

# THE HOLIDAY BLEND

Written by

Steven Clark & Erik Gagnon

Steamroller138@gmail.com  
Bigegagnon@aol.com

ACT ONE

**EXT. HART'S PASS, MAIN STREET - DAY**

Seasonally spectacular storefront windows and silver lights with evergreen garland around every available street lamp.

A Balsam Fir is hoisted into place in the town square as --

SHELBY ANDERSON (30), wrapped in a pea coat and scarf, crosses the street with a shopping bag in one hand and a stylish tote in the other. She channels her inner Mary Tyler Moore as she hops the curb and bounces into --

**INT. THE PORCHLIGHT CAFE - DAY**

Where she's greeted by a bustling, open concept cafe. SERVERS traverse the floor and coffee grinders whir amidst the Christmas finery.

From behind--

CASEY (O.S.)  
Table for one?

Shelby spins with a huge grin and embraces her sister, CASEY (28), a diligent taskmaster in a white chef's coat, her auburn hair twisted up into a bees nest.

SHELBY  
Hey, little sister!

Goes to hug her.

CASEY  
Careful. You'll get covered in flour.

SHELBY  
Dump a pot of sauce on me! What do I care?

CASEY  
So, how was Hawaii?

SHELBY  
Oh, it was beautiful. The coffee bean farms there are marvelous. Did you get the shipment of beans I sent over?

CASEY  
All eight sacks.

SHELBY  
Awesome! Can't wait till we try out  
that holiday blend. Hey, check this  
out.

Shelby reaches in her bag, pulls out Christmas ornaments.

SHELBY (CONT'D)  
This is Santa wearing a leis,  
Frosty in a grass skirt and, my  
favorite, hulu dancing Misses  
Claus.

CASEY  
Oh, they're so cute! Well, Mele  
Kalikimaka to you, too. I guess you  
had a good time.

SHELBY  
Well, I was there on business,  
Case.

CASEY  
You're telling me you didn't find  
any time to hit a white sandy beach  
with sparkling blue water?

Shelby pinches her fingers close together.

SHELBY  
Well, maybe a little bit.

CASEY  
That's what I thought. That's the  
third business trip you've been on  
this year.

SHELBY  
Still, nothing beats the comforts  
of home. Mom and Dad around?

Casey points to a table.

CASEY  
Dad's chatting up some of the  
locals, and Mom's out shopping for  
more Christmas decorations.

SHELBY  
You mean blandishment? She calls  
them blandishments.

CASEY

And never lets us forget it.

Shelby heads over to a side area of the cafe, set up as a gourmet coffee shop. Expensive machines, ornate carafes.

A lone BARISTA in an apron yawns.

Casey joins her.

SHELBY

The coffee side's not looking too busy, huh?

Casey waffles. This is awkward.

CASEY

It was busy earlier. Buying the space from next door was a big undertaking. Like anything, it needs time.

SHELBY

(not convinced, but)  
I guess so.

Just then, TIM (57) ambles over, kisses Shelby's cheek.

TIM

Hey! When did you get in?

SHELBY

Dad, why's the coffee shop look so... lonely?

Tim steals an uncomfortable glance at Casey.

TIM

It was busy earlier. So, how about some lunch? You must be famished from your flight.

SHELBY

Not really. I swiped an extra bag of peanuts from the guy next to me.

**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE, DINING ROOM - LATER**

Shelby, Casey and Tim at a table jammed with a menu's worth of food and drink.

Shelby tears into a loaf of bread.

SHELBY

So, I struck a deal with the owner of Island Haven for our beans, not to mention Cedar Creek Market over in West End.

CASEY

Ooh. That's a big get.

SHELBY

You bet it is. But things are slowing down, thankfully. I've got a few weeks to myself before Christmas. Couldn't have come at a better time, though. I haven't even started my shopping.

TIM

I have an idea.

(to Casey)

Why don't you knock off for the day? Remy's got the kitchen, I'll keep an eye on the front. You go shopping with your sister.

CASEY

I don't know, Dad. There's still a ton of stuff to do.

SHELBY

Oh, come on. It'll be fun.

CASEY

Nah. I better stay here. We'll have plenty of time to catch up.

MADELINE (54), their mom, strides in, holding two large bags with garland and lights spilling over the side.

MADELINE

Shelby! Welcome home!

They embrace.

SHELBY

Hi, Mom.

MADELINE

How was your trip?

SHELBY

Oh, it was great. Got a lot done.

MADELINE

That's wonderful. Girls, I'm so glad you're both here. I just picked up some extra blandishment for the store. You can help me decorate.

CASEY

(to Shelby)

So, umm... you wanted to go shopping?

**EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY**

A rural landscape straight from a Currier and Ives as a lone car navigates it's twisty, evergreen-lined roads.

**INT. CAR - DAY**

Expensive appointments and leather seats. Let It Snow plays on the radio as --

EVAN CHASE (30), red flannel rolled to his elbows under a thin down vest. His rustic attire underscores his GQ looks. Casual never looked so thought out.

He scats to the music as he drives.

A call comes in over the Bluetooth. He groans when he sees the screen -- MAYA CALLING.

EVAN

Maya. To what do I owe the pleasure? On my vacation, no less.

MAYA (O.S.)

I thought you said you were taking a sabbatical?

EVAN

Think of it as a long weekend, Maya. One that's going to last, oh I don't know, many consecutive long weekends. And week days. And then a few more after that.

A large SKETCH PAD sits on the seat, next to a box of charcoal pencils.

MAYA (O.S.)

Evan, don't say that.

EVAN

Maya, I need some time. Is that so bad?

MAYA (O.S.)

Of course not, but we need to talk about rehabbing your image. And we need to do it, like, yesterday. We need--

EVAN

Maya, Alden Vale bailed on me. Understand? There is nothing left. Finished. Over.

**STUDIO (FLASHBACK)**

A QUICK FLASH of Evan wearing nothing but tight fitting underwear at a photo shoot -- A CAMERA POP -- The majestic Alden Vale logo slithered across the screen.

EVAN

I may be wearing nothing but my man layers, but at least they're Alden Vale's.

Wink!

**BACK TO**

**INT. CAR (DRIVING)**

MAYA (O.S.)

It's not over. If you weren't so concerned about your Instagram--

EVAN

I didn't even post that picture! Look, I've made all the necessary mea culpa's and they still fired me. Right now I'm just concerned with going--

He stops himself.

MAYA (O.S.)

Going where?

EVAN

Somewhere.

MAYA (O.S.)

Evan! Tell me where you're going.  
I'll drag you back if I have to.

Through Evan's windshield, a rustic sign appears -- *Welcome to Hart's Pass, Utah!*

EVAN

(makes static-like sounds)  
Oh no. Maya - I think we're  
breaking up - bad signal - gotta  
go!

Info screen reads CALL ENDED. The Christmas music returns, and Evan, relieved, sings along as --

**EXT. CAR (DRIVING) - DAY**

He continues his journey, ever closer to town.

**EXT. MAIN STREET, TOWN SQUARE - LATER**

Evan exits his car and takes a short walk past the Christmas tree, now firmly in place and being trimmed.

Across the way is the MIDDLEBURY INN, a festively adorned Greek Revival that's the showpiece of town.

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN - DAY**

Evan walks in to a Christmas wonderland. It's like *sugar-rush-Santa* decorated this place.

ANDREW (O.S.)

Evan!

Evan turns to see ANDREW BURGERON (34), a quick-witted guy with hair like that dude from *Ancient Aliens*.

EVAN

Hey! What's going on?

They give the official guy handshake/half-hug combo.

ANDREW

Great, man. What's it been..?

EVAN

Since college, bro. So, you own  
this place, huh?

ANDREW

Yeah. For a couple years now. It's like a dream come true.

EVAN

That's awesome.

ANDREW

Yeah. And hey, everywhere I look, I see you face, man. Sometimes more. That's absolutely amazing! Who'd have thought?

EVAN

It's not all it seems.

ANDREW

Still...

EVAN

So, do you have my room set up?

ANDREW

Well, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Your reservation didn't come through till late and your room was already booked.

EVAN

Oh, no. You're kidding?

ANDREW

Unfortunately, no. But, for an old friend, I think I can pull some strings.

Andrew goes behind the counter, flips through some pages of a guest ledger. Then he pulls out a rotary phone and dials.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hi! Misses Johnson. Andrew Burgeron from the Middlebury. How Are you? Good, good. Look, I have some bad news. We've had to cancel your reservation. I know, I know...

Evan's eyes go wide. He waves his hands, trying to get Andrew's attention.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

(into phone)

I'm sorry, we've had a flood. No, no.

(MORE)

ANDREW (CONT'D)

The inn is fine, but your room is underwater. Yeah. Again, please accept my apologies. Of course. No, non-refundable. I'm sorry. Merry Christmas.

(hangs up the phone)  
All set!

EVAN

My God, why'd you do that! Dude!

ANDREW

Come on, don't be like that. We're old friends.

Evan doesn't quite know how to react. Then --

EVAN

You're joking, aren't you?

ANDREW

Burned you so bad! Phones not even plugged in.

Andrew picks up the receiver, makes like he's talking.

EVAN

Good one.

ANDREW

Thank you, thank you. So, flying solo?

EVAN

Sadly, yes.

ANDREW

Thought so. Hardly ever book the singles.

**EXT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - MORNING**

Shelby at the front door, peers through the window to see Casey taking chairs off the tables.

She turns the key in the lock and lets herself in.

**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - CONTINUOUS**

Piano jazz Christmas music plays over the speakers.

CASEY  
You're up early.

SHELBY  
You know what Mom always says -  
lose an hour in the morning and  
you'll spend all day looking for  
it.

Casey smiles.

CASEY  
Mom loves her colloquialisms. So  
what brings you here?

Shelby steps closer.

SHELBY  
That look you gave Dad when we were  
talking about the coffee shop.  
There's something you're not  
telling me.

#### **STORE ROOM**

Casey turns on the light, illuminating stacks and stacks of  
coffee bean sacks piled high. They're everywhere.

SHELBY  
What's all this?

CASEY  
The coffee shop hasn't taken off  
the way we planned. All the  
machines, the added payroll. And,  
honestly, you haven't really been  
here to help oversee it.

SHELBY  
That's because I've been working.

CASEY  
We've all been working, Shelby.

#### **DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Shelby, Casey and Tim sit at a table.

SHELBY  
What about advertising?

TIM

We did that, but our budget is stretched thin as it is.

CASEY

We figured word of mouth, especially here, would have sufficed.

SHELBY

So where does this leave us?

TIM

We're about to miss a payment.

Shelby SIGHS. Dejected.

SHELBY

Oh, Dad-- This is all my fault. I pushed so hard for it.

TIM

We all knew the risks. It's not your fault, Shelby.

CASEY

Actually, it kinda is.

SHELBY

Oh, sure, pin it all on me.

CASEY

I didn't pin it on you. You pinned it on you. Kinda like the time you set fire to my easy bake oven, almost burned the kitchen down and then blamed me.

SHELBY

That is not true!

TIM

Come on, come on! Look, we gotta think out of the box here. We--

*KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK* on the outside glass.

**EXT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - CONTINUOUS**

Evan cups his hands around his face to cut the glare as he looks into the cafe.

Sees Shelby, Casey and Tim at a table.

EVAN  
Are you open?

Inside, Tim points to his watch and mouths "we're closed," but Evan remains.

**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE**

Tim rises.

TIM  
Let me see what this guy wants.

He leaves the room. Shelby and Casey remain, arms folded and facing away from each other.

SHELBY  
You're lucky I don't tell Dad about the time you snuck out of the house to go to Joe Harrigan's party.

Casey GASPS.

CASEY  
You wouldn't dare!

SHELBY  
Oh no?

LAUGHTER is heard from the front of the restaurant.

Shelby peers around the corner. Then Casey.

Tim and Evan are chatting it up like old mates.

She looks curiously at Casey, and they both go over.

**FOYER**

TIM  
I can fire up the grill and make you some breakfast, Evan.

EVAN  
That's not necessary.

Tim turns to find his daughters pressed up against him.

Shelby locks eyes with Evan, and it's like time stops. It's this look of familiarity. This look of *hey, don't I kinda sorta know you from somewhere?*

He extends his hand.

EVAN (CONT'D)  
Evan Chase.

SHELBY  
Shelby Anderson.

CASEY  
*The Evan Chase?*

He appears embarrassed.

TIM  
The one and only. In our store. You know I switched to boxer briefs because of you.

EVAN  
Oh. How flattering.

SHELBY  
I'm sorry. Am I missing something here?

Casey squeezes through to shake Evan's hand, though he doesn't break his gaze with Shelby.

CASEY  
(to Shelby)  
Evan Chase? The spokes model for Alden Vale underwear. I'm sorry!  
(gushing)  
Man layers.

EVAN  
Formerly the spokes model for Alden Vale. Unfortunately, I-- we had a bit of a falling out.

Shelby, unimpressed.

SHELBY  
So, what brings you to Hart's Pass? Are you a powder hound?

EVAN  
A what?

CASEY  
You know, a shredder. A ripper.

SHELBY  
A skier.

EVAN

Oh! No, no. That's not me. I took lessons once when I was a kid and fell down doing absolutely nothing. I guess you could say I'm taking a sabbatical of sorts.

SHELBY

Ah.

TIM

Shelby, maybe you could show our guest around town?

SHELBY

Huh?

EVAN

That's okay. I wouldn't want to put you out. I already made you open your doors.

TIM

I'm sure it's no trouble at all. There's lots to see in this pretty little town of ours.

Shelby stands like a deer in the headlights until Casey shoves her awkwardly forward. She glares at her, then clears her throat.

SHELBY

Fine.

**EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY**

Shelby points out locations as she and Evan walk together.

SHELBY

Well, that's pretty much it.  
(points to a restaurant)  
Although they make a great lasagna, I gotta admit.

EVAN

I try to limit my carb intake. But I suppose if you took me there I'd give it a try.

SHELBY

Why would I take you there?

EVAN

Oh, no, I was just saying.

He glances at her, trying to gauge her aloofness.

EVAN (CONT'D)

You know, if I'm taking you away from something, I can wander the streets alone.

SHELBY

It's no trouble, really. Nothing worse than being alone at Christmas. I mean - I'm sorry. I didn't mean to imply you're alone.

EVAN

That's okay. I am alone. Remember?

AUBREY

Right, right.  
(switches gears)  
Here's the men's clothing store.  
This might be more your vibe.

EVAN

(laughs)  
That's exactly the sort of thing I'm trying to avoid.

He strolls past the store front, but Shelby stops to look. Check that. Ogle.

#### **STORE WINDOW**

A life-sized cardboard cutout of Evan in nothing but his briefs, topped with a Santa hat and surrounded by displays of the new line of fashion underwear.

Her jaw drops. Evan reappears beside her.

SHELBY

Is that... YOU?

EVAN

And that's not even my good side.

He walks away. She watches him. My God, he's right. She hustles after.

SHELBY

So, you are like a famous model.

EVAN  
More like infamous.

SHELBY  
But not anymore. You said you and Alden Vale had a bit of a falling out? What happened?

EVAN  
Eh... It's kind of embarrassing. Maybe when I get to know you better.

SHELBY  
Isn't that what we're doing right now?

EVAN  
(laughs)  
Sort of. For now, let's just say I'm a big believer in new doors opening when other's shut. I wouldn't be here now talking to you otherwise.

SHELBY  
If you say so.

A moment of silence as a few snowflakes fall.

EVAN  
So what do you do?

SHELBY  
A coffee bean importer. I travel a lot, visit farms. Make deals. I supply shops across the state. We tried opening a gourmet coffee wing in the family cafe, but it hasn't taken off. Figures. The one time I take a risk it blows up in my face.

EVAN  
Well, sometimes it takes a while for people to recognize something good when they see it.

There's a calmness in his smile. It's comforting.

SHELBY  
Thanks for saying that. We'll see how it plays out.

They're reached the town square at the end of Main Street, where folks hang lights on the Christmas Tree, the lamp posts. Everything they can reach.

EVAN

This sure is a festive little town.

SHELBY

For sure. We'll have to come for the tree lighting-- You, I mean. You'll have to come.

EVAN

You won't be here?

SHELBY

No, I'll be here.

EVAN

Cause if you're here, and I'm here, then we'll be here.

SHELBY

I'm aware of that. I just didn't want you to think...

EVAN

Think what?

They coyly smile at each other.

SHELBY

I think I better be going, that's what I think. I'm supposed to go shopping with my sister.

EVAN

All right. Do you have posted hours in the cafe? You know, in case I need a tour guide again.

SHELBY

Why would you need another tour? You've already seen everything there is to see.

She turns like an actress and sashays away. He watches her, and that's when she turns back, smiles and almost knocks down a SANTA in front of a store front.

She recovers, digs in her purse and throws money in his pot.

Evan's smile reaches his eyes.

*Who is this girl?*

**EXT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - DAY**

A perfect winter morning as Shelby approaches the cafe, says hi to someone as she enters.

**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - CONTINUOUS**

Shelby walks into a mess of boxes stacked on the tables and chairs. They're everywhere. She weaves around them, eventually finding her father sitting alone.

SHELBY  
Dad, what is all this?

TIM  
It's bad, Shelby.

SHELBY  
How? I cancelled your next shipment of beans.

TIM  
No, I'm talking about the bank.

SHELBY  
What about the bank?

TIM  
We're going to miss the payment.

SHELBY  
Ugh. Dad, I have money saved. I could help.

He waves her off.

TIM  
I can't ask you to do that. That's off the table. What else you got?

SHELBY  
I don't know yet. I'd have to think.

TIM  
Well, we better get the wheels turning. This is not a good look.

He scans the gourmet coffee area, rises with a SIGH.

SHELBY

Dad, I don't know what to say.  
There's gotta be a way.

TIM

If you have any ideas, now would be  
a good time. I guess I better get  
this cleaned up. We're gonna be  
open soon.

SHELBY

I'll help you, Dad.  
(picks up a box)  
What is all this anyway?

TIM

Evan sent over a lifetime supply of  
underwear and t-shirts for me.

SHELBY

For you or the entire armed forces?  
There must be a thousand pairs  
here.

TIM

Yeah, he's a good kid.

He picks up a box, carries it away.

Shelby opens a box and pulls out a package. Evan poses on the  
cardboard sleeve, smiling at her.

SHELBY

That's it!

She rushes off.

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN - DAY**

Shelby thrusts the underwear package across the counter into  
Andrew's face.

SHELBY

Have you seen this man?

ANDREW

Not this close to my face.

He takes the package, holds it a safe distance away.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
Oh, yeah, that's him. Looks  
different with his shirt off. Whoa!  
Look at those abs.

SHELBY  
I need his room number.

ANDREW  
Ohh. He warned me about girls like  
you. His Instagram followers.

SHELBY  
It's not like that.

ANDREW  
Of course not. You just show up out  
of the blue with a half-naked  
picture of him.

EVAN (O.S.)  
Shelby?

Evan descends the stairs into the lobby. She snatches the  
underwear package and meets him.

EVAN (CONT'D)  
How'd you find me?

SHELBY  
It's the only inn in town.

EVAN  
Good point. Oh, good. I see the  
underwear shipment came.

SHELBY  
All twelve cases of it.

EVAN  
Cases? Ugh. Did I click the wrong  
box again? I meant to order twelve  
packages.

SHELBY  
Listen, can we talk?

EVAN  
Sure. What's up?

She pulls Evan by the sleeve to the lobby couch in front of  
the fireplace. They sit.

SHELBY

I know we don't know each other particularly well, but my dad's in trouble and it's all my fault. I was hoping you could help.

EVAN

I already gave him twelve cases of underwear. What more can I do?

SHELBY

Well, as helpful as that is, you're a celebrity of sorts. Right? People know you.

EVAN

I guess.

SHELBY

There's a Christmas fair coming up. I was thinking we can set up a booth for the cafe. Give out some coffee samples. You make an appearance, drink the coffee, talk about the different brews. If we can generate some buzz about the coffee, it could boost sales at the cafe. Whaddya say?

Evan considers the offer. Sees the desperation in her eyes.

EVAN

Is this a paying gig?

SHELBY

I can pay you with my tour guide services. Say, an hour of my time.

EVAN

Two hours.

SHELBY

Two?

EVAN

Two hours and you get to keep my underwear.

SHELBY

Ha ha. Good one.

EVAN

Two hours and we have a deal.

SHELBY

You're a tough negotiator.

EVAN

It's a tough business. Not for the  
feint of heart.

Evan holds out his hand, Shelby takes it and they shake.

SHELBY

Good. I'm glad you agreed. So,  
um... How much do you actually know  
about coffee?

Evan tilts his head, clicks his tongue.

EVAN

Not a thing.

Shelby winces playfully.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY**

Shelby waits near the Christmas tree, watching as they add the finishing touches. Someone flips a switch and it lights up bright.

She covers her eyes.

SHELBY  
(calls out)  
Not supposed to see this till  
tonight!

A GUY in a red flannel jacket waves and laughs before the lights are turned off.

EVAN (O.S.)  
Hey you. I brought company.

It's Evan and Andrew.

SHELBY  
Hi, Andrew. Who's watching the inn?

ANDREW  
My handyman, George. He'll be fine  
for a few hours.

SHELBY  
All right then. Thanks. Glad to  
have the extra help.

They head up the street.

EVAN  
So, what do we have to do?

SHELBY  
I'm glad you asked. We have a few  
bags of extra coffee beans that  
have been piling up. We're gonna  
transfer them into mason jars,  
vacuum seal it and put a sticker on  
it. Easy peasy.

EVAN  
Okay. That doesn't sound too bad.

**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE, STORE ROOM - DAY**

Shelby stands in front of Evan and Andrew, whose jaws just hit the floor. Sacks and sacks of coffee beans stacked almost to the ceiling.

ANDREW

Wow. Few bags, huh?

SHELBY

It'll go by quick.

(holds up her phone)

I've got Shelby's Holiday mix all planned out. I'll put in on over the speakers.

EVAN

Oh boy.

SHELBY

And free lunch.

EVAN

Free lunch? Now you're talking.

ANDREW

I think I hear George calling.

Shelby dismisses it. She excitedly pairs her phone with a speaker across the room.

EVAN

(whispers)

Sorry, Andrew.

ANDREW

You owe me big time for this.

**INT. STORE ROOM - LATER**

Boxes of mason jars are filled, plastered with a sticker that reads: PORCHLIGHT HOLIDAY BREW.

The trio sit around the table eating sandwiches. Someone's phone dings, they all check their pockets.

It's Andrew's.

ANDREW

(re: phone screen)

Oh, look. It really is George this time.

(reads text)

(MORE)

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Hey, seriously. He really does need my help. I'm sorry, Shelby.

SHELBY

No, hey, you've done a lot. Thank you so much, Andrew.

ANDREW

It's my pleasure.

Andrew rises from the table, slips on his coat.

EVAN

Thanks, Andrew.

ANDREW

(points)

You owe me.

Evan laughs as Andrew exits.

EVAN

He's a good guy, that Andrew.

SHELBY

Yes, he is. So, I figure maybe a couple more hours of work left.

EVAN

You know, I was thinking. With all this work, I don't think two hours of your tour guide services are gonna be a suitable payment.

SHELBY

Oh, you don't think so, huh?

He shakes his head, a scampish smile on his face.

**INT. ROSSO & VERDE RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

A comfy, laid back vibe. Plates of pasta and meatballs traverse the room in the steady hands of staff.

Evan and Shelby seated at a table, a red and green candle at its center.

EVAN

You weren't kidding. Best lasagna I've ever had.

SHELBY

Told ya.

EVAN

You think we did enough today?

SHELBY

Enough to get started. The fair starts tomorrow. Booth is all set.

EVAN

Do you need help with that, too?

SHELBY

Oh geez. What's it gonna cost me this time? A horse drawn sleigh ride through the park?

EVAN

Free of charge this time.

SHELBY

So, how is it you wound up in Hart's Pass? Did you just close your eyes and drop your finger on a map?

EVAN

My sister and her husband came up one year. They raved about it. Plus, I know Andrew from college.

SHELBY

You know, you were a bit ambiguous on why you left Alden Vale. You said when you get to know me better and, well, here we are.

EVAN

You must not be big on social media.

AUBREY

Not really. For my work, yes. Personally, not so much.

EVAN

Alden Vale had their annual Christmas party a few weeks ago and, let's just say I was enjoying myself a bit too much. Someone dared me to strip down to my Alden Vales and, well, it was the Alden Vale Christmas party.

AUBREY  
(bites her lip)  
Makes sense.

EVAN  
Anyway, they started throwing candy  
canes at me, and... How do I put  
this? One got stuck and was hanging  
precariously in a very delicate  
area...

SHELBY  
I think I got the picture. I mean--

EVAN  
To make a long story short, someone  
took photos, they got posted to  
social media. HR got involved and,  
well, they fired me.

SHELBY  
Wow. I'm sorry that happened to  
you. So, what's next for you?

EVAN  
My agent's working on a few things.  
New gigs and all. I've got money  
saved, so I'm not too concerned  
really. I enjoy the down time.

SHELBY  
Did you go to college to become a  
model?

EVAN  
I went to college for studio art. I  
was into sculpture and photography.  
One day I volunteered to become the  
class model, and the rest is  
history.

SHELBY  
Fascinating.

EVAN  
What did you go to college for?

SHELBY  
Business. It kind of runs in the  
family. My dad always thought I'd  
take over the cafe one day.

EVAN  
But you had other plans?

SHELBY  
You could say that. I've always  
wanted to do my own thing, though.

EVAN  
That's admirable. Everything's  
kinda connected anyway, wouldn't  
you say?

He interlocks his fingers to illustrate the point.

SHELBY  
I just about believe the very same  
thing.

**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - LATER**

Shelby and Evan stroll towards the tree, where a large crowd  
has gathered for the lighting.

EVAN  
What's going on here?

SHELBY  
Nothing. People here in Hart's Pass  
like to randomly gather sometimes.  
It's a thing.

Evan laughs.

EVAN  
Tree lighting?

SHELBY  
Good guess. You ever been to a tree  
lighting before?

EVAN  
I grew up in San Diego and we had  
them there, but this is a bit  
different from what I'm used to. In  
a good way, though. The whole scene  
is like something out of a Norman  
Rockwell painting. Beautiful. I'd  
love to sketch it.

A certain twinkle in his eyes as he speaks.

SHELBY  
You sketch?

EVAN

Yeah. Charcoal and pencil.  
Portraits, landscapes. Stuff like  
that. I learned a little technique  
before I switched careers and--

SHELBY

Hey!

She points. They're about to light the tree. A small stage is  
set near the gazebo and a countdown has begun.

All eyes fixed on the majestic tree.

Except Evan. He's looking right at Shelby. Studying her  
facial features. Her hair. Finally, he turns away.

And she looks at him.

*Seven, six, five...*

Now they both look at each other.

EVAN

(smiles)  
What?

SHELBY

(returns his smile)  
What?

He shakes his head. Points.

EVAN

The tree?

*Two, one!*

The tree explodes in brilliant color to the delight of the  
gathered townspeople.

Shelby and Evan tear their gaze away from each other long  
enough to take in the festive sight. Vapor trails from their  
breath. Christmas music in the air.

This is a moment. It's written on their faces.

Something's brewing here, and it ain't coffee.

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN, COMMON AREA - DAY**

It's early. No one's up yet. Except Evan, who sits on a sofa,  
intently shading in a big sketch pad.

**SKETCH PAD**

It's a drawing of the town square, and the Christmas Tree lighting. Two figures, side-by-side, look into each other's eyes. The gazebo in the background.

And it's good. I mean, like, pro-level good.

He adds some detail.

Just then, a rustling across the room as Andrew, his hair wilder than usual, comes into the room.

EVAN  
You're up early.

ANDREW  
Just rolled out of bed.

Evan stares at the man's hair.

EVAN  
So, that's how you do your hair.

Andrew peers over Evan's shoulder.

ANDREW  
Did you just do that?

EVAN  
Yeah.

ANDREW  
Dude, that's seriously good.

EVAN  
(shrugs)  
Eh, I'm just messing around.

ANDREW  
No, for real. If I didn't know any better, I'd say if modelling doesn't work out, you should give this a try.

Andrew nods towards a pile of expensive designer luggage across the room. Gaudy and pretentious. Enough for a family of six.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
Oh, I see her luggage has arrived.

EVAN  
Who?

In storms JANICE HAWTHORNE (38), world traveller with hair that doesn't move and a phone glued to her ear

JANICE

(into phone)

No, I just got in. I hope my office is set up. Great! No, I don't care what McEuen said, that's our offer. Right... Uh, hold on.

She tosses a set of keys to Andrew.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Have the valet park my Range Rover. If there's a scratch on it-- Trust me, you don't even wanna know what's gonna happen. Room key?

Before Andrew can hand her the card, she swipes it and heads upstairs.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Oh, and have the bell hop bring up my luggage.

ANDREW

Um, we don't have a... bell hop.

Heels clacking, she's gone like a summer storm.

EVAN

Who in the world was that?

ANDREW

I'm not quite sure, but I think you better park the Range Rover.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY**

Lots of clamoring among vendors and patrons at the fair. Picture perfect day for gift buying and hot chocolate.

Shelby's behind a table near the Christmas tree. Prime location, but no action. Mason jars filled with beans, dispensers for free samples and a poster advertising the Porchlight Cafe.

Shelby smiles at passersby and tries unsuccessfully to interject their conversations as Casey walks up.

CASEY

How's it going, sis?

SHELBY

Slow. A few free samples, but no one's bought anything yet. And my salesman is late.

CASEY

You mean your date. You guys had a date last night, right?

SHELBY

No! It wasn't a date, it was more of a-- You know? Two friends just hangin' out.

Evan suddenly appears beside her.

EVAN

Who went on a date?

SHELBY

No one!

CASEY

Shelby did.

Evan looks between them, suspicious.

EVAN

Oh? With who?

Casey grins, watching her sister squirm.

SHELBY

Casey, don't you have to get to the cafe?

CASEY

Remy opened. I'm heading there now.  
(to Evan)

By the way, your Christmas catalogue from '23 is some of the best modelling you've ever done. Just saying.

EVAN

Thank you. I always thought the Spring of '22 is where I hit my peak. That was a good swimsuit season.

CASEY

Ooh, I didn't see that one.

If Shelby had ten pairs of eyes they'd all be rolling.

SHELBY

All right. Off you go.

Casey smiles and heads on her way.

EVAN

Sorry I'm late. A few ladies recognized me on the way over. Had to go through a round of selfies. You know how it is.

SHELBY

Oh sure. I get stopped for selfies all the time.

EVAN

(smiling)  
So, how do we do this?

SHELBY

It's easy. You look 'em in the eye, smile and nod. Offer a free sample.

EVAN

Sounds easy.

He clears his throat, announces to the entire town--

EVAN (CONT'D)

Get your coffee here!

Shelby shushes him!

SHELBY

Not like that! This isn't beer at a ball game. We're selling gourmet coffee beans.

EVAN

Right. Well, why don't you show me what to do, and I'll follow your lead?

SHELBY

Okay.

She grabs a jar of beans, showcases it like a Price Is Right model. Smiles, tries to get people's attention.

Evan watches, arms folded, waiting to be impressed. Shelby glances at him, finally asserts herself with two YOUNG WOMEN.

SHELBY (CONT'D)

Excuse me, hi. These are kona coffee beans from Hawaii. We're offering free samples in three flavors. Chocolate, jasmine, and peach. Give it a try.

One woman takes a cup, pours herself a shot. As she drinks, she makes eye contact with Evan and spits out the coffee.

SHELBY (CONT'D)

What? No good?

YOUNG WOMAN #1

It's delicious. I'm just surprised to see him here.

(points to Evan)

Are you...

YOUNG WOMAN #2

Evan Chase!

YOUNG WOMAN #1

From Alden Vale! Can we have a selfie?

They shriek and snuggle up to Evan.

EVAN

Yeah, sure. All right.

He flashes his charm for a few clicks. Then the giggling women start to walk away.

EVAN (CONT'D)  
Hey, don't forget the coffee.

YOUNG WOMAN #1  
I'll take a jar of chocolate.

YOUNG WOMAN #2  
I'll get one jar each.

They throw money onto the table as Shelby hands them jars of beans. They walk away, giggling and posting their photos.

Shelby looks at Evan, who smiles wide and shrugs. She clears her throat, announces to the entire town--

SHELBY  
Get your selfies here! With Alden  
Vale model Evan Chase!

Evan shushes her!

EVAN  
Not like that. These are gourmet  
coffee beans.

They share a smile.

A horde of women surrounds them, thrusting phones at Evan and cash toward Shelby. Selfies first, followed by beans. Shelby and Evan marvel at the sudden madness.

**EXT. OFFICE WINDOW - DAY**

A reflective glass window above the WRITER'S BLOCK BOOKSTORE, looking down on the fair.

**INT. OFFICE - DAY**

Minimal with trendy, feng shui'd accoutrements. An exotic potted plant rests in the corner.

Janice, sharp business attire, sits at her desk, clacking keys a laptop.

**LAPTOP**

"THE END"

She scrolls to the top to reveal a title --

"THE SWEATER THAT LOST IT'S BUTTON" (A Children's Book) by  
JANICE HAWTHORNE

**BACK**

She flashes a warm, satisfied grin as a phone rings next to the laptop. Caller ID reads: "MR. DUGAN." She answers.

JANICE  
(into phone)  
Yes, the office is fine ... No, not yet ... I'm on it as we speak, though ... I need to assess the situation first ... Okay. Will do.

She hangs up, rises and goes to the window where she spies the commotion surrounding Shelby and Evan's table.

**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY**

Janice wades through the crowd, toward Shelby's booth. A swarm of people block her view. As the crowd thins out, Janice steps closer, takes in the details:

Evan signing autographs and taking selfies -- Shelby hands over jars of coffee -- money changing hands.

The poster advertising the Porchlight Cafe. The name registers with Janice. She squints her eyes.

Shelby and Janice make eye contact, then she disappears into the crowd as Shelby keeps making sales.

**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - DAY**

Janice enters. Tim greets her.

TIM  
Table for one?

JANICE  
Yes, please.

He seats her at a bistro set by the window, lays down a menu.

TIM  
I'll give you a minute.

He hustles off toward the kitchen. Janice ignores the menu, takes in the atmosphere.

The cafe is bustling with patrons, no empty seats. Plates and utensils clink. Coffee machines whir. Not what she expected.

Tim returns and sets down a glass of water.

TIM (CONT'D)

Someone will be right with you--

The door opens, Evan rushes in. Looks around, spots Tim.

EVAN

Tim, you won't believe it. We're selling out! I need more beans. Mason jars! Where are they?

TIM

Should be on that shelving unit in the store room.

Evan nods, heads away. Tim looks at Janice.

TIM (CONT'D)

Sorry about that. Do you know Evan Chase?

JANICE

Should I?

TIM

He's the face of Alden Vale mens wear. Sorry. Was the face. He's helping us out today with the Christmas Fair.

JANICE

You don't say?

TIM

Yup. What can I get for you?

JANICE

Just coffee. Black.

Tim nods, walks off.

Janice gets her phone, searches "Evan Chase." Scrolls through the results. Key words from his social media accounts: "Alden Vale model" -- "Glamour photo shoot" -- "Fashion underwear" -- "Most Eligible Bachelors."

Then a video with the tagline: "Alden Vale model candy cane incident."

Janice watches the video. Eyes widen.

Tim delivers the cup of coffee. Quick, she hides her phone.

TIM  
Anything else?

JANICE  
Not yet.

Evan reappears, steering a dolly filled with boxes of mason jars and sacks of coffee beans.

EVAN  
Excuse me. Pardon me. Sorry, there.

He weaves between the tables. Tim hustles to hold the door open for him. Janice sips her coffee and watches.

**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - NIGHT**

Tim flips chairs upside-down on the tables, Casey wipes a counter top. Shelby and Evan sort money at a table.

SHELBY  
Six-twenty. Plus one-ninety. That's eight-ten. And what'd we say this was?

EVAN  
Seventy-seven.

AUBREY  
Then that's eight hundred and eighty-seven dollars.

TIM  
More than enough to cover the payment.

Evan pulls a wad of cash from his pocket, tosses it on the counter.

EVAN  
Oh, yeah. I forgot about this.

SHELBY  
Where'd you get that?

EVAN  
Some of the ladies gave me tips.

SHELBY  
Seriously?

EVAN

Hey, I'm not signing a woman's chest for free.

SHELBY

When did you--? Never mind. Well, that's your money then. You should keep it.

EVAN

If it'll help, take it.

She looks at his tips, notices a few slips of paper mixed in. She reads one.

SHELBY

Phone numbers! Looks like you got more than tips.

EVAN

Part of the job.

She counts the tips. Tim gives him a hearty slap on the back.

TIM

Thanks for all your help today, Evan. I can't believe we got rid of those sacks of coffee beans.

CASEY

Now I can organize the store room the way it ought to be.

Shelby finishes counting, gathers all the cash together.

SHELBY

Not too shabby. You made an extra buck fifty in tips. That puts us a little over a thousand.

TIM

I'll get this in the safe and we'll call it a night.

Tim takes the cash, walks out. Casey slips on her coat.

CASEY

The kitchen's clean. No thanks to you.

SHELBY

Sorry. I was busy counting all the money we made.

CASEY

Just teasing. You guys did an amazing job today. The response outside sent business inside, too. You really came through, sis.

SHELBY

As much as I'd like to take the credit, Evan was the star of this show.

EVAN

Once they try your coffee I'm sure they'll forget all about me.

**EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT**

Evan and Shelby walk slowly together. Everything's closed, but storefronts still glow with Christmas lights.

SHELBY

You really have a way with people.

EVAN

Thanks. And here all along I thought it was my pipes, pecs and turtle shell abs.

Shelby laughs heartily.

SHELBY

I'm serious. You have a gift.

EVAN

Well, thanks for saying that. You weren't so bad yourself.

SHELBY

I try.

Shelby slips a little on the pavement. Evan reaches over and helps her right herself.

EVAN

So what's this I hear about you talking to your Christmas ornaments?

She shoots him a quick look.

SHELBY

Ugh! I'm gonna kill Casey.

EVAN  
(laughs)  
No really. I'm curious.

Shelby SIGHs, reaches into her bag and pulls out a small REINDEER ornament. She holds it up.

SHELBY  
Well, this is Lunabelle. She's new to my collection. She-- Do you really want to hear this?

EVAN  
Yeah, of course I do.

SHELBY  
She got passed over to lead Santa's sleigh this year, even though she's extremely qualified. Unlike Rudolph, she leads with instinct and savvy.

EVAN  
Rudolph is so overrated.

She places the ornament back in her bag.

SHELBY  
Anyway, I keep her with me before I introduce her to all the other ornaments. Kinda eases the transition. But I'm sure she'll be on my tree soon enough. Speaking of which, I still need to get one.

EVAN  
We could do that tomorrow.

SHELBY  
We?

EVAN  
Yeah, I'll carry it home for you?

SHELBY  
They strap it to the roof of the car, silly.

EVAN  
And how do you get it down?

SHELBY  
Very carefully.

EVAN  
I can be careful.

SHELBY  
Okay. Then I guess it's a date.

He smiles at her, she at him.

They continue on towards the Town Square tree, the glow of the storefront lights reflecting in the slick streets.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - MORNING**

The morning sun stretches early shadows across Main Street.

Evan sits on a bench, sketch pad in his lap. Charcoal pencil box at his side, he selects one and brings lead to paper.

He inhales the frosty air. Peaceful.

Until his phone RINGS. He checks it.

**FACE TIME - MAYA CALLING**

He answers.

EVAN

You're up early.

MAYA (36), curly, flowing hair with a demeanor tight as piano wire, manages a thin smile.

MAYA

Well, well, well. You finally picked up your phone.

EVAN

Yeah, funny that. I lost it for a few days.

MAYA

Have you checked your social media lately?

EVAN

Nope. I deleted the app. I didn't want any distractions--

She holds up a printout PHOTO of Shelby and Evan at the Christmas Fair booth, a crowd of people surrounding them.

MAYA

Care to explain this?

EVAN

Just helping a friend.

MAYA

Dude, it's blowing up. People are not holding back.

(reads from a list)

(MORE)

MAYA (CONT'D)

*Hashtag: underwear model loves coffee and candy canes -- gritted teeth emoji --, Hart's Pass Passion play, who is that girl? And on and on, etcetera, etcetera.*

EVAN

So? People talk. We all know that.

Maya is stunned by that response.

MAYA

Evan, this is huge. Like fall of the Berlin Wall huge. This goes a long way to repairing your image.

EVAN

(laughs)

I think you're being a touch dramatic. Is this why you called?

MAYA

I know, I know. Get to the point. Evan, I want to start putting some feelers out there. Capitalize on all this good will you're spreading around.

Evan glances to the street to see Shelby heading his way.

EVAN

Really? Two weeks ago I was untouchable. Now you're saying... What are you saying?

MAYA

I can make some calls. Redwood Standard, Oxford Ridge, Harrington and Wynn, Black Anchor--

EVAN

Black Anchor? What is that even--? No. Look. Hold off for now. Okay? We can talk about this later. I gotta run.

MAYA

No. No, Evan! Don't hang up!

CLICK. He hung up.

Shelby sides up to him, the morning sun behind her as a winter hat with a pom pom frames her smiling face.

SHELBY  
Ready?

EVAN  
Born ready.

**EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE FARM - DAY**

In the field -- balsam fir's to the left, Douglas Fir's to the right, Blue Spruce straight ahead.

Shelby strolls next to Evan, who carries a saw. She stops at a tree and inspects it's branches.

EVAN  
You like that one?

SHELBY  
I don't know. It's a little bare on this side.

EVAN  
They're all a little bare on that side.

She heads to the next one.

SHELBY  
What about this tree?

EVAN  
I think--

SHELBY  
Nah. Too small.

She heads away, leaving Evan alone.

EVAN  
Okay.

Moments later, Evan hears Shelby squeal with delight.

SHELBY  
Now, we're talking.

Evan strides over to find Shelby, hands on hips, in front of a majestic ten-footer.

Evan looks up at it.

EVAN  
Gee, you think it's big enough?

SHELBY

Oh, yes. Definitely. Wait--

She reaches into her bag and pulls out her reindeer ornament, hangs it on a branch. Stands back. Surveys.

EVAN

Does Lunabelle approve?

She smiles, nods.

SHELBY

Cut away when ready.

Evan kneels, realizes he's gonna have to lay on the ground to get this done. He begins to cut, pine needles falling onto his face.

SHELBY (CONT'D)

Not so close to the ground.

EVAN

I'm not. It's right in the middle.

Shelby leans in close to inspect his work.

AUBREY

No, I think you're a little low.

She reaches out, and Evan suddenly grabs her arm and pulls her onto the ground with him.

Shelby lets out an infectious laugh that would draw anyone within earshot into the moment.

They gaze into each other's eyes. Something... Something's gonna happen... And--

EVAN

Timber.

Their tree topples and hits the frosty ground.

**EXT. TREE FARM CABIN - LATER**

Smoke rises from the cabin's chimney as several guests stand outside a fire pit nearby. A jolly Santa makes the rounds.

**INT. TREE FARM CABIN - CONTINUOUS**

Shelby and Evan sit at a table sipping hot cocoa. A plate of apple spice doughnuts between them.

SHELBY

We've been coming here for years,  
ever since I was a little girl.  
Family tradition.

EVAN

Let me guess. You were the one who  
always picked out the tree.

SHELBY

Guilty.

EVAN

I can see that. You have good taste  
and you're thought out. Two solid  
qualities to have.

SHELBY

I used to think so. Funny, but the  
older I get the less sure I am of  
things.

EVAN

Such as?

SHELBY

The cafe, for one. I was so sure of  
myself there and everyone trusted  
my opinion.

EVAN

From what I can tell, everyone was  
on board with that. You shouldn't  
beat yourself up. Besides, look how  
nicely you recovered.

He raises his hot cocoa, takes a sip.

SHELBY

So, in other words, I'm good at  
starting fires *and* putting them  
out.

Evan laughs.

EVAN

Good thing I'm fire proof.

**EXT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - DAY**

Madeline heads up to the cafe, goes to slide her key in the  
lock when the MAILMAN comes up on her and hands over a stack  
of mail.

MADLINE

Thank you.

She takes a cursory glance through the letters and stops when she reaches an envelope marked: URGENT.

**LETTER**

*NorthPeak Capital Group*  
*"Helping small business reach new heights"*

She studies the envelope a good long while. Exhales deeply, and goes inside.

**EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY**

Evan's car rolling along the winding road, Christmas tree tied firmly atop it.

**INT. SHELBY'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY**

The ten-footer stands near the fireplace as Evan tightens the screws on the base.

Shelby comes in with a box marked ORNAMENTS that she places next to several others.

EVAN

Are we trimming?

SHELBY

Oh yes. But wait. All these boxes are marked, so we start with lights first, then ornaments, then silver garland, then tinsel. In that order.

EVAN

Doesn't sound too specific.

She whips out her phone.

SHELBY

And don't forget about Shelby's Tree Trimming Holiday Mix.

Evan stands.

EVAN

Oh boy. Another holiday mix.

**MONTAGE - TREE TRIMMING**

A) It's a holiday dance party as Shelby and Evan vibe to infectious Christmas songs as they place ornaments on the tree.

B) Like a magician, Evan pulls an endless rope of silver garland as Shelby holds the box.

C) Evan tosses festive faux snow onto Shelby's head. She laughs, throws some snow of her own accidentally into his mouth, prompting laughter.

D) Shelby stands by a light switch, ready for the big moment...

**END MONTAGE**

SHELBY

Are you ready?

EVAN

Light it up.

She flicks the switch. The tree brims with shimmering color. Joins Evan as they admire their work.

SHELBY

What do you think?

EVAN

Perfect.

SHELBY

Be even better with Christmas cookies.

She retreats to the open concept kitchen, slips on an oven mitt and removes a tray of cookies from the stove.

Evan looks away from the tree to see a lone ornament sitting on a table. It's Lunabelle.

EVAN

Hey, does Lunabelle make the cut yet?

Shelby stops, leans over the counter.

SHELBY

I think she's ready. You wanna do the honors?

EVAN

Me? Shouldn't it be you? I mean, I don't really know her too well.

SHELBY

(smiling)

I think you know her better than you think you do. And stay clear of the candy canes!

Evan shoots her a playful glance, takes Lunabelle and carefully picks an open spot and hangs her on the tree.

EVAN

How's that?

SHELBY

Perfect.

**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - LATER**

Shelby and Evan enter, mid-conversation and laughing.

They go past the host stand, into the dining room to find Tim, Madeline and Casey together at a table.

They look at Shelby and Evan.

SHELBY

What's cooking?

Tim holds up a letter.

MADELINE

They sold our loan.

SHELBY

What?

CASEY

Some private equity firm from Colorado. North Ridge something or other.

TIM

North Peak.

SHELBY

Can I see that letter?

She scans it over, Evan peering over her shoulder.

SHELBY (CONT'D)  
It's a letter of intent from the  
new lender.

EVAN  
(points)  
A covenant letter.

Shelby looks back at him.

SHELBY  
You're familiar with this type of  
thing?

EVAN  
My mom was a lawyer. She handled a  
lot of my early contracts.

Shelby reads further.

SHELBY  
(reading)  
There's a lot of requirements here.  
Says the payroll has to be a  
certain percent?

CASEY  
I've had people out sick the last  
couple weeks. I had to give out  
overtime. Payroll's been way up.

SHELBY  
(reading)  
Failure to meet these requirements  
with cause the loan to accelerate,  
forcing a potential buyout of sixty  
percent of the business's current  
value! Are you kidding me with  
this?!

TIM  
I don't think they are.

SHELBY  
This is scandalous! Can they even  
do this?

EVAN  
Private equity firms do stuff like  
this all the time. I've seen it.

MADÉLINE

The letter said they sent out a rep  
to come visit us. Maybe it's not as  
bad as we're making it out to be.

Shelby slaps her leg with the letter. Emphatic. Paces back  
and forth. Fit to be tied.

SHELBY

This-- This will not stand! I am  
outraged! I want to meet that rep!

CASEY

(to someone O.S.)  
Ma'am, I'm sorry, we're not open  
for another half hour.

Standing in the doorway, backlit by the sun, is Janice  
Hawthorne. She steps into the light. One hand holds a  
designer briefcase, the other extended and ready to shake  
whoever dares take it.

JANICE

Yeah, the door was open so I  
figured I'd let myself in.

SHELBY

Can we help you?

JANICE

If you're the Anderson family, then  
by all means, yes.

SHELBY

And who might you be?

Janice smiles from ear-to-ear, extends her hand again.

JANICE

North Peak sales rep, Janice  
Hawthorne, at your service.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE, DINING ROOM - DAY**

Madeline, Tim and Casey remain seated at the table, staring silently at Janice.

Shelby simmers.

Evan, hands in pockets, watching closely.

You can hear a pin drop.

JANICE

Gee, I haven't gotten this cold a reception since the Titanic hit that iceberg.

CASEY

Maybe that's because you are the iceberg.

JANICE

I prefer to think of myself as the Carpathia. The first rescue ship on the scene, and the one person who's going to help turn this leaking ship into a money maker.

TIM

It is making money. We just hit a little rough patch.

JANICE

I know that. I've seen the financials. Your shop was in the black until... well, all due respect, until someone came up with the bone-headed idea to open that gourmet coffee extension.

Shelby creeps slowly toward Janice.

SHELBY

That would be me.

JANICE

Of course! Shelby Anderson. I've been wanting to meet you.

SHELBY

And why is that?

JANICE

Because, as much as your coffee ambitions helped put you in this pickle, you had the forethought to enlist the help of a man who makes cotton briefs look heroic. We have a lot more in common than you think.

SHELBY

That's not why--

EVAN

It sort of is.

Janice flashes a smug grin, points at Evan.

JANICE

So busted. But in all fairness, it was a smart move. I'm impressed.

SHELBY

You've been watching us?

JANICE

I do my homework.

CASEY

Then who am I?

JANICE

You are who you've always been. Just louder about it today. Anyway, shall we get started?

Janice struts over to the table with Casey, Tim and Madeline and sits. Reaches in her bag, pulls out a bakery box and plops it on the table.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Salted caramel butter blondies, pistachio rosewaters. Feel free. Now, let's get into some of this for real. Believe it or not, I'm actually here to help make your life easier. You know our motto -- "helping small business reach new heights."

CASEY

Before you push us off a cliff.

Janice fake laughs.

JANICE  
You're adorable.

Shelby turns to Evan, tries to be cheerful through the chaos.

SHELBY  
You don't have to stay for this.

EVAN  
It's a family matter. I'll head  
back to the Middlebury. Maybe we  
can catch up later.

SHELBY  
Sure.

She turns and heads slowly to the table.

**EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY**

Evan by himself, heading toward the Middlebury. He looks up,  
above the Writer's Block Bookstore, to the office above.

*NORTH PEAK CAPITAL GROUP* in frosted lettering.

He stops, stares curiously at it for a moment before going on  
his way.

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN - DAY**

Andrew at the counter, smiling as he checks in guests. He  
clocks Evan, staring pensively into the fireplace.

ANDREW  
You okay? You've been pretty quiet  
since you got back.

EVAN  
I'm just worried about Shelby. She  
was supposed to meet me here.  
(checks his watch)  
It's been over two hours now.

ANDREW  
I hope everything's okay.

EVAN  
Yeah. They had a meeting with some  
out of town private equity rep.

ANDREW

Oh, that would be that Hawthorne woman. The one with all that luggage.

EVAN

Janice Hawthorne.

ANDREW

Yeah, that's her. Kinda sophisticated and all.

EVAN

So she is staying here.

ANDREW

Yup. Said she didn't have any time line. Just like you.

EVAN

Hmm.

Evan slips on his coat.

EVAN (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go try and find Shelby. Call me if she comes by?

ANDREW

Will do.

EVAN

Thanks.

**EXT. CHRISTMAS STORE, MAIN STREET - DAY**

Evan comes out of the store, holding a small bag. He turns toward the town square to find Shelby sitting alone on a bench.

**PARK BENCH**

Shelby stares up at the town Christmas tree as Evan plops down next to her.

SHELBY

I stopped at the inn. Andrew said you went to find me.

EVAN

I did.

SHELBY

Boy, when I get myself into a jam I make it a good one.

EVAN

Well, at the very least you're consistent. What happened?

SHELBY

(deep exhale)

She basically reiterated what we read in the letter. The loan accelerates if we fail to meet certain criteria by the end of the month, yada yada yada.

EVAN

What's the biggest one? The criteria?

SHELBY

The payroll. It's gonna be impossible to get it where they want it.

EVAN

Impossible doesn't sound like a word in your vocabulary.

SHELBY

I'm gonna volunteer shifts to help out.

EVAN

What can I do?

SHELBY

Evan, I can't ask any more of you. You've done so much.

EVAN

I can do more.

SHELBY

I mean, here you are trying to reset your life and I feel like I've been throwing you to the wolves.

EVAN

Hey. You've done nothing wrong. Besides, sitting in that inn all day talking with Andrew is going to make me crazy.

Shelby laughs.

EVAN (CONT'D)

See, I made you smile. Get more beans. The fair starts up again tomorrow. We'll set up the booth, do what we did before. I can even work at the cafe.

SHELBY

What do you know about the restaurant business?

EVAN

Not much, but you can teach me. I can stand out front in my man layers and wave people in.

She laughs harder.

SHELBY

No candy canes this time. Okay, St. Nick?

EVAN

Deal.

Shelby, relieved, SIGHS as she gazes at the town square.

SHELBY

What's that you have there?

He hands her the bag.

EVAN

For you.

She pulls out a SNOWMAN ORNAMENT -- a cute little guy with rosy cheeks and outstretch hands.

SHELBY

Oh, he's so cute! Look at his little hands. Like he's ready for a snowball fight or something.

EVAN

I thought Lunabelle might be a little lonely.

SHELBY

Thank you. What's his name?

EVAN

Umm... Evan junior?

SHELBY  
No, seriously.

EVAN  
How about Neil? My dad is a big  
Neil Diamond fan. So, yeah. Neil.

SHELBY  
Neil Diamond, the snowman?

EVAN  
Unless you can think of something  
better.

SHELBY  
(smiles)  
Nope. Neil is fine. Thank you.

EVAN  
Well, you're welcome. So, are you  
doing anything tonight?

SHELBY  
No plans as of yet. Why? You wanna  
go ice skating?!

EVAN  
Not without a helmet, I won't.

SHELBY  
All right. We'll table that for a  
later date. Hey. I have an idea if  
you're up for it. It's not too far  
away.

**EXT. CHURCH STREET MARKETPLACE - NIGHT**

Shops and stores and food everywhere you look. And at  
Christmas, you can probably see the lights from space.

Shelby and Evan stride down the center of the street, sharing  
a funnel cake as large shopping bags dangle from their arms.

SHELBY  
And that's what the giving tree is  
all about. Last year I had a family  
in Cedar Ridge, this year it's Pine  
Hollow.

EVAN  
And you buy families presents every  
year?

SHELBY

Without fail. And not just presents. Essentials too. Warm hats and scarves, although I can't resist throwing in a toy train or the latest doll or gadget.

EVAN

Wow. I can throw in tons of underwear and shirts. I have so much unopened swag from Alden Vale and nowhere to put it.

SHELBY

That's perfect. Sure beats giving it all to my father.

EVAN

Yeah, but your father loves it.

SHELBY

Tell me about it. You're like the son he never had.

EVAN

He said that?

SHELBY

No, but I can tell. He likes you a lot.

EVAN

I like him, too. You got a really nice family.

SHELBY

Thank you.

Ahead is a SANTA MEET AND GREET. Evan points.

EVAN

Hey. You wanna?

SHELBY

I was just about to ask you.

**SANTA'S MEET AND GREET - MOMENTS LATER**

Shelby sits on Santa's lap as Evan hangs back.

SHELBY

Oh, come on! You said you wanted to do this.

EVAN

I don't know. With us both on his lap, I don't wanna crush the guy.

SHELBY

You're not gonna crush him. It's Santa!

Santa emphatically pats his free leg with a gloved hand, then gives Evan a wink.

SANTA

Solid as a rock in my man layers!

Shelby gasps.

SHELBY

See? He knows you!

Evan gives in, sits on Santa's lap next to Shelby.

EVAN

That's not fair. Santa knows everybody.

One of Santa's ELVES lines up the shot. A series of CLICKS follow and --

**MONTAGE OF PHOTOS**

- A) Shelby and Evan making goofy faces.
- B) All three of them making goofy faces.
- C) Shelby and Evan kissing Santa's cheeks.
- D) Shelby giving a surprised Evan a kiss on the cheek.
- E) Santa handing Evan a candy cane as Shelby laughs.

**EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT**

Shelby and Evan glide slowly past the town square towards the Middlebury, glowing in the distance.

EVAN

Well, that was fun.

SHELBY

Yes, it was. Tonight was exactly what I didn't know I needed.

EVAN  
Especially when you're in good  
company.

SHELBY  
Same.

They come up the front porch of the Middlebury.

EVAN  
Well, I guess I better head inside.

SHELBY  
Oh. Yeah. Big day tomorrow.

They stand across from each other a moment, unsure of what to do. Finally, Evan gives her coat sleeve a playful tug.

EVAN  
Well, I'll uh, I'll see you  
tomorrow.

SHELBY  
Okay. Bright and early.

EVAN  
Bright and early.

He turns, heads up the stairs. Goes to open the door and walks into it face first.

SHELBY  
Oh, my gosh. Are you okay?

EVAN  
(laughs)  
Door.

He flashes a smile, pulls the handle but it's stuck. He shakes the knob furiously until it opens.

EVAN (CONT'D)  
Good night!

And Shelby, the lights from the town Christmas tree twinkling in the distance, smiles.

SHELBY  
Good night.

END ACT FIVE

ACT SIX**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - MORNING**

Evan behind the counter at the coffee station, staring at the daunting point-of-sale terminal.

Shelby comes from the store room, boxes of coffee beans in her arms.

SHELBY

I'm surprised to see you here this early.

EVAN

Just can't get comfortable in that bed at the Middlebury. I miss my feather pillow back home.

SHELBY

Is that what you asked Santa for yesterday?

EVAN

That and a few other things.

SHELBY

Well, you're in the right spot because I figured we could work the coffee counter together.

EVAN

Sounds simple enough.

SHELBY

Ha! Just wait until you screw up someone's latte.

EVAN

Trust me, that's one of the first lessons I learned in the modelling world. Never get between a diva and her morning caffeine.

SHELBY

See, you already know lesson number one.

**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - LATER**

Lunch rush busy. Shelby spins, places a latte on the pick-up counter.

SHELBY  
Carla!

The customer steps forward, receives her drink. Evan addresses a guest at the counter.

EVAN  
Welcome to the Porchlight Cafe.  
What can I get for you?

But before she can answer, Shelby interrupts.

SHELBY  
This next one has no name.

EVAN  
What name?

SHELBY  
You didn't enter a name for the  
cherry chocolate.

EVAN  
Oh, sorry.

SHELBY  
(calls out)  
Who had the cherry chocolate?

Another customer steps forward to whisper her name to Shelby. Evan turns back to his guest.

EVAN  
Sorry about that. What's your name?  
I mean, what would you like?

Before she can answer, a WOMAN slaps a cup on the counter.

WOMAN  
I ordered a cappuccino. Not a  
latte.

Shelby and Evan glance at each other. The woman glares at both of them.

EVAN  
Sorry, I didn't realize...

SHELBY

Nope, it's my fault. I forgot to show you.

(re: the terminal)

This box right here. There's espresso, latte, and cappuccino. Mostly it's latte, unless they specify.

WOMAN

Which I did.

SHELBY

And I'll make you a new one. Sorry for the mistake.

EVAN

What's a macchiato?

SHELBY

We don't make those.

EVAN

But it's an option on the screen.

SHELBY

I know, but we don't...

She pauses, tries not to get frustrated.

SHELBY (CONT'D)

Evan, why don't you take a break from orders? Switch with Callie at the host stand.

EVAN

You want me to be hostess?

SHELBY

Hostess with the mostest!

He chuckles. She smiles. They weathered the storm.

SHELBY (CONT'D)

Go on, use that charm of yours.

#### **MOMENTS LATER**

Evan seats a couple at their table, lays down menus.

EVAN

Haley is your waitress. She'll be right with you.

(MORE)

EVAN (CONT'D)

And if you have any trouble deciding on what to order, I highly recommend the smoked gouda grilled cheese. To die for!

The couple nod at each other, impressed. Evan carries his smile back to the host's station, greets the next couple.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Table for two? Right this way.

He leads them to a spot by the window.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Connor is your waiter. He'll be right with you. May I suggest you try the open-faced turkey-bacon melt. We call it The Holy Moly because that's what you'll say when you take the first bite.

Back to the host's station. He's on a roll!

EVAN (CONT'D)

Table for three? Right this way.

As he ushers the next group, he crosses paths with Casey. He gives a thumbs up. She nods in agreement, impressed with his people skills.

Casey darts past the coffee counter. Shelby gets her attention.

SHELBY

Psst!

CASEY

What?

SHELBY

How's he doing?

CASEY

Who? Your boyfriend?

SHELBY

He's not my boyfriend.

CASEY

He's a natural.

Evan spots Shelby looking his way. He gives a thumbs up, a wink and a smile.

**EXT. MADELINE AND TIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Shelby and Casey sit cross-legged on the carpeted floor near the Christmas tree. They're wrapping presents as Madeline comes in with mugs of hot cocoa.

MADELINE

Time for hot chocolate.

They each take one, thank her. Madeline sits on the sofa.

SHELBY

So, that was a day, huh?

CASEY

It certainly was.

SHELBY

You think we did enough to put a dent in the payroll?

MADELINE

It's one day, honey. I doubt if it moved the needle.

SHELBY

Not even a little?

CASEY

It's not gonna happen overnight, Shel. That's not how this works. I'll check the numbers at the end of the week. We should have a better idea by then.

They continue wrapping in silence, with Casey stealing intermittent playful glances at her sister, then with Mom.

Shelby catches her.

SHELBY

What?

(no answer)

What?

MADELINE

She wants to know what's going on with you and Evan?

SHELBY

There it is!

MADELINE

You two are spending an awful lot of time together.

SHELBY

Well, yeah, we're working together, Mom. We sort of have to.

CASEY

That's not what I heard. You went to the Marketplace the other night. Picked out your Christmas tree together.

SHELBY

Who told you that?

MADELINE

I did.

SHELBY

And who told you/

MADELINE

Evan did.

SHELBY

He gives dad underwear, what does he give you?

CASEY

Blandishment.

The women laugh heartily, sip some cocoa.

CASEY (CONT'D)

Seriously, though. You think there's something there?

Shelby exhales, cycling through all that's happened so far.

She lets slip a small laugh.

SHELBY

Who knows? It's been fun, but I can't kid myself here. I know his career's on hold, but I don't think for long. Why get attached when you're not sure of the outcome?

MADELINE

Why not follow your heart?

SHELBY

I tried that with the cafe. Look how well that turned out.

MADELINE

Love is different, dear. It's not numbers and calculations. Good or bad, love is always worth the risk.

SHELBY

And if it turns out bad?

MADELINE

Then it becomes a short but fun chapter in your story, and you move on. Start another chapter.

SHELBY

You make it sound so easy.

MADELINE

Nothing worth anything is ever easy.

CASEY

Right. Keep your guard up if you want to, Shel. Close the road. Good luck with that.

SHELBY

What's that supposed to mean?

Casey sips from her mug, places a bow on a gift.

Madeline places her hand on Shelby's shoulder.

MADELINE

It means love will find a detour if it needs to.

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN, COMMON AREA - NIGHT**

Roaring fireplace crackling as several GUESTS sit around the table, talking animatedly about the day. Having night caps and merriment.

Alone at a table in the corner is Janice, martini glass in front of her as she types on her lap top.

In comes Evan, says hi to a few people as he picks through a fruit bowl. Grabs an apple, goes to exit when he sees Janice.

EVAN

Oh. Hi. Janice, right?

She quickly primps herself and closes her lap top.

JANICE

Hello. Yes. Janice. You're Evan Chase.

EVAN

Yup. Figured we'd have to run into each other at some point.

JANICE

And here we are. How rude of me, have a seat.

Evan obliges, looks around, slightly uncomfortable.

JANICE (CONT'D)

So, Evan - may I call you Evan?

EVAN

What else would you call me?

JANICE

Oh, I don't know. America's sweetheart? News of your stay here has been making the rounds.

EVAN

Haven't noticed. I'm kind of done with social media.

She raises her glass. Winks.

JANICE

And for good reason. I saw your dance with the candy cane.

EVAN

Danced myself right out of a job.

JANICE

Well, you're young. I don't think you deserved to get fired. Still, I can't help but admire your business savvy. You're working on a clever re-brand here.

EVAN

Re-brand? Is that what you think this is?

JANICE  
You tell me.

EVAN  
Have you ever done something out of  
the goodness of your own heart?

JANICE  
Umm... Not recently, no.

EVAN  
I was beginning to feel that way  
myself, and then...

JANICE  
Then what?

EVAN  
Then something comes along you  
weren't expecting. Something so  
powerful it just....  
(contorts his face)  
It just levels you. Makes you  
rethink everything.

Janice's eyes widen.

JANICE  
Oh, my god. You're in love.

Evan wilts. Someone finally noticed.

Janice rises, closes her lap top and finishes her drink.

JANICE (CONT'D)  
Well, if that truly is the case,  
then more power to you. But bear  
this in mind - there's usually an  
angle to everyone and everything.

EVAN  
What's that supposed to mean?

She grabs her tote.

JANICE  
You're a smart kid. I'm sure you'll  
figure it out.

And with that, she walks away as a business card slips out of  
her bag onto the floor.

EVAN  
Hey, you dropped--

But she's gone.

Evan picks up the card, holds it a moment before looking. A slow Christmas tune plays. The crowd in the dining room thinning out.

He flips the card over.

**BUSINESS CARD**

A steaming cup of coffee and a blue rocket ship blasting off into space!

*ROCKET FUEL!*

*"When you need to go from zero to human!"*

Phone numbers and locations.

He looks up, realization playing on his face.

EVAN (CONT'D)  
Yeah, I figured it out.

END ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE, DINING ROOM - DAY**

Shelby and Casey stand by the vacant tables at the back of the restaurant.

CASEY

Don't you think you may have taken this a bit too far.

SHELBY

No, no. He agreed. Besides, I think it'll look cute. Very Christmassy.

CASEY

It's your show.

SHELBY

How are the numbers looking?

CASEY

Didn't I tell you it was too early?

SHELBY

Oh stop. I know you looked at them.

CASEY

We've gone down seven percentage points with the adjusted payroll. We're almost there.

Shelby squeals.

SHELBY

I knew it!

CASEY

Okay, it's encouraging, but stay with me on planet Earth here. We still have a week to go.

SHELBY

Casey, we're gonna make it. We're--

Evan comes out of the store room wearing the tightest red and green ELF OUTFIT ever produced. Green tights, red coat and a pointy hat with a bell on top.

Casey conceals a laugh.

EVAN  
Shelby, I think this suit might  
have been made for an actual elf.

SHELBY  
Oh, my god. How can you say that?  
It's perfect! You make an adorable  
elf.

Evan pulls the coat down.

EVAN  
Can I talk to you a minute?

Casey waves, leaves them alone.

SHELBY  
Everything okay?

EVAN  
Well, you know how I'm sort of semi-  
famous and all?

SHELBY  
Okay.

EVAN  
Well, if I weren't a celebrity you  
wouldn't be asking me to wear this.

SHELBY  
Meaning?

EVAN  
I guess what I'm trying to say...

SHELBY  
Are you implying that I'm using  
you?

Evan emphatically brings his arms down, as if to say -- *Have you seen this outfit?*

Shelby's hurt by the accusation.

SHELBY (CONT'D)  
Evan... Yes, you've certainly  
helped, but I... I just kinda  
thought, you know, a part of you  
wanted to do this.

Her words hit him like a hammer.

EVAN

I'm sorry. I don't know why I would even think that.

SHELBY

Yeah. That kinda came out of left field.

EVAN

Besides, doing this means...

SHELBY

Means what?

EVAN

(smiles)

We've had a lot of fun together. It guess it means I get to see more of you.

There it is.

SHELBY

We have had fun together, haven't we?

EVAN

We have.

SHELBY

Well, it's, um, good to know it wasn't just me.

EVAN

It's not.

A moment of quiet understanding. A moment of neither of them knowing quite what to say.

Shelby composes herself.

SHELBY

Well, look, if you can just grin and bear it for a little while longer, I'd appreciate it. From what Casey tells me our fortunes are starting to change.

EVAN

That's good to hear.

SHELBY

So, shall we get started?

EVAN

Sure.

Evan follows Shelby until -- dead stop -- Shelby turns.

SHELBY

Evan, what made you think that I would do that to you?

EVAN

Umm...

SHELBY

Did Andrew say that?

EVAN

No. No, no. Andrew wouldn't say something like that.

SHELBY

Then who--?  
(realization hits)  
Janice!

Shelby's face looks meaner than a parking ticket.

She rushes to the front door -- Evan close behind -- she yanks furiously at the door -- it won't budge -- pulls and pulls and pulls.

SHELBY (CONT'D)

Will somebody open this stupid door!

Evan casually pushes the door open.

**EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS**

Shelby crosses the street. On a mission. Evan catches up.

SHELBY

I'm gonna knock her block off.

EVAN

Wait. Wait, wait!

SHELBY

What?

EVAN

There's more.

He produces the business card and shows her.

SHELBY

What's this? Rocket Fuel. That's that coffee chain. So?

EVAN

This fell out of her bag last night.

They hop the curb to the other side of the street.

SHELBY

And?

EVAN

And I did some research. North Peak Capital is a major shareholder of Rocket Fuel. Isn't North Peak the company Janice works for?

SHELBY

Yeah, it--

(it hits her)

They're trying to take over our store. All the posturing. The unrealistic restrictions. They want us to fail.

EVAN

That's what it sounds like.

They reach the outside door to North Peak that leads upstairs. Shelby pulls. Pushes. Again and--

EVAN (CONT'D)

No, no. I think it's really locked this time.

Shelby whips her head around. Scanning everywhere.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Is that her?

By the town square, on a bench, Janice sits alone.

#### **PARK BENCH**

It is indeed Janice, her face turned away.

Shelby and Evan come up on her.

SHELBY

Hey! Cruella DeVille. You have some explaining to do!

Janice slowly turns, mascara blotched around her wet eyes. Lower lip twitching, she bursts into exaggerated ugly cry.

Shelby and Evan look at each other. Flummoxed.

EVAN

Are you all right?

Janice waves her hand.

JANICE

No, I'm not all right. I look like the Bride of Frankenstein.

Shelby's not buying this. She holds up the business card.

SHELBY

Care to explain this? Tell me your company doesn't want to take over the cafe and turn it into a Rocket Fuel coffee shop.

Janice composes herself.

JANICE

That's exactly what we're trying to do.

Stunned by the brutal honesty.

SHELBY

So, you admit it. Call it off.

JANICE

I can't.

SHELBY

Why can't you? Do you know how long this store has been in our family? How dare you do this to us!

JANICE

Oh, stop. You did this to yourself. You and your ambitions with no escape plan whatsoever. You left your door wide open, sweet heart.

SHELBY

And you just walked right in!

JANICE

That's right. That's right, we did. That's how this works.

SHELBY  
Unbelievable. This is not over. Not  
by a long shot.

Shelby stares down Janice, shoots a glare at Evan, turns and stomps away.

EVAN  
Shelby!

He moves to follow her, but stops. Looks at Janice and her mascara tears. She does look kinda like the Bride of Frankenstein.

JANICE  
Let her go. She needs to blow off  
some steam. Nice outfit, by the  
way.

Evan's confused, then looks at himself.

EVAN  
Forgot I had this on.

He sits on the bench. Both of them silent in the cold.

Janice sniffles, blows her nose.

EVAN (CONT'D)  
I don't understand, Janice. Why  
would you do this?

JANICE  
(sighs)  
It's not just me. There's a whole  
company behind this with money to  
burn. I'm just a mouthpiece.

EVAN  
There's better ways to make a  
living, wouldn't you say?

JANICE  
Maybe. But I'm good at my job. I'm  
good at being tough.

EVAN  
Then why are you crying?

Janice half laughs.

JANICE  
You'll probably think it's silly.

**INT. OFFICE - LATER**

Evan, manuscript in hand, sits across from Janice, hands folded and anxious.

EVAN

*The End.* This is really good. You wrote this?

JANICE

I did.

EVAN

I didn't peg you as a writer of children's books.

JANICE

I was never able to have a family of my own. So... writing became cathartic, in a sense. But the publishing houses? I've gotten more rejections than I can count. The one I got this morning wasn't particularly complimentary, hence my ugly crying fit.

EVAN

I'm sorry to hear that.  
(flips pages)  
Where's the illustrations?

JANICE

I don't have an illustrator. I was trying to sell it on it's story alone. It's merits.

EVAN

Right, right. I get that. But, especially nowadays, people need to SEE. There's nothing to see here. Do you have a pencil?

Janice rolls a pencil across the desk to Evan, who flips to a blank page.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Do you mind?

JANICE

Be my guest.

EVAN

(as he draws)

This scene where the sweater goes looking for it's button, gets lost in the forest and meets all these animals. It's so visual.

And Evan, creative adrenaline spiking, draws. Pencil gliding along the page like it's possessed.

Janice looks on curiously.

Done. He holds up the paper and smiles.

**PICTURE**

A pro-level sketch featuring the sweater, with facial features, in a forest talking with a bunny and an owl.

Janice puts her hand to her mouth and starts crying again.

EVAN (CONT'D)

That bad, huh?

JANICE

(takes the drawing)

No, no. It's beautiful. I... I had no idea.

EVAN

I can illustrate this for you. The whole thing. Front to back. That way when you send it off to publishers they'll have a complete package. I'll help you put it together if you want.

JANICE

Oh, my god. You'd do that for me?

(Evan nods)

And here I thought you were just killer abs and perfect jaw line. Evan, I don't know what to say.

EVAN

Say yes.

JANICE

Okay. Yes.

Evan stands, moves to Janice as he removes his elf hat.

EVAN

There is one little favor I need.

JANICE

And what might that be?

EVAN

End this takeover of the restaurant. Call your boss. Whoever you need to call. Tell them this place is not for them. Tell them their assessment is all wrong.

JANICE

Evan, it's not that easy.

EVAN

Why?

JANICE

Hmmpf. You don't know my boss.

EVAN

You said you were tough.

She SIGHS heavily, lowers her chin.

JANICE

I know, but....

He places his hand on her shoulder.

EVAN

Hey.

(she looks up)

We all have dreams. Mine was always to be an artist. Yours is to write a children's book. And the Anderson's is to carry on a family tradition. It all hinges on to a decision that you need to make. Here and now... Please.

Evan extends his hand, she takes it.

JANICE

Okay.

END ACT SEVEN

ACT EIGHT**EXT. TIM AND MADELINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

A homey split-level with shining candles in each window and tasteful Christmas lights. Light snow falls.

**INT. TIM AND MADELINE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

A family gathering. Aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews. Clamoring and merriment and a decidedly celebratory vibe.

Evan stands alone, wine glass in his hand as he watches Shelby kneeling by the Christmas tree with a CHILD.

Tim claps his hand on Evan's back.

TIM

We're glad you came, Evan.

EVAN

Me too. You got a big family.

TIM

I forget half their names myself.

They laugh.

TIM (CONT'D)

Evan, what did you say to get Janice to change her mind? I know it wasn't a lifetime supply of underwear.

EVAN

Well, let's just say I helped her find a lost button.

Tim clinks his glass with Evan's.

TIM

Well, I'll drink to that - whatever that means. But seriously, thank you. She told me she's gonna convince corporate to aim their sights elsewhere.

EVAN

That's very good to hear.

Tim shuffles off to mingle.

Evan remains, watching Shelby by the tree. More CHILDREN have joined her, laughing, shaking gifts and snow globes.

She looks up to see Evan watching her. Smiles. She mouths the word "what?"

Evan returns her smile, just shakes his head. Nothing's wrong. Everything's right.

He feels a buzzing in his pocket and pulls out his phone.

**TEXT MESSAGE**

MAYA: Urgent news! Call me now!!!

He turns away and dials.

MAYA (O.S.)

Evan, I have great news!

EVAN

(into phone)

So do I. I'm extending my stay another week.

MAYA (O.S.)

Not when you hear this. Alden Vale wants you back.

EVAN

What?

MAYA (O.S.)

Your public appearances in Hope's Pass have gone viral.

EVAN

Hart's Pass.

MAYA (O.S.)

Well, wherever. Christmas fair salesman. Coffee shop host. Those stunts have turned your image around.

EVAN

They weren't stunts, Maya.

MAYA (O.S.)

I understand the sabbatical now. Repair your image, and come back a new man. A better man!

EVAN  
 Maya, that's not--

MAYA (O.S.)  
 Did you hear me? Alden Vale wants  
 you back, and they're willing to  
 pay you even more.

EVAN  
 I'm not sure I want to go back.

MAYA (O.S.)  
 What're you going to do? Stay there  
 forever?

EVAN  
 Would that be so bad?

Shelby spots Evan on the phone. Notices his frustration.

EVAN (CONT'D)  
 Look, Maya, I'll let you know after  
 the holidays. Okay?

MAYA (O.S.)  
 Evan, we need to act now. Strike  
 while the iron is hot.

EVAN  
 I'll be in touch.

MAYA (O.S.)  
 Evan!

He hangs up, turns back to the party. Sees Shelby and fakes a  
 smile. She fakes one too.

**EXT. TIM AND MADELINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Shelby and Evan stroll down the walk, toward their cars.

EVAN  
 That was fun. Thanks for inviting  
 me.

SHELBY  
 Well, you've been so helpful to us.  
 The least we could do is provide  
 unlimited cookies and egg nog.

EVAN  
 I think your father spiked my last  
 drink with rum.

SHELBY  
He only does that with people he likes.

EVAN  
Then I'll take it as a compliment.

SHELBY  
You should.

They smile at each other. Stop in front of their cars. Neighborhood Christmas lights glow on their faces.

SHELBY (CONT'D)  
I saw you on the phone. You looked worried. Is everything all right?

EVAN  
Maybe.

SHELBY  
You're not sure?

She chuckles. But he knows not to laugh. His seriousness scares her.

SHELBY (CONT'D)  
What is it?

EVAN  
Alden Vale wants me back.

SHELBY  
Seriously?

EVAN  
They're offering me a raise.

SHELBY  
That's... That's fantastic news. What are you going to do?

EVAN  
I don't know. I like it here. But my rainy day fund is almost dried up.

SHELBY  
Well, you can't vacation forever. Right?

EVAN  
No, I guess not.

A cold wind blows between them. Shelby gets emotional, hides her face. Evan reaches for her, but she backs away.

SHELBY  
I'm kind of tired so, uh, I guess  
I'll head home.

EVAN  
Shelby... Wait.

SHELBY  
Evan, I gotta be up early.  
Tomorrow's Christmas Eve. Besides,  
I'm sure you have a lot of thinking  
to do. This is not a decision to be  
taken lightly.

EVAN  
Shelby, I haven't made a decision  
yet.

SHELBY  
Well, you... you better get working  
on that, huh? I'll see you.

She gets in her car. Evan watches helplessly as she drives away.

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN - NIGHT**

Evan fixes himself a cup of coffee in the lobby. Janice descends the stairs with her briefcase. She heads for the front door, but spots Evan at the k-cup machine.

She sets her briefcase on the table, opens it. Evan hears her, turns around.

EVAN  
Good morning.

She doesn't answer. Looks like she's seen the Ghost Of Christmas Future.

EVAN (CONT'D)  
What's wrong?

Janice removes a sheet of paper, hands it to him.

JANICE  
You should read this before I tell  
the family.

EVAN

What is it?

JANICE

A fax I received from my boss.

Evan looks it over, but nothing registers.

EVAN

"Amortization? Conveyancing?" Okay, let's pretend I don't know what this means, cause I don't.

JANICE

It means what I said to the board didn't work. I pulled everything out of my bag of tricks, Evan. I really did.

EVAN

Yeah, but the payroll? I thought if they met the threshold...

JANICE

They're going to miss it. Eight more days isn't enough. The loan's going to accelerate like a runaway train. Unless...

EVAN

Unless what?

JANICE

It doesn't matter. They're already in debt up to their eyeballs.

EVAN

Unless what?

JANICE

Unless the loan is paid off in full. They owe forty-eight thousand dollars. That's the only thing that could save them now.

Evan's head spins with thoughts.

EVAN

How much time do they have?

JANICE

Until the end of the year. Eight more days.

EVAN  
There's still time.

He rushes off, sprints up the stairs.

JANICE  
This doesn't affect our children's book, does it? I did everything I could, Evan! You gotta believe me.

EVAN  
I do believe you, Janice. And thank you. We're good with the book. You held up your end, I'll hold up mine. But I gotta run! Merry Christmas!

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN, EVAN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Evan pacing, phone to his ear.

EVAN  
(into phone)  
Come on, pick up!

MAYA (O.S.)  
Evan. Kinda late, no?

EVAN  
Maya, I'm in. I'm back with Alden Vale. Tell them it's a deal.

MAYA (O.S.)  
That's wonderful! Evan Chase is back! The fashion world rejoices!

EVAN  
But listen, Maya, this raise he wants to give me. I need it as a signing bonus. Up front. Immediately.

MAYA (O.S.)  
But why?

EVAN  
Does it matter? I just need money up front. I'll even take less overall if I have to.

MAYA (O.S.)  
That's highly unconventional.

EVAN  
So is my popularity.

MAYA (O.S.)  
Okay, okay. I think I can make it  
work, but it has to happen  
immediately.

EVAN  
Why?

MAYA (O.S.)  
Mr. Vale leaves for Europe  
tomorrow. You know he spends the  
holidays skiing.

EVAN  
That's right. I'll never make it by  
car. Where's the closest airport?

MAYA (O.S.)  
Let me see.  
(computer keys click)  
The closest airport to Hope's Pass  
is ...

EVAN  
Hart's Pass!

**INT. SHELBY'S APARTMENT - MORNING**

Shelby sits on the couch, typing away on her laptop, sipping  
hot cocoa. Doing her best to do her day.

She clocks the Santa ornament that Evan gave her hanging on  
the tree, it's outstretched arms beckoning.

Can't concentrate.

Her phone rings. CASEY CALLING.

SHELBY  
(into phone)  
Hey, sis.

CASEY (O.S.)  
Are you sitting down?

We watch as Shelby's face cycles through a mix of emotions.  
None of them good.

She ends the call, gets up and stomps off.

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN - MORNING**

The lobby door opens. Shelby marches in and beelines for the stairs. Andrew spots her.

ANDREW

Are you looking for Evan?

Shelby stops, ranges to the counter.

SHELBY

Do you know where he is?

ANDREW

No.

SHELBY

I need to talk to him. The deal with Janice fell through. We're going to lose the cafe after all.

ANDREW

My gosh, I'm sorry. Then it's probably a bad time to tell you that Evan left.

SHELBY

Left? Where'd he go?

ANDREW

I don't know. Left late last night. Didn't even check out. Said he had to get to the airport.

SHELBY

You mean he left town? Why?

ANDREW

Something about signing a contract.

SHELBY

He took the deal.

ANDREW

I guess so. I mean, he took his luggage and all, but--

Shelby huffs and dials her phone.

SHELBY

Why don't we call him then?

ANDREW

I tried. Probably airplane mode.

Shelby hears his voice mail message, hangs up. She slowly heads to the door as the truth settles in.

SHELBY

No answer.

ANDREW

Hey.

(Shelby turns)

He didn't check out, you know.

A small laugh escapes her. She shakes her head.

SHELBY

Didn't even say goodbye.

END ACT EIGHT

ACT NINE**INT. PORCHLIGHT CAFE - DAY**

Shelby goes past the host stand, through the dining room. Business as usual, but different today. There's not much time left on the clock for the Porchlight.

**KITCHEN**

Casey squeezes filling from a piping bag onto festive eclairs as Shelby comes in.

SHELBY

Hi, Casey.

CASEY

Hey, Shelby.

SHELBY

Where's Mom and Dad?

CASEY

Oh, they're out and about. Last minute shopping, I guess.

SHELBY

Have you thought about what you're gonna do for work when..?

CASEY

I have a culinary degree, Shel. There's still places out there who need the kind of experience and leadership skills I have. I'll find something. I always have.

SHELBY

Why doesn't that comfort me?

CASEY

So, where's Evan? Haven't seen him around.

SHELBY

Couldn't tell you. Alden Vale rehired him and he took the job.

CASEY

You mean he left? Just like that?

SHELBY  
Just like that.

CASEY  
That doesn't sound like him at all.

SHELBY  
Yeah, well, apparently it is.

CASEY  
You wanna talk about it? We're closing early for Christmas Eve. After that, I'm free.

SHELBY  
No, I'll be okay. Got some last minute things of my own to do.

CASEY  
You sure?

SHELBY  
Yeah.

CASEY  
You're stopping by the Middlebury tonight, though, right?

SHELBY  
Oh, yeah. Almost forgot. The annual Christmas party. I'll be there.

A conflicted Shelby heads for the exit.

CASEY  
You better show. If not I'll track you down.

SHELBY  
(smiles)  
Don't worry. I'll be there.

**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT**

In her car, Shelby pulls onto Main Street and finds a parking space. Dressed for a party and holding a wrapped cookie platter, Shelby walks along Main Street.

She stops when she reaches the MEN'S STORE. The one with the cardboard cutout of Evan in his Santa hat.

Stares at him long and hard. She fumbles for her phone, checks it. No MISSED CALLS. Starts to dial, but stops. Suddenly, a voice from behind.

MAN

Hi there, young lady.

She whirls, jumps when she sees--

A MAN (63) in a black overcoat and scarf, silver hair down to his shoulders. Distinguished.

SHELBY

Oh my! You scared me.

MAN

Apologies. I didn't mean to frighten you.

SHELBY

It's okay. I was kind of lost in my thoughts for a moment.

MAN

I noticed. Anything I can do?

SHELBY

I don't think so. The world keeps spinning, you know.

MAN

That, it does.  
(off Evan's cutout)  
He's a handsome chap, isn't he?

She tilts her head to one side. Clicks her tongue.

SHELBY

Yep.

MAN

Just muscle and brawn, I bet?

SHELBY

I mean, yes, but... I thought there was more.

MAN

You know this fellow?

SHELBY

I did.

MAN

Sounds like things didn't turn out the way you'd planned?

SHELBY

You could say that.

MAN

Well, you know what they say? The heart never makes mistakes. Just journeys.

Shelby turns to face him, mouth open. Eyes hopeful.

SHELBY

I like that.

MAN

I just made it up.

She laughs politely.

A LIMO pulls up to the curb. The man pulls out his phone, taps a few keys and slides it back in his pocket.

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN, COMMON AREA - SAME**

Christmas music and dancing as numerous guests sample from an appealing pot luck buffet. The annual Christmas party.

At a nearby table sits Tim and Madeline. His phone buzzes, he pulls it out and checks it. His eyes go wide as he drops his fork with a clink.

MADELINE

(concerned)

What is it?

He holds up the phone to her. Her eyes bulge.

**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT**

MAN

Well, I'm afraid to admit I have to be off. I've a plane to catch.

SHELBY

Well, it was nice chatting to you.

MAN

And you. Merry Christmas.

He extends his hand, and as he does, Shelby clocks his wrist. A gold set of cuff links bearing the initials A.V.

SHELBY  
Merry Christmas.

Alden Vale steps to the curb, enters the limo. Shelby watches as it slowly heads away, having not quite registered who she's just met.

**INT. MIDDLEBURY INN - NIGHT**

The party continues as Shelby enters and wades through the festivities. Andrew greets her.

ANDREW  
Shelby! Merry Christmas! We've been expecting you.

SHELBY  
You have?

He takes her cookies and ushers her into the common room.

ANDREW  
We have. Right this way.

**COMMON ROOM**

Shelby scans the crowd. As Christmas tunes play, she spots Casey and her parents, who raise their glasses to her with big smiles on their faces.

TIM  
Shelby! You'll never guess what just happened.

SHELBY  
What is it?

TIM  
Alden Vale paid off our loan.

SHELBY  
What are you talking about?

MADELINE  
It's true.

SHELBY  
Hold on. Back up. What loan? The restaurant?

TIM

Forty-eight thousand dollars was deposited into North Peak's account five minutes ago.

SHELBY

(stunned, stuttering)

Wait, wait, wait. Ho-ho... Are you saying Alden Vale just paid off our restaurant loan? *The--*

TIM

Yes, *the* Alden Vale.

On Shelby as...

**QUICK FLASHBACK**

The man shaking her hand moments ago. The A.V. cufflinks.

**BACK TO**

SHELBY

I thought he looked a little out of place.

TIM

Huh?

SHELBY

(shakes her head)

Nothing. You're kidding me?

EVAN (O.S.)

No, he's not.

Shelby spins, almost knocks Evan off his feet.

SHELBY

(almost a whisper)

Evan...

He hands her a bouquet of flowers. Miffed, she takes them and mindlessly places them on the table.

Evan clears his throat as Shelby glares at him.

EVAN

Can we walk a bit?

**EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT**

The music from the party in the distance, the glowing lights of town in the chill night air.

Shelby and Evan slowly stroll.

EVAN

Once they told me they were giving me a raise, I asked for it up front as a signing bonus. I had to act fast.

SHELBY

So, you paid off the loan?

EVAN

No. I caught Mr. Vale before he left and explained the situation. His family owned a store in Europe when he was young, not unlike yours. The only difference is there was no one around back then to help them out.

SHELBY

I wish I could have thanked him.

EVAN

Trust me, he knows.

SHELBY

How'd you get back here so fast?

EVAN

A very fast private jet.

SHELBY

But you were going to try and pay off our loan?

EVAN

I was. Until Mr. Vale heard your story.

She stops.

SHELBY

Why..? Evan, why would you do that?

EVAN

The same reason I dressed up in an elf costume. For you.

SHELBY

For me? But you're working for Alden Vale again. You're not even going to be here.

Evan takes her hand, pulls her towards the street and points to the North Peak office above the book store.

EVAN

That's my new studio. Well, it will be once the renovations are finished. North Peak only rented it to give Janice a place to operate. And that's over.

SHELBY

(laughs)  
You're moving here?

EVAN

You can even help me design it if you want. Although I suppose you'll have to make up a new mix.

SHELBY

Evan, I don't know what to say.

EVAN

Shelby, I know you might be hesitant to take another risk. It scares me, too. Scares me like a candy cane flying in my direction.  
(Shelby giggles, Evan sighs)

But this-- I wouldn't have been able to live with myself if I didn't take this chance.

The confusion on her face wells into a smile. Her cheeks rise, full of color and radiant.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Look, I understand if you don't wanna give me an answer right now. We can just go back to the party for a little while and--

And she kisses him. Hard. Deep. Passionate. A kiss that says this is what she wanted all along.

They embrace tightly, then finally pull away.

EVAN (CONT'D)

So, is... was that a yes?

She look up at him.

SHELBY  
You betcha, partner.

Evan leans forward, touching his forehead to hers.

EVAN  
Good. Good. Well, what do you say  
we get back to the party?

SHELBY  
Sounds like a plan.

They interlock fingers and head away.

Shelby plucks a candy cane off the town Christmas tree, hands  
it to Evan.

SHELBY (CONT'D)  
Candy cane?

He regards it bemusedly.

EVAN  
Funny, but if it wasn't for candy  
canes I probably wouldn't even be  
here right now.

SHELBY  
Hmm. You know, come to think of it,  
I may have to accompany you to next  
year's party. Just throwing that  
out there.

EVAN  
You think so?

SHELBY  
Oh yeah.

THE END