama.

ROBERT
Sorry. OK? I didn't mean to say anything bad about your Daddy.

GABRIEL
(getting weepy)
You said he wasn't American.

Gabriel starts to sprint to the spare bedroom, but Robert hustles, cuts him off and kneels.

ROBERT
No, I didn't. It's just... it's a language thing. Look, let's get some popcorn to go with that cocoa, and I'll explain. If you still want to talk to your mother after that, we'll go get her. OK?

He puts out his hand.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Man to man. Do we have a deal?

Gabriel looks at him for a long moment, rubs his nose, then puts out his hand, and they shake.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Robert goes back to the couch and sits next to Gabriel, who's snuggled with Lambkin under a Seahawks throw blanket.

ROBERT
So, we've figured out that soccer, or *fútbol,* is not the same game as American football. I've further stipulated that being a soccer fan is not un-American.

Gabriel nods.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
And we learned the only football team we root for in my house is the Seattle Seahawks. Remember why?

GABRIEL
Because of Mrs. Dodge.

ROBERT
Exactly. And Mr. Dodge, former Seahawks linebacker.

Gabriel nods.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
OK. Then we learned about quarters and downs and touchdowns and lines of scrimmage and some basic rules of play. You got all that?

GABRIEL
(thinks)
No.

ROBERT
You got any of it?

GABRIEL
(thinks)
No.

They stare at each other for a long second, then Gabriel grins slightly, and Robert realizes he's being played. Gabriel looks back expectantly at the TV. Robert hits play.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Robert and Gabriel are still on the couch, with popcorn bowls and hot cocoa mugs on the coffeetable. The Seahawks score, and Robert looks to Gabriel expectantly.

GABRIEL
(softly)
Go Hawks.

ROBERT
What did I teach you? Put some oomph into it, boy.

GABRIEL
(slightly louder)
Go Hawks.

ROBERT
Better. When you go home later, you'll know what team to root for.

GABRIEL
(loud)
Go Hawks!

A voice comes from behind them.

ELIZABETH
What Hawks?

Robert turns.

GABRIEL
The Seahawks, Mama.

ROBERT
Mrs. Dodge’s husband used to be a defensive lineman for the team.

GABRIEL
Marcus the Mauler!

ELIZABETH
Charming. Can I talk to you for a minute, Robert?

ROBERT
Sure.
(to Gabriel)
Keep watching for touchdowns.

He get up and joins Elizabeth.

GABRIEL
Mama, we’re havin’ bro time.

ELIZABETH
Bro time?

ROBERT
Yep, just a couple of bros, chillin’ and watching the game.

GABRIEL
Lambkin’s having bro time, too. He’s chillin’.

He holds up his left hand in an L-shape.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
LOB, Mama!

Elizabeth looks at Robert.

ROBERT
Used to mean Legion of Boom, our defensive squad. Now Mrs. Dodge says it means Love Our Brothers.

ELIZABETH
Oh. OK. That’s nice. Let’s go talk.

Gabriel refocuses on the game, so they walk out of earshot.

ROBERT
What's up?

ELIZABETH
DeeDee needs her hypertension meds. She's sure she brought them, but they probably fell out in the car.

Elizabeth hands him the car keys.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Could you get them? I'll mind Gabriel.

ROBERT
Hypertension? Shouldn't we figure out some way to get them to the hospital then?

ELIZABETH
Don't know what that would be, but I wouldn't move her right now even if we could.

ROBERT
OK. Consider it done.

EXT. SMART CAR -- NIGHT

Robert takes off snowshoes and sticks them in the high snowbank the car is stuck into. He unlocks the driver's door, but finds it frozen shut. Grumbling, he chips at the doorframe with an ice scraper. Then he braces himself, grabs the door handle and gives a mighty pull.

He flies backwards, landing in a huge upward poof of snow. Robert looks up into the snow falling into his face.

ROBERT
All I wanted was a quiet Christmas by myself. Is that so much to ask?

INT. SMART CAR -- NIGHT

With his flashlight, Robert can see the pills, but no matter what he does, he can't quite reach them. As he backs up, he bangs his elbow hard on the shift lever.

ROBERT
Son of a...

He also hits the horn, drowning out the last word.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert comes in. Elizabeth, who's been sitting at the island with Gabriel, rises to meet him. Gabriel follows.

ROBERT
Can't reach the pills. I'm too big, and the car's too small.

GABRIEL
I'm small. I can do it.

ELIZABETH
Can't you go in from the back seat?

ROBERT
There isn't a back seat.

ELIZABETH
She needs those pills.

ROBERT
Could shovel out the passenger side.

ELIZABETH
How long will that take?

ROBERT
Dunno. I don't have a snowblower. The caretaker handles all that.

ELIZABETH
You'd better get shoveling, then.

At that moment, they get hit by a blast of cold air. In unison, they look over to see the front door open.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Gabriel? Gabriel?

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN -- NIGHT

Robert struggles through the snow, waving his flashlight.

ROBERT
Gabriel? Where are you? Gabriel?

He hears a muffled sound. Wheeling, he sees a hood and two mittens sticking out of a hole in the snow. Pulling hard, he hoists Gabriel up out of a snowbank. The boy sputters.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
What were you thinking?

GABRIEL
Didn't know there was so much snow in the whole world.

Robert picks Gabriel up and waves back to Elizabeth, standing in the doorway.

ROBERT
Got him. We're good. All good. Going for the pills.

Elizabeth waves back, relieved. Robert grabs his snowshoes, puts them on and crouches down.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Hop up.

GABRIEL
Hooray!

Robert hoists him up, and off they go.

EXT. ROBERT'S MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

They reach the car, and Robert opens the driver's door.

ROBERT
Ready?

GABRIEL
Ready.

ROBERT
Don't hurt yourself. Your mother will kill me.

GABRIEL
Mama worries too much. And I’m not a baby. I’m five.

ROBERT
Noted. But it’s better than having a mother that doesn’t care. So, let’s humor her, OK?

INT. SMARTCAR -- NIGHT

Robert follows Gabriel in, holding the flashlight so that it shines under the seat. Gabriel scoots down, with only his butt sticking up.

ROBERT
See it? Remember, pill bottle with a white cap.

GABRIEL
(muffled)
It’s too dark.

Groaning, Robert pushes himself in further and twists in a new direction, getting the light further back. Then...

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
Got it!

Gabriel pops up and hoists the pill bottle.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
Goooaaal!

At that, Robert gives a full-throated laugh (the first time we’ve heard that). Then, he notices a long rip down the sleeve of Gabriel’s parka.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
Mama’s gonna...

ROBERT
Kill me.

EXT. ROBERT’S MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

Robert trudges along, with Gabriel on his back, gazing up.

GABRIEL
Where’s the Christmas star?

ROBERT
Bethlehem, two thousand-ish years ago.

GABRIEL
Thought I saw it, but Mama said it was a shooting star. I made a wish.

ROBERT
Yeah, what did you wish for?

GABRIEL
If you tell, it won't happen.

Robert just shakes his head.

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN -- NIGHT

As Robert and Gabriel reach the light poles, Gabriel perks up from his perch on Robert's back. Voices singing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" can be faintly heard.

GABRIEL
Herald Angel!

ROBERT
What?

GABRIEL
Listen!

ROBERT
I don't have time.

Robert goes up the walk and slides Gabriel down so he can take off his snowshoes. Elizabeth is right there when he opens the door, and Robert hands her the pill bottle.

ELIZABETH
Where's Gabriel?

Robert wheels around, alarmed, and scans with the flashlight. After a beat, he picks up Gabriel standing beyond the light poles, head cocked, listening.

ROBERT
Just down there. I'll go get him.

Reaching the boy, Robert scoops him up with his free arm.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Stop doing that.

GABRIEL
Sorry. I heard *Herald Angel*.

Robert looks up and sees three CROSS-COUNTRY SKIERS wearing miner's lights and backpacks. Spotting Robert and Gabriel, they stop singing and wave.

SKIERS
Merry Christmas!

GABRIEL
Are you elves?

One of the skiers, DAN, late 20s, steps forward.

DAN
No, we're just carolers finally glad to have found someone home on this street.

The skiers appear to be preparing to sing again.

ROBERT
Don't mean to cut short the show, but we gotta go...

GABRIEL
There's a lady having a baby here, just like on Christmas!

DAN
Congratulations!

ROBERT
It's not mine.

Seeing everybody's faces, he hastily adds...

ROBERT (CONT'D)
It's a couple that got stranded in the snow up the street.

Dan waves the murmuring singers to be silent.

DAN
It's an emergency delivery?

ROBERT
Yeah. The baby's almost a month early. Why?

Dan fishes in his pocket, brings out a laminated card and shows it to Robert.

INSERT: It has his picture, the name Daniel Shepherd and the words EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN across the top of it and a caduceus. Robert's eyes light up.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert ushers in Dan and the skiers, a kindly looking couple, 60s, NICK and ELEANOR SHEPHERD.

DAN
These are my folks, Nick and Eleanor.

ROBERT
All named Shepherd?

They nod.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Of course. Why wouldn't you be?
(to Nick)
At least you don't have a beard.

ELEANOR
Thank goodness for that!

Robert knocks on the bedroom door. Elizabeth emerges.

ROBERT
Dr. Elizabeth Diaz, allow me to introduce Dan Shepherd, EMT. Last delivered a baby two weeks ago.

DAN
(indicating backpack)
Even have my bag.

Dan and a delighted Elizabeth disappear into the bedroom. Robert sees the Shepherds looking around the room.

ROBERT
Come through to the den.

Eleanor walks over to Gabriel and takes his face in her hands. Missing his Nana, he beams up at her.

ELEANOR
Your wife is lovely, and your son is very handsome.

ROBERT
She's a neighbor, and that's her boy, Gabriel.

ELEANOR
Well, why don't we get you out of that parka?

Gabriel sticks out his arm.

GABRIEL
I ripped it.

Rummaging in her backpack, Eleanor finds a small sewing kit.

ELEANOR
We'll make it good as new.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- NIGHT

Eleanor sits at the counter with Gabriel, fixing his parka. Nick busies with Robert's elaborate coffeemaker. Robert sits at the far end of the couch, staring into the fire. He doesn't notice that Gabriel watches him, curious. Then Elizabeth sits next to him. Robert turns and is startled.

ROBERT
Is the baby here?

ELIZABETH
Not quite. Almost.

As she sits down, she turns to wave at Gabriel, who waves back, and gets a twinge in her back.

ROBERT
Back still bothering you?

ELIZABETH
Perfect day for a little reminder of that run down Christmas Bowl.

ROBERT
The weekend warrior wanted to do a black diamond trail.

ELIZABETH
Yeah, yeah. Hit the slopes yet?

ROBERT
Not yet, but I did promise Samantha to try snowboarding.

ELIZABETH
Such a sacrifice! You're more like half-a-dad than a half-brother.

ROBERT
Not responsible for her before the age of eleven. But, when I came back to L.A. for law school, I did my best to undo the damage.

Elizabeth catches the flicker of wry humor and seizes an opportunity to try to mend fences.

ELIZABETH
The way you always talked about Samantha, I almost felt like I knew her. How is she?

ROBERT
Same as always. Never an unspoken thought.

She laughs.

ELIZABETH
She in Hawaii for Christmas?

ROBERT
No, actually, she's here.

ELIZABETH
We've wrecked her room.

ROBERT
Her stepfather bought a house closer to the mountain. She's up there with her sisters.

ELIZABETH
Why aren't you there? I mean, for the Baileys' sake, I'm glad you weren't, but...

He hesitates to answer.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Sorry. Your mom died on Christmas.

She puts a hand on his arm and squeezes. He locks eyes with her as she gives him a comforting smile. They're on the verge of having a moment, when Dan appears.

DAN
Hey, Doc, you'd better come.

With a last squeeze, she exits. Robert watches her go, then realizes everyone is looking at him. He stands abruptly.

ROBERT
I’m going to get more firewood.

Gabriel watches him go by toward the garage.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, SPARE BEDROOM -- NIGHT

DeeDee is on her back, with Joey at her side.

ELIZABETH
Not long now, DeeDee. You ready?

DeeDee nods and looks up at Joey, who kisses her forehead. Elizabeth gets up and walks to Dan.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
(sotto voce)
She’s still spotting.

DAN
What can we do about that?

ELIZABETH
Nothing. It’s almost time.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, GARAGE -- NIGHT

Robert starts to gather wood from a pile in the garage when he sees the boxes of ornaments. He traces a finger through the dust on one box and remembers:

FLASHBACK:

INT. ROBERT’S CHILDHOOD HOME -- NIGHT

Clutching his lion, the boy (Robert) looks up at the decorated tree above him, tears in his eyes.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, GARAGE -- NIGHT

Robert blinks hard and pulls himself together.

ROBERT
Merry Christmas to me.

He starts gathering up wood, then Nick enters.

NICK
Need some help with the firewood?

ROBERT
I've got it.

Nick notes the Christmas tree and the boxes.

NICK
Why don't you put these up?

ROBERT
It's just me here.

NICK
Might be fun for Gabriel, keep his mind off things.

ROBERT
I'm going to check the generator.

He hands Nick the firewood and exits out the back of the garage. Nick looks at the boxes for a moment then exits.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Everyone's waiting. Eleanor loads the dishwasher; Gabriel eats biscuits. Nick pours himself coffee and sees Robert at the far end of the sofa, staring into the fire. Robert looks up as Nick moves to sit next to him.

NICK
For twenty years, I owned a bar in Tahoe. I know the look of a man with a problem.

ROBERT
I'm fine.

NICK
Strict confidentiality assured.

ROBERT
Is that bartender/barfly privilege?

NICK
Something like that.

ROBERT
I don't like to talk about myself, even to bartenders.

NICK
Then ask me something.

Robert looks up briefly at Gabriel, who's talking to Eleanor.

ROBERT
Did you always want kids?

NICK
I wanted to marry Eleanor. I figured the rest would come naturally. But, it didn't. After five years, we'd given up.

ROBERT
But...

NICK
Dan's my brother's. He and his wife died in a car crash, oh, twenty-odd years ago. So Dan became ours.

ROBERT
You got what you wanted after all.

NICK
If you mean a small boy traumatized and struck with grief... absolutely. We had to become better parents than we ever dreamed possible, and in a hurry.

ROBERT
You never considered saying no?

NICK
Not for a second. Our only worry was that we wouldn't be up to the challenge. But with a lot of prayer -- and a lot of help -- we got him to adulthood.

ROBERT
He's lucky to have you two.

NICK
Nah. We're the lucky ones. Sometimes fate knocks on the door, and all you have to do is open it.

Before Robert can answer, there's a scream from the bedroom. Gabriel runs to him, grabbing his leg. Robert puts his hand on the boy's head.

ELEANOR
Sounds like the baby’s coming.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Nick and Eleanor are in the kitchen. Gabriel sits on the couch with Lambkin. Robert paces up and down, staring at his phone. Gabriel gazes at the chess set, and gets an idea.

GABRIEL
(to Robert)
Can I touch this?

ROBERT
(engrossed in his phone)
Sure.

He begins to move around the pieces. Robert finally looks up to see the chess pieces rearranged, and Gabriel on his knees next to the coffeetable, hands folded and head down.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You praying?

Gabriel nods. Robert then looks at the chess pieces.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
What is it supposed to be?

GABRIEL
A Nativity. You don’t have any Christmas stuff.

ROBERT
Right. Well, carry on.

Curious, Nick and Eleanor come in. Seeing what’s happening, they smile at each other, sit, link hands and bow their heads. Watching from a little distance and visibly moved, Robert finally lowers his head as well.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, SPARE BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Elizabeth focuses on DeeDee as she gives one last push. Joey sits next to her, with Dan in position to deliver the baby.

JOEY
I see it. I see the baby!

DeeDee is laughing/crying. Dan, though, looks concerned.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Why isn’t the baby crying?

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- NIGHT

The sudden quiet is unnerving. Nick looks at Robert.

NICK
Should we go check on them?

ROBERT
I will. You two keep the boy here.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert is about to knock when Elizabeth opens the door. He sees blood on her clothes. She closes the door behind her.

ELIZABETH
We have a baby girl, and a problem.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert huddles with Elizabeth near the bedroom door.

ROBERT
What problem?

ELIZABETH
We had trouble getting the baby breathing.

Robert gasps.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
But she's breathing now. DeeDee came through it like a champ. But, we can't wait for the plows.

ROBERT
You said the baby was breathing.

ELIZABETH
She is, but we're concerned she aspirated amniotic fluid. And DeeDee is bleeding -- not enough to be life-threatening, yet, but it's concerning. My OBGYN friend says we should get them to a hospital STAT.

ROBERT
Is it safe to move them?

ELIZABETH
At this point, safer than not. If the baby develops pneumonia or stops breathing again...

ROBERT
Thank God you were here.

ELIZABETH
Thank God you got me to come. And got Dan. Can't imagine what you would have done here alone.

That shakes Robert, but he refocuses.

ROBERT
So, we have to get them to the hospital.

ELIZABETH
How, exactly? Dan and I did some checking, and right now, it looks like we have cross-country skis and Santa’s sleigh, if he shows up.

Something sparks in Robert’s mind.

ROBERT
Not a sleigh, but I may have something almost as good.

Pulling his phone from his pocket, he places a call.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Hey, Sama. I need a huge favor. *Do not* tell your sisters.

EXT. KING LODGE -- NIGHT

Establishing shot of a luxe-rustic mansion, draped with lights, a huge Christmas tree visible through the windows. The house perches atop a wooded hill, with a long driveway.

INT. KING LODGE, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Bettina, a wooden box under her arm, walks up to Mariana and Dwayne, who work on gift baskets in a decorated great room.

BETTINA
Grab two of those baskets and suit up. We’re going out.

MARIANA
What? Where?

BETTINA
To deliver gifts to a newborn babe. It’s going to make a great video segment for the special. Might be just the thing to kickstart our ratings.

DWAYNE
These are to donate at St. Joseph’s.

BETTINA
We don’t get swag to give it away for nothing. Now, let’s go.

DWAYNE
What baby?

BETTINA
The one just born at Robert's cabin, which means he'll be there, which means we can film it. Samantha's taking the Sno-Cat down to get them to the hospital. We gotta beat her there.

MARIANA
A baby?

BETTINA
Don't worry. It's not his.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert comes in from outdoors. The Shepherds look up from the kitchen, where Eleanor's putting baked biscuits on a platter.

ROBERT
Walk's shoveled. Now we wait.

Robert raises the window shades and starts pacing, arms crossed and head down. Gabriel watches him for a moment. Then, his arms crossed over Lambkin, he imitates him. Robert looks around and just notices what Gabriel's doing, but then ENGINES are heard outside. Robert bolts out the front door.

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN -- NIGHT

Robert waits on his front step. His face falls when he realizes the noise comes from three two-person snowmobiles.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
What the...

The roar of the arriving snowmobiles drowns him out. They stop in front of the cabin. The engines shut down, and the driver of the two-female machine hops off and removes her helmet, revealing Bettina. Behind her is Gloriana. Machine two is Mariana and Dwayne. Machine three is the cameraman. He hops off, and as he unlashes and unwraps the bundle, with Dwayne's help, revealing a camera, the baskets and the box.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Where's Sama?

GLORIANA
She's coming. We're faster.

ROBERT
Why are you here at all?
(pointing at the cameraman)
And why is *he* here?

CAMERAMAN
I work for the show, sir.

ROBERT
I know. I wasn't talking to you.

BETTINA
Robert, a baby born on Christmas Eve? We can't miss this.

ROBERT
Well, you will miss it. Go. Now.

BETTINA
Robert.

ROBERT
Now.

BETTINA
But we brought things.

ROBERT
I don't care.

DWAYNE
Brother, if you'll just look...

ROBERT
Don't you "brother" me.

MARIANA
He'll be your brother-in-law if we get married.

ROBERT
We are not related.

BETTINA
OK, we won't go in. At least let us film you taking the gifts. They'll *really* want what we've brought.

Bettina stares at Robert, resolute. Finally, he gives in.

ROBERT
Fine. And we cut immediately when Sama comes. Agreed?

BETTINA
Agreed.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Nick, Eleanor and Gabriel look out the door's sidelight, where they see Robert, Dwayne and the sisters, lit by the cameraman, having an animated discussion. Eleanor gasps.

ELEANOR
Nick, that's the Three Kings.

NICK
What, Ellie?

ELEANOR
You know, from that show I like.

NICK
The one with the silly rich girls who always wear the same colors?

GABRIEL
They're pretty.

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN -- NIGHT

Filming commences, with Dwayne acting as host.

CAMERAMAN
OK, action.

DWAYNE
This couple couldn't have picked a more hospitable host on this snowy night than our brother and lawyer, Robert, who will be accepting these gifts on their behalf.

Robert gives a curt nod. Gloriana stumbles a couple of steps forward, regains her dignity and holds out her basket.

GLORIANA
There is a baby born here tonight, on Christmas Eve. To honor him...

ROBERT
Her.

GLORIANA
What?

ROBERT
Her. It's a girl.

After momentary consternation, she regains composure.

GLORIANA
To honor *her*, we...

BETTINA
The Three Kings...

MARIANA
... come bearing gifts.

GLORIANA
I, Gloriana, bring a nightgown, robe and slippers for the new mother, from designer Frank Ince.

ROBERT
You're kidding.

GLORIANA
No, really. He's a sponsor.

With a sigh, Robert takes the basket and sets it behind him.

MARIANA
And I, Mariana, bring a spa basket from a variety of designer lines, including Mark Murra.

Plastering a smile on his face, Robert accepts this one. Lastly, Bettina steps up and lifts the lid of the wooden box INSERT shows a cognac-bottle-shaped depression in the velvet-lined interior, which contains several gold coins.

BETTINA
And I, Bettina, come bearing gold.

Robert leans in, and shock registers on his face.

ROBERT
Is that actual gold?

BETTINA
Daddy always says to keep a few krugerrands in the safe, just in case.

Robert gapes at her for a moment, then regains his wits. Grabbing the box, he tucks it under his arm.

ROBERT
On behalf of the family, thank you for your generosity. Now, don't you have to get back to the King Lodge for the customary festivities?

GLORIANA
Why? This is fun.

Robert glares at her. Thinking quickly, Bettina jumps in.

BETTINA
But, there is the ceremonial cutting of the Christmas fruitcake.

MARIANA
The what?

DWAYNE
I love fruitcake.

ROBERT
You would.

GLORIANA
What's a fruitcake?

ROBERT
Your. Fruitcake. Awaits.

Bettina gets the hint and springs into action.

BETTINA
Kings, mount up!

Robert looks away from the camera, and finally gives an eye roll. Then he turns back, smiling and waving, as the sisters and Dwayne roar out of sight. The cameraman films their departure then shuts off the camera and turns back to Robert.

CAMERAMAN
Was there really a baby born here tonight?

ROBERT
Yep. And there were Shepherds, skiing across the fields, singing "Hark the Herald Angels" by night.

The cameraman looks at him, incredulous, then laughs.

CAMERAMAN
Ha! You had me going for a moment, there.

With another laugh and a wave, he goes back to his snowmobile and is just packing up when another engine is heard in the distance. As the cameraman puts on his helmet and roars off, an eight-passenger, orange Sno-Cat rumbles up to just beyond the poles. The door opens, and out hops Samantha.

ROBERT
Finally. And I told you not to tell your sisters.

SAMANTHA
I didn't. They overheard. And if you weren't so obsessed with being by yourself on Christmas and let me stay over like I asked, the Sno-Cat would have already been here.

ROBERT
That's not fair.

SAMANTHA
Yes, it is. You wouldn't have let these people in if it wasn't a dire emergency. Let me guess, the first thing you told them was to call Nine-One-One, right?

His expression answers her question.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
Thought so.

She swoops into the house, leaving Robert standing in the snow for a moment, fuming, before following.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

As Robert and Samantha enter, Eleanor turns from the window.

ELEANOR
Was that really the Three Kings?

ROBERT
Yeah. They're clients.

ELEANOR
I love that show.

As Robert grumbles, Samantha suppresses a giggle. Elizabeth comes out of the bedroom. She and Robert meet eyes, which Samantha notices -- and Robert notices that she notices.

ROBERT
Um, Dr. Diaz... Elizabeth, this is my sister, Samantha.

SAMANTHA
Hey. Sama, for short.

ELIZABETH
Thank you so much for this.

SAMANTHA
Beats leaving on a donkey, huh?

Elizabeth laughs. Then, Dan peeks out and sees Samantha.

DAN
Are you the driver?

SAMANTHA
(flirty)
Don’t look so surprised.

DAN
More happy than surprised.

There’s a moment. Robert registers disapproval.

ELIZABETH
We’ll start getting everyone ready. Then Robert can eventually get his house back.

SAMANTHA
Oh, you know he’s all about that.

Robert shoots her a look. Samantha grins and shrugs. Elizabeth just retreats into the bedroom, pulling Dan after her. Samantha waves bye-bye to Dan, who grins and does the same. She then turns to Robert, who is boiling.

ROBERT
Let’s step outside.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, SPARE BEDROOM -- NIGHT

At the window, Elizabeth rummages in her bag, which sits on a dresser. She sees Robert and Samantha.

EXT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN -- NIGHT

Down the walk a few steps, Robert turns on Samantha.

ROBERT
I'm well aware my whole Christmas thing is very funny to all of you, but it's not a joke to me.

SAMANTHA
I know.

ROBERT
Do you? Coulda fooled me.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, SPARE BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Evidently overhearing, Elizabeth is frozen in place.

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN -- NIGHT

Robert stomps past Samantha toward the house. He's got his hand on the knob, when she speaks.

SAMANTHA
Sorry I snarked, but I do get it. You know I do. And, is it so bad that *she's* here?

There's a long beat. Robert keeps his back to her.

ROBERT
Just keep the engine running.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, SPARE BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Elizabeth hears the door closing and sees Samantha shrug and get back in the Sno-Cat. She absorbs what she overheard.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Robert drops onto the couch, eyes closed. Gabriel, holding Lambkin, wanders over and picks up the lion, looking curiously at it. Robert gives him a sharp look, and he puts it down, chastened. Seeing hurt in his eyes, Robert sighs.

ROBERT
It's OK. His name's Lion. I've had him since I was younger than you.

GABRIEL
Oh. OK.

Gabriel looks at the lion but doesn't touch it again. He thinks for a moment, then comes over to sit next to Robert.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
Did you know my Mama before?

ROBERT
What? Why do you ask?

GABRIEL
I saw you talking.

Robert eyes him, internally debating what to say. Gabriel waits, clutching Lambkin, who seems to be staring right at Robert.

ROBERT
I met her here in March. It was snowing, and she left her car on the street because the garage was blocked. A plow then buried the car. I helped her dig it out.

GABRIEL
Are you friends?

Robert gives a "kinda" nod. Gabriel thinks through this.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
You live here?

ROBERT
No, in L.A. I come up to ski, like your mother.

GABRIEL
We live in L.A., with my Nana and Papi. I'm in my Daddy's old room. Why'd didn't Mama bring you to our house?

There's a long, awkward beat. Robert gets up abruptly.

ROBERT
You'll have to ask her about that.

GABRIEL
But...

Robert exits, leaving Gabriel confused.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert knocks on the bedroom door. Elizabeth opens it and steps out.

ROBERT
You should take Gabriel with you. Then, afterward, you two can go straight home. Everybody can go home.

Elizabeth's jaw drops in shock.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert starts to walk off, but Elizabeth grabs his arm and drags him away from the door.

ELIZABETH
What? What brought this on?

ROBERT
Gabriel figured out we already knew each other. He wants to know why I never came to your house. I'm very grateful you're here, but I don't need this. It'll be better if he leaves with you.

ELIZABETH
He's staying right here. That is not negotiable.

ROBERT
So, what am I supposed to say? Your mother lied to me for three months?

ELIZABETH
I didn't lie, as such. I just didn't tell you everything.

ROBERT
I really don't see the difference.

ELIZABETH
Look, I'm sorry, but you did say you could never see yourself getting married or imagine having kids -- several times.

ROBERT
I write contracts for a living. Words matter. Did I ever actually say that I would never *do* either?

ELIZABETH
I really don't see the difference.

He snorts.

ROBERT
Whatever. You never gave me a chance to decide.

ELIZABETH
I thought you'd dump me. Then when I told you, you dumped me.

ROBERT
Because you lied to me.

ELIZABETH
I don't have time for this. I've got a mother and a newborn to deal with. Gabriel stays, OK?

After a beat, Robert relents. She returns to the bedroom.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, SPARE BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Elizabeth turns to see DeeDee cradling the baby, with Joey's arm encircling her. Her anger drains away, and she smiles.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- NIGHT

Robert sits alone at the kitchen island, with his back to everything. Gabriel, holding Lambkin, watches him from the couch. Elizabeth walks up, holding a towel-wrapped bundle.

ELIZABETH
Robert?

He looks up. Elizabeth holds up the bundle for him to see.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
This night isn't about you or me. I thought you'd like to see what it's really all about.

Robert looks down and realizes it's the baby. He stares into the tiny face, dumbfounded.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Put out your hands.

ROBERT
Why?

ELIZABETH
I need to put on my parka.

ROBERT
Where are the Shepherds?

ELIZABETH
Helping DeeDee. Now, please.

With great trepidation, Robert puts out his hands, and Elizabeth settles the bundle into them, adjusting him to hold the baby correctly. He stares down, transfixed, overwhelmed. Elizabeth returns, parka on, with the Seahawks throw. She motions Robert to hand the baby back, which he does, shakily, and she wraps the baby up. Gabriel comes over.

GABRIEL
Can I see the baby?

Elizabeth stoops. Gabriel pats the top of the baby's head.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)
What's her name?

ELIZABETH
Robin Noel. It was close to Roberta, but nicer.

After a beat, Robert understands. He's still wobbly but, with some effort, collects himself.

ROBERT
Just hope her parents deserve her.

ELIZABETH
They do, as much as anyone deserves God's gift of new life.

With that, she turns and heads back toward the bedroom. Gabriel almost goes after her, but turns and goes over to Robert, who's just sitting motionless.

GABRIEL
Are you OK?

ROBERT
I'm fine. You go help your mother.

Gabriel waits a moment then exits, leaving Robert alone.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Holding the baby, Elizabeth waits at the front door with Gabriel, as Robert walks up. Joey emerges from the bedroom.

JOEY
We're ready, Dr. Diaz.

ELIZABETH
(to Robert)
I'll call when I get an update.

He just nods, so, after a beat, Elizabeth and the baby exit. Dan carries DeeDee out of the house, with Joey right behind with their things. Gabriel tugs at Robert's sleeve.

GABRIEL
Can we see the truck go?

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN-- NIGHT

Robert holds Gabriel. They stand in the snow with the Shepherds, who wave as Samantha pulls the Sno-Cat out.

As soon as she gets underway, the power on the street suddenly returns, and there are streetlights and Christmas lights everywhere. Gabriel laughs and claps; the Shepherds cheer over the rumble of the retreating Sno-Cat. Robert just looks around, a pensive expression on his face, and carries Gabriel back into the house, as the Shepherds follow.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert sets Gabriel down, as the Shepherds turn on additional lights -- which just emphasizes how bare the place looks.

ROBERT
I'm going to go make sure the generator shut down OK.

He exits.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GARAGE -- NIGHT

Robert re-enters the garage from the back door. Then, he stands for a long moment, looking at the ornament boxes.

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LOS ANGELES -- NIGHT

Marcus comes up the side aisle of a now-empty (but festively decorated) church after Mass and spies his wife, who's kneeling in front of the creche. He leans in so as not to startle her, and she looks up.

MARCUS
Sorry to interrupt, babe, but everybody's waiting. If we don't get the grandkids into bed soon...

She nods.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Still worrying about him?

MRS. DODGE
He sounded strange when I texted earlier.

MARCUS
More so than usual on Christmas Eve?

MRS. DODGE
My mama-bear sense is tingling.

MARCUS
Uh-oh.

She stands, leans over and puts a hand on the Infant Jesus, crosses herself and closes her eyes for a moment. When she opens them, she looks at Mary's face and winks.

MRS. DODGE
(whispering)
Mother to mother.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Robert comes in and sets the Christmas-tree box on the floor.

ROBERT
There's decorations in the garage. Put it all up. I don't care. I'm gonna go dig out the Baileys' car.

NICK
But it's still snowing. And the first plow will bury it again.

He speaks in vain, as Robert has already grabbed his parka and headed out the door.

ELEANOR
Well. You and Gabriel do the tree, and I'll tackle the spare room.

EXT. ROBERT'S MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

With Christmas lights twinkling around him, Robert ferociously hacks away at the snowbank imprisoning the SmartCar. He's only dug out a third, and he's exhausted.

At the house next door, an elderly NEIGHBOR in a red parka runs a snowblower. Just as Robert straightens up from dumping another shovelful of snow, a blast from the snowblower hits him in the face. He staggers and sputters, spitting out snow.

ROBERT
(shouting)
Seriously?

The neighbor indicates that he can't hear Robert over the snowblower, then serenely continues on. Frustrated, Robert throws himself down into the snowbank.

INT. KING LODGE, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Bettina, Gloriana, the field producer and the cameraman, all wearing headphones, cluster around a monitor, watching the footage from earlier. Mariana and Dwayne stand further back. When Mariana sees herself on screen, she cringes. Dwayne doesn't seem happy either.

MARIANA
Is it just me, Dwayne, or does this not seem right?

DWAYNE
I don't feel good about it.

MARIANA
We let Bettina bully us into it.

DWAYNE
I blame myself. I don't back down from three-hundred-pound linemen.

MARIANA
Yeah, but they never met Bettina.

They hold it in for a moment then giggle.

DWAYNE
So, what do we do about it?

EXT. ROBERT'S MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

The neighbor has stopped snowblowing and fiddles with his machine. Still on his snowbank, head in hands, Robert hears steps crunching in the snow. He looks up and is astonished to see a 12-point MULE DEER BUCK looking right at him. The buck comes closer. Robert's almost afraid to breathe, but something makes him pull off a glove and extend his hand.

The buck's snout just touches his hand, and Robert feels its warm breath on his palm. Then, the snowblower roars back to life. Robert turns his head for a second, and when he looks back, the deer is gone. Getting up, he looks around, puzzled.

ROBERT
(to the neighbor)
Did you see that? There was a deer, right there...

The neighbor indicates again that he can't hear him. Robert stands, thunderstruck. Then, his reverie ends when his phone buzzes in his pocket.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Yeah? ... Hey Nick, what's up? ... He said what? ... No, OK, I'll come back. Tell him I'm coming.

With a long breath, he sends a pleading look to the sky.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Seriously?

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- NIGHT

As Nick and Eleanor putter in the kitchen, Robert settles next to Gabriel, who sits, dejected, in front of the tree. A few ornaments are on it, but the rest are still in their boxes. Gabriel looks up at Robert, surprised,

GABRIEL
You came back. I thought you didn't want to decorate the tree with me.

Robert looks into the fire for a long moment, then starts talking, as much to himself as to Gabriel. The Shepherds listen discreetly from a distance.

ROBERT
When I was a bit younger than you, I had a very bad Christmas -- nothing I did, but because of the adults around me. After that, Christmas just reminded me of that bad time. Eventually, as I grew up, I got used to Christmas being everywhere, but I wanted my home to be a place I could escape from it. Now, this was a very long time ago. Mrs. Dodge thinks I should get over it altogether.
(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)
So, a few years ago, she sent the tree and a box of ornaments. Then, every year after that, more ornaments. She was sure that, one day, I'd put it all up. Apparently, she was right. There it is. But, I didn't drag it out for her, or for me. This is for you.

GABRIEL
For me?

ROBERT
Yeah. Pretty sure this isn't the Christmas you or your Mama had planned. You got stuck in a place with no Christmas stuff -- so you had to do the chess-set thing.

GABRIEL
The Nativity.

ROBERT
I thought, this kid deserves a tree. So, there you go.

GABRIEL
Will you help me decorate it?

That catches for a beat in Robert's mind. But...

ROBERT
Sure.

He glances over at Nick and Eleanor, who smile. Then he stands up, and Gabriel stands also. Robert shakes himself and takes a deep breath.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Let's do this.

MONTAGE: Under the strains of "The First Noel," Nick and Eleanor hand over ornaments (a mix of traditional and football-themed) as Robert and Gabriel put them on the tree. Finally, Robert hoists Gabriel up on one arm, so he can put a star on the top of the tree. When the star lights up, Gabriel throws his arms around Robert's neck. Nick and Eleanor see him tear up a little.

INT. SNO-CAT, SOMEWHERE IN MAMMOTH -- NIGHT

Aboard the Sno-Cat, Dan sits across from Joey and a nursing DeeDee.

Elizabeth sits in the front passenger seat across from driver Samantha. There's a lot of rumbling from the treads, so Elizabeth speaks just loud enough for Samantha to hear.

ELIZABETH
Samantha, can I ask you something?

SAMANTHA
Sure.

ELIZABETH
Does Robert dislike Christmas because his mother died then?

SAMANTHA
He said that? He said she died?

ELIZABETH
He said he lost her then.

SAMANTHA
Oh, she didn't die, at least not that night.

ELIZABETH
What?

SAMANTHA
Don't know the whole story. But I do know it was Christmas Eve, when Robbie was not quite five. There was some fight, and she packed her bags and left.

ELIZABETH
Right then and there, on Christmas?

SAMANTHA
Yup. Never came back. Apparently just vanished.

ELIZABETH
What do you think happened to her?

SAMANTHA
Not a clue. He tried to find her once, few years ago, but no luck. And let's face it, his face is on the website. He's not that hard to find. So, he just avoids Christmas. Do me a favor, would you?

ELIZABETH
What?

SAMANTHA
What broke you guys up is none of my business. But if you can fix it, please do. He was actually happy when he was with you, and he hasn't been happy since.

ELIZABETH
Really? Huh. Ah, I don't know. I messed up, big time.

SAMANTHA
Maybe, but I'm sure he did his part. Look, I got eyes. If you state your case, guaranteed there's room for negotiation.

Elizabeth nods and looks back out at the falling snow. At that moment, the Sno-Cat lurches and shudders with a loud scraping noise. Elizabeth grabs her seat belt. Joey and DeeDee look up. Samantha abruptly stops the Sno-Cat.

ELIZABETH
What was that?

SAMANTHA
Whatever it was, it didn't sound good. I'm gonna take a look.

DAN
I'll come with you.

END OF ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN

INT. KING LODGE, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Dwayne, carrying a mug of cocoa, comes in to find Mariana (green Christmas pjs) sitting in front of the tree, with a mug of cocoa piled high with marshmallows next to her.

MARIANA
Can’t sleep either?

DWAYNE
Yeah. I’m next door to one of my buddies, and I think he’s reliving the whole season in his dreams -- with color commentary.

He sits. They clink mugs and drink. Mariana gets marshmallow on her nose. Playfully, Dwayne wipes it away.

MARIANA
I keep thinking about that couple. Can you imagine how scary this is?

DWAYNE
Really makes you think twice about the first Christmas.

MARIANA
I hope they got to the hospital OK. I texted Samantha, but I haven’t heard back.

DWAYNE
She’s probably pretty busy.

He looks around. He sets down his mug; she does the same.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
It’s quiet, and we’re finally alone.

MARIANA
Yeah?

DWAYNE
No matter what Bettina says, I don’t want everything in our lives to be on TV.

MARIANA
Or recreated for TV.

DWAYNE
Pushing Robert about coming over tonight so we could film nearly got me a pop in the nose.

MARIANA
Really?

DWAYNE
He can be scary.

Mariana laughs.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
I want this to be just for us.

He holds out the ring box and opens it. Mariana gasps.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
Will you huddle with me from now until Heaven?

She looks a bit perplexed.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
OK, that sounded better in my head. Mariana, will you marry me?

She can’t quite form words, but manages to nod enthusiastically.

EXT. KING LODGE -- NIGHT

Mariana’s delighted squeal echoes into the night.

INT. SNO-CAT, SOMEWHERE IN MAMMOTH -- NIGHT

Elizabeth and Joey look out the windows of the Sno-Cat, down at Dan hunkered in the snow, pulling hard on a branch stuck under the tread. Samantha is behind him, also pulling. There’s a good-sized tree behind her.

DAN
OK. One more good yank, and it’s free. You ready back there?

Samantha braces her feet and tightens her grip.

SAMANTHA
Ready.

Dan draws a big breath and pulls with all his strength. The branch resists then suddenly lets go. Dan flies backward and lands in the snow. He sits up and spits it out.

DAN
Well, that was easier than I expected.

He waits but doesn't hear anything.

DAN (CONT'D)
Samantha?

He scrambles to get upright and turns around.

DAN (CONT'D)
Samantha!

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- NIGHT

Robert sits on the couch, with Gabriel, who's hugging Lambkin, curled against him, gazing at the decorated tree. Gabriel looks over at Lion, sitting under the lamp.

GABRIEL
Mr. West?

ROBERT
Yeah?

GABRIEL
Lion looks lonely over there.

ROBERT
What are you gonna do about that?

With a grin, Gabriel leaps over, grabs Lion and snuggles back down with both toys. Robert looks around, like, "What have I done?", when his phone buzzes. He answers it.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Hey, Elizabeth.

GABRIEL
Mama!

Robert shushes him.

ROBERT
Is she OK? ... Yeah, I can drive one. ... No, text me the location and stay right there. On my way.

He hangs up.

GABRIEL
Mr. West, is something wrong?

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- NIGHT

Dressed to go out, plus ski boots, Robert comes into the den.

NICK
Did my boots fit?

ROBERT
No.
(indicates Eleanor)
But hers did.

ELEANOR
I've always had big feet.

NICK
Remember, skinny cross-country skis go downhill faster and with less stability than your alpine skis.

ROBERT
Thanks, I can handle it.

ELEANOR
Samantha will be OK. Dan wasn't certain she had a concussion. She was only out for a few seconds.

ROBERT
He's worried enough he won't let her drive. And I agree.

Gabriel comes up and hold out Lambkin.

GABRIEL
Take Lambkin. For luck.

Robert hesitates, but the boy's insistent. Robert kneels and tucks Lambkin into a pocket of his parka.

ROBERT
Look after Lion until I get back?

Gabriel nods then throws his arms around Robert's neck. Robert gives him a warm hug back, catching Nick's approving eye. Then Gabriel steps back, a serious look on his face.

GABRIEL
Go help my Mama. Go help everybody.

EXT. MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

Robert (snowshoes strapped to his back) awkwardly cross-country-skis down streets, amid falling snow and Christmas lights. He struggles to keep the rhythm and his balance.

ROBERT
People do this for fun?

EXT. MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

Robert arrives at the crest of a hill.

ROBERT
Ah, real skiing at last.

He crouches and starts heading down. Suddenly, he’s going too fast and begins to lose stability. Realizing he’s headed right for a snow-covered car, Robert changes direction, loses his balance, and slides down the rest of the hill on his back, on the snowshoes, before ending in a heap.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Glad nobody at the lodge saw that.

Struggling up, he realizes one of the skis is broken.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Great.

EXT. MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

Now snowshoeing along, Robert looks at the street map on his phone. But snow covers the streets and everything else,

ROBERT
A visible landmark would be useful.

He comes up to a mound and digs down to a street sign. It says “Candy Cane Lane.” He looks up to see a street of garishly lit houses.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Great.

Then, from between trees, appears the buck. The deer turns, walks a few steps and looks back. Robert looks at his phone, and the deer appears to be walking the right way.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Why not?

EXT. MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

Robert struggles to keep up with the deer. They turn a corner, and Robert finally spots the orange Sno-Cat. Leaning on his poles, he breathes a sigh of relief. The buck gives him one last look, then bounds away effortlessly.

ROBERT
Show-off.

He takes a step, then pauses and looks up.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Thanks.

INT. SNO-CAT, SOMEWHERE IN MAMMOTH -- NIGHT

Robert gets into the Sno-Cat and goes back to Samantha. She sits with Dan, who's holding a cold pack on her head.

ROBERT
Tread's OK. We're good to go. How's the head?

SAMANTHA
I'm fine. I keep telling everyone.

DAN
You might have a concussion.

ROBERT
We'll find out at the hospital.

Robert gently touches her cheek. She puts her hand on his.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Dan, can you watch all your patients? I'd like Elizabeth to help me watch the road.

Dan nods.

JOEY
We're good. Whatever gets us going.

ROBERT
OK. The hospital's not far off.

He looks out at the swirling snow.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Which is a good thing.

EXT. MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

Barely visible in the blizzard, the Sno-Cat rumbles along.

INT. SNO-CAT, SOMEWHERE IN MAMMOTH -- NIGHT

Elizabeth plucks up her courage and speaks, keeping her voice low. When he answers, Robert does the same.

ELIZABETH
Samantha told me about your mom, that she left, not died.

ROBERT
Great.

ELIZABETH
Knowing that, I think I did about the worst thing I could have -- acting like I didn't have a child. I don't blame you for blowing up.

ROBERT
OK, fine, but why did you do it?

ELIZABETH
At first, because I was just having so much fun, more fun than I'd had in years. And, I thought, any day, he'll get bored of me and ghost.

ROBERT
Because of your gotta-put-a-ring-on-it clause?

ELIZABETH
Yeah. Also, I was worried about bringing someone into Gabriel's life who wasn't likely to stick around. You stayed, but you didn't talk about the future.

ROBERT
Maybe not, but it's all I was thinking about -- along with proposing.

ELIZABETH
I had no idea.

ROBERT
Then why did you finally tell me?

ELIZABETH
There were... real feelings.

ROBERT
Real feelings?

ELIZABETH
Yeah. My heart said it was worth the risk to keep you in my life.

That hangs in the air for a long beat.

ROBERT
You might regret listening to that. I'm not easy on my best day. Ask my sister or my assistant.

ELIZABETH
Me neither. Ask my nurse after an exploding cyst nails me.

ROBERT
Don't tell Samantha. She watches that stuff on YouTube and TV.

ELIZABETH
Oh, I don't watch a lot of either.

ROBERT
Don't you love "The Three Kings"?

ELIZABETH
That's a show?

Robert finally bursts into a real smile.

EXT. MAMMOTH HOSPITAL -- NIGHT

A lone tree twinkles outside a wintry Mammoth Hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert sits alone in the waiting room, on his phone.

ROBERT
So, now I sit and wait.

INT. DODGE HOUSE, LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Mrs. Dodge and Marcus huddle on a couch amid half-wrapped gifts, and Christmas decor that's a mix of traditional and football, listening on a cell's speakerphone.

MRS. DODGE
Why are you there all alone?

INTERCUT BETWEEN ROBERT AND THE DODGES

ROBERT
I'm the only one who's not a patient, spouse of a patient, or a medical professional. Dan went with Samantha. He knows all the doctors.

MRS. DODGE
Oh, honey. What a night.

ROBERT
I can barely believe it myself.

MARCUS
The deer thing really happened?

ROBERT
That's the part you don't believe?

Mrs. Dodge and Marcus chuckle.

MRS. DODGE
What can we do?

ROBERT
Elizabeth would say, pray.

MRS. DODGE
What do you say?

There's a long pause.

ROBERT
Can't hurt.

END OF ACT SEVEN

ACT EIGHT

INT. EMERGENCY-ROOM BAY -- NIGHT

Samantha sits on a gurney, with Dan hovering over her.

SAMANTHA
Told you I didn't have a concussion.

DAN
But you still have to be careful for twenty-four hours.

SAMANTHA
I might need constant monitoring.

They giggle and clasp hands. Robert comes in but not before he notices. He gives Dan a hard look. Dan backs off, so Robert can sit on the edge of the gurney.

ROBERT
(to Samantha)
Well, you've got your wish. You get to spend what little is left of Christmas Eve in my guest room, and all of Christmas Day, at minimum.

SAMANTHA
Not the lodge?

ROBERT
I wouldn't trust your sisters to take care of a houseplant.

DAN
I only live around the corner. Happy to pitch in.

ROBERT
I bet you are. They'll be by in a little while with discharge papers.

SAMANTHA
Where's Elizabeth? We saw you two having a heart-to-heart on the way.

He ignores that.

ROBERT
I'll be back.

He gives her a hug and forehead kiss. With a side-eye at Dan, he starts to leave then turns and looks back at her.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
I should have let you stay.

SAMANTHA
I did put an overnight bag in the Sno-Cat, just in case.

She grins. He shakes his head and leaves.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert returns and finds Elizabeth hanging up her phone.

ELIZABETH
The Shepherds said Gabriel is trying very hard to stay awake.

ROBERT
What's the word on the Baileys?

ELIZABETH
DeeDee's OK. They do think the baby aspirated some fluid, but they've already got her on antibiotics, and she's stable. I'm so glad we didn't wait until morning.

ROBERT
Now, we have to hang until Samantha's released. By then, this band of snow will have passed. Weather says there's another one right after it, though.

Robert then sits next to her. As he does, she sees Lambkin's head poking out of Robert's parka pocket.

ELIZABETH
Gabriel gave you Lambkin?

ROBERT
Yeah, for luck.

He pulls Lambkin out and scrutinizes his face.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
He really doesn't have a mouth.

ELIZABETH
No, the stitching came out long ago. Gabriel won't let me fix it.

Robert holds the toy out.

ROBERT
Here, you hold him.

ELIZABETH
Oh, no. If Gabriel thought enough of you to let you have Lambkin, you keep him. Anyway, he's good for what ails ya.

Robert looks at Lambkin for a long beat then tucks him back in the pocket. Elizabeth waits. He sits, staring at the floor for another beat, then looks over at her.

ROBERT
Elizabeth, deals are what I do. So, I'll make you a deal.

ELIZABETH
What deal?

ROBERT
We forgive each other for all the stupid stuff we did or didn't do or say, and we begin again -- the three of us this time.

He sticks out his hand. She waits a moment, then clasps it.

ELIZABETH
Agreed.

ROBERT
The win-win -- it's what I always go for.

They shake.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
We make a good team.

ELIZABETH
J.D., M.D. ... like a rap duo.

ROBERT
I have those as clients. I could also be our lawyer.

ELIZABETH
I could Botox the backup singers.

ROBERT
Match made in Heaven, then.

The laughter starts slow, sputtery, then, despite their best efforts to suppress it -- they're in a hospital waiting room, after all -- it briefly bursts out. It ends with tears, snuffling, another long look and, just before a kiss can happen, Dan arrives.

They part quickly and look up.

DAN
She's signed out. We can go.

ELIZABETH
Great.

ROBERT
Yeah. Great.

INT. SNO-CAT, MAMMOTH STREET -- NIGHT

Robert pauses the Sno-Cat in front of Elizabeth's building.

ELIZABETH
I'll check my place then be right over.

He nods. She hops out. From behind him...

SAMANTHA
Dan, don't you want to stay over?

Robert turns, eyes narrowed, growling, but Dan jumps in.

DAN
No need. I'm around the corner.

ROBERT
Yes, you are.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN-KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Robert watches as the Shepherds prepare to leave. Then he looks at Gabriel, sound asleep on the couch with Lion. He pulls Lambkin out of his pocket and tucks him under Gabriel's arm. The boy just mumbles and hugs his toys tighter.

ROBERT
Can’t spend the night here.

Carefully, he scoops him up, toys and all.

INT. ELIZABETH’S CONDO, BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Going into her bedroom, Elizabeth flicks on a lamp and rummages in the closet, coming out with clothes and a pre-prepared Christmas stocking labeled “Gabriel.”

Turning around, she sees a framed PHOTO of herself, Gabe (in fatigues) and BABY GABRIEL, on the nightstand. Picking the photo up, she sits on the bed, thinking. Then she touches her lips, presses a finger on Gabe’s face then replaces the photo.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, LOFT BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Gently, Robert lays Gabriel down on the bed and pulls the covers over him. He starts to walk off then...

GABRIEL
Where’s Mama?

Robert kneels by the bed.

ROBERT
She stopped off across the street for a minute. She’ll be back soon.

GABRIEL
Everybody OK?

ROBERT
Yeah. Everybody’s OK.

GABRIEL
You OK?

That stops Robert dead. He blinks hard then composes himself.

ROBERT
I’m fi--, I’m good. I’m OK.

Gabriel sticks up his fingers in an L.

GABRIEL
LOB. Love Our Brothers.

Robert does the same.

ROBERT
LOB. Now go back to sleep.

GABRIEL
Night, night. Merry Christmas.

His eyelids close. Robert pushes a lock of hair off his face.

ROBERT
(whisper)
Merry Christmas.

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN -- NIGHT

As Elizabeth, carrying a backpack, approaches the front door, Dan and his parents come out, carrying two pairs of skis and a pair of Robert's snowshoes. They give her big hugs.

ELIZABETH
Samantha all settled in?

DAN
I've left strict instructions, which she'll probably ignore.

ELIZABETH
Not if Robert can help it. Are you sure he can't drive you home?

NICK
It's very close, and we just might finish our caroling.

ELEANOR
The Baileys were truly blessed tonight.

ELIZABETH
Glad I could help. Thanks for looking after Gabriel.

ELEANOR
You named him perfectly. He's an angel.

NICK
So wonderful to spend Christmas with a little boy again.

ELEANOR
You take good care of our dear Robert.

ELIZABETH
If he lets me.

ELEANOR
Oh, I think he will.

They go down to the walk, get into their skis (Dan uses the snowshoes), turn on their headlamps and move off, singing "Silent Night." Elizabeth lingers for a moment then goes in.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, SPARE BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Samantha is ensconced in the bed, with tea and biscuits. Robert stands over her.

ROBERT
Stay in bed. Bathroom trips only.
If you want me, text or yell.

SAMANTHA
All the way upstairs?

ROBERT
The couch. Gabriel's upstairs.
Elizabeth will join him there.

SAMANTHA
She does live just across the
street, right?

ROBERT
The boy was already asleep.

SAMANTHA
And what will the reason be
tomorrow? And the day after that?

ROBERT
Good night. Good morning. Whatever.

He comes over, kisses the top of her head and leaves. She snuggles down, a satisfied smile on her face.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Robert steps out of the bedroom to see Elizabeth entering. He grabs her backpack and slings it over his own shoulder.

ELIZABETH
Toiletries, clothes and a little
surprise for Gabriel. Where is he?

ROBERT
Asleep upstairs in my room.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Entering the den, she stands in astonishment.

ELIZABETH
Whoa. Looks like Christmas threw up in here.

ROBERT
Mrs. Dodge has been sending things for ages. Gonna shoot her a picture tomorrow. It'll blow her mind.

ELIZABETH
If I wasn't so tired, it'd blow mine. But now, I need my baby.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, LOFT BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Robert sets the backpack at the top of the stairs, as Elizabeth sits on the bed and kisses Gabriel's cheek as he sleeps, curled up with Lion and Lambkin. She touches Lion.

ELIZABETH
This the one that was yours?

ROBERT
It's his now, if that's OK.

Elizabeth nods.

ELIZABETH
I'm so tired, but I'm famished. Is there food?

ROBERT
So much food. So many biscuits.

ELIZABETH
Mmmm, biscuits.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN -- NIGHT

At the counter, Robert watches Elizabeth slather a biscuit with butter and jam and wolf it down.

ROBERT
Easy, tiger.

She grins, chews, then washes it down with hot chocolate.

ELIZABETH
I can’t believe your pantry. Are you feeding an army?

ROBERT
My caretaker’s wife thinks so. And you haven’t even seen the freezer. Ergo, I don’t eat out much here.

She remembers something and gasps.

ELIZABETH
Dang. Forgot to put the pork chops in the slow cooker for dinner.

ROBERT
Pork chops, for Christmas dinner?

ELIZABETH
You wouldn’t say that if you’d eaten my stuffed pork chops.

She gets a text, reads it and looks crestfallen.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
St. Joseph’s just canceled Christmas morning and noon Masses, because of the snow.

ROBERT
That’s too bad.

ELIZABETH
Yeah, and this is the first year that Gabriel would really understand it all.

ROBERT
Because he’s not a baby, he’s five?

She laughs.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
We can go next Sunday. Should be well clear by then.

ELIZABETH
We? You’d go?

ROBERT
Won't know what's going on, and I may burst into flames, but sure, I'll go with you.

She gets another text and smiles at it.

ELIZABETH
We can go at three today instead.

ROBERT
Really? Great.

She grins and downs the rest of her cocoa.

ELIZABETH
Now, I need to crash.

He reaches out and wipes a bit of cocoa from the side of her mouth. His hand lingers on her cheek.

ROBERT
If only there was mistletoe.

ELIZABETH
We never needed it before.

She takes his face in her hands, and they finally share a long kiss... and one more. Then she steps back.

ELIZABEH
See you in the morning.

She heads for the stairs, and just as she reaches them...

ROBERT
Merry Christmas... baby.

ELIZABEH
Seriously?

ROBERT
I went for it.

She chuckles and heads upstairs. All he can do is smile.

END OF ACT EIGHT

ACT NINE

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN-- DAY

Robert, Elizabeth and Gabriel (all dressed for church), come into the kitchen from the garage. Gabriel scampers toward the den, where Samantha and Dan play chess.

SAMANTHA
(to Robert)
You didn't spontaneously combust!

ROBERT
Very funny.

GABRIEL
We saw Mr. and Mrs. Shepherd, and all the pretty sisters.

SAMANTHA
(to Robert)
What'd they do when they saw you?

ELIZABETH
Stood up, clapped and cheered. Dwayne also whistled.

SAMANTHA
I'm going to forever regret missing that. Wait, did they livestream?

ELIZABETH
Unfortunately, no.

Robert is about to speak when there's a knocking at the door.

ROBERT
Not again.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- DAY

Robert peers out the sidelight. He leans back, with a give-me-strength look. He glances around behind him.

ROBERT
Stay here. I'll deal with this.

He grabs his parka and steps outside.

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN -- DAY

On his front walk stand Dwayne and Mariana, in snowmobile suits and carrying helmets, on front of their snowmobile.

MARIANA
We tried to catch you after church, but you left too quickly.

ROBERT
Why ever would I have done that?

The sarcasm escapes his audience.

MARIANA
Can we come in?

ROBERT
Maybe. What do you want?

Mariana and Dwayne exchange puzzled looks and shrug.

MARIANA
Last night, we all talked.

DWAYNE
We talked, they argued, but we won.

MARIANA
We're not using the footage we shot last night in the Epiphany special.

She pulls a camera card out of her pocket and holds it out.

MARIANA (CONT'D)
This is the only copy.

Robert takes it.

ROBERT
What brought this on?

MARIANA
What happened was a real miracle. We don't want to exploit it. That's not what our show is about.

DWAYNE
And, we realized that the Internet would figure it all out...

MARIANA
Where you live, who the parents are, who the doctor is, especially since Samantha warned us that you two were an item.

ROBERT
Oh, did she?

MARIANA
But the couple can keep the gifts.

ROBERT
Thank you. That's very thoughtful.

MARIANA
Something else happened last night.

She holds out her hand, with the huge engagement ring.

ROBERT
Congrats. Did Bettina pitch a fit?

MARIANA
We're doing a big ring reveal instead. More original. And we can use the Cartier spares as decoys.

Robert chuckles.

ROBERT
Don't you need to get back to the lodge for Christmas dinner?

DWAYNE
We can't eat the Christmas-dinner food until tomorrow, when you come.

ROBERT
Oh. Right.

MARIANA
Now, can I go in and see my sister?

He steps back and opens the door. Mariana scampers through, squealing, hand held out, to the response of a squeal from Samantha.

DWAYNE
You were right about the ring.

ROBERT
Happy to help.

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, DEN/KITCHEN -- DAY

Robert and Elizabeth cuddle on one side of the sectional. Samantha and Mariana still oooh and aaah over her ring. Gabriel stares adoringly at Mariana. Dwayne and Dan sit at the counter, talking over coffee and biscuits. Suddenly, Samantha stops, looks at her watch and stands up. Robert starts, snaps his fingers and points at her.

ROBERT
Hey, not so fast. Sit back down.

Dwayne and Dan look around. Samantha eases back down, rolling her eyes.

SAMANTHA
I was just going to say, look at us, all together on Christmas Day. And it's almost dinnertime.

She looks straight at Robert with a hopeful smile. Robert glances around, sees, with some dismay, the same hopeful smile on all the other faces. He grumbles and looks at Elizabeth. She takes his hand.

ELIZABETH
Whatever Christmas you want is the Christmas I want for you.

He debates internally then turns to Mariana and Dwayne.

ROBERT
It'll be a potluck of sorts, but would you like to stay for dinner?

Mariana nods eagerly, but before she can speak...

ROBERT (CONT'D)
On one condition. Just you two, OK?

Mariana's face falls, and so does Dwayne's.

MARIANA
But Christmas is for family.

GABRIEL
Yeah. All the pretty sisters.

DWAYNE
And what about my buddies?

DAN
Could my folks come?

MARIANA
Don’t know where we’d all sit, though.

Samantha looks at Robert, eyebrow raised, and angles her head toward the great room. Finally, Robert heaves a long sigh, gets up and heads in that direction, with everybody but Samantha following.

INT. ROBERT’S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- DAY

With everyone clustered behind him, he pulls sheets off, revealing a long, extendable dining table, a dozen dining chairs, two upholstered chairs, a coffeetable, lamps and side tables.

ROBERT
This all came with the place.

GABRIEL
Mr. West, you have a whole house!

ROBERT
It was always just me here.

GABRIEL
Not any more!

As everyone inspects the furniture, Elizabeth smiles at Robert and grabs his hand.

ELIZABETH
Not any more. Thank you.

He just shakes his head.

ROBERT
Been wondering, when is this Epiphany anyway?

ELIZABETH
January sixth.

ROBERT
January sixth?

She nods.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
That’s my birthday. I’ll have to be at their live special on my birthday. It never ends.

Elizabeth not quite successfully suppresses a smile. Robert sighs and resigns himself -- then gets a thought.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Can you do those pork chops without a slow cooker?

INT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN, GREAT ROOM -- NIGHT

Around the table, covered in an improvised variety of dishes, sit Mariana, Dwayne, Gloriana, Bettina, and Dwayne's two NFL buddies (one of whom flirts with a very willing Gloriana), Nick and Eleanor, Samantha and Dan. Elizabeth and Gabriel (perched on a stool from the counter) sit on either side of Robert, who is at the head of the table.

SAMANTHA
I'd ask Robert to say grace, but I don't think he knows it.

GABRIEL
(to Robert)
Don't worry, Mr. West, I do.

Everyone laughs, including Robert. Elizabeth takes Robert's hand.

SAMANTHA
Then you'll do the honors, but first, Robert should say a few words.

Robert looks up, startled.

ROBERT
Why?

SAMANTHA
Because it's Christmas, and you put yourself at the head of the table.

Robert looks at Elizabeth, who smiles and nods, then at Gabriel, who does the same. He then draws a deep breath.

ROBERT
This wasn't the Christmas I wanted, but thanks to family...

He smiles toward Samantha and then, reluctantly, nods at the King sisters.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
And friends...

He looks at Nick and Eleanor, but Dwayne gives him a thumbs up, which he grudgingly acknowledges. The NFL guys wave eagerly.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
And new friends.

The NFL players high-five each other. Robert ignores that and squeezes Elizabeth's hand.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
And you.
(to Gabriel)
And, you, too.

Gabriel beams.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
I've never had a better one.

He looks lovingly at Elizabeth, then leans over and kisses her. Everybody claps. Gabriel grins.

GABRIEL
(whispering to himself)
Thank you for my wish, Christmas star, wherever you are.

EXT. ROBERT'S SKI CABIN -- NIGHT

Outside, in a light snowfall, the buck watches the whole merry dinner party through the cabin's glowing windows. He glances back, where a doe waits for him. He then bounds away into the night, as one more shooting star streaks across the sky.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END