

Plus One

written by

Shaun Baland

(916) 316-1377
shaunbaland@gmail.com

NEIGHBORHOOD GROCERY STORE

Christmas music. Endless checkout lines.

A pretty young woman, SARAH (27F), at the checkstand. The cashier scans groceries. Sarah answers her phone.

SARAH

No, no, no. Mike, you can't do this
to me now. We're literally about
to--

Sarah pays. Moves to the end of the checkstand.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Ugh, fine. See you in training.
Happy Thanksgiving.

She ends the call. Holds the phone to her head and pulls the imaginary trigger. She notices--

An OLD WOMAN (80F) at the next checkstand. Rummages through her purse. The cashier rolls her eyes. The line grows impatient. Sarah moves to help just as--

A handsome young man, JACK (25M), leaves from his middle spot in line to intervene. The old woman fumbles. Nervous.

JACK

Ma'am, it would be an honor if
you'd let me buy your groceries.

She looks up at him. Her savior. Wipes a tear away.

OLD WOMAN

I have money. I don't know where--

Jack smiles. Swipes his card. She hugs him.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Happy Thanksgiving. Thank you.

Jack returns to his spot in line like nothing happened.

Sarah smiles. Impressed. Taps her phone against her lip.

GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT

Jack exits the store with bags. Sarah leans against her car.

SARAH

Excuse me.

Jack smiles with a 'Who, me?' look. She waves him over.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I saw what you did in there.

Jack squints. Eyes open wide as he remembers--

JACK

Singing the Mariah song in the
frozen food aisle? Sorry, it
couldn't be helped. That song is--

She laughs. Stops him from finishing that sentence.

SARAH

No, I must have missed your
performance. I saw you help that
old woman.

Jack offers a soft smile. Kind. Sincere. Disarming.

SARAH (CONT'D)

It was sweet. Usually that's
followed by someone posting it
online to look kind.

Jack shrugs. Shakes his head.

JACK

I would have but I gave my film
crew the day off for the holiday.

They laugh. She points to his grocery bags.

SARAH

What'd you forget? Gravy? Stuffing?

JACK

Thanksgiving for one this year.

SARAH

Been there. No family? Friends?

JACK

I'm brand new here. Moved for work.
Haven't met anyone yet.

Sarah studies him. Jack studies her back.

SARAH

So, no real Thanksgiving plans?

JACK

Well, I've got a date with that old lady later. Groceries ain't free!

They laugh. She raises an eyebrow--

SARAH

Since you're such a helper, I have a proposition for you. If you can get out of your date with Mildred.

JACK

It's Phyllis. Don't be jealous. What she and I have is--

SARAH

I'd like you to be my boyfriend.

Jack laughs. Confused. Tilts his head. She extends her hand.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Sarah. I could really use your--

He shakes it. Still confused.

JACK

Jack. I don't know if--

SARAH

I told everyone I was bringing my new boyfriend. The boyfriend I don't have. Whatcha say, Jack?

JACK

Sounds like an 80's movie.

SARAH

Perfect. You understand! I've kept 'him' a mystery, so you can improv whatever. I could use your help.

Jack purses his lips. Ponders.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Live a little. You'd really be saving me. Plus, free dinner!

He holds his hands up. Surrenders.

JACK

Our own little Hallmark Movie.

SARAH

Wait until you meet the co-stars.

SARAH'S HOUSE

The house is immaculate, a Pottery Barn ad.
 Conversations and Thanksgiving smells waft from the kitchen.
 She smiles at him, grabs his hand. A squeeze as they enter--

KITCHEN

Chaos. Mayhem. Like Martha Stewart's kitchen exploded.
 Every surface covered in food, dishes, flour. So much flour.
 Arguments. Profanity. The typical Thanksgiving.
 Sarah whistles. The madness pauses.

SARAH
 Psychos, this is Jack. Jack, my
 family. Unfortunately.

A wet washcloth flies, narrowly misses Sarah.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 I swear to God, Jess.

Sarah regroups. Smiles.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 If you could all refrain from
 assault for a moment--

They reluctantly pause the action.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 Thank you. Jack, this is Mom, Dad,
 my sister Jessica, and Aunt
 Lorraine.

Waves and smiles from MOM (47F), DAD (50M), JESSICA (19F),
 and AUNT LORRAINE (43F).

Sarah pushes Jack through the door and into--

THE LIVING ROOM

They sit on the sofa. Football and the parade on TV.

JACK
 Can I help with anything? I can
 make mashed potatoes or--

SARAH

They've got it. They're already fighting over duties. Just hang here. Dad will be out. Oh, and don't mention the--

Dad bursts through the door. Cussing under his breath.

DAD

Every single year. I don't know why I even bother. Dry turkey and terrible football.

Sarah leans in. Whispers to Jack--

SARAH

The Cowboys. Don't get him started.

Jack nods. Dad collapses into his chair. Sarah returns to the kitchen.

DAD

Hope you snuck in extra gravy, kid. Her turkey could chip a tooth.

Jack laughs. Shrugs.

JACK

Better than the microwave turkey dinner I usually have.

DAD

I wouldn't bet on that.

The group emerges from the kitchen, parading food to the dining room. Sarah motions to the men to join them.

DAD (CONT'D)

Here we go. Brace yourself, kid.

THE DINING ROOM

A picture perfect spread. The food smells amazing. Looks like an HGTV ad. A moment of pure Thanksgiving perfection, then--

DAD

I'm taking my food out to the TV.

MOM

Here we go. Can you just ONE TIME--

Jack notices the mood about to explode.

JACK

Sir, I was hoping you could tell me
what you'd do if you were coaching
the Cowboys.

Dad lights up. Fills his plate. Ready to unload his plan.

SARAH

Can we say grace first?

Dad's eyes rolls. Mom smiles, nods.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Dad, would you--

He's pissed. Not in the mood.

JESSICA

Let Jack say grace.

She smiles. Setting him up for failure. Records on her phone.

Sarah tries to save him. Jack smiles. Heads bow.

JACK

"Alright, here goes...
Dear Lord, we thank you for
bringing us together today as a
team. We might be an unexpected
lineup, but we're grateful for
every player at this table.

Dad looks up. Smiles. Jack winks.

Sarah is in love. Tries to hide her smile.

JACK (CONT'D)

Thank you for the food, the
laughter, and for letting us share
this moment, even if there are a
few fumbles along the way.

Jessica's eyebrows raise as she records.

JACK (CONT'D)

Bless the cooks, especially the
mashed potatoes, because I've got a
feeling they're the MVP tonight.

Mom and Aunt Lorraine beam to Sarah. Oh, he's good.

JACK (CONT'D)
Here's to family, food, and maybe a
little chaos—just like any good
Thanksgiving game. Amen.

Silence. Then 'amens' from all. Jessica lowers her phone.

JESSICA
Boy, did that backfire.

The assault on the dishes begins. A flurry of food.

AUNT LORRAINE
Jack, how did you meet our Sarah?

Jack and Sarah lock eyes. No game plan.

JACK
It's kinda embarrassing, actually.
I was jogging outside her hospital.
I saw her leaving and stopped to
check my smartwatch. Hoped she'd
see me and fall in love.

They look at Sarah. Gives nothing away. She smiles, waiting--

JACK (CONT'D)
But I stopped too quickly and
passed out. I woke up to her giving
me an IV.

SARAH
He was dehydrated. I'm basically
his hero.

JACK
We connected. And here we are.

Jessica furrows her brow. Isn't buying it. An evil smile--

JESSICA
Her last guy was taller.

MOM
Jessica Anne!

JACK
If I was tall, collapsing might
have killed me. Average height, but
still alive!

Aunt Lorraine laughs.

AUNT LORRAINE
Sarah, he'll fit right in.

Dad scoots his chair closer. Finally able to get a word in--

DAD
Their 4-3 defense is predictable.
They don't get enough pressure off
the edge, so offenses are ripping
them to shreds.

Sarah winces to Jack. Attempts to step in just as--

JACK
So you think a 3-4? Smart. Take
advantage of their ends and their
athletic linebackers.

Dad explodes into a smile. Hands flailing. Beyond excited.

DAD
Exactly, Jack! Then I'd--

JACK
One second, sir. Before you get to
the offense--

Dad sinks. Has to delay his offensive plans.

JACK (CONT'D)
Ladies, this stuffing is
incredible. What's your--

SARAH
Old family recipe. I used to--

MOM
I finally got to make it this year.

Aunt Lorraine shoots daggers.

Jack catches the awkwardness. Smiles it off.

JACK
Well, it's all delicious.

A moment of silent eating. Broken by--

AUNT LORRAINE
So Jess, when you bringing a guy of
your own?

JESSICA
When are you? Or a woman?

AUNT LORRAINE
Maybe both? This family's too
stuffy! You'd explode!

The group howls.

SARAH
Auntie! Oh my god!

JESSICA
Freak.

MOM
Jessica! Don't encourage her!

JESSICA
SHE'S the adult! I'm supposed to
be the sexually exploring one!

DAD
This is why we can't talk anything
but football. So Jack--

Jack's shellshocked. So much information. Tries to focus--

DAD (CONT'D)
I'd draft a mobile QB. Rookie
contract. Give him a line and young
weapons. Money for the defense...

Jack tries to keep up. Sarah places her hand on his thigh.

Jack melts. The drama blows away.

A sly look to her. She winks back.

SARAH
That's enough, coach.

DAD
Welp, the turkey didn't suck.

Jack looks for offended responses. Instead, they smile and
nod. The best compliment the old guy could give.

SARAH
Dessert will be ready soon.

MOM
I'd like to make a toast.

They all raise glasses.

SARAH

Thank you, Sarah, for bringing us
all together again. And for adding
Jack to our crazy mix.

They clank glasses. The table makes small talk.

JACK

So you don't see your family often?

Sarah searches for an answer.

SARAH

They're close but we are all busy.

Jack nods. Purses his lips.

JACK

Jessica, do you go to school?

Jessica eyes Sarah. Back to Jack.

JESSICA

I'm, uh, taking a semester off.

JACK

And doing what?

JESSICA

Music. I write and play music.

Aunt Lorraine seems surprised.

JACK

Can you play something for us?

JESSICA

Really? I don't usually--

JACK

I have zero musical ability. I'd
love to hear what to do.

Jessica shrugs. Runs from the room.

JACK (CONT'D)

What style does she--

SARAH

Country. She likes Country.

Jessica returns with a guitar case. Covered in rock band
stickers. Pulls a weathered electric guitar.

JESSICA
Unplugged. Save Dad's ears.

She begins playing. Beautifully. Then an angelic voice--

JESSICA (CONT'D)
*I AIN'T THE PICTURE OF A PERFECT
LITTLE DAUGHTER.*

*DIDN'T FOLLOW RULES, NEVER WALKED
ON WATER.*

*TOOK THE LONG ROAD, FOUND A FEW
DEAD ENDS.*

*BUT I KEEP ROLLING, YEAH, I DON'T
PRETEND.*

Jack's mouth drops. The family is mesmerized.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
*I'M TANGLED ROOTS AND BROKEN
STRINGS.*

*I'M THE WILDFIRE YOUR MAMA WARNED
WOULD SING.*

She taps the guitar. The family claps along.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
WILD-WILD FIRE.

WILDFIRE.

She tails off. The family explodes.

JACK
That was incredible! You wrote
that, too?

Jessica smiles. Sets her guitar down.

JESSICA
It's just for fun.

AUNT LORRAINE
I had no idea, kiddo!

Mom and dad step in.

DAD
She's gifted as hell. Voice like
her mama!

JACK
Yeah? Sing us a duet!

Mom and Jessica stare at each other. Mom squirms.

SARAH
Uhhh, Mom doesn't really sing
anymore. She just--

Jack notices Mom is uncomfortable.

JACK
Raps? She's more gangster?

Nervous laughs. Jack studies the family. Sarah jumps in--

SARAH
Pie! Who wants pie?

Enthusiastic hands raise. Dad escapes to watch football.

Sarah slinks into the kitchen. Jack follows her.

JACK
Excuse me, ladies.

Mom, Jessica, and Aunt Lorraine freeze. Once Jack leaves--

MOM
Why didn't we know you're Adele?

Jessica smiles. Aunt Lorraine throws a napkin at Jessica.

AUNT LORRAINE
We all looked like it was our first
time hearing you! Shoulda warned--

JESSICA
It was. You never asked

MOM
Think he knows?

INT. KITCHEN

Sarah cuts slices from several pies. Jack leans against the kitchen island. Head tilted. Soft smile.

JACK
So, who are those people?

Sarah stops cutting. Stares out the window.

SARAH

Wha-what do you mean? Who?

JACK

The people in the other room
pretending to be your family.

She turns. Eyes well up. Can't speak.

She shakes her head. Races outside.

Jack's head drops. He clasps his hands behind his head.

He takes a deep breath. Returns to--

INT. DINING ROOM

Small talk around the table.

JACK

I gotta get going. Thanks for
having me. Happy Thanksgiving.

The group exchange glances. Aunt Lorraine nods to them,

AUNT LORRAINE

Jack, please sit.

Jack politely decline with a hand motion. Waves goodbye.

JESSICA

Jack, please.

Jack sits. Raises an eyebrow.

AUNT LORRAINE

Sarah has no family. Well--

DAD

Not anymore. Her family was killed
in an accident. She...she--

Jack exhales slowly. Closes his eyes. Damn.

MOM

She moved her for a new start. To
rebuild.

JACK

Wow. That's so...so you guys are--

AUNT LORRAINE

She found us. Like she found you.

JESSICA
We're the family she chose.

A moment of silence. Sarah stands in the doorway. Tears in her eyes. Steps in to explain.

SARAH
I met Lorraine at the shelter. We volunteered together. She was alone, so I invited her for Thanksgiving four years ago.

AUNT LORRAINE
I've been her auntie ever since.

Jack smiles. Sarah places a hand on Aunt Lorraine's shoulder.

SARAH
We both needed family we didn't have. So we decided--

DAD
They needed more football in their life, so here I am.

SARAH
Met Bob- Dad- at the hospital. He's a pharmacist.

Jack smiles, looks to Mom and Jessica.

MOM
I'm Beatrice. Sarah's tax preparer.

JESSICA
I'm her barista. She's my "venti oat milk creme brulee latte with--

SARAH
Three pumps. Not five".

AUNT LORRAINE
Each of us were alone, Jack. Every year, she added...WE added...to our Thanksgiving family.

DAD
Now, here we are. Dysfunctional.

JACK
So, every Thanksgiving you all--

JESSICA
And Christmas.

AUNT LORRAINE
And New Year's.

DAD
And the Super Bowl.

MOM
And some Friday nights.

SARAH
Friends are the family you choose.
We found each other. I'm sorry I--

Jack holds up his hand. Shakes his head.

JACK
You all lied to me. I can't sit
here and pretend that--

Sarah covers her face. The group braces for the scolding.

JACK (CONT'D)
I like the Cowboys. I'm a Steelers
fan.

They beam. Laugh. DAD throws a dinner roll. Jack blocks it.

JACK (CONT'D)
See that, Dad? Defense! You don't
know what that even is!

Smiles and happy gestures around the table.

INT. LIVING ROOM

The group wear coats. Each holding a box of leftovers.

They all lean in as Sarah snaps a group selfie.

They hug goodbyes. Head outside.

Jack and Sarah sit on the couch.

She leans into him. Rests her head on his shoulder.

He takes her hand. She squeezes back. They smile.

Jack grabs the remote control.

JACK
Planes, Trains, and Automobiles?

SARAH
Anything but more football.

Jack starts the movie. Kisses her forehead.

JACK
Maybe we add a dog next year?

Sarah shrugs. Closes her eyes. Laughs.

The wall behind the sofa. A gallery of framed photos.

- Sarah as a little girl. With her original family.
- Sarah's graduation. Alone.
- Sarah in scrubs. Alone.
- Sarah holding a key in front of her home. Alone.
- Sarah and Aunt Lorraine. Cozy Thanksgiving for two.
- Sarah, Aunt Lorraine, and Dad on the couch. Football on TV.
- Sarah, Aunt Lorraine, Dad, and Mom at the table.
- Sarah, Aunt Lorraine, Dad, Mom, and Jessica at the table.
- An empty frame awaits this year's photo.