

Away From The Manger: Lost at Christmas

by

Brian, Pam, and Aubrey Charette

Brian Charette
brian@leaderhelps.com

CHARACTERS

- JACK STRAUSS** Lead character. Jack owns Lebens (which everyone mispronounces "lebbinz") Bread, a long-standing, well known bakery in town. He is mid-40's-ish. His sense of duty led him to take over the family bakery that his grandfather started after emigrating from Germany in 1939. He loves his Lord, his work, and Christmas. He has a tender heart for his younger brother Phillip.
- PHILLIP STRAUSS** Jack's younger brother by 2-3 years. Phillip really doesn't want to be in the family baking business with his brother, but a number of life failures have led him to fall back. He's not all that happy about his past or present life. He's not so jaded that he doesn't believe in God, or even in Christmas, but he doesn't "feel" Christmas the way others do. In that way, he's a victim of his past. He rolls his eyes at all the hoopla of Christmas. Deep inside, of course, he wants to believe in what Christmas can mean.
- LILY STRAUSS** Jack and Phillip's mother. The "Cloris Leachman type." She is a tough, no-nonsense businesswoman who values a dollar and loves her sons. She's known for her bad driving, which she doesn't understand. Although she's in her sixties, she takes pride in being a very effective (if sometimes meddling) partner in the bakery.
- CAMILLE STRAUSS** Jack's wife. She works hard by his side, both in raising their two children and in working at Lebens. While she doesn't get as overboard about Christmas as her husband, she loves the Lord and gently tolerates his holiday quirkiness.
- EMMY STRAUSS** Jack and Camille's 17 year-old daughter. She tends to be gregarious and thoughtful. She's a little like her Dad.
- NATHAN STRAUSS** Jack and Camille's 14 year-old son. Since he's a little bit more quiet and shy than his older sister, he's more like his mom.

PASTOR DYLAN The relatively young, but wise-beyond-his-years pastor of Jack and Camille's church. They consider him both a friend and pastor. *(Note, this is flexible in terms of the actor's age.)*

CUSTOMER 1 Woman

CUSTOMER 2 Man

LITTLE GIRL Young girl, 8-12. Customer #2's daughter.

KATIE MARKHAM A woman, about Phillip's age.

CAROLERS This should be a group of 6-8 young people of varying ages – perhaps from 10 to 17 – who will play Christmas carolers who visit the shop. They will only sing one song and it will be a common Christmas carol, so no training or even much musical rehearsal will be needed.

SETTING

The setting for the play is a small but busy bakeshop – Lebens Bread. It is an old shop, clean and warm. Stage left implies “the back room” or kitchen, where they do their baking. A table is featured and containers of flour, sugar, etc. are prominent. The backdrop, which may be simplified and/or stylized, implies an oven. Far stage left is an implied door where workers and family members enter. Generally, the family members enter from “the back of the store” (stage left) and customers enter from the “front” (stage right). At approximately center stage, a counter separates “the back” from “the front.” A glass display case and cash register are implied. (Actors must be able to cross from “the back” to “the front” easily, so the counter shouldn’t impeded that movement.) Far stage right is the bakeshop’s customer entrance.

In the “front area” of the bakeshop (but at the rear portion of the stage), a nativity scene will be set up. It is on a small table with a light shining on it. The nativity set itself will be described as being made of bread. However, it is not necessary to create a real bread nativity set (obviously). Create a setting and props so that the audience perceives such a nativity. This set is a focus of great love and care for Jack, so it should reflect that from the audience’s perspective.

As part of the action of the play, Jack will set up a string of garish, large, red and green Christmas lights, an important set piece. Those lights will need to be activated from off stage.

The play is designed specifically for a Christmas season dinner or dessert theater presentation.

TIME

Modern Day.

SKETCH LENGTH

Approximately 90 minutes

ACT I

Lebens Bread Bakeshop. Morning, December 23.

ACT II

Lebens Bread Bakeshop. Morning, December 24.

Lebens Bread Bakeshop. Afternoon, December 24

ACT III

Lebens Bread Bakeshop. Early evening. December 24.

ACT [1]

Jack and Phillip are working in the shop at the front. Jack is sitting with his legs crossed working lovingly on setting up his treasured nativity set. It has been in his family since the shop was opened in 1937. So he handles it very carefully, with love. He sets each piece in its place as if it is fragile jewelry. Phillip is working in the back. At open, his back is to the audience.

PHILLIP

(Back to the audience, kneading bread, over his shoulder.)

I'll never understand why that thing is such a big deal to you.

JACK

Phillip, we've been through this...This little manger scene is priceless. It represents 75 years of our family faith and history!

PHILLIP

Oh and what a glorious history it is! You and I, two grown men, toiling away in a run-down bakery. Oh the glamour. The prestige. I feel like one of the Backstreet Boys.

(Phillip turns to reveal that his face is almost completely covered

in flour because of the baking he's been working on. He crosses to Jack, wiping his hands on a towel.)

JACK

(Notices his face and stifles a laugh.)

You look more like one of the Spice Girls.

PHILLIP

What?

JACK

(Pointing to a spot on Phillip's cheek.)

Bro, your face. You've got a tiny bit of flour...

PHILLIP

(Feeling his face.)

Where?

JACK

(Reaches out and brushes a speck from Philip's cheek, leaving the rest of his face still completely covered in flour. Still stifling a laugh.)

There. I got it. Good as new.

CAMILLE

(Entering, on her cell phone.)

Lebens Bread, this is Camille!

(Pause.)

Well I don't know, Mrs. Cole, I'm not sure we've ever done that before... True, Jack can do anything...

(Looking at Jack lovingly.)

Why, yes, my husband IS amazing. I'll check and call you back.

(Notices Phillip's face and jumps back.)

(To Phillip.)

What happened to you?

PHILLIP

What?

CAMILLE

Well, you've either been working on Mr. Harrison's Christmas rolls or you've seen a ghost...or...you ARE one.

PHILLIP

(He feels his face and realizes it's covered in flour.)

You are my brother, and you are also an idiot.

(He cleans his face with the towel in his hand. While Jack and Camille laugh.)

JACK

(To Camille.)

(He hugs her.)

Hey girl. What's that about?

CAMILLE

Mrs. Cole wants to know if you can make her 36 cannolis in the shape of New Jersey.

PHILLIP

(Rolling his eyes.)

Oh sure... And I'll get crackin' on a nice coconut cream pie that doubles as an iPad.

JACK

(Ignoring him.)

She needs it by Christmas Eve?

CAMILLE

Of course.

JACK

I think we can get it done. After all, it is the most wonderful time of the year!

PHILLIP

Jack, I know you're into the "holiday spirit," and that's fine, but we're backed up as it is. You have to learn to say no.

JACK

It's true. I do LOVE Christmas and I know you...

(Phillip gives a "don't go there" look.)

...would rather have it be over.

CAMILLE

(Putting on an apron.)

We need to get to work. We have a ton of Christmas orders and less than two full days to get them all done. We're cutting it closer than ever this year.

JACK

(Moving back to the nativity.)
And I need to get my manger scene finished and my lights strung.

CAMILLE

(Noticing the manger scene.)
Oh, you're starting to set up. I always look forward to seeing it!

PHILLIP

(Exasperated.)
Every year...

JACK

(Interrupting.)
You got that right.

PHILLIP

...You pull out that silly thing. Whoever heard of a nativity with the figures made of bread!

JACK

Well, first of all, you know very well it's more a cured dough sculpted and sealed with varnish. Second, our grandfather made this "silly nativity" with his bare hands on the day he started this bakery, fresh from the old country. It means a lot to me.

(Admires it.)

The perfect reminder of God's goodness. I mean, think of the symbolism!

PHILLIP

OK, then, if it makes sense to have a bread manger scene, how come you don't have a Christmas tree made from a giant piece of toast?

CAMILLE

(Laughing.)

Phillip.

PHILLIP

Or how about a nice whole wheat Christmas wreath?

(To Camille.)

And are you going to let him string those ugly lights again? They make the customers all queasy.

JACK

I won't set the timer to turn them on until six o'clock on Christmas Eve. The exact time I accepted Christ at that Christmas Eve service in 1977. So you won't even see them unless you're caroling or last minute shopping around the neighborhood.

PHILLIP

And we all know the chance of that.

(Emmy enters the back room.)

(To Emmy.)

Finally, sense and reason! Good morning beautiful!

EMMY

Hey Uncle Phil!

CAMILLE

Hi Sweetie. Here to help I hope?

EMMY

Definitely. Just tell me what I can do.

PHILLIP

(While Jack is hugging Emmy.)
Make your father more like you.

EMMY

(To Camille.)
Let me guess, the manger scene and the lights?

CAMILLE

Yep! Wouldn't be Christmas without it.

LILY

(Off stage, yelling.)
Oh yeah! Well Merry Christmas to you too!
Nincompoop.

(Enters.)

God sends His one and only Son as savior of the world to be born in Bethlehem and people still drive like dummkopfs.

EMMY

(To Camille)
Is there a connection there somewhere?

JACK

How was traffic court, Mutti (moo'-tee)?

LILY

Oh it was fine. Bill is always so understanding.

EMMY

Grandma has had so many traffic tickets she calls the judge by his first name?

CAMILLE

Who do you think coerced him into joining the church choir?

PHILLIP

(To Lily.)

What was it this time?

LILY

I really don't understand. I just did a "straight on red."

PHILLIP

You mean "right on red."

LILY

Yes. That.

(Pause.)

Except I went straight.

JACK

(Hugging her.)

Mutti, "straight on red" is called "running a red light."

LILY

(Dismissing that as insignificant.)

It should be completely acceptable if you're in a hurry. And I was. I told Bill so.

PHILLIP

I'm guessing, a hundred eighty four dollars again?

LILY

We have no time to talk. We've got orders to fill. Work work work. This place should be as busy as Santa's workshop.

PHILLIP

That makes me so proud.

JACK

How?

PHILLIP

I've just been promoted to elf.

(Nathan enters.)

LILY

(To Nathan.)

Nathan, Schnucki! (schnooky). Good morning!

(She gives him a big, comedic hug, nearly smothering him.)

NATHAN

(Gasping for breath.)
Morning grandma.

LILY

(Squeezing Nathan's cheeks
roughly.)

(To Camille.)

Your two children are like Christmas
angels.

(To Nathan.)

And we're blessing you by giving you an
opportunity to work! Work is good for the
soul!

NATHAN

(Good naturedly.)

It's every boy's dream to wake up at the
crack of dawn during Christmas vacation
to get coated in prune Danish gunk.

JACK

And we are so grateful for your deep
sacrifice. You can help me with the
nativity and lights.

NATHAN

Just relieved I survived the greeting.

(All characters are now busy at
work. Jack and Nathan with the
manger scene and lights, all
others working on
preparation/baking, organizing,
etc.)

JACK

And this year, I'M putting away the lights. If I'm not mistaken...

(To Phillip.)

YOU put them away last year.

(He holds up Christmas tree lights that are so tangled they are in one big round ball. The ball should be hidden from the audience until the reveal.)

PHILLIP

Hey, they're YOUR lights.

LILY

Now look everyone, we have thirty-six orders to fill and no telling how much walk-in work we'll have. Thanks to these two technology geniuses,

(Indicating Emmy and Nathan.)

(Proudly, beaming.)

Lebens Bread is now on SpaceBook.

(Pause.)

And Emmy says soon we'll be on MyFace.

(To Nathan.)

Nathan, make sure you put the information about the Christmas pies up on Tooter.

PHILLIP

I think you mean Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, Ma.

LILY

Whatever.

(Busying herself.)

Work is from God Himself. A busy Christmas is a wonderful Christmas around here.

PHILLIP

And if we play our cards right, it will soon be Christmas past.

LILY

(To Emmy and Nathan.)

Pay no attention to Uncle Scrooge here.

PHILLIP

(She hit a nerve.)

Look, I'm not a Scrooge! I'm not saying bah humbug or anything like that. It's just that... Well, Christmas isn't a joyous occasion for everyone.

JACK

We do understand my brother... maybe it will be again.

(Gesturing to the manger scene.)

That's what He's all about.

PHILLIP

You mean "Bread Baby?"

JACK

You know I was talking about the real LORD. This manger scene isn't just a family tradition for me. At Christmas, when our customers see it, and zoom in on that baby in that manger, what I hope they see is REAL CHRISTMAS – forgiveness, peace, new life, a fresh start.

(Subtle gesture to Phillip.)
No matter what their past has been like.

CAMILLE
I know that's what it means to me.

EMMY
And me.

NATHAN
And me.

LILY
(Gesturing to the nativity.)
And unlike all of you, I knew the hands
that made that set... very well. So maybe
it means even more to me.

JACK
(Looks carefully at the nativity,
deep in thought.)
You might be able to have a manager scene
without animals or shepherds or maybe
even Mary and Joseph. But it wouldn't be
a nativity without Jesus.

CAMILLE
Wouldn't be Christmas.

PHILLIP
Did you ever think it might not be a good
thing for people to see that and see
Jesus as a baby? Jesus WAS a baby, but He
isn't anymore. Maybe it gives people the
wrong idea about God. Maybe that's
actually harmful.

CAMILLE

I don't think it's harmful.

(Crosses to look more closely at
the baby Jesus.)

But you know Jack, the baby Jesus IS
starting to show its age, as strange as
that sounds. Chips here, wear spots there.
Even his swaddling cloths are worn. It's
in need of a little T-L-C.

NATHAN

Seventy-five years is a long time.

LILY

Hah! Seventy-five years is nothing!

NATHAN

Maybe we could touch him up, or make a
new one.

JACK

I think it's all part of the character of
the set. The tradition. Look, this is
just a symbol. A sign. But it's an
important one. Really important.

(Beat.)

Think about it. The angels told the
shepherds... "This will be a sign to you..."
Maybe this year, this will be a sign...

(To Phillip.)

To you.

PHILLIP

(Not argumentative, more
plaintive.)

Look, I'm a Christian, just like you.
It's just that...

(Struggling for words.)

When I see manger scenes or Christmas cookies or carolers, I don't feel the same feelings you all do.

(Pause, pensive, resigned.)

I guess at Christmas I'll always be on the outside looking in - and that's just the way it is. I'm a big boy. I can handle it.

JACK

I don't think it has to be that way.

PHILLIP

(Reacting, a touch of anger.)

And I definitely don't want to be pitied.

JACK

No pity here. But I care about you.

PHILLIP

I know, I know.

(Wistful.)

I guess another part of it is...

(Holds up his hands, which are covered with dough.)

Well, not exactly livin' the dream here.

EMMY

We're really glad you're here, Uncle Phillip.

PHILLIP

I know sweetheart.

(The shop phone rings. Since Camille has it forwarded to her cell phone. She picks up.)

CAMILLE

(To Jack)

I have it forwarded to my cell. I'll get it.

(On the phone.)

Lebens Bread. Merry Christmas!

...Oh hi, Mr. Willis.

...We open in about 15 minutes and close at 5:00. How can I help you?

...I see.

...Well, so you want a chocolate cake then?

(Pause, listening.)

(She puts her hand over the phone.)

(To Jack.)

Mr. Willis is asking if you can make your special Christmas red velvet cake, only he doesn't want it to be red this year.

JACK

So he wants a regular chocolate cake then?

CAMILLE

That's what I thought. He says he wants a red velvet cake but not red.

JACK

Does he have a particular color in mind?

CAMILLE

(On the phone)

Mr. Willis, do you have a particular color in mind?

...I see.

(Covers the phone.)

(To Jack.)

He says he loves your Christmas red velvet cake. He just doesn't like the red taste.

PHILLIP

(Deadpan.)

I will begin screaming momentarily.

JACK

Tell him we'll take care of it. He can pick it up tomorrow, Christmas Eve.

PHILLIP

(Like a commercial spokesman.)

Lebens Bread, official bakers to the loony bin.

CAMILLE

(To Jack.)

Honey, can we get all this done?

LILY

We will!

JACK

Sure. We always do. It's that time of year. Long days, late nights, but we're an important part of our customers' Christmas celebrations. Everyone has

memories of a special Christmas bread or cookies. We get to share in all that. I think that honors God.

EMMY

And it's actually kinda fun!

CAMILLE

Some churches even have desert nights where they enjoy our delicious goodies and maybe have a Christmas-themed play of some kind.

NATHAN

Wow! Those must be great churches.

(All characters stop what they're doing and pause for a beat. Then, slowly in unison, turn their heads to the audience. Then snap back into character.)

JACK

So, yes, we can do this people!

LILY

We WILL do this!

EMMY

(Holding up a piece of paper.)
Hey Dad?

JACK

Yes Sweetie?

EMMY

It's this order I'm working on.

JACK

What about it?

EMMY

I'm going to need a map of New Jersey.

(Fade to black.)

ACT [2]

Lebens Bread bakeshop. Christmas Eve morning. The manger scene is set up. A lamp is shining down focusing attention on it along the back wall of the front of the shop. The garish red and green string of lights is strung across the shop, but not turned on. (The string of lights should be placed in such a way so that, when they are turned on in Act III, they are obvious to the audience.)

As lights go up, Emmy is alone on the stage, crouched over the manger scene. She appears a little nervous, glancing over her shoulder to the back door.

CAMILLE

Good morning sweetheart!

(Her greeting startles Emmy, who quickly leaves the nativity and approaches Camille in the back room.)

Happy Christmas Eve morning!

EMMY

Morning Mom!

CAMILLE

(Putting on her apron.)

I really appreciate you getting up so early to get things ready. It's a real blessing to your Dad and me.

EMMY

No problem. Besides, I can't imagine trying to wake Nate up at this hour.

CAMILLE

I'm sure he'd threaten to call Child Protective Services.

EMMY

He asked me how you expect him to be a "high academic achiever" when he can't get caught up on his rest on Christmas vacation.

CAMILLE

He actually said "high academic achiever?"

EMMY

Yep.

CAMILLE

If he's a high academic achiever, I'm an astronaut.

(They laugh.)

Where's your father and Uncle Phillip?

EMMY

Dad said he worked late. All night, in fact.

CAMILLE

I know, he's determined to get all of these orders done. I had no idea we'd get so many more yesterday.

EMMY

They went to get eggs and confectioner's sugar.

(Pensively.)

Mom?

CAMILLE

Yes, Sweetie?

EMMY

Have you noticed that Uncle Phillip seems especially edgy this year? I know it's not his favorite time..

CAMILLE

Yes. I've seen it too. I think it's because this year marks exactly twenty years since the accident. I just realized that a couple of days ago.

EMMY

He sure doesn't like to talk about it.

CAMILLE

He was very young.. Not much older than you.

(Thinking back.)

He was on his way to church with Brad Markham.. his best friend in the world.

EMMY

Dad said they'd known each other since kindergarten.

CAMILLE

(Nodding sadly.)

Uncle Phillip was driving and Andy was in the passenger seat. There was ice and snow... I've never thought it was Uncle Phillip's fault.

EMMY

I don't think he believes that.

CAMILLE

(Thoughtfully.)

No, you're right.

(Pause.)

By the time they got Andy to the hospital, he was already gone.

EMMY

Poor Uncle Phillip... Twenty years...

CAMILLE

He's right. Christmas does mean something different to him.

(Pause.)

Then there was the divorce from Aunt Mercy and having to come back home to work in the shop. He sees all this as total failure.

(Having an idea.)

You know what, let's just pray for him right now.

(They join hands.)

Father, I lift up Phillip to you now and ask you to open his eyes this Christmas. Surprise him with truth of the baby in the manger and make this Christmas a new beginning.

(Jack and Phillip enter. Jack in front with the bag of eggs, Phillip behind with the confectioner's sugar. When Jack notices Camille and Emmy are praying, he stops in his tracks so as not to interrupt. Phillip doesn't see him stop and walks right into Jack, who stumbles comedically.)

JACK

Phillip!

PHILLIP

Well what are you doing just stopping without giving any warning!

JACK

What, am I supposed to signal?

CAMILLE

Hey guys!

JACK

Hey girls. Sorry, didn't mean to interrupt.

CAMILLE

Did you get the eggs? I'm going to need some.

JACK

(He looks in the bag and realizes that the eggs were broken when Phillip bumped into him.)

(Looking back and forth between the eggs in the bag and Phillip.)

Well...yes. And I'm now happy to report that they are... PRE-SCRAMBLED!

PHILLIP

(Disgustedly.)

Chickens. Ya just can't trust 'em anymore.

(Under his breath, comedically.)

Flimsy shells...

JACK

Where's Ma?

PHILLIP

(Sarcastically.)

She must be on the way. I think I hear sirens in the distance.

CAMILLE

She said she wanted to make sure the Salvation Army got the cupcakes Phillip made yesterday. She'll be here.

JACK

(To Phillip.)

Aww... you big Teddy Bear.

(Playfully.)

Who's a teddy bear? You are that's who... a widdle teddy.

PHILLIP

Hey, I just wanted to get them done. You know how annoying those bell ringers can be. All the non-stop tinkling and ringing and gonging...

LILY

(From offstage, yelling.)

Deck your own halls Mr. Nascar man! Watch where YOU'RE going!

(Enters.)

JACK

Mutti... what happened? Did you try "straight on red" again?

LILY

Of course not!

JACK

Well, that's good.

LILY

It was a perfect LEFT on red. Text book.

PHILLIP

Ma, I'm not certain you understand the concept of "red."

(Pastor Dylan appears at the front door.)

PASTOR DYLAN

Good morning! Can I come in?

JACK

Pastor Dylan! Of course!

(He crosses to let him in, since the shop is still closed. They exchange a hug.)

You OK? You look a little flustered.

PASTOR DYLAN

I just saw this car cut wildly in front of two oncoming lanes of traffic...

(Lily busies herself, feigning ignorance.)

Scary...

LILY

You know how some drivers are these days, pastor.

PASTOR DYLAN

(To Jack.)

I know you're not open yet and I don't mean to trouble you.

CAMILLE

(Hugs him.)

It's no trouble at all! It's good to see you!

PASTOR DYLAN

I knew I'd find you hard at work early on Christmas Eve morning!

(Looking around, taking it all in.)

I gotta say, this is one of my favorite places.

JACK

It's home to us!

PHILLIP

(Deep sarcasm.)

Shangri-la.

PASTOR DYLAN

Someone ought to make one of those reality shows out of this place. I know I'd watch it.

JACK

(Chuckling.)

Pastor, as much as I love this business, I'm afraid no one will ever make a reality TV show about a bake shop.

(All characters stop what they're doing and pause for a beat. Then, slowly in unison, turn their heads to the audience. Then snap back into character.)

CAMILLE

Well, if you all will excuse us, Emmy and I are going to see if we can find some eggs.

(Camille and Emmy exit.)

PASTOR DYLAN

Jack, I came about the Christmas play tonight.

JACK

Looking forward to it.

PASTOR DYLAN

Me too.

JACK

I love Christmas plays. They're so cute... and meaningful. Wish I could be in one someday.

PASTOR DYLAN

I'll take you up on it next year!

JACK

And maybe Phillip..

(Phillip gives them both a leave-me-alone look.)

Maybe not.

PASTOR DYLAN

Anyway, you had said you had a baking pan we could borrow.

JACK

Oh that's right. Wait here. The one I have for you may still be in the pot scrubber. I'll be right back.

LILY

Let me help you, son.

JACK

Mutti, I think I can handle...

(Tails off when he sees Lily gesturing to Phillip, indicating a chance for Phillip to be alone with Pastor Dylan. Phillip is oblivious.)

Right... you'd better give me some help.
It's such a huge pan.

(Jack and Lily exit.)

(Pastor Dylan and Phillip are now alone on stage. After a few beats, Phillip notices and appears nervous.)

PASTOR DYLAN

(Breaking the tension.)

Phillip, that was really great what you did for the Salvation Army. Those kids are going to love your cupcakes.

PHILLIP

Thanks Pastor. Any time.

PASTOR DYLAN

Hey. Do you think you might be able to come to the Christmas Eve service tonight? Some of those folks will be there and they can thank you in person.

PHILLIP

Wish I could... got a lot to get finished here. I'm sure it will be great though.

(Reaching, stumbling.)

Nothing, like church... and... Christmas.

(Verbal hesitation, stumbles.)

Yessiree, big fan of the whole holiday thing.

PASTOR DYLAN

Phillip, friend. I was born at night but not LAST night. I know Christmas is a tough time for you. But I also know you're a good man. And He's a good God.

PHILLIP

All due respect pastor, but did you ever think that some people just don't deserve what God is offering?

PASTOR DYLAN

All the time.

PHILLIP

(Startled at the candor.)

So... you agree that Christmas isn't for everyone?

PASTOR DYLAN

Well, that's not what I said.

(Pause)

You know what I "deserved" Phillip?

PHILLIP

(Leaves his work and approaches Pastor Dylan.)

Look, I apologize. I shouldn't have said that. You don't have to explain.

PASTOR DYLAN

No, it's a fair question, especially at this time of year. I know something about

what you've been through. And it seems as though you've disqualified yourself from God.

PHILLIP

That's not...

PASTOR DYLAN

(Warmly.)

And you've singled yourself out... but the truth is, there isn't a person who DESERVED what God started at Christmas and completed at Easter. Not me, not your brother, not anyone.

PHILLIP

Did Jack put you up to this?

(Getting a little angry.)

Well... OK, I know what you're trying to do.

(Re-starting.)

Look, since we're being honest, isn't it just your job to say that?

PASTOR DYLAN

Maybe... But does that make it untrue?

(Phillip can't disagree and he begins to soften.)

I can be free from sin and darkness because of the sacrifice of Christ. I love Him because He loved me first. I obey Him because I love Him. It's really as simple as that. "Deserving" doesn't have anything to do with it.

PHILLIP

Pastor...

PASTOR DYLAN

It applies to me... and it applies to you.
Forgiveness.

(Pats Phillip gently on the
chest.)

God wants you back. THAT's the true
meaning of Christmas.

PHILLIP

(Earnestly.)

If that's true...

CUSTOMER 1

(Interrupting, from the door.)

Hello! Are you open yet?

PHILLIP

What do you need, Mrs. Mills?

CUSTOMER 1

Well, since you asked, I need an extra 24
hours to get ready for Christmas and a
dozen cream puffs. But I can come back...

PHILLIP

Can't do much about the time warp but I
think I can arrange the cream puffs.

(He begins to fill the order.)

PASTOR DYLAN

Morning Ma'm, Dylan Rogers. Merry
Christmas!

CUSTOMER 1

A pleasure.

(Pause.)

Isn't this place just wonderful. Those delicious smells and wonderful goodies. Just wouldn't be Christmas without Lebens.

PASTOR DYLAN

Absolutely.

(Pointedly in Phillip's direction.)

They really do help make the season bright don't they.

(Phillip gives her a box and she begins to exit, passing the manger scene.)

CUSTOMER 1

Oh, and Jack has his special nativity set up as always.

(She looks at it, somewhat quizzically as if seeing something odd.)

(Speaking loudly enough for the audience to hear, but not, ostensibly, Phillip and Pastor Dylan.)

Shame about the baby Jesus though.

(Exits.)

PHILLIP

What did she say?

PASTOR DYLAN

Just admiring the nativity I think.

PHILLIP

Maybe she wanted to take a wise man to
sop up some gravy.

JACK

(Entering with Lily. He is
carrying a small to medium sized
baking pan. It is definitely not
"huge" as he described it.)

Got your baking pan pastor!

PHILLIP

(Sarcastically.)

Gee, glad you had Ma's help to carry that
monstrosity.

PASTOR DYLAN

Thanks so much.

LILY

(Reviewing an order sheet.)

Phillip, are you going to church tonight?

PHILLIP

(Looks nervously at Pastor Dylan,
as if tempted to say yes.)

Uh, why?

LILY

I need to try to find a way to keep the
shop open until 6:00. I have an order for
(list all the items that are available to
the audience for dessert.). But the woman
can't pick them up until after five.

PHILLIP

(Hesitating.)
Yes. OK. I can hang around and wait.
What's the name?

LILY
(Checks her notes.)
(Hesitating, a little nervous.)
...Katherine.

PHILLIP
(Oblivious.)
OK.

PASTOR DYLAN
Well, folks, I need to get going. Have a
wonderful Christmas Eve and I'll see you
tonight.

JACK
Merry Christmas PD!

LILY
Frohe Weihnachten (fro-er vine'-ah-k-tin).
Drive safe!

(Lights go dark for cast change
and to show the passage of time.)

(At lights up, we see the last
couple of hours of Christmas Eve
in the shop. It's busy. Phillip,
Lily, Emmy, and Nathan are in the
back room, hustling, filling
orders. Jack is at the counter
helping Customer 2 and little

girl. Camille is on the phone out front.

CUSTOMER 2

I'm so sorry for the last minute order.

JACK

Happy to help, sir. Especially for a sweet young girl.

CUSTOMER 2

It's just that I didn't expect to get here so late. I'm sure you want to get the shop closed so you can enjoy Christmas Eve.

JACK

(Checks his watch.)

It won't be long now. I'm so glad you like the cake. Let me box it up for you.

LITTLE GIRL

It's beautiful daddy. A snowman cake with Justin Bieber as the face!

CAMILLE

(On the phone.)

I completely understand sir. Let me check on that.

(Loudly, to Emmy.)

Emmy, do we have an order ready for Mr. Bailey?

EMMY

(Checking her notes.)

What's the first name?

CAMILLE

(On the phone.)

What's the first name on the order sir?

(To Emmy.)

It's George.

EMMY

It's ready.

(Camille returns to the phone.)

PHILLIP

Ma, what time did you say that late order is getting picked up?

LILY

She said after five, but definitely before six. Why? You have someplace to go?

PHILLIP

Nah. Just as well to kill time here as anywhere else.

JACK

(Handing the package to Customer 1)

Here you go! Have a blessed Christmas.

CUSTOMER 2

We sure will.

(To little girl.)

Let's go sweetheart. Mommy and Jacob are waiting.

(As Customer 2 and the little girl exit, the girl notices the nativity and it draws her attention.)

LITTLE GIRL

Look daddy! A manger scene, like ours!
(She rushes over to it.)

JACK

Our grandfather made it seventy-five years ago. The figures are made out of bread.

CUSTOMER 2

(Making the connection.)
Like Bethlehem – Doesn't it mean, "House of Bread"?

CAMILLE

And Jesus, the Bread of Life.

LITTLE GIRL

But where is Jesus?

CUSTOMER 2

He's in your heart.

LITTLE GIRL

I know but, why isn't he in the manger?

CUSTOMER 2

(Peering into the manger scene.)
I...I don't know.

CAMILLE

(Now inspecting the nativity.)
Jack, do you have the baby Jesus?

JACK

(Approaching, just a little
worried.)

No, he should be right there.

(Inspects the manger scene
carefully. Getting more anxious.)

Did anyone take the Jesus figure out of
my nativity?

(No one responds. They all
gather around the manger
scene.)

PHILLIP

It was there yesterday.

JACK

It has to be here somewhere. No one would
take the baby Jesus and it didn't just
walk off.

(He begins to search the shop and
they follow his lead.)

NATHAN

Maybe a customer's little kid picked it
up. That's what I probably would have
done when I was young.

CAMILLE

I didn't see anyone, but I've been out a
lot.