

INT. PATTISON-SCHNAPPS HOUSEHOLD - MORNING

DWIGHT PATTISON (content to be coasting into his mid-40s) and HAROLD SCHNAPPS (not letting his 30s go without a fight) are asleep in bed. Dwight's eyes snap open.

DWIGHT
(whisper-yelling)
THE ELF!

Dwight sits upright, terror on his face, shakes Harold awake.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
Did you do Peppermint?

HAROLD
(groggily)
Who?

DWIGHT
The ELF!

Harold paws at the bedside table, still half-asleep.

HAROLD
Where's my iPad?

DWIGHT
Peppermint! The elf! Did you do
him? Yes or no?

HAROLD
No. I did not do the mother-fu--

DWIGHT
Bleep, bleep, bleepity, bleep.
(sing-songy)
Swear when you're all alone, and
you'll swear when the kid's at home.

Dwight leaps from bed in his PJs, tiptoes down the hall and peeks in on JAKE (6), asleep.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
Thank God! He's still asleep!

Harold pulls a leopard skin robe on over his too-tight boxer-briefs and follows Dwight down the stairs.

HAROLD
(nonplussed)
Lucky us! Yet another chance to
trick our child into believing a
doll flies to the North Pole every
night to narc him out to Santa.

DWIGHT

If you were going to be like this,
why even promise you'd do him?

Downstairs, Harold follows Dwight to a bookshelf where PEPPERMINT the toy elf (slender, eternally youthful) sits and stares at them with a creepy self-righteous smile.

Dwight pulls a chair over to the bookcase to reach for the Elf, but Harold stops him.

HAROLD

No, no. It's my turn.

Harold steps on the chair, takes PEPPERMINT down and walks to the living room, about to place the Elf on the mantel.

DWIGHT

Not there. He has to be high enough
that Jake can't reach him.

Harold shoots a look at Dwight.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)

It's Elf on the Shelf 101.

HAROLD

Jesus, the person who came up with
this scam must have had wall-to-wall
shelving. I'll just put him back
where he was then.

DWIGHT

NO! Then Jake will think he didn't
fly back to the North Pole!

Harold walks into the kitchen, and puts the elf on top of the fridge.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)

Not on the fridge! I put him there
on Wednesday!

HAROLD

I don't buy that a dude who always
wears the same boring outfit would
care so much about being in a new
spot every day. He just doesn't
scream variety, y'know?

Dwight snatches PEPPERMINT back from Harold.

DWIGHT

You weren't ready for this kind of
responsibility. I knew it.

HAROLD

Don't make this about me.

DWIGHT

Well, you only had one day this whole month to do the Elf, and---

HAROLD

Please stop saying "do" the Elf. Listen, I'm on board with all the one-day delusions. Santa? The Easter Bunny? The Tooth Fairy? No problem. But this Elf on the Shelf all-December-long marathon?

DWIGHT

We're the magic makers. It's our job.

HAROLD

Who thought this elf bullshit up anyway? It reeks of a stay-at-home mom who used to be on the CEO fast-track but gave it all up to be with her kids.

DWIGHT

Was that a jab at me? 'Cause I decided to stay home when he was a baby?

But Harold doesn't hear this. His attention is elsewhere.

HAROLD

My iPad!

Harold spots his iPad on the kitchen counter.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

It's in camera mode. It was recording. Jake must've taken it.

DWIGHT

That's so sweet. He wanted to catch the elf in the act!

HAROLD

Not the elf. Us.

Dwight sits down, dejected, Elf in hand.

DWIGHT

Oh no! He's only six. He's too young to stop believing.

HAROLD

A spy cam. Wow, that Montessori preschool really paid off.

DWIGHT

Shut up. This is terrible!

HAROLD

Are you kidding me? We should congratulate the little dude for his critical thinking skills!

DWIGHT

I never thought I'd have a chance to play Santa, let alone Elf on the Shelf. I just don't want it to be over yet.

HAROLD

Oh sweetie. I know.

Harold gets it, puts his arm around Dwight, as JAKE (6) walks downstairs in his PJs.

JAKE

Hi Dads.

Panicked that Jake will see PEPPERMINT, Dwight opens Harold's robe, stuffs the Elf down Harold's boxer-briefs, and ties the robe up again.

HAROLD

(whispering to Dwight)

Oh, this is what you meant about doing the elf.

Dwight groans at Harold's joke.

JAKE

You found my trap.

DWIGHT

Your trap?

JAKE

I started thinking. If my elf and all the other elves are flying home at the same time every night, shouldn't there be some kind of place like an airport to make sure they don't bump into each other?

DWIGHT

Sounds like a good idea.

HAROLD
Elf Traffic Control!

JAKE
But then Zach at school told me that
moms and dads move the elf. So I
wanted to test it out myself. You
don't move the elf, do you Daddies?

Harold hands the iPad to Jake.

HAROLD
You had to find out eventually.

Dwight looks at Harold, betrayed. Jake deftly swipes and
handles the iPad, the way only a 6-year-old can, and cues up
the video he recorded.

JAKE
Hey! It recorded for a bit, but
then it went black. Where is he?

Jake looks around the house.

HAROLD
You can look all you want, Jake, but
you won't find him.

Jake races from room to room, tears streaming down his face.

JAKE
Peppermint! He's not here!

HAROLD
You're a smart kid, Jake. Why do you
think that is?

DWIGHT
Harold! Don't!

HAROLD
He's old enough for the truth, Dwight.

DWIGHT
Don't listen to Daddy, Jake.

Dwight has never been angrier.

HAROLD
The secret is...the magic doesn't
work if you don't believe. When you
set the iPad up, Peppermint knew you
were testing him.

Dwight is touched.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

And also, you should never take
Daddy's iPad without asking.

JAKE

Will Peppermint ever come back?

Harold looks at Dwight, smiling.

HAROLD

Peppermint has been here every day
this month, hasn't he?

JAKE

Yes. And sometimes after school
while Daddy is making my snack, I
talk to him. Like on Wednesday, I
asked him to sit on top of the fridge.
And he did!

HAROLD

I bet if you show him you believe,
he'll be back tomorrow. Now go put
Daddy's iPad back in our room.

Jake hugs Harold and Dwight and runs upstairs.

DWIGHT

Thanks.

HAROLD

Thank you. For making the magic
happen every day. By the way, I
knew there'd be no space for him to
record a video all night long. That
iPad is already chock-a-block full
of all his mother-bleepin' video
games.

Dwight hugs Harold.

DWIGHT

Hey! Is that an elf in your pants or
are you just happy to see me?