

YULETIDE CAROL

by

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Based on the true story by Rev. Dan Dick.

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YULETIDE CAROL (V.O.)
(loud a cappella singing)
*Deck the hall with boughs of holly.
Fa la la la la la la la la...*

FADE IN:

SERIES OF SHOTS - MUNCIE, INDIANA (SPRING 1964):

- Huge round sign: "Muncie Indiana - We're having a ball!"

ADULT DAN (V.O.)
In every town, in every time, there
are those rare individuals who are
part of the local color.

- Ball State University

YULETIDE CAROL (V.O.)
Fa la la la la la la la la...

- Church marquee: "THIS EASTER: THE HOUSE OF THE RISING SON"

ADULT DAN (V.O.)
If they're wealthy, they're labeled
eccentric. If they're poor, they're
simply "crazy."

- Town icons - YMCA, library, Central HS, local cinema, etc.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - MAIN STREET - DAY

YULETIDE CAROL (50), an anonymous plump homeless woman, face
hidden under a raspberry-colored babushka, pushes a grocery
cart full of her earthly belongings.

YULETIDE CAROL
(top of her lungs)
Fa la la la la la la la la...

ADULT DAN (V.O.)
Outsiders see these people and
marvel. But townies hardly notice
them - they become part of the
fabric - odd threads that give
special texture to the whole piece.

Townspeople go about their business.

YULETIDE CAROL
*Troll the ancient Yuletide carol.
Fa la la la la la la la la.*

She turns a corner into an alley.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Yuletide Carol sings with her oversized rear end sticking out from a Dumpster as she forages.

YULETIDE CAROL
On the first day of Christmas my--

A eureka moment of discovery silences the voice and she crawls backward out of the bin.

Yuletide Carol stands 5 feet tall and about a yard wide, bundled in a worn wool coat. Her scarf encircles her jack-o-lantern face - squinted eyes, lumpy nose, picket-fence grin, hairy warted chin.

She marvels at the Easter basket she's salvaged.

In admiration of her find, her voice grows soft, reverent...

YULETIDE CAROL
*O holy night. The stars are
brightly shining...*

Lost in song, her tree-trunk legs propel her in a Weeble-like wobble behind her cart back toward the busy

MAIN STREET

where no one seems to notice her, until...

YOUNG DANNY (6) follows his distracted, cigar-smoking FATHER out of a barber shop. Both sport fresh crew-cuts. Danny's father covers his with a frumpy fedora.

The pair go to a corner to wait for the light to change.

Curious at the singing homeless woman walking away behind them, Danny reaches for his father's hand.

YOUNG DANNY
Dad?

Danny's father flinches his hand away and glowers at him.

FATHER
We ain't crossin' yet, Danny Boy--

YOUNG DANNY
Who's that lady?

His father turns to look at Carol who seems content in her own musical world, well into another verse of *O Holy Night*. He stares at her for a moment as if trying to recall.

FATHER

Not sure. She's been here forever.
Sat outside Central High singin'
Christmas songs all year 'round.

The light changes and Danny's father grabs Danny's hand and leads him across the street.

FATHER

Yuletide Carol. That's what we
called her.

Once across, they get into a parked 1950s beater.

ADULT DAN (V.O.)

That was the extent of the answer I
was given, and it sufficed for many
years.

The car spews a cloud of smoke as it revs to life.

ADULT DAN (V.O.)

It had to. Dad skipped out on me
and Mom that night.

Danny watches Yuletide Carol through the dirty car window as his father drives them away.

[[need scenes from YC's perspective - show her awful life & hide the good parts - she passes the house that burned down - or the property that is now something different - stops & is haunted (sends her into depression or mania)]]

EXT. DORTIE'S YARN SHOP - NIGHT

Autumn colors and decor everywhere.

Sweet GRANDMA DORTIE closes up shop with Young Danny in tow.

[[stop narrating & show everything possible - intro all the characters including Chella & Mom - & barber & Meeks here]]

ADULT DAN (V.O.)

Mom's sister Chella helped raise
me, but they were both so busy
working, I don't think they even
knew Yuletide Carol existed.

Yuletide Carol's voice shreds the air with unusual malice.

YULETIDE CAROL (O.S.)

*Fear not! Said he, for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind...*

Grandma Dortie tenses her grip on Danny's hand as they walk the sidewalk directly toward Yuletide Carol.

ADULT DAN (V.O.)

My Grandma Dortie definitely knew who she was.

As they pass her, Danny eyes Yuletide Carol's cart full of all her earthly possessions.

YULETIDE CAROL

Glad tidings of great joy I bring--

Yuletide Carol grabs Danny's wrist and hisses at him...

YULETIDE CAROL

Touch my f***ing stuff, and I'll break your f***ing arm!

Grandma Dortie hustles Danny away while Yuletide Carol finishes her song as if never having stopped...

YULETIDE CAROL

...to all of humankind, to all of humankind.

Danny stares back at Yuletide Carol as Dortie drags him away.

EXT. PARK - DAY (WINTER 1970)

Wet, heavy snow blankets everything.

[[show - not tell

intro Jolly Uncle (mayor?), Black Woman, others who show up later

keep BUDDY as a bad influence throughout - becomes a drug dealer - foster kid]]

ADULT DAN (V.O.)

Despite my family's best efforts to get me over my dad's abandonment, I joined a vast and growing number of delinquents-in-training.

PRETEEN DAN (now 12) trades cigarettes with a BUDDY as they make and stack an arsenal of snowballs behind a tree.

Several snowballs pellet the tree, then Dan and Buddy come out of hiding to counterattack the THREE SNOW WARRIORS at the treeline across from them.

YULETIDE CAROL (O.S.)
Angels we have heard on high...

Buddy looks and points across the street.

BUDDY
 Dan, look. The troll, Yuletide
 Carol!

Yuletide Carol struggles through the slush with her cart, all
 the while singing.

SNOW WARRIOR 1
 Let's get her!

They all gather armfuls of snowballs and run toward her.

Dan hesitates...then packs three hard snowballs and takes off

ACROSS THE STREET

toward Yuletide Carol.

YULETIDE CAROL
Come to Bethlehem and see...

Hollering like a posse of vigilantes, the boys race at her.

At last, she turns her head and locks frightened eyes with
 Dan whose forward momentum is unstoppable.

YULETIDE CAROL
Glo-o-o-o-ria...

The boys - and Dan - cream her with a dozen snowballs.

Yuletide Carol drops to her knees and covers herself.

YULETIDE CAROL
In excelsis Deo...

Buddy dumps her cart in the slush and takes off in full run.

Dan slows and gives a look of pity. He stops...contemplates
 helping her gather her things.

YULETIDE CAROL
Glo-o-o-o-ria. In excelsis Deo...

BUDDY
 C'mon, Danny!

Loaded with guilt, Dan speeds away with the others.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - NIGHT (SPRING 1973)

Spring. Light jackets. Everyone with long flowing hair.

EXT. BARBER SHOP - NIGHT

In a hoodie, high on something, DAN (now 15) breaks in with a crowbar. He spews *Eve of Destruction*, loud and angry.

DAN
*You're old enough to kill, but not
 for votin'...*

INT. BARBER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Dan goes ballistic with the crowbar. Smashes every mirror.

DAN
*You don't believe in war but what's
 that gun you're totin'...*

He focuses on a specific chair and goes to town on the headrest, as if it were a certain person's head.

DAN
 (angry singing)
*And even the Jordan River has
 bodies floatin'.*

Once there's nothing left of the headrest, he releases a guttural scream, then collapses, exhausted.

[[more about Dan's break-ins & his little gang]]

EXT. CENTRAL HIGH - ENTRANCE - DAY

Alone on the empty campus, Dan takes a last draw from a spent cigarette. He drops it onto a tulip and grinds it into the dirt with his heel.

Satisfied both butt and bud are dead, he flips up his jacket hood and heads inside.

INT. CENTRAL HIGH - MATH CLASS - DAY

Bored 15-year-olds watch a teacher write an algebra equation on the board.

In the back row, Dan hunches over a test paper with a red "D" scrawled at the top next to his name.

EXT. PARTY HOUSE - NIGHT

Bikes and a few beat-up 1960s cars litter the driveway.

Teens high on various substances wander the property inside and out. They smoke. Drink. Make out.

INT. PARTY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Smoky haze. Psychedelic rock music. Misfit teens everywhere.

Dan sits back in an easy chair, lethargic, high. A used bong sits on the coffee table before him.

Through his fun-house-mirror vision, Dan watches hippy teens groove to the music.

Someone slaps a cold beer into Dan's hand then walks away to bestow the same generosity on other unsuspecting loners.

Without hesitation, Dan peels the ring tab off and downs half the beer.

The music switches to the mellow open of Merilee Rush's *Angel of the Morning*.

Dan's eyes roll in search of focus until they settle on a blurry angelic vision across the room as the chorus climaxes.

MERILEE RUSH (V.O.)
*Just call me angel of the morning,
 angel...*

The angelic shape morphs into...

LISA JENNINGS (15), blonde with owlsh glasses that magnify her pretty eyes, sinks as far down into the couch cushion as humanly possible. Her enlarged, fearful eyes scan the room.

The room's traffic disperses as the 2nd verse's mellow tones inspire teens to pair off into corners and other rooms.

Dan's eyes are glued to Lisa.

Aware that they're alone now, Lisa stares at Dan as if she's ready to flee at any sudden move.

Dan eases from the chair - slow - and walks over to her. He sits on the floor in front of her.

DAN
 Hi.

LISA
 (almost inaudible)
 Hi.

Dan smiles.

Finally, so does Lisa.

EXT. HIGH STREET BRIDGE - NIGHT

Dan and Lisa walk across the river lost in conversation.

LISA
I'm so sick of her hounding me. "Be more like your sister..." Blah blah blah.

DAN
Your dad too?

LISA
No. He's the opposite. He thinks I'm perfect.

DAN
Maybe your mom's jealous.

Lisa halts at the never-thought-of prospect.

LISA
Maybe.

DAN
That why you dig partying? Tick off your mom?

She walks again and Dan follows like a puppy.

LISA
Just an escape. But it's a bonus if it tees her off... What about you? Why so hard-core into drugs? You trying to tick someone off too?

Dan lets the question hang in the air.

They walk in silence to the other side of the river. Lisa takes his hand. Leads him down a road parallel to the river.

In the shadows along the river, under the bridge, Yuletide Carol (now 60, same clothes) sleeps in a torn-up Westinghouse refrigerator box, unnoticed.

EXT. LISA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Lisa and Dan sit on the steps and look up at a clear sky. They talk in hushed tones.

DAN

Sorry. I don't see any dippers, big or little.

LISA

Yeah - gotta be farther out from the ambient city lights.

DAN

I thought Muncie was as far from a city as it gets.

Lisa giggles and looks at him, which draws his gaze to her.

LISA

Did you know you can see the whole Milky Way from Africa?

DAN

Wish I knew as much about the world as you do.

LISA

I just know what I read in books.

DAN

What's a book?

LISA

(another giggle)
Your grades must be great.

DAN

Let's just say I have about as much chance of graduating as I do getting into Heaven. Fifty-fifty.

LISA

I think your odds are better than that. With Heaven at least.

DAN

Sure, now that I have an in.

Lisa stares at him. Doesn't get it.

DAN

With an angel.

LISA

I don't know about that... But maybe I'll pray for you.

Lisa looks back up at the stars and hums the "Star of Wonder" chorus of *We Three Kings*.

Dan recognizes the tune and shakes his head in disbelief.

DAN

Wait...you're not related to that carol-singing snowflake, are you?

LISA

(looks at him)

Who?

Relieved, Dan goes back to being enchanted with his angel.

They stare at each other for a time when--

She grabs his face and lays a big kiss on his lips.

Startled, but game, Dan kisses her back and it's a full-on make-out session... [[change - she kisses him on the cheek & it sustains him until they have a real kiss & become a couple]]

Until the porch light comes on.

[[need much much more insight into Lisa's life

get to know her thoroughly as she is without Dan's influence

make her 3-dimensional - see it from Dan's POV, but fully as a real character not just serving a purpose

she finds increasing purpose with Dan, so his PASTORAL SKILLS shine through -

he likes to help her fix things & once he wins over her dad, she kisses him & they become a couple]]

MONTAGE - DAN & LISA ARE INSEPARABLE (SPRING):

[[turn into full scenes for feature

Dan & Lisa never met before because they went to different middle schools

Lisa gets Dan to get a haircut - not short, but groomed - the barber is pleased to see him, but Dan is guilty for his vandalism & leaves a big tip

her dad takes Dan under his wing - like a surrogate father. They even get haircuts together.

CONFLICT = Lisa's strained relationship with her mom & Dan's with his mom who is never around - pushing them together even more

take their relationship all the way to the center point - they are making plans for a life - she is getting him to commit to better grades & they get their lives together together, though both have issues with their parents throughout

she plans to become an astronomer - maybe even an astronaut

he plans to figure out what he'll be - she thinks he could be a writer, maybe a journalist - he can work for the paper

he gets a job at the People's Studio & thinks about photography as a career - maybe a photo journalist

he has a relapse she gets him through after he photographs a little boy & his dad get matching haircuts

he takes photos of Yuletide Carol from afar - or Lisa does with his camera & he only sees it after he develops photos - or he only sees Yuletide Carol in the b.g. when he didn't know she was there

he turns his dad's shed into a dark room for his photos & decides to sign up for photography club in the fall - join the yearbook staff

even makes a couple of decent friends through his work

an entire dream summer from May to June

one night in June she tells him about the trip to Colorado - she & her mom plan to use the trip to grow close

they are inseparable throughout July - dreading the 10-day separation

leave it ambiguous whether they have sex or not - is not the focus]]

- Hand in hand, Lisa and Dan stroll into the cinema under the marquee: "Charley and the Angel"

- Romantic riverside picnic. Lisa reads a book while Dan smokes. Without looking up she plucks the cigarette from his mouth and drops it in a "Green River" soda bottle. He's irritated but all's forgiven when she kisses him.

- They go into another movie: "Paper Moon"

- Holding hands, they enter school with the other students

- Dan smiles at a test grade: "B-"
- Dan and Lisa laugh and play Yahtzee in a small living room
- At a dime-store counter, they gaze into each other's eyes over root-beer floats while Yuletide Carol belts out a song as she passes unnoticed outside
- Dan compares his C-average report card to Lisa's B+ average. Both shrug it off, satisfied

INT. THEATER CONCESSIONS COUNTER - DAY (SUMMER)

In summer shorts, Lisa pitches in \$1 when Dan comes up short.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - THEATER - DAY

Hand in hand, Dan and Lisa walk out below the "Live and Let Die" marquee humming the movie's theme song.

DAN
I'll pay ya back tomorrow.

LISA
A dollar? It's no big deal.

DAN
It is to me.

They pass the Muncie Mission storefront with a cross on it.

LISA
How 'bout a good deed instead? Help me serve lunch at the mission after church Sunday.

DAN
Pews and volunteer work? How 'bout a shiny new Eisenhower dollar and let's call it even?

LISA
(disappointed)
You still have to go to church with me before I leave. You promised.

DAN
I will, but I can't believe you're going for a whole week. What if her baby's overdue?

LISA
It's a C-section. The date is set. I already have my return ticket.

Dan stops.

DAN
I thought you hated her.

LISA
I can't hate my sister... She annoys me.

DAN
She annoys me too. Why'd she marry a guy who lives in Denver?

Lisa kisses him, and he gives in with a sigh.

DAN
Guess we'll have to spend every waking moment together - even at church. I gotta get my Lisa fix before you go. Or else I might not make it.

LISA
So I'm your new drug?

They stare at each other over the profoundness, as if they can read each other's thoughts, until...

Lisa breaks into a grin and sings out...

LISA
Live and let die!

They run off and bellow out the theme tune together...

DAN & LISA
Da da da. Da da da. Dun dun...

They never notice Yuletide Carol who hums a Christmas song in the b.g. a block away.

INT. INDIANAPOLIS AIRPORT - DAY

Forlorn, Dan hugs Lisa goodbye.

LISA
You've got a week to get that dollar you owe me, mister!

Dan smiles and Lisa gets in line with other travelers.

EXT. INDIANAPOLIS AIRPORT - DAY

Lisa's plane takes off. Its wheels retract.

EXT. DAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A modest, somewhat dilapidated house.

INT. DAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dan, in summer wear, watches "Match Game" on a color TV. A squeaky fan in the corner fails to dry the sweat off his brow.

The rotary phone rings. He ignores it. Someone answers it.

AUNT CHELLA (O.S.)
Dan! It's your girlfriend's--

Dan perks.

AUNT CHELLA (O.S.)
--dad. Pick up.

Puzzled, Dan picks up the phone.

DAN
Hi...Mr. Jennings?

Dan listens to the rambling, shaky voice on the other end. The more he listens, the more his heart sinks along with the level of the phone at his ear until--

The phone receiver falls from his hand to the floor.

MR. JENNINGS (V.O.)
Dan? Hello? I know... I can't believe it either. I'll let you know when the funeral is--

Dan kicks the phone against the wall with a ringy thud.

AUNT CHELLA (40s) runs in wiping her hands with a dish towel.

AUNT CHELLA
What's going on?

Dan is motionless, in a stupor. His voice is monotone.

DAN
A truck hit their car... Lisa, her mom, they're... I can't believe it.

Chella understands and approaches Dan, tentative. Just as she almost reaches him--

Dan explodes, arms flailing. He yells at the ethers.

DAN

I can't believe you took her from
me, you bastard!

He storms out. Slams the door. The fan falls off its perch.

[[this is either MIDPOINT or the 1st act turn - there isn't
much conflict prior to this after meeting Lisa to sustain a
1st act, unless her problems are magnified

MIDPOINT could turn out to be later when after trying to get
through the loss, her dad leaves, & that makes everything
fall apart]]

EXT. DOWNTOWN - MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Everything is closed for the night. Only a few street lamps,
neon window signs and the movie marquee for "American
Graffiti" light the empty street.

Yuletide Carol pushes her cart along, trading off singing and
whistling.

YULETIDE CAROL

*...Good tidings we bring to you and
your kin. Good tidings for
Christmas and a Happy New Year. We
wish you a Merry Christmas...*

Dan, lost in his own world just walks past her.

Neither seem to notice the other. Dan takes a left at the
"High Street" sign and heads toward a church.

Tears in his eyes, Dan looks up at the impressive etched
glass above the church entrance.

DAN

You sure know how to f*** up the
world, don't ya?

Dan lowers his head and continues on and around the church.

Across the street, The Muncie Morning Star's trucks are lined
up, loading the early edition.

Dan just walks...

- Alongside the river

- Between high farm crops along a single-lane highway

- Across Interstate 69's overpass, busy with commuter traffic

- Past a vast cemetery
- Aside a country road with afternoon commuter traffic
- Toward a dark sunset behind Indianapolis's well lit skyline
- Through busy nightlife in downtown Indianapolis

EXT. INDIANAPOLIS - LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Dan lurks in the shadows.

A college guy comes out with a brown paper sack.

Dan goes to the guy, pays him.

DAN

Thanks.

EXT. UNDERPASS - NIGHT

Dan leans against the embankment and gulps the last drop of a pint of bourbon. Upset that it's empty he storms out into the open where cars pass in all directions on I-69 and I-465.

From the side of the road, Dan flings the empty bottle into the sky, tears running down his face.

DAN

(screams)

You're a f***ing loser, God! I hate you as much as you hate me! You gave me an angel, then took her away. What the hell did she ever do to you? What have I done to deserve this!?

He crumples in the field alongside the road, sobbing.

DAN

Why'd it have to be her?

Dan falls over, passed out.

EXT. MUNCIE - BALL STATE UNIVERSITY - STUDENT CENTER - DAY

College students hurry to morning classes.

Dan wakes up on a bench, disoriented and disheveled.

DAN

What the...?

Barely able to sit up, Dan teeters to feet and treks away, cringing from the light and campus noise.

[[fill pages with Dan trying to come to terms, growing angrier - 4 months of this total from September to December

Dan reaches out for help from those he & Lisa had befriended along the way...

He loses Lisa's dad's support when he moves back to be with ELIZABETH, his only surviving daughter who just had a baby. Abandoned again, it sends Dan over the edge...

after Dan gets back from Indianapolis, a confrontation with his mom should include:

"I was gone 4 fucking days. Did you even notice? I don't even know how the hell I got back."

Dan's first day at school - he's more alone than ever in a sea of happy teens - the friends he & Lisa had made don't know how to act around him

Dan's hair grows longer & longer every time he passes the barber shop

He sets his dad's shed on fire after he develops the final pictures Lisa had taken - angry he didn't take more of her]]

EXT. DAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FALL)

Three plain pumpkins and a stalk of dried corn by the door.

INT. DAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

On the nightstand: empty liquor bottles and beer cans, a bag of weed, a stack of trashy novels. Dan's untouched school books are piled under a few dirty socks.

Long-haired Dan half-watches replays of Pete Rose in a brawl on a small B&W TV with bad reception.

His untouched school books are piled in the corner under a few dirty socks.

DAN'S MOM (O.S.)

Dan! We'll be late for the church potluck.

The door handle rattles. Then a knock.

DAN'S MOM (O.S.)

I'm going to have this lock removed. Open up.

Dan ignores her and hits the TV. Reception improves.

DAN'S MOM (O.S.)

Dan. This is getting ridiculous.
You can't just lock yourself away
forever.

Dan's glazed eyes never leave the TV screen.

DAN'S MOM (O.S.)

(gentle)

You have to move on, son.

DAN

What, like you did after Dad left?
Bury yourself in work. Forget you
have a kid...

After a moment, a frustrated sigh signals her departure.

Dan stews while he listens to the front door open and close,
then a car start up and drive away.

He gets up, slams the TV off and grabs his hoodie.

EXT. HIGH STREET METHODIST CHURCH - NIGHT

Hood up, puffing on a cigarette, Dan paces in front of the
entrance, muttering to himself.

A few pedestrians cross the street to avoid him.

DAN

World's going to s*** on your
watch, old man.

He stops to look up at the massive etched glass.

DAN

Vindictive a**h***.

A slight drizzle begins. Really? Now!?

He spreads his arms out.

DAN

STRIKE ME NOW, YOU BASTARD!

Nothing happens. Dan stumbles back a bit. Thunder rumbles and
Dan just stands there, waiting.

YULETIDE CAROL (O.S.)

*O come all ye faithful, joyful and
triumphant...*

Dan looks around, but doesn't see anyone.

DAN
Give me a break.

He stuffs his hands in his pockets and storms off.

EXT. CENTRAL HIGH - DAY (WINTER)

Christmas garland and a wreath adorn the front entrance.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Slumped in his invisible place in the back, Dan watches the clock's second hand tick away the last seconds before 3:00.

The TEACHER at the front finishes holiday flourishes around "Merry Christmas" on the chalkboard.

STUDENTS waste the last minute with teen chatter. One looks out the window where snowflakes stick to the glass.

STUDENT
Cool! It's snowing.

Dan's eyes never move from the clock. The bell rings--

Dan gets up and beelines for the door.

TEACHER
Looks like we'll have a white
Christmas. See you next year!

Dan's already gone.

EXT. DAN'S HOUSE - BACKYARD SHED - NIGHT

Patches of grass show through the snow from footprints.

Metallic sounds of rummaging inside.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - CINEMA - NIGHT

Crowbar in hand, Dan glares up at the marquee: "SUPERDAD"

Anger builds. He storms off.

EXT. CINEMA - BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Dan forces the back door open.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Dan walks away from the marquee that now reads "SUCKERDAD"

Satisfied with himself, he scrapes the crowbar along the side of a long brick building, carving a white line the whole way.

Ahead Dan sees all the businesses lit up with Christmas lights. As he passes each store he knocks down lights, wreathes or whatever kind of holiday decoration he can reach without stopping his forward momentum.

He uses the crowbar to loosen the garland on every street lamp so all come unraveled.

Headlights approach down the road.

Dan dips into the shadows of a doorway.

It's a cop car. Clueless, it passes then turns.

DAN
Friggin' Barney Fife.

Done for the night Dan steps out onto the sidewalk and holsters the crowbar in his belt. Shuffles home.

INT. DAN'S ROOM - DAY

Cross-legged on the floor, Dan chugs a beer. He flips through his yearbook under the colorful light of a lava lamp. He stares at Lisa's B&W class picture where she signed in curly-cupid lettering:

"Thank God you found me when you did! I love you, Dan. --Lisa."

Dan pulls out an Eisenhower dollar coin from his pocket and studies it. Anger brews.

Seething, he reaches for the glow light button on his alarm clock. It reads: "2:27"

MONTAGE - DAN ON THE RAMPAGE:

[[turn into full scenes...sort of]]

- With pleasure and glee, Dan uses his crowbar to mow through Christmas displays on neighborhood lawns

- He swings the crowbar to rip lights from trees

- Dan tackles a snowman

DAN
Up yours, Frosty.

- He punches several Santas in the face

DAN
Screw you, Father Christmas.

- At a convenience store, Dan walks away from a clerk who refuses to sell him beer

DAN
F yourself, mister.

- The barber and his customer watch from inside as Dan vents his rage with a kick to the "Merry Christmas" sandwich board sign near his barber pole.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Shops are still open. Countdown signs are plastered on several windows: "3 Shopping Days Left!"

Dan takes a swig from a full pint of gin as he passes "People's Studio" photography shop.

He winces and gags as the sour gin goes down. Clutching his stomach, Dan runs to the alley next to the studio.

He spits out the unswallowed portion.

Passersby turn and look at the sound of the pint SMASHING followed by his SCREAM of frustration. The shoppers move along at the sound of RETCHING.

Dan leans his hands on the wall and heaves.

Rage builds and something inside him snaps.

He roars out of the alley onto the street heedless of traffic.

A car honks.

He jerks his head like a madman at the car then swings his fists at an imaginary opponent as he leaps up to the curb on the opposite side of the street.

Dan mutters incoherent raves against God and Christmas.

A few people steer clear as if he's a psych-ward escapee.

Dan disappears around a corner onto High Street.

EXT. HIGH STREET - NIGHT

Still muttering to himself, Dan glimpses the lit nativity in the churchyard on the next block.

He heads toward it but takes a detour when he spots something in an alley across from the nativity.

He goes into the alley and sits in the shadows on a 2x4 board lain across two paint buckets like a bench.

He glares like a vulture at the nativity, plotting.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

All the shops are closed. No people. No cars.

EXT. HIGH STREET - NIGHT

Dan comes out of the alley with the 2x4 board. He stalks across the street, his eyes glued to the Joseph figure.

He steps up on the sidewalk, almost to the display when--

YULETIDE CAROL (O.S.)
 (half hummed as a dirge)
*You better watch out. Better not
 cry. Better not pout...*

Huddled on the steps, Yuletide Carol rocks from side to side.

Dan just stands, unsure what to do. He glances at the manger scene. Then back at her.

Rage builds.

DAN
 (to the sky)
 Why do you hate me!?

With all his might, he chucks the 2x4, which decapitates a wise man figure.

YULETIDE CAROL
 You shouldn't oughtta do that.
 Them's purty. They's nice.

He looks at her.

Yuletide Carol scratches her elbow through her tattered sweater. She looks at the baby in the manger as if Dan's not even there.

YULETIDE CAROL
*O little town of Bethlehem, how
 still we see thee lie...*

Dan follows her gaze to the baby Jesus. He cycles through a slew of raging emotions, and appears ready to bolt.

Instead, he walks over and sits near Yuletide Carol. He buries his head in his arms, leans on his knees...

and cries.

YULETIDE CAROL

*Fall on your knees. O hear the
angel voices...*

(seamless transition)

*Peace on the earth, good will to
men from Heav'n's all gracious
king.*

During her impromptu medley, Yuletide Carol puts her hand on the back of Dan's head and pats him in time to the music.

He lets her.

YULETIDE CAROL

*The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.*

Yuletide Carol pulls her hand away and looks at him.

YULETIDE CAROL

What's so bad, Dan?

DAN

(choked emotion)

You wouldn't understand.

Yuletide Carol puts her hands together in her lap and looks at him.

YULETIDE CAROL

Is it the girl who died?

DAN

(looks at her, stunned)

How do you know about Lisa?

And...you know my name?

Yuletide Carol leans back and breaks into a picket-fence grin.

YULETIDE CAROL

I'm crazy. Not stupid. Nobody looks
at us bums, but you couldn't
believe what we know. I been on
these streets forty-five years.

(wide-eyed sincerity)

I know you been breaking stuff all
over town. You better stop it.

DAN

(looks down, ashamed)
I'm sorry. I don't know what to do.
I sure wasn't expecting you to know
anything about it. I just...can't
handle what God did to me.

YULETIDE CAROL

What did God do?

DAN

He took Lisa.

Yuletide Carol throws her head back and laughs.

Dan is offended.

YULETIDE CAROL

Boy, you don't know much, do you?
You don't know nothin' about God,
that's for sure.

DAN

(annoyed)
What do you mean?

YULETIDE CAROL

God didn't take your girlfriend. He
may have welcomed her in, but God
didn't do nothin' to her.

DAN

Then why'd she die?

YULETIDE CAROL

Why, why, why? Why am I living on
the street? Why do good people get
hurt and bad people get good stuff?
Why don't somebody give me money?
It's 'cause it's life, that's why.

DAN

That doesn't make sense. Why
believe in God if he doesn't do
anything for us?

YULETIDE CAROL

(rubs her bristly chin)
The way you been cussin' God out
all this time, I don't think
believin' is your problem.

Dan concedes that with a shrug.

YULETIDE CAROL

God don't do nasty stuff to us. Why would he? That's just dumb. Your trouble is you've decided to be mad, and sad, and mean. You don't have to be that way, you know.

DAN

(disarmed)

I don't want to feel this way.

YULETIDE CAROL

Yes you do, or you'd feel different. Nobody makin' you feel like you do. Look at me. I used to have a nice house and a family.

Dan is incredulous.

YULETIDE CAROL

Lost it all in a big fire. Nobody helped me. Now I live in a box by the river and most of my meals are from what other folks throws out. You know how I feel about all that?

Dan shakes his head.

YULETIDE CAROL

I feel like singin' Christmas songs.

DAN

What?!

YULETIDE CAROL

My whole life I was always happiest around Christmas. That's when people, even nasty folk, get nice. When I lost everything else, I thought about what I wanted to keep, and I wanted to keep that feeling I get at Christmas.

Yuletide Carol looks at her cart wrapped in grimy garland.

YULETIDE CAROL

And so, that's what I do.

DAN

It's not that simple--

YULETIDE CAROL

What's not? Why not? Why can't
people just decide to be happy?

He looks into her eyes, squinted by her smile. A once-handsome woman's smile which, despite everything, comes from joy within.

Yuletide Carol leans her elbow on her knee like an old philosopher about to dispense sage advice.

YULETIDE CAROL

Nobody can make you happy, but -
nobody can take joy away neither,
'less you let 'em. It's your
choice. If I can choose, you can
choose.

She lifts her head back, opens her mouth and trolls out...

YULETIDE CAROL

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come.
Let earth receive her king!*

Dan waits for her to stop and talk to him again, but she launches fully into her song. Back in her own joyful world.

YULETIDE CAROL

*Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
and Heav'n and nature sing. And
Heav'n and nature sing. And Heav'n,
and Heav'n and nature sing.*

Yuletide Carol gets to her feet, grabs the handles of her shopping cart and trundles off down the sidewalk.

YULETIDE CAROL

*He rules the world with truth and
grace, and makes the nations prove
the glories of His righteousness...*

Dan stands and puts his cold hands in his pockets. He feels the dollar coin and pulls it out. Looks in Carol's direction.

YULETIDE CAROL (O.S.)

*And wonders of His love. And
wonders of His love...*

Dan ponders the coin, then Carol... He white-knuckles the coin and ambles off in the opposite direction.

INT. DAN'S ROOM - DAY

Dan lies on his bed, hands behind his head. Stares at the ceiling.

He props up on his elbow and rummages the nightstand drawer. He pulls an old photo out and stares at it.

YULETIDE CAROL (V.O.)

It's your choice, Dan.

With a deep breath, he tears it in two and drops the pieces into the nearby trash can where they land face-up:

It's Dan as a child given a piggy-back ride by his dad.

He dumps his weed from its baggie onto the discarded photo.

Having second thoughts, he starts to reach back for the weed when there's a knock on the door.

DAN'S MOM (O.S.)

Dan, I'm leaving in about an hour to get Grandma Dortie.

Dan leaves the weed untouched and sits up.

DAN'S MOM (O.S.)

There's leftover Hamburger Helper in the fridge.

DAN

Okay.

Dan listens for her to leave. She doesn't. Her voice softens.

DAN'S MOM (O.S.)

You could come with you know. It might...help.

Dan's shoulders slump. He waits.

Finally, she walks away.

Dan stands, goes to a mirror on the door. Studies his shaggy appearance.

INT. DAN'S HOUSE - HALL - NIGHT

Clean-shaven, hair combed, dressed in slacks and nice jacket, Dan knocks on his mom's bedroom door.

DAN

Mom? I want to go with you.

His shocked MOM opens the door, pleased at his appearance.

EXT. HIGH STREET METHODIST CHURCH - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Dan helps his Grandma Dortie out of the car with her walker while Aunt Chella and his mom get out of the driver's side.

He notices that the wise man in the nativity is repaired.

INT. HIGH STREET METHODIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Everyone and everything is decked out for an old-fashioned Christmas Eve service.

Dan sits in a pew with his family as an ELDERLY PASTOR delivers a sermon from a grand altar podium.

ELDERLY PASTOR
 ...a time for giving of oneself,
 and of one's resources. True
 Christmas magic comes from
 within...

Dan stares at his hands, expressionless.

ELDERLY PASTOR
 When it comes to joy, the choice is
 yours.

Dan looks up, jolted by the words.

ELDERLY PASTOR
 When you give...if you give...let
 it be from joy. Not guilt. Not
 obligation. Not even a giving
 spirit...

A collection plate is passed to Dan. He stares at it.

ELDERLY PASTOR
 But a spirit of gratitude to the
 God who gave us His son on that
 first Christmas.

Dan pulls the silver dollar from his pocket and, after a moment, puts it in. Then passes the plate down the row.

ELDERLY PASTOR
 Please turn to hymn two three four.

Dan plucks the Methodist hymnal from the back of the pew in front of him. He flips through its pages.

ADULT DAN (V.O.)
 Before I graduated high school, I
 joined that church, and its leaders
 voted me into the candidacy program
 which led to my ordination.

Dan smiles at the intro to *O Come All Ye Faithful*...

EXT. DAN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY (WINTER 1983)

COLLEGE GRADUATE DAN (now 25), clean-cut, dark suit, walks
 alone toward a sunset past festive Christmas decorations.

ADULT DAN (V.O.)
 Exactly ten years after my
 encounter with Yuletide Carol, I
 saw her picture in the paper...

He turns up a walkway toward the entrance of

MEEKS MORTUARY

Dan stops at the door to gather his emotions.

ADULT DAN (V.O.)
 ...on the obituary page. I still
 recall the shock in finding out
 that her name wasn't Carol.

He takes a deep breath. Braces to go in.

ADULT DAN (V.O.)
 I made the decision that I wouldn't
 let this poor woman's death pass
 without some loving kindness. Even
 if I was the only one.

Dan opens the door and steps inside.

INT. MEEKS MORTUARY - LOBBY - DAY

Dan stands at the entrance in utter disbelief.

The place is packed with MOURNERS. Businessmen and street
 people stand shoulder to shoulder in conversation.

The rail-thin UNDERTAKER reaches to shake Dan's hand.

[[intro DAVID MEEKS earlier by adding a graveside summer
 scene for Lisa]]

UNDERTAKER
 Thank you for coming, friend.

Dan, in a daze, shakes his hand. He moves on to the

MAIN ROOM

where it's standing room only.

He spots Aunt Chella across the room but can't get to her. He stands off to the side.

An enlarged picture of Yuletide Carol looks out at the crowd from a tripod by the casket.

The room quiets as Yuletide Carol's round JOLLY UNCLE (75) steps up to the mic at the podium.

A perpetual smile frozen on his face, tufts of clown-like white hair on the sides of his head, the uncle clears his throat.

JOLLY UNCLE

My niece grew up in an abusive home. She ran away, got pregnant at fifteen and had a child.

Most are surprised to hear this.

JOLLY UNCLE

She hurried into a relationship, found herself in an abusive marriage, and ran back home.

Empathy fills the room.

JOLLY UNCLE

Growing up, Margaret knew very little happiness... Except at Christmas.

Dan spies "In loving memory of MARGARET" under the photo.

JOLLY UNCLE

For whatever reason, at Christmas time a marvelous thing happened. During the month of December, the abuses and strife ended, and they lived in an ideal home. The family transformed the house into a Christmas village, and happiness and cheer filled every room.

(smile dims)

But by the turn of each new year the magic was gone. And the dysfunction returned.

Dan shifts, uncomfortable, anticipating what's next.

JOLLY UNCLE

Margaret's escape from a horrendous marriage only came through the tragedy of a fire that cost the lives of her parents and her infant daughter... She lost everything. And never fully recovered.

Emotion fills every last dry eye in the room, Dan's included.

JOLLY UNCLE

Most people thought of "Yuletide Carol" as a crazy old indigent, but the truth was very different.

As the story lightens, he interjects chuckles between words.

JOLLY UNCLE

Whenever Margaret got her hands on money, she spent it... On others. Each year, as Christmastime approached, Margaret would seek out families in hardship, children in need, people who suffered--

A BLACK WOMAN in the front raises her hand and stands.

BLACK WOMAN

Mm-hmm. She helped me with rent so's my kid and I wouldn't get evicted... Any you ever seen Miss Margaret enter the Muncie Mission?

Lots of head nods as the woman breaks down in tears.

BLACK WOMAN

She went there, every single day... As a volunteer.

The woman sits, sobbing, and the room falls into quiet awe.

A TEEN BOY, about the age Dan had been, stands, awkward.

TEEN BOY

My dad's a lawyer. And my mom works at the Children's Aid Society. They told me she left over ten thousand dollars to the charity. And more to others. I couldn't believe it...

(looks around)

Until now.

Murmurs ripple through the crowd.

JOLLY UNCLE

She would occasionally visit me,
get cleaned up and nicely dressed
and go out for a nice dinner or to
a movie. For years, we - her family
and friends - tried to get her
medical help, fearing she was manic-
depressive or schizophrenic. She
always went into the hospital, but
eventually checked herself out.
Whatever ailed her, she often said,
"At least I'm happy."

Dan's smile pushes tears from his eyes.

JOLLY UNCLE

Margaret lived precisely the way
she wanted to. She was not unhappy.
Not crazy.

(choked with emotion)

Would that we all could live
exactly the life we wanted and be
as happy in the process.

Dan uses his scarf in an attempt to dry his eyes.

JOLLY UNCLE

Margaret once told me, "I am never
poor, never alone..."

Dan envisages Yuletide Carol clear as day standing next to
her uncle, her eyes on Dan.

YULETIDE CAROL

...never afraid, and never sad. You
know why? Because I always have a
song."

She fades from sight and Dan notices her uncle's eyes on him
as he starts to sing.

JOLLY UNCLE

Silent night...

DAN & EVERYONE

*Holy night. All is calm. All is
bright 'round yon virgin mother and
child. Holy infant so tender and
mild, sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

[[intersperse flashback images of young Yuletide Carol with her baby & family]]

JOLLY UNCLE

(prays)

Thank you, Father God, for sending us your angel. Amen.

He's ready to dismiss everyone when--

MOURNER

Wouldn't it be more like "Yuletide Carol" to sing Joy to the World?

Everyone sings, except Dan, who cries tears of gratitude.

EVERYONE

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come.
Let earth receive her king. Let
ev'ry heart...*

The voices fade to MOS, with every face aglow as if looking up at a host of angels as they sing out strong.

ADULT DAN (V.O.)

Whenever I think of Yuletide Carol
I say this simple prayer...

Yuletide Carol's gentle voice fades up in the b.g.

YULETIDE CAROL (V.O.)

Do you hear what I hear?

ADULT DAN (V.O.)

Please let me be a gift to someone else. Let my life be filled with a peace and joy that lets me see others' needs instead of always focusing on my own.

YULETIDE CAROL (V.O.)

Pray for peace, people everywhere.

Dan now joins everyone in the MOS singing.

ADULT DAN (V.O.)

Allow me to touch just one single heart the way that Yuletide Carol touched mine.

YULETIDE CAROL (V.O.)

Do you hear what I hear?

ADULT DAN (V.O.)
O God...please give me a song.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Snow falls. All the shops are decked out for Christmas.

YULETIDE CAROL (V.O.)
(full voice)
*A song, a song high above the trees
with a voice as big as the sea...*
(big finish)
With a voice as big as the sea!

FADE TO BLACK.