

FILMTREATMENT

The Christmas Ride

Logline: A family falls apart over the usual things but then is reconciled, primarily due to a mysterious mountaintop Christmas light display and the powerful will of a determined young woman.

Screenplay by Edie Hand, Don Keith, and Dave Alan Johnson
Inspired by *The Ride* novels by Edie Hand and Don Keith

The Warner family has mixed feelings about their annual Christmas tradition of spending the holiday each year at Gatlinburg in the Smoky Mountains. What was conceived as a heartwarming family get-away seems to always fall short.

Robert is an emerging music producer and a workaholic. Meg is concerned about the rising tension in her relationship with her husband and his driven, single-minded determination to save and succeed in the music-industry business he took over from his father-in-law. Their children, Edie and Terry, typical teens, are frustrated with each year leaving Memphis, their new gifts, their dog Racket, and their friends.

They spend most of the car ride to Gatlinburg squabbling with each other. However, unlike the icy relationship of their parents, Terry and Edie do like each other (sometimes) and when they reach their destination Terry has a special surprise for Edie. He leads her on a Christmas ride on horseback up a mountainside to show her a beautiful but mysterious display of Christmas lights.

The vista is identical to a cherished Christmas card of their mother's, a gift from her own mother that she sets on their mantel every year. The remarkably beautiful display of lights covers half the mountaintop but can only be seen from one unique vantage point. Nobody knows who puts on the display or why. It's a mystery that forges a bond between brother and sister and one that will ultimately help reunite their family.

The Warner family—several years later—inevitably falls apart. Robert's and Meg's marriage finally snaps. They are divorced. Robert moves to Los Angeles and Meg remains in Tennessee. The events also tear Terry and Edie apart. Terry follows his father to California for college. Edie still lives in Memphis with her mother as she finishes high school.

Edie struggles with the rift in her family. She blames her father. Terry has chosen to blame his mother, driving a wedge between brother and sister.

As a new Christmas approaches, Edie decides the situation must be addressed and she, without her mother's knowledge, sets out alone—except for Racket, her dog—on a perilous drive across the country to Los Angeles. Her trip is threatened by a blizzard and some rough characters she runs into along the way, but she forges her way through all obstacles to be with her brother on Christmas. While it's great to see Terry and to spend Christmas with him, she is determined to challenge him, to get him to patch things up with their mom.

Edie plans to avoid her father on the trip, but Terry quickly squashes that notion. Edie is forced to confront her dad. Though it doesn't go well at first, Edie and her father finally find a breakthrough. Each begins to listen to the other. Through honest communication, grace is extended, and truths are shared. Edie's words touch her father deeply and provide him a pathway to reconsider his actions. Robert surprises both Edie and Terry when he decides to sell his now successful music company and return to his Tennessee roots. He wants to win back his wife's confidence and her heart. With help from Edie and Terry, he begins to do just that, in courtship and rekindling of lost love that none of them would have thought possible.

The next Christmas, the Warners are back in Gatlinburg in a beautiful new condo Robert has bought for them. Meg is supposed to be there, too, but told the kids she had to remain behind to care for their ill grandmother, Grandma Alice. Robert and Meg are not officially back together yet, but Edie and Terry are very aware that their parents have been dating like a couple of teenagers. Edie and Terry had plans to push it over the top on this trip. On Christmas night, the siblings and their parents were to take a horseback ride together up the mountainside to share—for the first time as a family—the inspiring view of the enigmatic lights. Now, to their disappointment, Meg will not be there. Still, they decide to take their dad up the mountain.

But that ride becomes so much more. As Robert, Terry and Edie enjoy the lights in a bitter-sweet moment, family and friends begin to appear in the mountain meadow. So does their mother. And Grandma Alice suddenly recovered.

Unbeknownst to Edie and Terry, Robert and Meg's relationship is already 'over the top.' And all of those people are present to be a part of Robert and Meg remarrying there in the glow of the stunning light display. The surprise is on Edie and Terry. And they are thrilled.

Edie, as happy as she's ever been, learns the who and the why of the amazing Christmas light display on the mountaintop, and why it is meant only for those who most need the blessing the lights offer. What she discovers is an even stranger twist, one that only adds to the beauty and miracle of it all. And especially when the Warner family find that they need the memory of those lights even more than ever.