

LIFE ON LIBERTY STREET

SYNOPSIS

Denise DeFiore (Annabeth Gish) is an emergency room nurse and divorced mother of 10-year-old Sam (Galvin Chapman). She's a take-charge type who is good at her job, but is a bit jaded and not one to suffer fools gladly. These are qualities that allow her to take over and save the life of a gunshot victim when an in-over-his-head medical intern freezes. Her fast actions also cost Denise her job when the young doctor files a complaint that, even though she did the right thing medically, she didn't follow protocol. Instead of accepting a two-week, no-pay suspension, Denise walks out. Needing a new job and needing it fast, she accepts a position as a temp nurse at Liberty Street, a transitional care facility that helps prepare brain trauma injury patients for life in the outside world.

Denise gets the lay of the land from Liberty Street director Lucy Zane (Wendy Phillips). She quickly learns that all eight resident patients received brain injuries either through accident or illness. Denise is also introduced to the residents, including troubled Rick Spencer (Ethan Embry). A boyishly handsome young man in his mid-20s, Rick was a star athlete and a 150 IQ academic whiz before suffering severe brain damage in an auto accident at age 16. His physical recovery is complete, but he experiences memory lapses and emotional outbursts. Most of the time he wears a fedora and trench coat in an attempt to emulate Humphrey Bogart, whom he believes "knows everything." Rick's words often come out scrambled. Trying to come off as suave, he calls Denise "a real potato," instead of tomato.

Meanwhile, there's tension at home for Denise, in large part because her ex-husband, Mitch (Bruce Thomas) has a wealthy new girlfriend who could be a stay-at-home mom for Sam. The only male role model in Denise's life is her Uncle Gil (Richard Costanzo), owner of a local pizza parlor/donut shop.

At work, Denise has to step in when Rick attacks Derek (Silas Weir Mitchell), a fellow patient who refers to the very sensitive Rick as "retarded." She also strikes up a friendship with Jake (Brett Cullen), the doctor who visits Liberty Street every week to treat the patients. There are sparks and some flirting between them, but that's as far as she lets it go. Late that evening, Rick apologizes to Denise for the fight she had to break up. She recognizes that his remembering something that happened hours earlier is a major breakthrough.

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Richard Spencer (Ed Begley, Jr.), Rick's very rich and very busy attorney father, visits Liberty Street. Upset about the fight his son had, he is ready to take him home. "I have an extremely busy law practice. When I go to work in the morning, I want to know that my son's world is under control." Lucy Zane urges Mr. Spencer not to give up on the facility, but her arguments fall on deaf ears. Then Denise pops into the office to save the day, blurting out that she has gotten Rick a job at her Uncle Gil's pizza parlor/donut shop. Rick is ecstatic; Mr. Spencer is wary, but begrudgingly agrees to give it a try.

Denise teaches Rick how to take the city bus to the pizza parlor/donut shop and introduces him to her Uncle Gil. Gil demonstrates the art of making pizzas. Rick is quite a sight in the kitchen, as he insists on wearing his fedora. And his short-term memory loss makes his job performance sub-par. Sam comes to the rescue, developing a pizza-making routine that Rick will be able to remember and master. As a result, Sam and Rick become fast friends. On payday, in fact, Rick insists on buying his new friend a football with his earnings.

Rick goes home to spend the weekend with his father. They have plans to visit the planetarium, although Mr. Spencer quickly disappoints his son when work takes priority and their outing is canceled. Mr. Spencer seems ambivalent about Rick's progress and refuses to allow his son to control his own life.

On Rick's next day of work, a robber pulls a gun on Gil. Rick doesn't fully comprehend what's going on. When the robber impatiently says, "The money now, retard," Rick loses his temper, smacks the gun away, tackles the robber and beats him up. This, of course, rates local news coverage and Rick is hailed as a hero, although his on-air interview with the reporter goes awry when he stares blankly into the camera.

Back at Liberty Street, Rick's father is seething mad. "Rick could have been killed," Mr. Spencer says. "But he wasn't," Denise counters. Mr. Spencer, who isn't accustomed to people standing up to him, says he is taking Rick home with him. But Rick refuses to go. "Denise, do I have to?" "It's your decision, Rick," she tells him. And he stands up to his father, declaring, "Here. I live here. Liberty Street." As Mr. Spencer leaves, it is clear that Denise has made an enemy.

On another day, Rick leaves the shop and approaches the limousine parked across the street. He tells his father, who has been observing him at work for weeks, to leave him alone. Meanwhile, when Mitch suggests to Denise that Sam spend Christmas with him and his girlfriend at her family's ski house back East, Denise gets upset.

Later, back at Liberty Street, Rick insists that Denise teach him how to drive a car.

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As the Liberty Street residents are preparing to celebrate Christmas, Lucy Zane warns Denise that Rick has a crush on her. "He has the body of a 25-year-old man and he's going through adolescence. Think about it." But Denise dismisses the warning. Denise, meanwhile, has a bit of a crush on Jake, the Liberty Street doctor, and the feeling is mutual. They start dating, but their relationship soon sparks feelings of jealousy in Rick. Denise temporarily smoothes things over by inviting him to spend Christmas at her home. Later, she also approaches Mr. Spencer and invites him to her home for Christmas, too. He accepts and her intervention turns out to be a success, as father and son form a fragile truce on Christmas day; the Spencers even get to enjoy a few minutes of catch with a football.

On New Year's Eve, Rick and Derek, who now lives on his own, go out on the town. They go into a bar, where an attractive young woman approaches Rick and asks him to dance. Although his dance steps leave much to be desired, the woman clearly likes Rick and kisses him – an experience he is emotionally ill-equipped to deal with. He panics and makes a hasty exit. Days later, at Liberty Street, Rick jealously pulls Jake away from Denise. When Denise tries to talk to Rick about her relationship with Jake, Rick grabs her and kisses her. At that very moment, the worst possible timing, Rick's father enters the office and gets the wrong idea. "I don't know if there's a law against a nurse exploiting a patient, but there should be!" he says. "It's not what you think," Denise protests. But Mr. Spencer doesn't believe her. He takes Rick away from Liberty Street and, later that night, Rick overhears him discussing a plan to take his son on an extended trip and have him declared incompetent. When Rick hears that, he decides to run away.

Rick is determined to find Denise, convinced she can fix any situation. With Derek's help, he learns she has quit Liberty Street and gone back to work in an ER, although he isn't told which one. Rick sets out to track her down, taking the bus to hospital after hospital. Meanwhile, once he discovers his son is missing, Mr. Spencer is out of his mind with worry. Still believing the worst of Denise, he leaps to the conclusion that she has taken him and suggests to the police that she has kidnapped him.

Rick, still hunting for the ER where Denise works, happens upon an idling empty car, its driver having stepped out to withdraw money from a cash machine. Rick gets a bright idea. He gets in the car and drives away. Meanwhile, at the ER, Denise is unloading on Mitch about Sam's desire to live with him. Mitch doesn't argue back, though. He merely says, "Denise, look at me. I'm not going to take him away from you. You're his mother. I wouldn't do that." Meanwhile, Sam is watching TV in the ER lounge and sees a news report about Rick that says he has been missing for an entire day and stolen a car. He rushes to tell his mother. Just moments later, Rick, behind the wheel of the stolen vehicle, arrives in the alley behind the ER. "You have to help me," Rick

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tells Denise. "My father is going to make people think I'm ..." He struggles with the word "incompetent," but Denise immediately fills in the blank. Amidst all of the chaos, Sam winds up standing in the path of an oncoming truck. Rick, the former athlete, dives for Sam, grabs him, turns his back to the truck and takes the brunt of the impact himself.

In the hospital, Denise is no longer a nurse – she's a concerned mom and loved one. Her son is okay and Rick will be, too. He was lucky enough to suffer only minor injuries. Then Mr. Spencer shows up, fuming. "Before my attorney arrives," he tells Denise, "you might want to give me an explanation." Denise, never one to back down, tells him that Rick overheard his father's plans. Mr. Spencer is devastated and embarrassed by his actions. He confesses to Denise that he feels responsible for the automobile accident that took his wife's life and left Rick with a traumatic brain injury. He tearfully admits that he fears Rick's memory will come back – and he will blame his father for the accident.

Realizing that his own grief and guilt have driven a wedge between him and his son, Mr. Spencer takes the first tentative step toward mending the relationship. As he joins Rick at his bedside, Denise steps away to place a phone call to Jake. "Are you free for dinner?" she asks nervously. Then a smile appears on her face, making it clear that he has said yes and that all is forgiven.

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