



SAVING SALEM, M.I.

"CHRISTMAS LUMP"

Written by

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This episode is based on a true story.

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"CHRISTMAS LUMP"

THIS EPISODE IS BASED ON A TRUE STORY

TEASER

EXT. SALEM VILLAGE - DAY

December 1971.

Quaint midwestern town, sparsely decorated for the holidays appears warmer than the cold snow falling on a church. It's at the far end of the town's single sidewalk.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

WINDOW FRAMED IN GARLAND: a bicycle dominates an array of toys. A tape recorder leans against its box below.

Stopping to inspect, SUSAN (7) pops up, excited, pigtails escaping her knitted hat.

A SNOWBALL SMASHES against the glass. Turning--

SUSAN

You couldn't hit a Rhino staring
you in the face.

TOYS LOOK OUT as a nine-year old boy, in blue coat, DAVID SMITH, darts forward, presses his mitten to the glass.

The box with a 70's style "rock-n-roll" font, announces
"CASSETTE TAPE RECORDER."

In a red parka, pursuing, LORETTA SMITH (40), beehive hairdo straggling in the wind like a frayed Brillo pad, pauses. She palms her chest, catches her breath.

Glancing at her reflection in the window, she fixes her hair.

Their excitement is SILENT from this side of the window. But the TEA LADIES are not. Their CHATTER livens inside the--

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

TEA LADIES CHATTER heighten as a round of dice roll across the table they've claimed.

TIZIANA DANIELS (26), big girl, big breasted, African-American, who plays a mean piano, interrupts, passing a cup.

TIZIANA

You could use a Yahtzee to stay in this game, Mary Ann.

MARY ANN BAKER (17), smart cookie already out of school and unsure how to conquer the world in this small town, notices--

MARY ANN

Barbra, Is that Cosmo? Let me have a peek.

Placing magazines behind the counter, in a lampshade style hat, BARBRA DONAVAN (38), turns around, lifts her chin. She hands over the red covered December 1971 issue.

BARBRA

It's seventy-five cents.

MARY ANN

I just want to see the cover.

BARBRA

Get any of that candy cane in your mouth on it and you're buying--

MARY ANN

(reading)

The Diary of a career girl in New York City... Kate?

KATE RODGER (44) housewife and mother of three leans over for a peek. Noticing the MODEL with her breasts barely covered--

KATE

If Warren got sight of that, he might citation you for pornography and then send me to a doctor to make mine bigger.

Kate examines her top self.

MARY ANN

Warren has nothing to complain. You've got a great set, Kate.

SAMANTHA GOLD (46), seeming older than her age, looks away.

SAMANTHA

With that outfit, she probably got promoted for sharpening a pencil.

BARBRA

Samantha, a woman can look attractive and be successful. Who do you think runs this store--

MARY ANN

Barbra, you run the whole town.

SAMANTHA

My girls already feel like they need to dress like that. Tammie is only seven and she already wants to try make up.

Loretta, David and Susan wander into the store to inspect the toys closer.

TIZIANA

By the time she's sixteen she'll be eyeing those new breast implants.

DAVID

Ewww.

MARY ANN

You don't wanna try breast--

LORETTA

I think he's more interested in that tape player in the window.

DAVID

I told everyone at school I was getting it this year and we're going to record our own radio show.

BARBRA

Hey there, Blue Santa. Over here.

David looks up, flashes his signature two-finger wave.

LORETTA

Brought David and Susan down to get some gift ideas.

KATE

Loretta, you grew-up during the *Walton depression era*... Seems we all want to give our family a big Christmas this time around.

TIZIANA

Whoever said size doesn't matter?

LORETTA

Last year was pretty dismal with a funeral the day after.

Even the CHRISTMAS MUSIC in the background sobers up at the mention of "last year."

BARBRA

Is it difficult for your husband to minister to the sick when faced with a doctor's grim prescription? After making his living, selling miracles to people...

LORETTA

We're praying that no one else in our village gets something like breast cancer this year.

KATE

I thought she had Hodgkin's?

LORETTA

She did.

Picking up the dice and rolling them in the cup--

MARY ANN

In a town this small? Another cancer calamity is about the chance of me rolling six of a kind.

Five dice land as a SIX, while the last teeters on the edge, finally settling on a ONE.

TIZIANA

Cancer best not be crossing our rail tracks this year.

Each of the WOMEN look at their own breasts as if some spell had been cast.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. SALEM VILLAGE - DAY

Loretta exits the store, tugging David from the window.

EXT. SALEM EXT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

Half a block from the store, stairs lead up to the porch of a 1920s farmhouse, one half turned photo studio. Adjacent the studio, framed by a window, BOY and GIRL decorate a tree.

Their father, OSCAR PAYNE (35) enters, hanging his coat.

MANTLE with yearly Christmas photos. The most recent is missing their mother, THERESA.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO, LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK - LAST YEAR)

A drooping pine tree leans against the corner wall. Boxes of decorations are stacked next to it, a single lid ajar.

Beyond the television, a bed is propped up. THERESA PAYNE (34) turns her pale face, energy draining from her soul.

Loretta consoles, holding her hand. Susan cries leaning into David's shoulder.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. SALEM VILLAGE, SIDEWALK - PRESENT DAY (1971)

Loretta squeezes David and Susan's hands.

SUSAN

Why do people always get sick at Christmas?

DAVID

Why didn't God heal Mrs. Payne?

They move toward home where the majestic CHURCH STEEPLE HONKS! Its actually a HONK from the HARPER BOYS truck piled with spruce.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Look at the size of those trees!

David shoots ahead, running after the wagon.

EXT. SALEM CHURCH - DAY

The HARPER TRUCK backs up to align with the front steps.

JAMIE HARPER (10) in overalls, directs the truck back, but his gaze is focused beyond the cracked front door--

THROUGH THE CRACK: Susan and friend TAMMY GOLD (7) in a short dress, open a box of decorations.

TAMMY
(muffled, distant)
Last year I got a bike. Whatcha
getting this year?

SUSAN
Dunno, yet.

TROY HARPER (17), swoops in to avert the collision--

TROY
WHOA! Stop the truck!

BRAKE LIGHTS.

TROY (CONT'D)
Forgetting which side of the tracks
our farm is on?

JAMIE
Wasn't looking...

The HARPER BOYS cut the twine and begin unloading the trees as David comes leaping up to help.

Troy opens the front doors below the belfry, and yanks the rope.

The BIG BELL above CRANKS, RINGS. It announces the warm gathering inside--

INT. SALEM CHURCH, AUDITORIUM, BACK AREA - CONTINUOUS

An artificial tree hangs out of a split open box on a pew. An ugly white board with a painted goal thermometer can't be missed in the corner. (It's from a previous episode "Masks.")

ALEX GOLD (42), in a green shirt, the knot of his tie hidden beneath the beard he strokes.

LANCE SINGER (40), jolly farmer in a hog head hat, comes down the adjacent stairs--

LANCE
That artificial one can go--

ALEX
In the corner right there.

LANCE
You're thinking about keeping it up
all year? Hoping to hide Evan's
monstrosity?

ALEX
Maybe he'll earn his paycheck this
Christmas. He was absent most of
our busiest season last one.

LANCE
Kinda expected-- with Theresa sick.

ALEX
They aren't even members of our
church. Didn't she have a minister?

LANCE
He did spend a lot of time there...

NICK SINGER (20), bellbottom jeans, slides by--

NICK
Come on dad, they've lived half a
block from the church, forever.

ALEX
Perhaps it provided some training
that Evan can now use for the REAL
church members here.

LANCE
Careful. Would you wish Samantha or
someone else here sick?

Carrying in the first tree, an EIGHT FOOTER, TWO HARPER BOYS
pause for instructions.

TROY
Where's Pastor Smith?

LANCE
Take em all up to the front. Evan
will be down soon.

INT. SALEM CHURCH, PASTOR'S STUDY- NIGHT

Setting a box of ribbons on the desk, REVEREND EVAN SMITH (40), thin, yet athletic, fits into his Santa hat. Turning, he's greeted by his secretary BETSY BREWER (60).

EVAN

Feel it! The energy! The Christmas Spirit has fallen tonight!

BETSY

Prayer requests came in. Thought you should see this one...

Examining the card she hands him, turning it over--

EVAN

Seriously? Who sent--

BETSY

Unsigned.

QUICK FLASHBACK: FUNERAL HOME: EVAN talks with OSCAR PAYNE (35), casket behind. LORETTA handling the kids.

EVAN

Can't be that serious? She's just asking prayer for a checkup.

BETSY

You always squeeze your bottom lip when you're in doubt.

EVAN

You know how women are. You get a pimple and think its breast cancer.

BETSY

Cause all the magazine and TV shows have us all paranoid.

EVAN

As a pastor I am here to support everyone, even Miss Anonymous-- Is it you? It isn't you?

Shaking her head--

BETSY

She's probably got, as you men say, "a good set on her." Timid as a rabbit to whimper about it.

EVAN

We'll put some prayer on it and
find out more after the holidays.
(toning it down)
When she's ready to talk.
(singing)
Can't let Satan blow the Christmas
lights out. Gonna let them shine.

He tucks the card in his shirt pocket.

INT. SALEM CHURCH, AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

Evan enters by way of the back staircase descending into the main room. Quietly, VARIOUS WOMEN catch Evan's eye as they tend to duties. He ponders to himself, "is that her?"

A SANTA LADY checks her clipboard.

SANTA LADY

Hit it Tiziana!

Tiziana turns a sheet of music as she stands, pushing the piano bench back to bang out "CAROL OF THE BELLS."

VILLAGERS HUSTLE with decorating duties. The place bustles more like Santa's workshop.

DOUBLE DOORS SWING open as FOUR HARPER BOYS parade in with another giant EVERGREEN -- twice the height of the first.

Choreographed "ELVES" yank pieces from the front planters, replacing them with poinsettias.

SANTA LADIES march by with large garland pieces, handing them up to MEN on scaffolding.

Down the center isle the HARPER BOYS march, turning round the GIANT EVERGREEN. The SANTA LADIES feed tinsel, ribbon and miniature lights to the large rotating tree.

ELVES place candles in front of each stained-glass window.

Evan directs the big tree into a stand, as others cover a makeshift platform in the front corner with a green cloth.

DAVID

They got us a tree too, Dad.

EVAN

You think this could be our most
memorable Christmas ever?

SANTA LADIES and ELVES toss boxes across the isles and hang ornaments on the tree.

Tiziana's MELODY hangs on the HIGH NOTE keys as an ornament teeters on falling off the tree.

SANTA LADY catches the ball as the SONG comes to a close.

APPLAUSE.

Evan nods his head.

The auditorium lights dim.

A SWITCH is thrown on their 1970's POWERBOARD.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS bathe the sanctuary in awe.

EVERYONE CHEERS!

EXT. PARSONAGE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Quiet CHRISTMAS MUSIC plays. Decorations spill from a stack of boxes as tall as the tree.

Seven year old SUSAN SMITH, one of her pigtails half falling, pulls a BICYCLE ORNAMENT out.

SUSAN

My bicycle is missing a wheel.

DAVID

You don't have a bike.

SUSAN

But I've always wanted a real one.
Mommy, can I have a bike for
Christmas -- please!

LORETTA

Let's finish this decorating before
making lists Santa might have to
check twice.

DAVID

Dimwad, you can't ride a bike in
the snow.

Susan grabs a stack of OLD CARDS.

LORETTA

No Susan, those don't get hung up.

David snatches it away, turning it over.

DAVID

Weird card. They want people to
sell them too.

Susan pushes in for a look.

SUSAN

I can do that. I can sell cards and
then buy my new bicycle.

DAVID

Susan, you always do this. You
won't sell anything then you'll cry
to Mommy. She'll feel sorry and buy
your WAY TOO EXPENSIVE gift anyway.

Susan sticks her tongue out.

LORETTA

You'd sell 'em if it was for your
tape recorder. Why not let her give
it a shot?

SUSAN

And I'm buying you and Daddy
something too.

LORETTA

Only to neighbors and not on
Sundays at church.

She hands David the TELEPHONE ORNAMENT. David's jaw drops
with a PUFF.

DAVID

Why do we have a phone ornament?
Always bad news when it rings.

LORETTA

Susan, here's the front wheel to
your bike?

Susan jumps for joy, repairing her broken ornament.

DAVID

You can stop being a jumping bean.
All the candy canes are broken.

David dumps a box spilling crushed peppermint across the rug.

EXT. GOLD HOUSE - DAY

DING DONG! Susan rings the door bell. She's taken back by a TINY REINDEER center of the door wreath, grinning at her.

Opening the front door--

SAMANTHA

Hello, Susan. Tammy is in the--

SUSAN

I'm here to see you. I am selling Christmas cards and was hoping you would be my first customer.

SAMANTHA

I would love to. Come on in while I go get my purse.

Susan enters with her selling kit.

EXT. SALEM, RANDOM HOUSE - DAY

DING DONG! Susan rings the bell.

A man cracks open the door.

SUSAN

I was hoping you'd be my second--

The door SLAMS shut.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

A pretty pink bike overshadows the tape recorder in the store window. The showcase is festively decorated for the holiday.

Susan wishes in awe, enters.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Susan runs her fingers along the showcase of pastries, stopping at the register.

Barbra, arranging things on a shelf, steps down from her stool, startled--

BARBRA

Susan? You snuck in here as quite as a church mouse.

SUSAN

Happy Holiday Greetings, Mrs.
Donavan. I was hoping I could sell
you some of my Christmas cards.

Barbra looks down at the catalog Susan holds.

BARBRA

Why thank you Susan. But we already
have Christmas cards. We even sell
them here.

SUSAN

I know. But I was hoping that since
I always buy your stuff, that maybe
you could buy mine for once.

Barbra chuckles.

BARBRA

That's just not how it works here,
Ankle-biter. Now go on.

Susan's face drops, she looks like she's going to cry. She
pouts to herself on the way out.

SUSAN

I'll never save enough to buy that
bike. No one will buy my cards if
the Donavan's won't...

Barbra grimaces, paces, changes her mind.

BARBRA

On second thought, some variety
might be commendable this season.
The inventory here is... becoming
stagnant. Now don't go telling
anyone I mentioned such a thing.

Susan eagerly opens her catalog.

SUSAN

And these are even personalized
with your name imprinted at the
bottom. See--

Barbra looks them over, carefully.

BARBRA

Nice, indeed. Sign me up for a box
of these. Make it two, and be sure
they spell my name correctly.

(MORE)

BARBRA (CONT'D)

The last name is D-o-n - A - v-a-n.
Donn-A-van with an "A."

SUSAN

You can fill it in right here.

Barbra grabs a pen and fills out the order form.

INT. SALEM CHURCH, AUDITORIUM - DAY

Evan strings lights between the poinsettias in the planter beside the church organ. Toys under the large tree PART WAY (in his mind) when his eye catches sight of a TOY AIRPLANE.

Loretta quietly comes up beside him.

EVAN

Here to help me finish up, Honey?

LORETTA

Kinda worn out today. Wanted to review those prayer request--

EVAN

Then sit down, rest. See these wonderful toys people have donated? They will go out to -- families.

LORETTA

Ones that need them badly.

EVAN

Or not. When I was boy, we didn't have money to buy gifts. But my Mom was adamant about the season being a time to give. She saved extra money so we could make toys for a needy family.

FLASHBACK

INT. DETROIT, SMITH HOUSE, KITCHEN, 1940 - DAY

Finishing off an AIRPLANE MODEL, YOUNG EVAN (9) wipes the last bit of glue on his torn shirt, hoping to fix its tear.

His mother, ELAINA SMITH (40) busily hangs her apron, taking the model and placing it in a box.

ELAINA

Don't dally. Go fetch a paper bag and wrap it. The minister has given an address of a family in need.

EVAN

Why doesn't someone give us gifts?

ELAINA

Perhaps because of an attitude like that. You have plenty of toys and even a musical instrument your grandmother gave you. Christmas is a time for giving not receiving.

EVAN

But everyone else is rec--

As if putting her fist down, Elaina SLAPS a tied ribbon to the table for the package.

INT\EXT. DETROIT, STRANGER HOUSE, 1940 - NIGHT

Noisy KIDS tearing about the place are heard as the front door opens. The SMITH FAMILY stands, a dark silhouette against the bright festive living room beyond the door.

A MOTHER

Come on in...

ELAINA

Oh no. We're just here to drop off gifts in the name of the church to help you all have a meaningful--

BRAT BOY (9), kicks his sister, his shoe flies off, lands in a pile of already opened toys. Spotting the visitors he rushes to the front door.

BRAT BOY

Which one is mine?

Elaina shuffles the boxes as Brat Boy grabs one.

BRAT BOY (CONT'D)

(mocking)

Look. They didn't even use real wrapping paper.

He tears the box open snatching the airplane.

BRAT BOY (CONT'D)
Wow! Look at the painted detail on
this. Let's see if it can fly.

He tosses the model across the room. It CRASHES into an art
deco console radio. A torn wing teeters, then falls off.

BRAT BOY (CONT'D)
What a piece of junk. I thought we
were getting real toys Mom.

Elaina extends an arm, holding Evan back from lunging at the
boy. The Mother shrugs, closing the door.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. SALEM CHURCH, AUDITORIUM - PRESENT DAY (1971)

Evan winds the cord of the string of lights to an outlet,
plugs them in. Nothing. He proceeds to checking bulbs.

EVAN
Guess I'm that minister now. Who am
I to judge who needs that airplane
or something else? Just makes me
want to give our kids the best
Christmas possible.

LORETTA
(head elsewhere)
Yeah, the best one ever...

EVAN
Now what did you come over here to
talk about?

BIG STRESSFUL SIGH.

LORETTA
Just looking for some reinforcement
that everything will go off without
a hitch this holiday.

EVAN
Committed to making this the best
one yet. What could possibly go
wrong after last year's ordeal?

EXT. SALEM - DAY

Loretta's VEGA crosses the rail tracks, leaving town.

INT. PARSONAGE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Soft Christmas music plays in the background as Susan runs in with an ornament, hanging it on the tree.

SUSAN
Mrs. Gold gave me this one...

DAVID
She never gives me anything.

SUSAN
It's for all of us, Dip Stick.

DAVID
How many boxes did she buy?

Susan hold up two fingers.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Do you think you'll sell enough?

SUSAN
I have all week.

DAVID
We're both going to end up getting zilch. Do you really think you'll have enough for a bike?
(hinting)
Selling them all by yourself...

SUSAN
You could help me and we can put the money toward both our gifts.

David thrusts his head away, pretending to be miffed. Then giving in--

DAVID
Maybe Rick and a couple other kids will buy. But if I do this and then don't get that recorder--

SUSAN
I'll chip in my allowance to help if you don't.

David extends his hand to seal the deal.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER

Establishing shot looking over the parked Vega.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, GIFT SHOP - DAY

Isles are brightly lit with flowers, balloons and toys.
INTERN DAVE WATERS, late twenties, sorts through a section of stuffed animals that could have walked off Noah's ark.

Picking up a giraffe--

INTERN DAVE

How old did you say your niece was?

DOCTOR THOMAS SCRUPLES, early 50s, down to business, examines the price tag attached to the long neck.

DR. SCRUPLES

I usually don't stick my neck out on matters... Just haven't time to run about Christmas shopping before the ski trip.

NEXT ISLE:

SHOPPER

(whispers to wife)

Half the people here dying and wise ole doc living it up.

Approaching the register--

INTERN DAVE

Ski trip? I thought you we're getting married?

DR. SCRUPLES

Keep a secret? We're going to elope. Cost of the wedding buys us two extra weeks in the Alps.

CASHIER

Lucky intern. You're working with the best cancer doctor in town.

Departing with a bag, giraffe head poking out--

DR. SCRUPLES

The 1 PM. New patient. The referral indicates a breast lump hard as a rock. What course of action do you think we should plan?

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Plunking a dime in the vending machine, a cup drops and coffee from a spigot begins to fill.

DR. SCRUPLES

She appears to be a standard text book case.

Dr. Scruples takes the cup, inserts another dime.

INTERN DAVE

A mammography first, of course.
Then I'd follow that up with a
ultrasound before the operation.
Half and half in my coffee, please.

DR. SCRUPLES

All good in theory. The ultrasound
is still a fairly new procedure.
Hospitals, like this one, aren't
equipped...

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, HALL - CONTINUOUS

Dr. Scruples WHITE SHOES CLUNK on the tile floor, noticed by OTHERS he passes.

DR. SCRUPLES

My opinion, the extra step is too
new and costly.

INTERN DAVE

Then we'd proceed with an
operation.

Sipping--

DR. SCRUPLES

Ouch that coffee is hot. Let's get
this examination underway.

Opening the door to--

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, PATIENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The chilly blue walls contrast with the dark red examination table. The back of a WOMAN sits, fidgets, intimidated.

The door opens. Entering, shoes CLUNKING--

DR. SCRUPLES

How are you feeling? We're going to give you a physical examination similar to what had you last week at doc Atchison's. Then discuss options, if it comes to that.

Turning, arm over breasts, Loretta shrugs, gives a nod.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Sitting on the treatment table, Loretta buttons up her blouse as Dr. Scruples and Intern Dave WHISPER in the corner.

Loretta crosses her legs, then uncrosses them.

Finally the doctors approach.

DR. SCRUPLES

The lump is small enough that we may have options.

INTERN DAVE

Catching this early, like you did is key.

DR. SCRUPLES

I've been doing this for over twenty years, Loretta. Based on the hardness... There is no question we are dealing with cancer here.

LORETTA

So how do we treat this? Am I going to need chemo---

INTERN DAVE

We've made progress with chemotherapy and radiation therapy for other kinds of cancer. But right now in 1971...

DR. SCRUPLES

We're most likely going to have to remove at least part of the breast. I'd like to schedule you for a mammography.

Loretta looks puzzled.

INTERN DAVE

It's just an x-ray machine that takes pictures inside your breast at different angles.

DR. SCRUPLES

That will give us a better idea of the extent of the bugger.

INTERN DAVE
Or if there might be more than one.

DR. SCRUPLES
The size will determine if we'll
need to do a lumpectomy or a
radical mastectomy.

LORETTA
Lumpectomy?

She folds her hands with worry.

INT. SALEM CHURCH, PASTOR'S STUDY

Walking past a reprint of Hofmann's painting "Christ in the Garden," Loretta presents the basket of prayer requests.

Evan stops typing. He turns the radio down, preceptive of her serious nature.

LORETTA
I've been wanting to talk with you
about a special private prayer req--

Getting up, rushing to her side--

EVAN
No. It can't be. How didn't I
realize...

LORETTA
I went to the doctor--

EVAN
You went alone? I'm slightly taken
back that you didn't feel
comfortable enough to come talk...

LORETTA
I was praying. Trusting God that it
wouldn't be an issue. That there
would be nothing to discuss.

Trying to be supportive, yet conflicted--

EVAN
Right. I understand. Wow.

LORETTA
Didn't want to spoil Christmastime
again this year--

EVAN

Nonsense. What did the doctor say?

LORETTA

After they do an x-ray, he called it a manograph, then they'll decide if they can do a lumpectomy.

EVAN

Lumpectomy? That's...

LORETTA

When they remove the lump and some tissue around it.

EVAN

Doesn't sound all that extensive. And you'd keep...

LORETTA

The "bugger," as the doc called it, has to be under three centimeters, else I'll need a the mastectomy.

EVAN

The mammography?

LORETTA

Later next week. I suspect the holiday is too close for them to schedule any procedure right now.

EVAN

We'll wait until we know more before telling the kids. But shouldn't we let other key people know? So they can pray with us?

INT. SALEM CHURCH, AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A SINGLE LIGHT in the BACK AREA sways over a long table where BOARD MEMBERS settle in. The decorations in cold darkness ruffle in an uneasy eeriness. The WIND OUTSIDE howls, RATTLES a window.

FRONT DOOR swings open as Alex Gold shakes snow from his boots and makes way to the table, rubbing his hands.

ALEX

Kinda bleak-- Without the decorations blazing.

Alex throws the switch, the DECORATIONS BEAM but the absence of music and BOARD MEMBER stares, triggers him to dim them.

EVAN

Tonight I wanted to address the board with a personal matter. My wife, Loretta, is going in for a mammogram in a few days. I ask that you keep her in your prayers. That the results will be favorable.

After a long silence, Lance stands up.

LANCE

I want you to know, and I think I speak for the entire board, that we will do everything we can to help Loretta and your family through this difficult time.

EXT. SALEM - DAY

Evan sits in the church van, stopped at the rail tracks. He worries as a train WHIZZES by. A light snow adds to the grayness of the departure.

Loretta places her hand on top of his.

INT. HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM - DAY

EVAN paces to a stop at the bleakness beyond the window.

OUTSIDE: Two mounds of snow cover the parking lot. A SNOWPLOW SLAMS into one, bulldozing it away.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, PATIENT ROOM - DAY

A box like machine extends an arm with a mechanical pincher the size of a small table. The MAMMOGRAM IMAGER radiates a DULL HUM.

LORETTA seated on the gurney. Dr. Scruples examines papers on his clipboard, glancing down at his white shoes.

LORETTA

I was praying that this thing would be all cleared up when I arrived.

DR. SCRUPLES

I can see you are a woman of faith.

LORETTA

My husband is a minister. And to my knowledge he's never made a prayer request that God denied.

DR. SCRUPLES

Personally, I'm not religious. In this hospital, I have to follow proven medical routines.

LORETTA

I am a patient who knows nothing about you or your healing methods, Doctor. But I have faith in you. And I have faith in God. I am trusting the two of you will work together perfectly.

She gathers her clothes together as the doctors leave.

INT. HOSPITAL, NURSE STATION - DAY

Nurse Pearce gets up, seeing the doctors approach.

INTERN DAVE

Faith. Sounds like something my mother would chime in with.

DR. SCRUPLES

She's in the denial stage right now. Be a different story once on that gurney. Everyone wants a miracle. Never seen one in my operating room in twenty years.

Dr. Scruples hands the paperwork to the nurse, holding it back for a second, examining the address.

DR. SCRUPLES (CONT'D)

Nurse Pearce, if there was a God, out of four billion people on the planet, do you think he would notice a single housewife from-- Salem, Michigan?

Nurse Pearce GRUNTS, snatches the paperwork away.

Having overheard, Evan approaches.

EVAN

That's the beauty of our Savior. He's omnipresent. He notices every housewife everywhere.

DR. SCRUPLES
You are very lucky Reverend Smith.

EVAN
Evan.

DR. SCRUPLES
I'll admit that faith might help.

EVAN
Then you do believe in God.

DR. SCRUPLES
Oh far from. There is science
behind all this. It works a little
like when we have a drug trial.
Sometimes half the people that
receive the placebo improve. What
the brain believes is a powerful
thing. We just haven't learned
enough about it yet.

A distant ambulance SIREN SOUNDS.

EVAN
Besides praying for my wife,
Doctor, I'm going to pray that God
will reveal himself to you.

DR. SCRUPLES
I would love to see your wife
healed. I've been doing this for
decades and I've never seen cancer
just vanish.

Scruples turns away, queued by the SIREN loudening.

INT. GOLD HOUSE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Steam pours from a bowl of noodles as Samantha dishes them
onto plates. She follows up with meatballs on top.

Alex unfolds a napkin, tucking it beneath his beard as a
scoots his chair closer to the small table.

The awkward silence prompts--

TAMMY
Did you two have a fight?

SAMANTHA
Mind your business.

ALEX

You can't repeat this to anyone,
Tammy. It's the about the Smith's.

TAMMY

What crime against your plot did he
do this time?

SAMANTHA

Hush. It's Loretta.

ALEX

Mrs. Smith, it seems, has a small
lump of cancer in her breast.

Tammy's mouth drops.

Their eating slowly resumes.

SAMANTHA

It's your fault you know.

ALEX

My fault?

SAMANTHA

You're always plotting something
against her husband. Don't you
think God is doing this to get your
attention?

TAMMY

If she dies-- No one will support
anything you say ever again.

ALEX

Calm down now. You know what we say
at the table here, stays here.

Tammy gets up, leaves.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You don't think that thought hasn't
crossed my mind all day.

SAMANTHA

If Evan's left with two kids to
raise alone... Why he'll have
complete support of the whole town.

ALEX

At this point, I think we should
all support her and Evan.

SAMANTHA

Maybe we should donate some of our vacation savings...

Alex uneasily flinches in his chair.

ALEX

She's not going to die. It's just a small knot.

INT. GOLD HOUSE, TV ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tammy turns on the TV (RCA color console from pilot episode) reducing the volume. A BLACK BIRD outside on the snow covered windowsill cocks his head.

Tammy picks up the rotary phone and dials.

INT. PARSONAGE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hanging up the phone, Susan runs in, giving Loretta hug.

SUSAN

Mommy, Mommy! Are you going to die?

Evan drops the evening edition of the Detroit News.

LORETTA

I think the word is out.

EVAN

Kids, come here. We have something to discuss, to tell you.

They all settle into the sofa and chairs.

LORETTA

I have a small lump in my breast and it's possibly cancerous. It's not very big at all, but it has to be removed before it grows larger.

EVAN

They probably won't even do the procedure until after Christmas with the holidays so close.

David's face plummets. Susan bursts into tears.

DAVID

Everyone who gets cancer dies.

LORETTA

Honey Boy, they're just going to remove the infected area and possibly the breast if its grown larger than they like.

EVAN

Your Mom is going to need a lot of rest. We're all going to have to pull together as a family and help.

DAVID

I don't want to pull anything together. Mrs. Payne died. What if--

EVAN

Theresa Payne had a different kind of illness.

David abruptly walks to the window, stares out, the Payne house across the way.

LORETTA

David, where is your faith?

EVAN

"The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all."

DAVID

Sure. Lots of troubles round here, needing delivering.

Perplexed, David heads up the stairs.

LORETTA

Maybe we shouldn't build up hope, when little exists.

Susan, clutching her catalog order, realizes there won't be a bike this year.

LORETTA (CONT'D)

Maybe next year, Peaches.

SUSAN

I'm still going to buy you a present Mommy.

Susan runs upstairs.

Loretta's eyes well-up with tears.

From the end table, Evan grabs a Bible, holds it.

EVAN

It's normal to question. From Abraham's wife, Sarah, to the disciple Thomas, who doubted. But God always came through.

LORETTA

And if we promise our kids God will take care of things and then--

EVAN

"And then." How long have we lived in this village? Can you count the prayers that God didn't answer?

LORETTA

(hope returns)

Not many. This village hides volumes of miracles untold.

INT. PARSONAGE, DAVID'S ROOM - NIGHT

David plops on the bed pouting, staring at an Etch-a-sketch. He swipes at it. It CRASHES to the floor.

DAVID

Dear God, why mom? This can't be happening. Why are you so far away?

Susan barges in with her order form.

SUSAN

David, can you help me with this so I can mail it?

DAVID

Isn't Mom supposed to help you?

SUSAN

But she's sick, I thought you could help instead.

David scoffs.

DAVID

(lowering voice)

Since you're makin' the bacon, get her something real nice this year. What if it's the last one?

Somber, Susan nods.

Snatching the order form--

DAVID (CONT'D)
Pinhead, your form looks like a
skuzz bucket threw up on it.

SUSAN
I dropped it in the snow.

DAVID
Well... Do you have another form? A
blank one? We can copy it over.

Susan presents a blank one.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Go get an envelope and a stamp from
the desk while I copy this.

Leaving--

SUSAN
You don't have to call me names.

David meticulously fills in the new form.

Upon reaching the "Donavan" order, David can't make out the
runny ink. He holds it up to the window for more light.

Shrugging, he copies the name wrong, incorrectly spelling it:
"D-o-n- 'O' -v-a-n."

EXT. GENERAL STORE - EVENING

With envelope in tow, David runs toward the General Store,
passing a SALVATION ARMY BELL RINGER.

Ready to pop the door open, David turns, stops, stares into
the bay window. There his dream tape recorder waits, only the
glass preventing them from being together. He presses his
nose against the window.

David drops the envelope.

A RANDOM CUSTOMER opens the door. BELL on the door JINGLES.

RANDOM CUSTOMER
Think you dropped something.

David looks down, quickly scoops up his letter, follows the
customer into the store.

BEYOND THE WINDOW: David inserts the piece into the mailbox.

Returning outside, David gathers his coat together, ignoring the Bell Ringer. He stops, discovers a penny in his pocket.

Bell Ringer nods at the gift.

INT. SALEM CHURCH, PASTOR STUDY - DAY

Evan selects a few books from the shelves to study. In the next room a PHONE RINGS.

A moment later, a shout--

BETSY (O.C.)
Pastor. Telephone. It's Alex.

Evan picks up the receiver of the fifties-style desk phone.

EVAN
Reverend Smith here.

ALEX (V.O.)
This morning in my devotions, I was reading Jeremiah and came across the verse, "Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it." And then I felt this "silent voice." As if it told me to pray for complete healing for Loretta. I don't recollect a feeling like this ever before. Perhaps something good is going to come out of all this.

EVAN
Thank you for sharing Alex.

ALEX (V.O.)
And don't tell anyone, please. About me having "feelings." The other men would... and if Samantha got wind, why there would be--

EVAN
Thank you for praying.

As Evan hangs up the phone, it RINGS again.

BETSY (O.C.)
Pastor!... Lance!

Evan picks up--

LANCE (V.O.)

Just had to tell you, Evan. I was praying for Loretta this morning. When I dropped the *Good Book*. There on the floor it lie opened to a verse in James. It read, "A prayer offered in faith will heal the sick." I'm not one that looks for signs. But this, be it coincidence or not, has told me to pray for healing for Loretta.

Evan's mouth drops, he holds the phone in thought.

A MUFFLED DIAL TONE projects from the receiver.

INT. PARSONAGE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

BUZZER SOUNDS on the stove.

Loretta pulls a pan of brownies from the oven.

Hanging his jacket near the back door--

EVAN

Those sure smell delicious.

LORETTA

Whipped up a nice desert to keep our minds on the holidays instead of on...

An awkward pause. Loretta turns back to the stove to turn knobs off, even the ones that don't need turning.

David rushes in from the cold, kicking his boots off and throwing his coat at the hooks. It falls to the floor.

LORETTA (CONT'D)

David! Hang your coat--

DAVID

But I did...

Loretta nods her head toward the rack. David slows to notice the fallen coat.

Running in--

SUSAN

David. My boot won't come off.

DAVID

Susan, I'm busy right now. Can't you see.

He finally helps her.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Mrs. Donavon said I could borrow that tape recorder now, to make a demo, if Mom would vouch that she is actually going to buy it.

SUSAN

Yeah, right, smarty-pants.

LORETTA

And ruin the surprise?

EVAN

No gifts before Christmas day.

Rushing to his seat at the table--

DAVID

Cool beans! Spaghetti, my favorite.

SUSAN

And meatballs too.

EVAN

Pretty sizeable meatballs...

Loretta glances down at her breasts wondering if she's overcompensated.

DAVID

When I get my tape recorder I can record you making dinner too.

SUSAN

It's an audio recorder, D-mutt. Not a movie camera.

LORETTA

Made brownies for desert.

EVAN

I have a feeling things are going to turn out quiet fine. Had the weirdest phone call, not from one, but two men today.

Loretta looks up.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Both of them said the Lord was telling them to pray for complete healing.

LORETTA

Really? I got a call from Kate Rodgers this morning. She said something similar.

She looks toward the ceiling satisfied.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, NURSE STATION - DAY

Nurse Pearce raises her head at the sound of the CLUNKING WHITE SHOES. She quickly grabs a chart from the lazy-susan carousel--

NURSE PEARCE

Dr. Scruples, These just came back.

The doctor mulls over the x-ray results as Intern Dave catches up, looks over his shoulder. Shaking his head--

DR. SCRUPLES

Its over the cut-off. We'll have to do the radical mastectomy. Hate to be the bearer of bad news this time of the year.

INTERN DAVE

Goodness. Maybe I should pray. I went to Sunday School... once.

DR. SCRUPLES

A better use of your time might be spent reviewing S.O.P. You'll be in the operating room on this one.

NURSE PEARCE

Could wait until after Christmas to call? Your calendar is...

Scruples clears his throat.

NURSE PEARCE (CONT'D)

I'll get her on the phone now.

She begins dialing.

INT. PARSONAGE, KITCHEN

The family is eating brownies and ice cream, having a joyful desert when the PHONE RINGS.

David's jaw drops with a PUFF.

Loretta gets up, answers it.

DR. SCRUPLES (O.C.)
Hi. Loretta?

Loretta's rosy cheeks fade in a disquieting tone.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FLASHBACK:

EXT. DETROIT, FULLERS SHOP - DAY

"1954"

A small 5 & 10 shop nestled between other stores displays antiques in its window, along with a "CONSIGNMENT" sign.

MRS. BROWN (50s), hugs a wrapped package under her winter coat as she hurries inside, out of the rain.

INT. DETROIT, FULLERS SHOP - DAY

Mrs. Brown sets the bundle on the counter unwraps the piece.

Closing the candy dish she was filling, STORE CLERK (40s) eagerly investigates--

STORE CLERK

What an exquisite vase. Might take some time to find a qualified buyer for this one.

MRS. BROWN

Whatever you can sell it for. I need the money by end of the month.

STORE CLERK

Certainly.

The clerk hands the paper work to Mrs. Brown as she examines the ANTIQUE VASE.

STORE CLERK (CONT'D)

Do mind me asking why you are willing to part with such a piece so quickly? What calamity has come upon your family?

MRS. BROWN

(chuckles)

Oh it's not for me. I have a friend who is going to be a missionary and she needs money to travel to Taiwan. This might sound crazy, but I just feel God wants me to sell this and give her the money.

(MORE)

MRS. BROWN (CONT'D)
So whatever you can get for it will
be fine. I'm trusting the right
buyer will find it.

EXT. DETROIT, CONSIGNMENT SHOP - DAY

QUICK MONTAGE: Various SHOPPERS examining the vase in the
store window, entering, exiting, returning again.

INT. DETROIT, CONSIGNMENT SHOP - DAY

"1954 - ONE MONTH LATER"

Mrs. Brown returns, noticing the vase still in the window.
Her smile fades as the Store Clerk gathers up the paper work.

MRS. BROWN
Oh, well. No takers? I'll have to
write her a check my--

STORE CLERK
On the contrary. That vase has been
the most popular item I have ever
carried in this store. Women, men
too, came from out of nowhere
asking for it. I kept raising the
price all along.

MRS. BROWN
I don't get it.

STORE CLERK
Each time as I was wrapping it up,
I told them how you had parted with
it to donate the money to a mission
trip. And once they heard that,
each one of them decided to donate
what they were going to pay for the
vase, and asked me to sell it to
someone else. You're not going to
believe how much money is here.

The Clerk hands a fat envelope to Mrs. Brown. Her eyes widen.

MRS. BROWN
Why many thanks to you and all your
customers.

STORE CLERK
Mind me asking, who is this
missionary?

MRS. BROWN

Her name is Loretta Smith. She was
my daughter's roommate at college.

As Mrs. Brown departs--

STORE CLERK

Oh and don't forget to take your
vase with you. I don't think
there's an angel in Heaven that
would ever let me sell that thing.

Mrs. Brown picks up the vase on her way out.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. PARSONAGE, DINING ROOM

"PRESENT DAY - 1971"

Stack of mail. Magazine on top. Loretta flips it over. On the
back cover a swimsuit ad: "If nature gave you a 36C..."

Loretta shoves the magazine away. It flies off the table end.

Entering, picking it up, Evan looks surprised.

LORETTA

I'll never fit into a swimsuit
again. I won't be able to teach
swimming at camp this summer.

EVAN

It'll be okay--

LORETTA

They don't make swimsuits for
freaks like me. Think they'll let
me buy one, cut in half. Charge me
half price? Wouldn't be able to
afford a half-a-one anyway with
this stack of bills.

Evan takes a seat across from her.

LORETTA (CONT'D)

I've been on my knees every day and
not a dime has come in. Look at
this one... more than you make in
an entire year. And that's just the
first bill.

Evan stands, begins pacing. Bites his lower lip.

EVAN

What about your dad?

LORETTA

All he has is his retirement funds and most of that is in stocks. Said he'd sell some and loan us maybe a thousand.

EVAN

I could sell the car and use the church van for a couple years. But I'd have to ask the board, permission.

LORETTA

If only we had more time.

EVAN

Could pay the doc a visit and see how long this might be put off?

Loretta nods.

INT. PARSONAGE, MASTER BEDROOM - EVENING

A small door opens up into a side attic. Susan waits by the door as David comes out.

DAVID

No way I could crawl behind those boxes. You're small enough though. Bet you could cruise in there easier than a monkey's uncle.

SUSAN

But its dirty. Besides mom is sick we're not getting anything--

DAVID

Maybe they're just saying that to make it a bigger surprise.

SUSAN

But a bike ain't gonna fit--

DAVID

You DO want to know what we're getting... Don't you?

Susan starts in--

SUSAN
It's too dark to see anything--

David hands her a flashlight. She crawls in further.

At the door, bending in--

DAVID
Behind the folded boxes. Look for
any green or red paper?

SUSAN
I think I found something.

An indistinct VOICE and FOOTSTEPS on the stairway catch
attention--

DAVID
Uh oh!

David zips out of the room.

INT. PARSONAGE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

David makes it safely to his bedroom, peaks from the doorway
as Loretta rounds the stairwell.

Seeing him peek--

LORETTA
What's going on?

DAVID
Susan snuck into the attic trying
to score some Christmas presents.

Loretta frowns--

INT. PARSONAGE, MASTER BEDROOM - EVENING

Coming into the room Loretta meets Susan just as she emerges
from the small attic door with a present in hand.

LORETTA
SUSAN--

Looking up, she sees Loretta.

SUSAN
(starts to cry)
I was afraid we weren't going to
get presents. I just wanted to see.

Susan drops the gift and runs into Loretta's arms.

EXT. SALEM SCHOOL, PLAYGROUND - DAY

Gray clouds hold back their snow as CHILDREN slosh through muddy snow.

As David walks through the playground, the other kids move away, avoiding him.

David looks down, dragging his feet, depressed.

ONE KID starts to approach but his friend pulls him back, shaking his head.

Haunting David's ears--

WHISPER OF KIDS

His Mom's got cancer... Poor
kid.... Leave him alone... He's
just sad right now... Santa's not
visiting them this year... His
dad's the minister can't he heal
her?... It doesn't work that
way.... I don't know what to
say.... What are we supposed to do?

David makes his way around to the slide, where he plops down underneath it, facing the steps the other kids climb.

A few moments later, the kids begin avoiding the slide.

RICK KENNY, light brown hair, David's best pal, cheerfully appears on the other side of the ladder.

RICK

Hey. Wanted to say I'm real sorry
about your...

DAVID

Don't sweat it. I'm just bummed out
right now.

RICK

Just wanted--

David barely raises his two fingers before looking away.

Rick shrugs, walks on.

RECESS BELL rings and the kids return to the school building.

From a classroom window, MISS BEAVER (35), in her drab brown dress, notices David still sitting there.

David slowly gets up, lagging, dragging.

Miss Beaver, bundling her coat, steps outside and meets up.

MISS BEAVER

Your classmates... they'll come around soon enough.

Kicking the snow.

DAVID

Don't care about them. I prayed and I asked God. Nothing has changed. Only gotten worse. She's going to die just like Benny's mom last year, I know it.

Entering the--

INT. SCHOOL, LIBRARY - DAY

Kid height bookshelves snake from the doorway like an organized maze.

Removing her winter coat and helping David with a boot--

MISS BEAVER

Just because a miracle didn't come for someone else, does that mean it won't happen for you?

DAVID

Miracles cop out when cancer comes calling. Even you said "history repeats itself."

MISS BEAVER

Wouldn't your Mom say that God has a reason for everything?

DAVID

God has abandoned me.

MISS BEAVER

Look at all these books here. Filled with stories of people and their struggles. Not one ever quit. Maybe someday you can write about your experience and help some other David facing his giant.

DAVID
Write? I can't even spell mom's
name half the time.

INT. PARSONAGE, DAVID'S ROOM - DAY

With some passion, David swings the door open. He starts to kneel, realizing the bed is wrinkled, he smooths it out before assuming position.

DAVID
Dear God. Why Mom? Why MY Mom? I'm
sorry if I made you mad. Forgive me
for calling my sister names. Please
make Mom better. I promise to help
out more.

David starts to get up, then kneels again.

DAVID (CONT'D)
And Dear God, forget about that
tape recorder for Christmas, please
just don't let mom die.

David stands, shaking head, looking up.

INT. CHURCH, SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

SUNDAY SCHOOL CHILDREN age five are seated, looking at a flannel covered board. David's AUNT WANDA (30s) steps up.

AUNT WANDA
David is going to present the
Sunday School lesson today, instead
of his mother.

The kids look at each other as David steps up with cut-out figures to place on the board.

DAVID
Once long ago, almost two thousand
years ago, there was a--

INT. PARSONAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

David is mixing cookie dough with a big spoon when Susan enters.

SUSAN
What are you doing?

DAVID
Making cookies for the church
Christmas packages, so Mom can
catch a break.

Susan opens a cupboard and pulls out her EASY-BAKE OVEN.

SUSAN
I'm going to help too!

Laughing--

DAVID
Really? Cookies with that?

SUSAN
Chocolate-chip.

Susan plugs the oven in, starts setting up her pans.

The DOORBELL RINGS.

David stops mixing, runs to the back door.

Returning with a big box--

DAVID
Susan, I think your Christmas card
orders arrived.

Susan jumps up excited. Takes the box and exits.

David unplugs her Easy-bake oven.

DAVID (CONT'D)
(with a sigh)
Just in time.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

BELL JINGLES as Susan, with box, skips into the General Store. She selects a piece of candy, perhaps a reward.

She twirls around and drops a box of cards on the counter.

In the background, Christmas music plays from an old radio on the counter.

Susan leans forward over the counter, trying to peak at the back room.

SUSAN
Mrs. Donovan?

A closet door closes and she appears--

BARBRA
Greetings, Susan. What can I--

SUSAN
They're here! Your Christmas cards arrived. I brought them right over.

BARBRA
Wonderful. I have been anticipating their arrival with the "big day" on the horizon.

Barbra unwraps the box and pulls out a card. She examines it holding it up to the light.

BARBRA (CONT'D)
Oh yes these are lovely. Certainly look much more impressive than... Wait--

Barbra lowers the card to the counter.

BARBRA (CONT'D)
You misspelled my name. It's with an "A" not an "O."

Susan shrugs.

BARBRA (CONT'D)
Well, these are completely and utterly useless.

SUSAN
Can't you just write over it?

BARBRA
Absolutely not. That would look contemptible and invite even more attention to the error.

SUSAN
I guess I'll see about sending them back to be redone.

BARBRA
You best just grant me a refund. They'll never turn around before Christmas. Last day to mail packages was yesterday.

SUSAN
A refund?

BARBRA
(short, upset)
Yes, I want my payment returned.
All of it. Today.

Susan runs out of the store, crying.

Barbara Donovan reaches for the telephone.

INT. CHURCH, PASTOR STUDY - DAY

On the telephone, Evan nods and agrees at the loud voice. He moves the receiver a space from his ear.

BARBRA (V.O.)
(on phone)
I would have envisioned some
appropriate parental supervision.
You should have double checked the
girl's order before letting her
mail it off. I expect a full
refund. I want my two dollars back.

EVAN
Rest assured, Barbra. I'll send
Loretta over right away. I do
apologize for everything. I'm sure
that once--

BARBRA (V.O.)
I'd expect better, especially from
the minister's kid.

CLICK, Barbra hangs up.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Barbra Donovan piously wipes spots from the glass case, that only she can see. Then she precisely arranges a couple pastries that might be off-centered.

Mary Ann quickly puts out her cigarette when she notices--

Loretta enters the store and unties her winter scarf, shakes the snow from her boots and approaches.

LORETTA
(noticing music)
Lovely Christmas music. You always
pick out the most inspiring tunes
this time of the year. "O Holy
Night"... It makes one think of--

BARBRA

It's just the radio. We play whatever comes on... The songs the broadcaster has already selected.

Loretta nods and then pulls her purse from her shoulder, starting to open it.

LORETTA

I am so sorry about the mix up with Susan and your Christmas cards.

BARBRA

Perhaps you ought to teach your kids to spell better. Enough illiterate people in town, already. Heard you were a teacher once. What happened there?

LORETTA

Evan said you needed the money right away... I've got your two dollar refund... right here...

Mary Ann wanders over to them. Barbra becomes uneasy.

MARY ANN

A refund? There's a reversal for a change...
(laughing at pun)
Change...

Loretta finishes counting the coins in her hand, sets a SPARKLING QUARTER on the counter.

Mary Ann steps behind Loretta and mouth words--

MARY ANN (CONT'D)

(whisper)
She's got cancer, remember?

With a large sigh, Barbra takes hold of Loretta's hands.

BARBRA

Loretta, put your money away. Why don't you just call this a Christmas gift from me. I was just dissembled in the moment. But do teach those ankle-biters to be a little more careful.

Startled, Loretta puts the coins back in her purse.

LORETTA
Swell. Why thank you.

BARBRA
(unemotional)
Merry Christmas.

LORETTA
Yes. Merry Christmas. And hope to
see you in church this year.

Barbra grimaces, rolls her eyes as Loretta exits. She notices the SPARKLING QUARTER left on the counter and quickly picks it up. At first, she intends to keep it, but then reaches out to offer it -- but Loretta is already gone.

Finally, she sets the quarter on top of a SALVATION ARMY donation can on the counter, the 3-cm coin still uncommitted.

INT. HOSPITAL, DOCTOR OFFICE - DAY

A globe and lava lamp top off the green credenza behind a desk where Dr. Scruples gets up to extend a hand.

DR. SCRUPLES
Evan. Nurse Pearce tells me you
have some scheduling concerns.
Regarding Loretta?

At the doc's gesture, Evan takes a seat.

EVAN
We were hoping to postpone the
operation. Just until after the
holidays. Since the "bugger" is
over the size limit and we're
having the full mastectomy surely a
couple weeks won't matter?

A bulge grows within the lava lamp, behind.

DR. SCRUPLES
Evan, cancer is nothing to mess
with. We just don't know enough
about it. While it sits there, it
could release cells into the blood
and cause a new growth elsewhere.
Best to attack it now and not risk
it spreading.

The bulge in the lava lamp breaks free, rises.

EVAN

We're willing to trust God on this.
We have an entire church praying.

Scruples paces, stops, placing his hand on the globe.

DR. SCRUPLES

A woman I knew once... A little
like your wife. Minister told her
if she had enough faith, God would
take care of her. He was convincing
and even I rendered prayers. Many a
night, on my knees, I blamed myself
for not believing enough.

Slowly he spins the globe.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. CEMETERY: 1925. YOUNG THOMAS SCRUPLES (10) watches a
wooden coffin lowered into a grave against an eerie sunset,
void of color.

DR. SCRUPLES (O.C.) (CONT'D)

She was my mother. An orphan, I
went to live with my aunt. Four
years later, she too succumbed to
the dreadful "C-word."

INT. CABIN: 1929. TEEN SCRUPLES (14) holds his aunts hand, he
looks up, his countenance turning to disgust as the
overzealous MINISTER pounds the Bible he holds.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HOSPITAL, DOCTOR OFFICE - PRESENT DAY (1971)

The globe slows to a stop as the doc walks over to the wall
where dozens of diplomas and certificates crowd.

DR. SCRUPLES

I decided that I was going to find
a cure. To save as many people as I
could from cancer. Maybe even save
them from... God.

EVAN

I'm sorry, I didn't know. Not all
ministers sell snake oil. As a
pastor, I'll be the first to admit,
we don't have all the answers.
Neither one of us can cure cancer.

Scruples chuckles.

DR. SCRUPLES

Fifty years from now, we may look back on this operation as a needless barbaric procedure. For now we're saving lives.

EVAN

So what can I say to convince you to push this out a few weeks?

DR. SCRUPLES

Truth is, I'm getting married. Will be out of the country on a six week honeymoon trip.

Awkward silence.

DR. SCRUPLES (CONT'D)

If you depend on a god, maybe you need to trust his timing. This operation has to go forward.

EVAN

Loretta is worried about the cost.

DR. SCRUPLES

That's expected. The hospital will defer, work with you on it. Loretta should not be stressing at this point. She will be very weak after the operation. Its important that she gets the physical and mental help she needs.

EVAN

We have a whole congergation waiting to help.

DR. SCRUPLES

Before this over, even you, Evan, you may look in the mirror and wish you could see God, if only for two seconds to ask him-- why?

Evan is taken back, realizing for the first time the seriousness of the situation.

After walking Evan to the door, Scruples stops at the wall covered in diplomas. His gaze stops at a fond piece, a framed advertisement from the *New York Times*, December, 1969:

MR. NIXON: YOU CAN CURE CANCER.

INT. PARSONAGE, ENCLOSED PORCH - EVENING

Looking out one of the window enclosures, LORETTA watches TWO BABY BUNNIES follow MOTHER BUNNY across the snowy lawn.

Evan enters the dark room and steps up behind her, placing an arm on her shoulder.

LORETTA

How did Thresa do it? How do other women handle this?

EVAN

Now, Dear, It's only natural to reflect on other--

LORETTA

It's a miracle that any woman makes it through this operation alive. The bills, the deforming of your body-- It makes one want to just curl up and die. Why doesn't God fix this? Do I not have faith?

Evan sits, holds her hands, with a nod of empathy.

EVAN

We're trusting in the doctors God allowed to cross our path. Rarely have I seen a miracle happen that didn't include trusting someone God sent my way.

Abruptly standing, passionate, angry--

LORETTA

I know the verses, the rhetoric. I've heard them all. Teach them myself. We repeat stories we learned in Bible school to give hope to anyone who is in distress. But this time it's me! Me... that's having to...

Loretta calms, holds open the door leading inside.

EVAN

I'll be up in a minute.

Evan looks out across the still blank road.

FLASHBACK (From pilot episode)

EXT. GRAND RAPIDS, CIVIC AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

1947. Glancing down, he notices a flyer tumbling by. YOUNG EVAN grabs it:

"GREAT DAYS. YOUTH FOR CHRIST. BILLY GRAHAM."

YOUNG EVAN

Save our family from him, and I
promise I will bring your word to
as many people as Billy Graham.

INT. DETROIT HOUSE - DAY

Amos plops onto a beat-up sofa. The drunk father grabs his stomach in pain, releasing his grip, a GLASS BOTTLE BREAKS.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. PARSONAGE, ENCLOSED PORCH - NIGHT

PRESENT DAY (1971)

Evan paces, kicks the sofa. Placing his hands on top of a credenza, he looks out the window toward God.

EVAN

Why Loretta? Why not me! I'm the
one that deserves cancer.

Looking down, Evan barely notices the ANTIQUE VASE poised.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Certainly... if this is a test?
(trying to convince self)
We will press on.

INT. PARSONAGE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Beyond the open bathroom door, Evan completes brushing his teeth. Leaning out, he peeks into the hall.

The LONG SHADOW of a doorway leads his gaze to its end. A light through its crack focuses his attention on DEEP BREATHES that come from Loretta's chest.

Agonizing, he squeezing his bottom lip. Evan struggles like a VIOLIN SCREAMING IN DISSONANCE.

INT. PARSONAGE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Leaning over the sink, Evan laments, looks up, faces himself in the mirror.

EXT. PARSONAGE/CHURCH - NIGHT

FROM THE BATHROOM WINDOW--

DARK SAD VERSION, CAROL OF THE BELLS haunts the parsonage as it shrinks beyond the church.

The CHURCH STEEPLE BELL, fallen silent, encased in icicles.

A cold moon stretches long shadows across the icy road.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

A broken branch tumbles across the sidewalk passing the store front as a HOWLING WIND jars the front door, its attached BELL JINGLES.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Barbra is fussing with the register, attempting to thread a new roll of paper into it.

AT THE TEA TABLE: Tiziana settles in with a cup of tea, unbuttoning her coat.

Tying the belt around her coat tighter--

KATE

That wind is cutting like a knife--

TIZIANA

There's a choice of words...

Barbra pulls out a bank bag and begins to load money into the cash drawer.

SAMANTHA

Don't tell anyone, but Alex and I are going to anonymously donate some of our vacation fund for Loretta's operation.

TIZIANA

How can it be anonymous now that you just told us all?

KATE

That's a great idea. We should activate the prayer chain, and suggest people place an extra envelope in the Sunday offering if they can.

TIZIANA

Barbra, could I get some change?

BARBRA

Not sure I can help. Senseless teller at the bank gave me mostly fifty dollar bills.

TEA LADIES get up, preparing to depart.

TIZIANA

Lotta people here might not be able to give much. Remember that their prayers are just as valuable.

Tiziana follows the last lady out the exit.

Barbra looks up toward heaven, as if she might add a prayer.

When she looks down, her eyes catch focus on the SPARKLING QUARTER left there earlier.

INT. CHURCH, AUDITORIUM - DAY

Lance Singer steps up on stage to lead the closing hymn.

LANCE

Hymn number one-eighty. "God will take care of you."

Standing and flipping pages in hymnals, the CONGREGATION settles into song.

CONGREGATION

"Be not dismayed whate'er betide,
God will take care of you; Beneath
his wings of love abide, God will
take care of you."

(chorus, louder)

"God will take care of you, Through
ev'ry day, O'er all the way; He
will take care of you, God will
take care of you."

FLASHBACK IMAGES DURING SONG FROM PREVIOUS EPISODES:

"Smash the Hell-e-vision" Episode: EXT. Parking Lot - Night: EVAN, LORETTA argue with the TV set EVAN tries to rid.

"Labor Day Contest" Episode: EXT. Baker House - Night: LORETTA and MARY ANN hand off a box of historic photos.

"Masks" Episode: INT. School Library - Day: LORETTA and MRS. BEAVER share photos from mission trips abroad.

"A Colorful Markup" Episode: INT. Church Gym - Day: LORETTA and LADIES AID team make quilts.

"Disappearing Act" Episode: EXT. Church - Night: LORETTA, BETSY, WARREN engage when the police arrive where EVAN is being held hostage.

LANCE
Verse Four.

CONGREGATION continues to sing as focus and vocals zero in on individuals.

SAMANTHA
"No matter what may be the test..."

ALEX
"God will take care of you."

LORETTA
"Lean, weary one, upon his
breast..."

BART
"God will take care of you."

CONGREGATION
(chorus, lively)
"God will take care of you..."

LANCE
"Through ev'ry day..."

BETSY
"O'er all the way..."

EXT. SALEM CHURCH - DAY

From across the street, bundled in a fur coat, Barbra Donovan stands, unmoved by the ferocious wind. Her soul yearns to belong. Her proud face turns away.

CONGREGATION (O.C.)
(muffled)
He will take care of you, God will
take care of you.

EXT. SALEM CHURCH - DAY/NIGHT

Day turns to night, quickly. The lights come on in the church building dimly glowing through the stained-glass windows.

Even the little white lights twisting on bushes and hung Christmas wreaths begin to brighten.

INT. CHURCH, PASTOR STUDY - NIGHT

Evan files away books in the large case behind his desk.

Alex Gold steps in, walking past the Hofmann's painting "Christ in the Garden."

ALEX

Reverend. Something here for you.

Evan walks around from behind the desk.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I was tallying up the offering counts for today. There were a number of envelopes marked specifically for Loretta's operation. A couple of them were stuffed with very large amounts.

EVAN

What are you saying?

ALEX

There's more than two thousand dollars here. All for Loretta. From completely anonymous people.

EVAN

I think Loretta was kind of hoping a postponement was the answer. But this obviously sheds a different light on the matter.

Evan takes the DRAWSTRING BAG, peaks inside.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Wow. A few fifty dollar bills? Can't remember last time I saw a note that big.

ALEX

I'm still praying for healing. That it won't be cancer.

EVAN

Seems our villagers have more faith than their pastor. Certainly, God will show up in some way.

INT. HOSPITAL, LORETTA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Monday Night.

Loretta sits up in her blue hospital gown, a red shawl draped over her left shoulder. The white sheet leads down the bed where FAMILY stand behind.

She finishes a piece of bread.

On his way out--

DR. SCRUPLES

Wish I had better news. Operation
is a go, at rooster's crow.

In blue and green dresses resembling robes, Kate and Samantha
bring a package. Loretta unwraps it.

KATE

Remember the batch of quilts you
helped us work on? For missions?

SAMANTHA

You kept asking about the last one--

KATE

It was a surprise, for you,
Loretta.

Samantha drapes the quilt over a stool next to the bed.

At head of the bed, Susan SNIFFLES.

SUSAN

Where are you going, Mommy? Can we
go with you?

Unzipping his coat--

DAVID

Who will take care of us?

Leaning her head around--

LORETTA

Susan, David, Dad is here. No
matter what, the outcome, trust in
God. Remember always that he loves
you as much as I do.

In a green shirt and brown suit, Evan pours a glass of water.
Loretta sips.

David and Susan lean in toward Loretta.

Putting the water down, Evan leans away, toward Kate and
Samantha, forming a void in a "V" shape.

Remembering, Susan breaks away to grab the ANTIQUE VASE
stashed by her coat. Filled with plastic flowers, she sets it
on the stool.

SUSAN

I want Mommy to see the flowers.

LORETTA

That antique vase? What a remembrance.

The beige walls and evening sky in the windows paint a visual mood reminiscent of Da Vinci's "Last Supper."

INT. HOSPITAL, HALL - DAY

Tuesday. On a gurney, Loretta is wheeled out of the room.

INT. HOSPITAL, OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Loretta drifts off as the anesthesia kicks in.

The SURGERY TEAM prepares the instruments for the operation.

Putting his gloves on, DR. SCRUPLES approaches.

SURGERY NURSE prepares the biopsy needle, hands it him.

Looking up, in crumpled surgery cap, Loretta's eyes flutter.

THREE BRIGHT OPERATING LIGHTS merge into one.

FAR AWAY VOICES SEEM TO ECHO--

DR. SCRUPLES

I want everything double checked.

FADE OUT.

INT. HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM - EVENING

BRIGHT. Sterile aqua blue sofas are arranged around a table. A small Christmas tree sits in the corner, imprisoned by three sixties style lamps dangling from the ceiling.

A LADY motions to David and Susan to wait in the area.

Susan properly sits down close to the tree.

David takes off his coat and tosses it.

DAVID

We should borrow this tree and slide it into Mom's room.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)
Don't you think it would look swell
in there and cheer her up?

LADY WAITING in seat nearby, lowers her magazine, overhearing the comment.

SUSAN
You just want to outdo my flowers.

LADY WAITING
I think you're one fry short of a
happy meal, bud. See that nurse
over there? She carries some mighty
big needles.

David folds his arms in a HUFF as Evan enters.

EVAN
Mom is just waking up. She's going
to be real tired.

David and Susan run over.

INT. HOSPITAL, LORETTA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LORETTA is sitting up in bed. She is feeling herself around the chest area, under the blanket as the kids run up.

LORETTA
Did they postpone the operation?

Evan shakes his head.

LORETTA (CONT'D)
Everything is still here.

EVAN
You're still groggy. The operation
was hours ago.

DAVID
Hey. Mom. It's so groovy that
you're back.

David gives her a big hug.

SUSAN
Mommy. I made you a card.

Susan offers up a folded construction paper piece.

Flipping papers over on his clipboard, entering--

DR. SCRUPLES
None of us could believe it.

EVAN
Okay kids. Time to go.

The kids exit.

DR. SCRUPLES
When we made the incision for the
biopsy... There was fluid.

EVAN
It was just a cyst?

LORETTA
So you're saying it's not
cancerous?

INTERN DAVE
(eagerly approaching)
Not one cell of cancer.

Pacing, unsure what to think --

DR. SCRUPLES
I've never seen anything like this.
You are one lucky lady.

Evan and Loretta gleefully hug.

Sitting up, delighted--

LORETTA
Apparently you can work well with
God. I just can't decide...

INTERN DAVE
Decide what?

LORETTA
If I should get the black Jackie O
swimsuit or the white Elizabeth
Taylor one, this summer.

INTERN DAVE
White definitely suits you well.

A slight nod of acknowledgement--

DR. SCRUPLES
I want you to follow up with your
regular Doctor in two weeks.
(MORE)

DR. SCRUPLES (CONT'D)
And we'll have to keep an eye on it
regularly, for a very long time.

Dr. Scruples grabs his clipboard, looking at it again.

DR. SCRUPLES (CONT'D)
Salem, M.I.

INT. HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM - EVENING

Dr. Scruples walks past David and Susan. They are playing tag, running in circles near the Christmas tree.

LADY WAITING
(grumbling)
Should've let you take the darn
tree when I had the chance.

AT NURSE STATION:

Dr. Scruples hands the clipboard to Nurse Pearce.

DR. SCRUPLES
It's all about saving lives...

NURSE PEARCE
Someone got their holiday miracle.

DR. SCRUPLES
Made me look like a bumbling idiot.
(looking up.)
How could you do that? Make me look
so foolish in front of my intern...
of all times.

NURSE PEARCE
I didn't think you believed in God?

DR. SCRUPLES
I don't.

NURSE PEARCE
Then why are you yelling at him?

Dr. Scruples SCOFFS, snatches the clipboard back, walks away,
down the bright hallway.

FADE TO WHITE.

END ACT FOUR

TAG

EXT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

The last light in the upstairs window fades to darkness. The Bunny Rabbit hops across the front yard.

INT. PARSONAGE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

David tiptoes to the doorway of Susan's room.

DAVID
They're asleep. Ready to sneak down
and see what we got?

SUSAN
Shhh... I'm sleeping.

DAVID
Get down... Don't you want to see
if you got that bike?

Susan yanks her blanket over her face, turns away.

David GRUMBLES, sneaking down the stairway by himself.

INT. PARSONAGE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The FLASHLIGHT, David holds, scans the room, stopping at the Christmas tree.

A scan to the left shows a bicycle with a big bow on it.

DAVID
Gosh doggit! Susan got her bike.

Scanning right--

DAVID (CONT'D)
My tape recorder's got to be here
too... Somewhere...

David pokes all around, looks up and down.

He sits down by the tree examining boxes. They're too small.

Shoulders drooping, David makes way back upstairs.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Bummer...

INT. PARSONAGE, HALLWAY - DAY

Evan steps out of the bedroom, calling--

EVAN
Merry Christmas!

Susan bolts out, tears down the stairs.

David groggily walks, with disappointment.

INT. PARSONAGE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Before anyone else can even get to the tree, Susan is already trying to get onto her new bike.

Evan plugs in the Christmas tree lights and MUSIC begins.

Stopping on the stairway--

LORETTA
Susan! You can't ride that bike in the house.

SUSAN
See David, we didn't need to sell all the cards.

DAVID
Real groovy, and at whose expense?

David grabs what appears to be the last wrapped gift. He claws into it, revealing the HO model.

DAVID (CONT'D)
As expected, I got another engine for the train set!

LORETTA
I think you missed a box under the tree... Toward the back.

David pushes through the boxes discovering an item peaking from under the tree skirt. Peeling it back, the TAPE RECORDER box announces its arrival.

DAVID
Jeepers! It's here! Lay it on me!
Now I can produce a radio show!

LATER:

On the sofa with his recorder, talking into the microphone--

DAVID (CONT'D)
Susan is a camel... without a hump
a candy cane... without the curve.

SUSAN
Mommy--

LORETTA
David. Be nice. It's Christmas.

Noticing out the window--

EVAN
It's starting to snow.

David and Susan run over, look across the way.

EXT. PARSONAGE - DAY

From the front window of the house, the family watches the flakes fall. David glances back at his parents.

DAVID
Didn't I say, this would be the
most out-of-sight Christmas ever?

Giving his signature two-finger raise, David turns to the window's snowy wonderland. Behind him, Evan and Loretta hug.

A WAYS FROM PARSONAGE, THE PAYNE HOUSE: A small tree in the window, we see Oscar and kids at the dining table holding hands, saying grace over TV dinners.

END CAPTIONS:

In the US 300,000 women and men are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.

In 1971 the mortality rate was 35%.

In 2022 the mortality rate was 13%.

The real Loretta Smith lived to be 84 years old, cancer free.

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW