

CHRISTMAS IN VERONA, MINNESOTA

Written by

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Based on, Romeo & Juliet

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EXT. THE CITY - EVENING

Chicago is decked out for Christmas. Lights are everywhere, in the trees and on buildings. There's a hotel that climbs into the sky, golden light coming from the windows. Snow falls softly.

INT. HOTEL BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

SFX: Instrumental of "Sleigh Ride"

The Banquet Hall of the hotel is dressed in Christmas greens, reds, and golds. Light Christmas music is pumped through the room, just audible over the sound of laughing and Christmas cheer.

JOY CHRISTMAS, an event manager in her late-twenties, stands off to the side of her work Christmas party. Her fiancé, PETER, stands behind her, texting. Joy has a hot chocolate to her lips and is utterly disinterested in the party around her. She eyes the happy partygoers with a brow raised, judging everyone.

CO-WORKER  
(to Joy, jovial)  
Merry Christmas, Christmas!

JOY  
(fake happy)  
Thanks!

He waves and walks away. Joy turns to Peter with a frown. Peter glances up at her over his phone, just enough to let her know he's 'listening'.

JOY (CONT'D)  
(sighing)  
I got out of Verona to escape  
Christmas. Why does it follow me  
everywhere?

PETER  
(not looking up)  
Mmm.

JOY  
I spent eighteen years in Christmas  
central just to get stuck going to  
Christmas parties in the city.  
(crossing her arms)  
It's ridiculous.

This is a common rant and Peter answers with canned, emotionless answers.

PETER  
Then don't come.

JOY  
I have to.

PETER  
Okay. I don't know what you want me to say.

Joy finally takes a sip of her drink. She watches Peter for a moment, making sure he's not about to say something.

JOY  
(changing the subject)  
My parents want me to come home for the holidays.

PETER  
(feigning interest)  
Oh?

Joy nods, either unaware or uncaring about his lack of interest.

JOY  
My dad fell last week and broke his leg. They want me to help them take care of the Bed & Breakfast for the season.

PETER  
(finally looking up)  
Are you going to go?

JOY  
(shrugging)  
I don't know. I haven't been home in years. Besides, I don't have the time to go home for a month.

PETER  
(looking back at his phone)  
Up to you. Just let me what you decide.

JOY  
(deflating)  
Sure.

Her boss, Mr. McCallister, walks up, smiling. He's in his seventies, in a Christmas sweater with glasses.

MR. MCCALLISTER  
Merry Christmas, Joy. Peter.

He nods to each of them. Joy smiles back and Peter nods.

MR. MCCALLISTER (CONT'D)  
Are you enjoying the party?

JOY  
Of course. Always.

MR. MCCALLISTER  
(smiling knowingly)  
You don't have to lie. I know you hate these things.

JOY  
You're right. They're not really my thing.

MR. MCCALLISTER  
Well, I'm still glad you showed.  
What are your plans for the holiday season?

JOY  
You know me. I'll probably work through Christmas. The hotel never sleeps.

MR. MCCALLISTER  
(scandalized)  
Through Christmas? Absolutely not.  
Take some days off, see your family! Do something festive!

JOY  
Oh no. Don't worry. I don't really celebrate...

PETER  
(unaware)  
Her parents invited her home for the month.

MR. MCCALLISTER  
For the month?

JOY

(explaining)

My parents run a bed & breakfast up North. My Dad fell and they were asking for my help through the season. It's no big deal. Nothing they can't do without me.

MR. MCCALLISTER

(incensed)

You have to go!

JOY

But-

MR. MCCALLISTER

Joy, you've been with us for over three years now and I'm not sure you've taken more than a day off in that whole time. Take the month! Come back after New Years! Your family will love to see you.

JOY

But... It's the holidays! We're too busy for me to be gone that long!

MR. MCCALLISTER

(waving her off)

We'll be fine. Go be with your family. It'll be good for you. You'll come back with fresh eyes, be better for the company.

JOY

But, but Mr. McCallister-

MR. MCCALLISTER

Joy, go home. If I see you step foot in this building before New Year's, you're fired. Got it?

Joy nods, resigned.

JOY

Yes, sir.

Mr. McCallister smiles at her.

MR. MCCALLISTER

I'm glad. Now, go home and pack.

He starts to turn away but pauses. Mr. McCallister looks back to the two of them.

MR. MCCALLISTER (CONT'D)  
 (winking)  
 Have a wonderful time in Verona,  
 Ms. Christmas.

He walks off to talk to another worker, leaving them behind.

JOY  
 (to Peter)  
 Well, it looks like I'm going home  
 to Verona.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AIRPORT IN VERONA, MINNESOTA - TWO DAYS LATER

Joy walks through the airport, lugging a suitcase and a backpack. The building is covered in Christmas decorations and she scoffs at the pomp. She's annoyed as she exits the airport.

EXT. AIRPORT IN VERONA, MINNESOTA - CONTINUOUS

Joy walks outside and scans the pickup area for her parents. She sees a car that she thinks is theirs.

Joy walks toward it, utterly focused on her destination and not where she's walking.

Joy runs right into someone. She stumbles and a few knickknacks fall out of her bag. She quickly gathers them and stands up, ready to yell at whoever she hit.

JOY  
 (angry)  
 Hey! Watch where you're-

She gasps in shock when she notices it was her best friend from high school, NINA, waiting for Joy next to her car.

JOY (CONT'D)  
 (tentatively)  
 Nina?

Nina turns to her and smiles.

NINA  
 (lighting up)  
 Joy! You're here!

JOY  
I'm so sorry about... I didn't  
mean...

NINA  
(waving her off)  
Oh, don't worry about that! It's  
been too long!

She runs up and hugs her. Joy waits a moment before hugging  
her back.

JOY  
(pulling back)  
What are you doing here?

NINA  
Your parents said you were going to  
be in town so I offered to pick you  
up.

JOY  
(surprised)  
Really? That's kind of you. Thanks.

NINA  
Of course! What else are friends  
for?

Joy looks disappointed in herself. She puts her bag in the  
trunk of the car and climbs in next to Nina.

They start driving. Nina points out all the things in the  
town that she thinks Joy would have missed,

NINA (CONT'D)  
There's the old skating rink! And  
the Christmas tree farm. Do you  
remember when we used to play hide  
and seek with the Vaughn twins in  
there?

Joy does her best to seem disinterested in the colorful  
lights passing by, but she can't seem to hold up to it.

JOY  
(half-smiling)  
Of course. I lost every time.

NINA  
(rolling her eyes)  
That's just because Jimmy was a  
cheat.

JOY  
 (her smile expanding)  
 I knew I wasn't that bad.

Joy looks out just in time to see two billboards go by, one after the other. The first says "Christmas Bed & Breakfast, Verona, Minnesota". The other says "Main Street Bed & Breakfast. Verona's Only Choice".

Joy rolls her eyes.

JOY (CONT'D)  
 (re: the billboards)  
 Nothing's changed.

NINA  
 Oh, yeah. Your parents and the Whites are still fighting. It might actually be worse than when you left.

Joy watches out the window as they enter the town, passing the sign that reads "Verona, Minnesota, Christmas All Year Round".

They start down a street absolutely bedecked in decorations. No building is left untouched and everything is practically dripping lights and joy.

JOY  
 Main Street?

NINA  
 (laughing)  
 Of course. Hasn't changed that much, has it.

JOY  
 No, not at all.  
 (noticing a building)  
 Hal's Diner is still around?

NINA  
 And as busy as ever. We should go back soon.

JOY  
 (sincerely)  
 I think I'd like that.

A little further down the road are the two bed & breakfasts. Main Street Bed & Breakfast is first, with Christmas Bed & Breakfast caddy corner to it.



They pull into Christmas B&B. As Nina and Joy get out and Joy begins to collect her bags, NICK WHITE and his daughter BENNY WHITE exit Main Street B&B and leave in Nick's truck.

INT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST - CONTINUOUS

The inside of the B&B is crowded with families celebrating the season in a Christmastown. Kids are running around, chasing each other and laughing with Christmas spirit. There's a table by the front door with urns for hot cocoa and coffee, marshmallows and whipped cream lined up next to them.

Joy's parents, MR. AND MRS. CHRISTMAS - late fifties - appear, excited to see their daughter. MR. CHRISTMAS is in a wheelchair and is pushed by MRS. CHRISTMAS.

Both of them hug Joy and then Nina, laughing.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(smiling wide)

Joy! We're so happy you're home!  
And just in time for Christmas!

MR. CHRISTMAS

Merry Christmas, Honey! Welcome home.

JOY

(to her dad)

Dad! How are you? Are you okay?

MR. CHRISTMAS

(chuckling)

Oh don't worry about it. I'm fine.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(frowning)

Your father decided to replace some lights without me and fell off the ladder, even after I asked him to wait until I got home. He broke his leg.

MR. CHRISTMAS

(shrugging)

What can I say? You know me.

JOY

(laughing)

Of course you did, Dad. I'm glad you're okay.

MR. CHRISTMAS  
 (grumbling)  
 I'll be better once I'm out of this  
 chair for good.

He shifts around in the wheelchair to try to get comfortable and Mrs. Christmas playfully swats at him.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (stern)  
 Dear. Be careful. We don't need  
*another* hospital visit this season.

MR. CHRISTMAS  
 (to Joy)  
 The White's have been getting most  
 of the tourists this year since  
 I've been stuck inside.  
 (mock whisper)  
 I think it's affecting your mother.

Mrs. Christmas is obviously upset, but tries to play it off as humoring her husband.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (condescending)  
 Your *father's* not a fan of losing  
 to the Whites.

JOY  
 (patting her dad's hand)  
 He never was.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (to Joy)  
 You're staying in your old room. Do  
 you want me to take you?

Joy shakes her head and looks to Nina with a cheerful eye roll.

JOY  
 No, Mom. I remember where it's at.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (laughing)  
 Well, alrighty then. I'll leave you  
 two girls alone to unwind and catch  
 up. Don't worry about anything  
 tonight, Joy. Have fun with Nina,  
 enjoy Verona. Do whatever you would  
 like!

Joy and Nina push past all of the boarders running around the lobby to get to Joy's childhood bedroom on the second floor.

It's the only room in the B&B untouched, all of the things from Joy's childhood still out on the desks. She has a varsity jacket hanging on her closet door and a photo of a younger Joy and Nina hanging on the wall.

Nina flops onto Joy's bed.

NINA

Where do you want to go tonight?

JOY

(sitting next to her)

Is there even anything to do here?

NINA

Well, Big City Girl. In fact, there is. We can go to the Tavern? See everyone, grab some dinner?

JOY

(thinking)

I'd like that.

INT. VERONA TAVERN - LATER

Joy and Nina are sitting at a bar, drinking something out of mugs. Christmas music plays softly in the background.

NINA

The Pub is crawling with tourists this time of year. This is basically the only place left to escape them.

JOY

(thoughtful)

I remember coming here in high school. It was always the highlight of my week. How...

(looking around)

...Quaint

NINA

(shaking her head)

Quaint, but fun. We had a great time here.

JOY

(laughing)

You're right. It was fun.

A couple about their age walks up to them, the woman heavily pregnant.

MAN

Hi Nina. And... Joy? Joy Christmas?

(laughing)

Wow. It's been so long since we've seen you in our little neck of the woods.

WOMAN

(agreeing)

Wow. It's so good to see you. It's been since, what? Senior year?

JOY

(nodding)

At least since then. How are you guys?

MAN

Oh, you know. We got married out of college and moved home to run Marylin's parents' grocery.

(rubbing Marylin's swollen stomach)

We're expecting our second just in time for Christmas.

Marylin glows with the interaction and Joy blinks in surprise.

JOY

(pushing for happiness)

Oh. Congratulations, guys.

MARYLIN

(with pride)

Thank you! Oh my goodness, everyone's going to be so happy to know you're back home.

JOY

(half-serious)

I'm so excited to see everyone again.

The couple exchanges a nice look and smile at Joy and Nina.

MAN

Well, Merry Christmas! See you around, you two!

The girls wave as the couple exits the bar, arms around each other as they head out into the cold.

Joy sips at her drink quietly. The patrons are jolly, laughing and dancing around the tavern. There is a quiet hum of conversation and the lighting and tone of the tavern is overall warm.

SFX: Joy to the World by Nat King Cole

JOY  
(sudden)  
Oh! I love this song!

NINA  
(surprised)  
You do?

JOY  
I know, I know. I should hate it.  
But it's like... an inside joke. Is  
that weird?

NINA  
I don't think so.

JOY  
(smiling softly)  
My mom used to play it on the piano  
every year for me and the kids  
staying at the Bed & Breakfast.  
It's always reminded me of home.

Someone taps on her shoulder and she turns around. Standing behind her is NICK WHITE, late-twenties. He's wearing a flannel shirt and has a scruffy brown beard. Handsome, but shy.

NICK  
Hi.

JOY  
(unsure)  
Hi.

Nick smiles at her, his dimples showing. Joy smiles back and for a moment they're lost in each other's eyes.

Nick realizes and shakes his head, regaining control.

NICK  
(still smiling)  
Would you? Like to dance? With me,  
I mean?

Joy looks to Nina to see her reaction. Nina's eyes are practically bugging out of her head. Joy doesn't seem to notice and shrugs to her friend.

JOY  
(a little flustered)  
Sure.  
(standing up)  
I'd like that.

They make their way to the middle of the floor and sway together. Nick smiles and spins Joy, who giggles. They're joined by other couples also dancing to Nat King Cole.

NICK  
I'm Nick.

JOY  
Joy.

NICK  
Joy? As in...

JOY  
(laughing)  
Like the song, yes.

NICK  
That's-

JOY  
(raising a brow)  
Weird?

NICK  
I was going to say 'a very nice name'.

JOY  
(taken aback)  
Oh. Thank you.

SFX ENDS

Nick and Joy make their way back to where she was sitting at the bar. Nick nods to the empty seat next to her. Nina watches all of this, eyes wide. She pulls out her phone and begins to frantically text someone.

JOY (CONT'D)  
(re: the empty seat)  
Sure.

They sit next to each other. The bartender notices Nick and brings him something steamy to drink.

NICK  
Thanks, Bud.

Bud winks.

NICK (CONT'D)  
(slowly)  
So... Verona. What brings you here?

JOY  
(smiling over her mug)  
How'd you know I wasn't from here?

NICK  
It's a small town. I know everyone here.

JOY  
(a little disappointed)  
Oh.

NICK  
(cocking his head)  
And I would have remembered someone as pretty as you in our town.

JOY  
(blushing)  
Oh.

She runs her hand over her face, trying to brush the flush away. She stops when she realizes Nick hasn't spoken and is still waiting for her answer.

JOY (CONT'D)  
(explaining)  
My parents. They live here and convinced me to stay with them for the season.

NICK  
That's very sweet of you.

JOY  
(ducking her head)  
It's been nice to see them again.  
(hurriedly)  
And you? Are you from here?

NICK  
(nodding)  
Born and raised.

JOY  
(shocked)  
You never left?

NICK  
(laughing)  
I went to the city for my  
honeymoon, but, no. I haven't left.

JOY  
(frowning on "honeymoon")  
Oh.

NICK  
(not noticing)  
My daughter loves it here. I'd  
never make her leave.

JOY  
(a bit sad)  
You have a daughter?

Nick pulls out his wallet and shows Joy a photo of BENNY  
WHITE, six. She's standing next to a Christmas tree three  
times her size, smiling with all her teeth.

NICK  
This is Benny.

JOY  
She's adorable.

NICK  
(lovingly)  
She's my whole world. Everything I  
do is for her.

JOY  
(fishing, looking at the  
photo)  
I'm sure you and your wife are very  
proud.

NICK  
(subdued)  
Actually, Benny's mom passed when  
she was just a baby.

Joy places her hand on the bar.



JOY  
I'm so sorry.

Nick reaches out to cover her hand with his own.

NICK  
It's alright, Joy. You didn't know.  
Rosie's been gone for a long time  
now.

Nick squeezes Joy's hand and Bud places Nick's tab in front of him.

JOY  
(thinking)  
Rosie?

NICK  
(explaining)  
My wife.

Joy opens her mouth to say something, but is stopped by Nick checking the time on his watch.

NICK (CONT'D)  
(rueful)  
I have to go. My parents are  
watching Benny and I promised her  
I'd tuck her in.

He signs his check, then takes Joy's hand in his own.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Here.

JOY  
(smiling)  
What are you doing?

He scribbles something on her hand. Joy turns it around to see a phone number.

NICK  
My number. Maybe we can get dinner  
sometime?

JOY  
I think I'd like that.

Nick exits the tavern. Joy turns to a still thoroughly-stunned Nina.

JOY (CONT'D)  
 (smiling, blissful)  
 What?

NINA  
 (shaking her head)  
 I just never thought you'd have a  
 thing for Nick White.

The blissful look falls right off of Joy's face. She turns her head to where Nick just left and then back to Nina as though she couldn't believe what she was hearing.

JOY  
 (shocked)  
*That's Little Nicky White?*

NINA  
 He's definitely grown up a bit.

Joy places her chin in her hand.

JOY  
 I'll say. Gosh, the last time I saw  
 him was graduation. I think I was  
 still taller than him.

NINA  
 (agreeing)  
 He did hit quite the growth spurt  
 while you were gone.

JOY  
 (thoughtfully)  
 Nicky White gave me his number.  
 (realizing)  
 Oh my gosh. Nick White gave me his  
 number.

NINA  
 Now you see why I was shocked.

JOY  
 (distraught)  
 What am I going to do? My parents  
 will kill me for talking to him,  
 let alone *flirting* with him.  
 They're mad enough that his parents  
 are taking all their customers this  
 year!

Joy starts rubbing at the number on her hand, trying to get it off. Nina takes pity on her and dips a napkin into a water glass.

NINA

Here.

She takes Joy's hand in her own and starts rubbing the number off. Joy starts thinking aloud while Nina works to get rid of the ink.

JOY

(in a rush)

How do I handle this? Our parents hate each other. Do you think he knew who I was?

NINA

(placating)

It's going to be okay.

JOY

(stopping her)

Nina. I had *fun* with him.

NINA

(agreeing)

It sure looked like it.

Joy gives her a look and Nina sighs.

NINA (CONT'D)

Look. I wouldn't blame you if you wanted to see him again. You two looked like you were having fun.

JOY

(pointed)

As friends.

NINA

(knowing)

Of course.

JOY

(beat)

So, Rosie...

NINA

(sad sigh)

His wife.

JOY

Is it...

NINA

(frowning)

Rosie Collins, from school.

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)

His high school girlfriend. They got married pretty quickly and had Benny. She got sick not long after and passed.

JOY

Oh my goodness. That's so sad.

NINA

(nodding)

It was. It was pretty sudden. No one was sadder than Nick, though. He became totally withdrawn. After she passed, I only ever saw him with Benny, never anyone else. He works all the time. This was actually the first time I've seen him smile with someone other than his daughter in... years.

Joy stops rubbing her hand and looks a bit sad about her actions.

JOY

(thinking)

We should head back.

NINA

You're probably right.

JOY

And don't tell my parents about this!

NINA

(crossing her heart)

I won't. I swear.

The girls smile and laugh and link arms together as they leave.

INT. JOY'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Joy sleeps in, but is eventually awoken by the sound of shouting. She quickly pulls on a flannel shirt, jeans, and a robe before going out to investigate.

The inside of the Bed & Breakfast is surprisingly devoid of bodies. Joy looks confused before following the sound of chaos outside.

## EXT. CHRISTMAS BED &amp; BREAKFAST - CONTINUOUS

Outside, Joy finds her parents and Nick's parents in the street, yelling at each other. She wraps her robe tighter around her and heads off the porch toward the commotion, eyes rolling.

MRS. WHITE

(to Mrs. Christmas)

That's a lie! You're lying to your customers about us! No wonder they choose you!

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(pointing her finger)

They're not lies if they're the truth! I'm simply *informing* our patrons of some facts about the Main Street Bed & Breakfast that they might not otherwise know.

MR. WHITE

(joining in)

Do *not* speak to my wife like that!

MR. CHRISTMAS

(from his chair)

My wife has the right to say whatever she pleases!

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(ignoring the men)

Besides, nothing I say will ever be worse than your new 'promotion'.

Mrs. White crosses her arms and tilts her nose up in response to Mrs. Christmas's words.

MRS. WHITE

I don't know what you're talking about

MRS. CHRISTMAS

Don't mess with me. I know you're offering a discount if your customers prove they cancelled their booking with us before rebooking with you. I've had dozens of our patrons inform us of this!

The noise in the street is escalating and people all down the road are beginning to peak out of windows and go outside to see what the commotion is about.

The group in the street have blocked traffic and now cars are backed up on either side of them. Tensions are high and the whole town is beginning to feel them.

MRS. WHITE

(laughing)

That's ridiculous. I would do no such thing.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

Of course you would, you-

Joy steps in-between the women, trying to broker peace. She holds her arms out to keep them away. The two women glare at each other over her head.

JOY

(placating)

Can we please not fight. It's not worth it.

The women look ready to ignore her when the crowd parts. MAYOR CHRISTOPHER PRINCE, late forties, walks through.

MAYOR PRINCE

(head cocked)

What seems to be the trouble this morning? Mrs. White, Mrs. Christmas?

The women look up at him and then to each other. This is a moment of peace in their constant battle. Both women know that if one of them is to blame, they both are, and neither woman is willing to take the fall for another.

MRS. WHITE

(smiling)

Nothing, Mayor Prince.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(joining)

Just some good old fashioned Christmas ribbing.

Mrs. Christmas actually elbows Mrs. White in the ribs as she says this. Mrs. White's eyes light in anger, but she forces her smile to stay up, even as she bumps Mrs. Christmas with her hip.

MAYOR PRINCE

(nodding, looking between the two women)

Hmm. I see.

(MORE)

MAYOR PRINCE (CONT'D)

So that means there's no reason for you two to be blocking traffic on our main street during the busiest month of the year?

MRS. CHRISTMAS AND MRS. WHITE

No, sir.

MAYOR PRINCE

(nodding, pleased)

Good. Then it would be nice to see this taken out of the road and to somewhere less... obtrusive.

MRS. CHRISTMAS AND MRS. WHITE

Of course, sir.

MAYOR PRINCE

Thank you, ladies.

(an afterthought)

Oh. And a heads-up that there's still no snow in the forecast-

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(shocked)

Still?

MAYOR PRINCE

Still. Some of our visitors are getting anxious, so I think it's about time to fire up the old snow machine and make some of our own.

MR. CHRISTMAS

(shivering)

It's certainly cold enough for it.

MAYOR PRINCE

That it is. Anyways, take it inside. You know better. Anymore of this and the town will need two new Bed & Breakfasts to replace yours once you've been kicked out. Got it?

Everyone nods. The crowd begins to dissipate due to the sudden lack of fighting.

Joy grabs the handles of her dad's wheelchair and starts to push him back to the house.

JOY

There really hasn't been any snowfall at all this season?

MR. CHRISTMAS  
(shaking his head)  
None. It's the latest first snow  
we've had since... probably since  
before you were born.

INT. NICK'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Nick is driving Benny home from breakfast, the little girl  
bundled up in a pink puffer jacket and matching knit cap with  
a pom pom on top.

NICK  
(to Benny)  
She was very nice. She said that  
you were adorable.

BENNY  
(lighting up)  
She said that about me?

NICK  
(laughing)  
She did.

BENNY  
Well, I like her already, then.

They pull into the Main Street B&B. Nick notices the dying  
commotion in the road and pauses in the driveway. He catches  
sight of Joy pushing her father's wheelchair.

She turns and catches his eyes. The two look at each other  
for a moment as they both realize exactly who the other is.

There's a suspended moment where it feels like one might go  
to the other, but it ends quickly. Joy continues pushing her  
father and Nick continues pulling into his driveway. He turns  
to Benny with a sigh.

NICK  
I don't know if you're going to  
meet the lady anytime soon.

BENNY  
Aww. Why not?

NICK  
You know how Grandma and Grandpa  
hate the Christmas family?



BENNY  
 (giggling)  
 Yes.

NICK  
 (sighing)  
 It looks like that lady might be  
 their daughter.

BENNY  
 (solemnly)  
 That's okay, Dad. If she's nice  
 that doesn't matter. Grandma and  
 Grandpa will have to like her!

Nick looks at his daughter and smiles.

NICK  
 You know what, Benny? You're right.

BENNY  
 (pleased with herself)  
 I know. I always am.

He looks off to where Joy went back inside. A moment later, Joy exits the house again with her mother, wearing a sensible coat this time. Her mom hands her a handwritten grocery list and the keys to her car. Joy nods a few times at whatever her mom is saying before heading to the car and starts to drive away.

NICK  
 (to Benny)  
 Do you want to go on a little trip?

BENNY  
 (excited)  
 Yes! Yay!

Nick puts the truck in reverse and begins to back out of the driveway to follow Joy.

EXT. OUTDOOR HOLIDAY FARMER'S MARKET - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Nick and Benny walk past vendors selling everything imaginable. There's homemade chocolate, fresh apple cider. They pass an elderly couple selling wood carvings. The old woman surreptitiously winks at Nick as they continue on.

Joy is standing at a bakery counter, browsing the pies. Her arms are laden with bags of fresh apples and a gallon of homemade apple cider.

She seems to take an interest in a large cherry one, but pauses to think. As she does, Nick sees an opening and swoops in and grabs it for himself.

JOY  
(errant)  
Hey!

She looks up and sees Nick standing there, holding her pie with a cheeky grin. Her frown grows.

JOY (CONT'D)  
I need that!

NICK  
(unapologetic)  
Oh. Sorry. I didn't know.

Benny comes around from behind Nick's back. Joy's expression immediately softens upon seeing her.

JOY  
Oh! Hello!

Benny turns from her dad to Joy.

BENNY  
(smiling wide)  
Hi! I'm Benny.

JOY  
Hi, Benny. Nice to meet you.

Benny's already turned back to her dad. She tugs on his shirt sleeve until he looks at her.

Nick crouches so he's on her level.

NICK  
Yes, Sweetie?

BENNY  
Can I have donut money?

Benny smiles wide, totally innocent. Nick laughs and pulls a twenty out of his wallet. He hands it to her and she pockets it and dashes off without so much as a thank you thrown in her wake.

NICK  
(after her)  
Save one for me!

Joy watches as Nick smiles after her, obviously overwhelmed with love for his daughter. He turns back to her, still grinning.

NICK (CONT'D)  
(shrugging)  
Kids. You know.

JOY  
You're really good with her.

NICK  
She's my whole life. After her mom... She was all I had left. Everything I do is for her.

JOY  
I'm sorry about that, by the way. I didn't realize... Rosie always seemed nice in school.

NICK  
(smiling sadly)  
Don't worry about it. Benny's had a rough time, but we've been pushing through. Christmas is always hard, but I just make sure it's the best Christmas for Benny, every year.

JOY  
That's sweet.

NICK  
Well, it *is* our favorite holiday, so it's not that hard. I just make sure I have Benny's favorite things around at all times.

JOY  
(gesturing to the pie)  
Is that what that's for?

Nick looks at the pie in his hands as though he's totally forgotten it was there.

NICK  
(thinking quick)  
Oh, yeah. We come here every Saturday. To the Farmer's Market, I mean. Cherry's her favorite and I am the worst baker known to man.

They both chuckle at his joke.

NICK (CONT'D)

(sudden)

Oh! You can have it, if you need?

(gesturing to the booths  
around them)

I'm sure we can find something else  
to enjoy in all of this.

He offers her the pie, but Joy shakes her head no.

JOY

Don't worry about it. Keep it. We  
can live with pumpkin.

She picks a pumpkin pie off of the rack to prove her point  
and they both pay the baker.

Benny comes running back, cinnamon dust all over her mouth.  
She has a white paper bag clutched in one of her chubby hands  
and she grabs Nick's legs. He gives her a one-armed hug, his  
pie still in the other.

NICK

Did you get your donuts?

Benny nods excitedly and holds the white bag out. Nick  
reaches in and pulls out a mini cinnamon sugar donut. He pops  
it in his mouth and Benny giggles when he gets cinnamon in  
his beard.

NICK (CONT'D)

(mouth-full)

Delicious!

He hands the bag back to Benny. She looks inside and then  
sheepishly holds it out to Joy.

BENNY

(uncertain)

Do you want one?

Joy looks up, shocked to find that Benny was talking to her.

JOY

Oh! Are you sure?

Benny nods, holding the bag out again, closer this time. Joy  
smiles at her gratefully.

JOY (CONT'D)

(Taking one)

Thank you.

Joy eats the donut and nods, getting just as much cinnamon on her as the others.

JOY (CONT'D)  
(eyes wide)  
This is amazing!

NICK  
Miss Jeanie makes them. She's the best.

JOY  
Oh, right! Miss Jeanie! I used to love her desserts. I'm so happy she's still cooking.

NICK  
(thoughtfully)  
I keep forgetting that you know everyone around here.

JOY  
(blushing)  
Well, we did grow up together.

NICK  
So you do know who I am.

JOY  
Of course I do, Nicky  
White.  
(beat)  
Well, I didn't at first. But in my defense you do have a beard now!

He laughs and scratches at his beard, as though remembering he has it.

NICK  
That's true. I'm also probably eight inches taller than when you last saw me.

JOY  
(laughing)  
That's true, too.

There's a pause and Nick runs his hand through Benny's hair.

JOY (CONT'D)  
Our parents would be so mad if they knew we were talking.  
(MORE)

JOY (CONT'D)

My mom would never let me live it down if she found out I was "fraternizing with the enemy".

NICK

Mine, too. My dad would personally kick me out of the house.

They laugh again, comfortable.

NICK (CONT'D)

(slowly)

Since we're reminiscing... Would you like to maybe get dinner sometime?

Joy smiles sadly. As much as she would like to, she is technically in a relationship.

She holds up her left hand and points to the ring on her finger, a sad smile on her face. Nick's falls as he sees it, even before she's said anything.

JOY

(sadly)

I can't. I'm engaged.

NICK

(melancholy)

Oh. Of course.

(recovering)

Congratulations! Who's the lucky guy?

JOY

His name is Peter. I work with him in the city. He's nice.

NICK

(nodding, more to himself than her)

Well, congratulations.

(pointing to Benny, who's munching another donut)

I've gotta get this little monster home before she crashes on all of this sugar, but it was nice to see you again!

JOY

(sadder)

You too.

Nick swings Benny up into his arms with a giggle and walks off, both of them laughing. Joy watches them go with a frown, sad about not going with them.

INT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST KITCHEN - A WEEK LATER

Joy and her mom stand in the kitchen, making breakfast for the boarders. Joy whips eggs while her mom starts pouring pancakes on a griddle.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
(without looking up)  
Do you want to help me decorate the town entrance tomorrow?

JOY  
(confused)  
How is the entrance to a town that celebrates Christmas all year not already decorated for Christmas?

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
(giving her a look)  
Some of the light strands are old and went out. I volunteered to help replace them.

JOY  
Sure, then. I'll help.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
(surprised)  
Really? No grumbling involved?

JOY  
Nope. Not this time, at least.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
See? I knew the spirit of Christmas would grow on you again. You just needed time.

JOY  
(rolling her eyes)  
It's *not* the spirit of Christmas. I like keeping myself busy! And work is work, no matter what kind.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
(smiling)  
Keep telling yourself that.

Nina knocks on the kitchen door and the Christmas women turn to see her.

NINA  
(entering)  
Knock, knock.

MRS. CHRISTMAS AND JOY  
Nina!

Mrs. Christmas wipes her hands on her apron and gives Nina a big hug.

NINA  
Good morning, Mrs. C! It's nice to see you!

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
You too.

JOY  
Morning.

NINA  
Good morning to you, too, Joy.  
How's it going with You-Know-Who?

Joy shoots her a dirty look as Mrs. Christmas looks over her shoulder at them, a brow raised.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
You-Know-Who? Who's that?

NINA  
(deviously)  
Oh, you know-

JOY  
(cutting her off)  
Nina's just being ridiculous. She's trying to get a rise out of you. You know how she is.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
(accepting with an eye roll)  
Ah, girls. Some things never change.

Mrs. Christmas flips the pancakes onto a plate. Joy passes her the eggs.



MRS. CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

What brings you to our neck of the woods?

NINA

I was actually wondering if your lovely daughter here wanted to go get breakfast with me at Hal's? I know how much she used to love those pumpkin pancakes.

Joy stands up straight, her eyes lighting up at the mention of the pancakes. She bites her lip and looks to her mom, silently pleading for the morning off.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(good-naturedly)

Well, I did have some things I wanted help with...

JOY

(groaning)

Come on, Mom. You know you can do all that alone. Pumpkin pancakes are calling me.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(rolling her eyes)

Fine. I suppose I can stand to lose you for one day. But help me set the food out first, please!

Joy, Nina, and Mrs. Christmas bring the food out to a table laden with breakfast, buffet style. The pancakes and eggs were the last of the meal. The girls put everything out for the boarders, the children of whom are salivating at the sight and smell of the food.

Joy lays out a few more coffee cups and her mom gives her a big hug.

MRS. CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

Thanks so much, girls. Enjoy the diner!

INT. HAL'S DINER

Hal's Diner is a local hangout. It's an old-fashioned diner, packed wall-to-wall with patrons looking for a quick, good bite to eat.

Joy and Nina sit at a booth across from each other.

JOY  
Pumpkin pancakes, please.

NINA  
For me as well.

The waitress- a girl likely still in high school- smiles and walks off to another table.

Joy watches her go and catches sight of Nick and Benny as she does. They're a few tables away. Nick is holding a mug in both hands, watching Benny dig into the biggest stack of chocolate chip pancakes ever.

Nina waves her hand, trying to get Joy's attention.

NINA (CONT'D)  
Hello? Earth to Joy!

Joy snaps back to reality with a shake of her head.

JOY  
I'm sorry. What were you saying?

NINA  
Nothing important. Especially since I just saw who you were staring at.

JOY  
(blushing)  
I wasn't staring at anyone.

NINA  
I have eyes, you know. Go talk to him! I don't mind. I'll keep your pancakes safe, don't worry.

JOY  
(narrowing her eyes)  
I do not believe for one second that my pancakes are safe with you.

Nina raises her hands in mock-innocence.

NINA  
Joy! I would never cause harm to your food! Believe me! Now, go over and talk to that man before you both miss your chance!

Joy nods to herself, pauses, nods to herself again, and stands.

JOY  
 You're right. I'll just go say hi.  
 I'm a big girl.

NINA  
 (excited)  
 Yes, you are! You go!

As Joy gets up, Nina quickly calls someone on her phone. Joy gives her a questioning look, but Nina shoos her off toward Nick and Benny.

NINA (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Hi Freddy! It's Nina! Yeah... I'm actually looking at Nick right now. Hey, did you know that Joy Christmas is back in town...? I know...

Joy walks over to where Benny and Nick are sitting. Nick has his back to her, so Benny notices her first. She waves at Joy and beckons her over.

JOY  
 Hi Benny! Those pancakes look amazing!

Nick swivels to see her so fast that he hits his knee on the table. He flinches but still waves to the open seat between him and Benny. Joy takes it, smiling all the while.

BENNY  
 They're really good! You should try some!

Benny tried to offer Joy some of her pancakes, but Joy waves her off with a smile.

JOY  
 Oh, no thank you. I have some of my own coming.

She points to her seat two tables back. Nina, still on the phone, waves at them and Nick waves back.

NICK  
 (with a wink)  
 Just couldn't stay away, huh?

JOY  
 (blushing)  
 No. This is Nina's fault.  
 (MORE)

JOY (CONT'D)

She encouraged me to go "make new friends" or something. Personally, I think she just wanted the whole table to herself.

NICK

(smirking)

Whatever you say...

JOY

(peaking at Nick's cup)

Whatcha drinking?

NICK

An apple cider.

JOY

(cocking her head)

Is that what you were having at the Tavern that night?

NICK

(nodding)

I can't get enough. I drink them all the time. Doesn't hurt that Verona only has the fresh stuff.

The waitress comes back by to check on them.

NICK (CONT'D)

(to the waitress)

Can I get another of these?

(he lifts his mug)

And can you get our good friend Joy here her very own mug as well.

The waitress nods and starts to walk away, but Joy calls her back.

JOY

(shaking her head)

No, that's okay. None for me.

NICK

(jaw dropped)

What? No hot apple cider for the city girl?

Joy scrunches her nose, sad to disappoint him.

JOY

It's not really my thing.

(to the waitress)

(MORE)

JOY (CONT'D)

Can I just get a black coffee,  
please?

The waitress nods again and this time manages to make her escape.

NICK

(side-eyeing her)  
Black coffee for the city girl?

JOY

(nose still scrunched)  
Don't judge me! It's still early.

BENNY

Joy! Look!

Joy looks to where Benny has taken all of the sugar packets on the table and made them into a tower. Nick just sits back and enjoys them interacting.

JOY

Wow! That's amazing! You got it so tall!

BENNY

(beaming)  
Thanks! I've been practicing. We get breakfast here every Saturday, so I have a lot of time.

JOY

(brow raised)  
I thought you go to the farmer's market every Saturday

Benny opens her mouth to respond, but Nick beats her to it.

NICK

Start the day with breakfast at Hal's, then the farmer's market. You can't go wrong with that combination.

Benny stuffs her mouth with more pancakes and nods her assent.

JOY

(turning back to Benny)  
So, Benny. What grade are you in?

Benny holds up one finger while she finishes chewing her pancakes.

BENNY

First. At Verona Prep. Mrs. Goldheart is my teacher.

JOY

(shocked)

She's still teaching? That was my teacher when I was in first grade.

BENNY

(nodding)

Yeah. She's suuuuper old.

JOY

(laughing)

I'll bet. Do you like school?

BENNY

Uh huh. Mrs. Goldheart says I read at a fourth grade reading level. It's because Dad makes me read to him every night before bed.

The waitress drops the drinks off in front of them. Joy immediately wraps her hands around her mug.

NICK

(shrugging)

It's no big deal. Goldheart said it would be good for her, so that's what we've been doing recently.

BENNY

(shaking her head)

No. We've been reading every night since I was a baby. That's way longer than I've been in first grade!

NICK

(chuckling)

You're right. You caught me. She's a big reader so it's only right to indulge her.

Joy laughs at the interaction. Her original waitress walks by the table with two plates of pumpkin pancakes. Joy looks at them hungrily and stands up.

JOY

I see my food. I should head back. I've left Nina alone for long enough.

(chuckle)

(MORE)

JOY (CONT'D)

Besides, I do want to actually  
enjoy my breakfast before it falls  
victim to Nina.

Nick stands up to meet her. They actually bump each other and giggle as they fight the small diner for space between them.

Nick runs his hand through his hair.

NICK

I know what the answer's going to  
be, but I have to ask one more time  
if we could possibly get dinner  
sometime?

Joy shakes her head sadly and points at her ring again.  
Nick's eyes follow her finger and he sighs.

JOY

Fiancé, remember?

NICK

(sucking on his teeth)  
Fiancé. Right, of course. Sorry. I  
just figured I would ask.

JOY

I'm sorry.

NICK

(shaking his head)  
Don't be. Have a good rest of your  
day, Joy.

JOY

(soft smile)  
You too, Nick.  
(to Benny)  
Don't forget the other half of your  
pancakes!

NICK

(laughing)  
She's right. They're all over your  
face.

Benny frowns and uses her napkin to wipe all over her mouth in the hopes of mopping up some of the chocolate smeared there.

Joy takes her coffee back with her to her original table.  
Nina is sipping her own coffee, waiting.

NINA  
(on Joy sitting)  
Fiancé, huh?

JOY  
(waving her off)  
It's not a big deal.

NINA  
I think that my friend being  
engaged is a pretty big deal, not  
going to lie.

Nina lifts a brow like she's waiting for Joy to go on. Joy  
laughs at her face.

JOY  
What?

NINA  
(waiting)  
So? Go on? What's he like? I want  
all the details!

JOY  
There's not much to say.

NINA  
There has to be something. You're  
engaged to him, after all.

JOY  
(sighing)  
His name is Peter-

NINA  
(wagging her brows)  
Oooh.

JOY  
(giving her a look)  
He works with me. We've been  
together for a few years now. He  
proposed back in August.

NINA  
(blinking)  
And I'm just now hearing about it?

JOY  
Don't feel bad. I didn't really  
tell anyone. I haven't even told my  
parents yet.



NINA

Why not? If I were engaged to a Big City hot shot, I'd be singing it from the roof.

JOY

(shrugging)

It's not a big deal. I'll tell them eventually. They'll just freak out and I don't want them to do that. Besides, he hasn't called me since I've been here. I'd rather wait until after we talk again to tell them.

NINA

(sarcastic)

He sure sounds like a keeper.

JOY

(laughing)

He's a good guy. I promise.

NINA

(serious)

Do you like him?

JOY

(startled)

What?

NINA

Do you like him? This guy you're going to marry?

JOY

(brow furrowed)

Of course I love him. He's a nice guy.

NINA

(scrutinizing her)

But do you *like* him?

Joy thinks for a moment and then sighs. She rests her face in her hands and scrubs at her eyes before looking back up at Nina.

JOY

I don't know anymore. I did for a while. Now, I think it's more because we've been together for so long that I don't even know what it would be like to live without him.

NINA

Joy, you know that's no reason for marriage.

Joy presses her hands back to her face.

JOY

I know. I don't know what to do.

Nina reaches across the table and grabs Joy's hands in her own.

NINA

No one will blame you if you broke up with him.

Joy looks up with a groan.

JOY

I know. But I can't just leave him like that.

NINA

(simply)

If he doesn't make you happy, you shouldn't stay with him.

JOY

(nodding)

You're right. But I can't do it now. After the holidays. It will hurt both of us to break up now.

NINA

I can get behind that.

She looks back to where Benny and Nick are still sitting and laughing.

NINA (CONT'D)

Besides, you have some options here that you could explore. You know, just to see what else is out there. In case you change your mind.

Joy swats at her friend.

JOY

I don't like Nick. Not like that.

Nina dodges her with a laugh.

NINA

I'm not saying you do. I'm just saying that I wouldn't blame you if you did.

JOY

(quietly)  
He asked me out.

NINA

Joy! You've been holding out on me.

JOY

I know, I know. But I have Peter. It wasn't a big deal.

NINA

(invested)  
Well? What did you say?

JOY

(confused)  
I said no.

NINA

You said no!? Why?

JOY

(dragging out her words)  
*Nina*, I'm *engaged*. I told him that and he seemed fine with it.  
(beat)  
Well, he seemed okay the first time. This time he seemed almost sad.

NINA

(scandalized)  
He's asked you out more than once? And you said no both times?

JOY

Of course I did.

NINA

Well, since you're no longer engaged-

JOY

Not true!

NINA

-I think you should say yes the next time he asks.

JOY  
If he asks again.

NINA  
(conspiratorially)  
Oh, he will. Don't worry about that.

JOY  
We'll see.

NINA  
I'll see you saying yes, you mean.

Joy doesn't respond, just purses her lips in thought. Nina sighs and rests her chin on her hands.

NINA (CONT'D)  
Look, this could be good for you. Go out with Nick once. See how a real man should treat you. When you realize how much better Nick is for you than Peter, you'll have a much easier time breaking things off.

JOY  
(after a moment)  
Okay.

Nina stops, surprised by the speed of Joy's concession.

NINA  
Okay?

JOY  
(shrugging)  
Okay. Fine. You win. I'll do it- Platonically!- just to see the world around me.

Nina grins like a cat with a canary.

NINA  
That's fine with me.

INT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST - JOY'S ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Joy is brushing her hair and gazing out of her french doors toward Nick's house. She sighs, watching as the last light turns off for the night.

There is a quiet tapping against her window and she turns, intrigued.

After a moment, the tapping happens again and she sees a little pebble fall onto her balcony. Joy gathers her robe and puts it on before opening her french doors and stepping out onto her balcony.

She looks around, trying to find the source of the noise. At first, Joy doesn't see anything and she sighs. Then-

NICK O.S.

Pssst!

Joy looks around to find him, but sees no one around. She finally looks straight down and sees Nick hiding in her bushes.

JOY

(incredulous)

Nick?

Nick grins up at her and offers her a light wave. The two whisper back and forth, careful to stay quiet.

NICK

Hi.

JOY

(whispering)

What- What are you doing here?

NICK

(whispering)

I wanted to see you.

JOY

What if my someone sees you? Or, worse. What if my parents find us?

NICK

Let them. We're adults who can make our own decisions.

She shakes her head with a laugh.

JOY

Something tells me our parents wouldn't agree with that.

NICK

They will. Someday.

JOY

So why are you really here? I know it wasn't just to freeze.

Joy shivers and stamps her feet a bit as though to emphasize her point.

NICK

I never got your number and you never called mine.

JOY

(sheepish)

Oh. Sorry. It washed off before I wrote it down and I forgot.

NICK

(waving her off)

I wanted to invite you out to dinner tomorrow night-

JOY

(sucking her teeth)

Nick, I-

NICK

(stopping her)

Before you say anything, hear me out. I know you're engaged, but I'm offering a friendship dinner, no strings attached. Completely platonic. I just want to get to know you.

JOY

(softening)

Oh, Nick...

NICK

Please don't say no.

JOY

I wasn't going to. I was going to say yes.

NICK

(brightening)

Yes?

JOY

(nodding)

Yes. I think that I would really like that.

NICK

That's a relief. We'll have a good time. I promise. I can pick you up here?

JOY  
 (laughing)  
 I don't think Mom and Dad would appreciate that.

NICK  
 Oh. Of course.

JOY  
 Why don't we meet outside of Hal's and go from there?

Nick grins up at her, his dimples showing.

NICK  
 It's a date.

EXT. TOWN ENTRANCE - NEXT DAY

Mrs. Christmas is taking down a stand of lights from the town sign. She hands them down to Joy, who replaces them with a new, working strand.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (while working)  
 So... Do you have any plans tonight?

Her question surprises Joy, who almost drops the lights. She peers up at her mom, trying to decide if she knows something she isn't supposed to, but Mrs. Christmas is focused fully on the decorations.

JOY  
 (looking away)  
 Actually, I do have dinner plans.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (turning, raising a brow)  
 Oh? With anyone in particular?

JOY  
 (shrugging)  
 No big deal. Nina invited me out with some people I used to know. I thought it might be fun.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 That would be fun. And good for you to get out and see some other people your age.  
 (MORE)

MRS. CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

I was thinking about asking if you wanted to get dinner with your father and I, but that can wait another night.

JOY

(quickly)

Of course! I'd love that. Sometime soon, for sure!

Joy smiles up at her mom, who smiles down at her, completely oblivious to the fact that her daughter is going out to dinner with the son of her two least favorite people in the town.

Joy looks up at the sky. It's blue, cloud free. A beautiful day.

JOY (CONT'D)

(frowning)

Still no snow on the radar?

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(sighing)

Not yet. The meteorologist says we might not have anything until January.

JOY

(shocked)

January!? That's... a long time from now.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

Don't I know it.

(frowning)

Hopefully, people don't start cancelling if there's no snow.

(matter-of-factly)

They do that sometimes, you know.

JOY

I know.

Mrs. Christmas hangs up the last of the lights.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

Just keep your fingers crossed for a white Christmas.

JOY

Can do, Mom.

The Christmas women smile at each other.



Mrs. Christmas nods to the pile of boxes next to them.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
Pass me that garland, please?

EXT. HAL'S DINER - THAT NIGHT

Joy is dressed in fashionable, but warm, clothes. Her hair and makeup are done and she looks both excited and nervous as she waits for Nick. She scuffs her shoe on the ground and leans out toward the road to look for his headlights, anxious for Nick to arrive.

After a moment, he pulls up in his truck. He gets out, dressed in a huge flannel jacket and a scarf that winds itself around his neck.

NICK  
(grinning)  
Good evening.

JOY  
(sheepish)  
Hi. How are you?

Nick just smiles in response. Just then, the back door of the truck opens and Benny jumps out and runs at Joy's legs, smiling wide.

BENNY  
(screaming)  
Joy!

Joy and Nick both laugh as Joy gives Benny a big hug around her waist.

NICK  
(to Joy, nodding at Benny)  
See? I said it would be just  
platonic.

JOY  
(laughing)  
I do see that.  
(to Benny, squeezing her  
back)  
Hi, Benny!

NICK  
Alright, ladies. We should go. The  
food's getting cold.

He walks back to the truck and helps Benny in before opening the door for Joy and closing it behind her.

JOY  
(once Nick's in)  
What do you mean the food's cold?

NICK  
(shrugging)  
I was thinking something a bit different for dinner tonight. Corral your city girl sensibilities back to our little town.

JOY  
(brow furrowed)  
What are you planning?

NICK  
You'll see. It's a surprise

They drive for a bit until they come across the Christmas tree farm just outside of town. They pull into the abandoned parking lot. Once they stop, Nick once again gets out first and opens the door for both Benny and Joy and helps them out.

Nick goes around the back of the truck and gathers up a pile of blankets and a picnic basket.

NICK (CONT'D)  
(explaining)  
I thought we might like to eat under the stars tonight.  
(hurriedly, at Joy's look)  
And don't worry. It's all hot food and I have more than enough blankets for all of us.

JOY  
(mock annoyed)  
Mhmm.

NICK  
Oh! Give me a second.

He jogs off to the booth at the front of the parking lot. He fumbles around for a moment before all of the twinkling Christmas lights come on, transforming the dark lot into a Christmas wonderland.

Both Joy and Benny gasp, delighted by the farm. Nick heads back to them, grinning.

NICK (CONT'D)  
(explaining)  
I just had to plug everything in.  
Now we can see.

JOY  
It's lovely.

Benny nods enthusiastically. Nick picks up the picnic basket and Joy grabs the bundle of blankets, following his lead.

Joy and Benny follow him through the trees. He brings them to a clearing surrounded by towering pines covered in Christmas lights. Benny and Nick are grinning, obviously aware of this place's existence. Joy can't stifle her gasp as she takes everything in.

JOY (CONT'D)  
This is...

NICK  
(finishing her sentence)  
I know.  
(beat)  
I work here every summer, tending the trees before the season starts. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson are getting older and appreciate the help. It's nice work and it makes me feel useful.

He nods to the blankets in her hands.

NICK (CONT'D)  
May I?

Joy nods and he sets down the basket to pull the blankets out of her hands.

Nick lays a large blanket on the ground and gestures for all of them to sit. They do. He hands each of them a warm blanket and Joy snuggles into hers, content.

Joy puts her hand on Nick's shoulder.

JOY  
This is amazing.

NICK  
(embarrassed)  
It's nothing. Something that anyone could do.

JOY

But not everyone would.

Nick busies himself passing out food for them. He pours him and Benny a mug of hot apple cider.

NICK

(at Joy's look)

Don't worry, I remembered.

He pulls out another thermos.

NICK (CONT'D)

Black coffee for our resident city girl.

They laugh and clink glasses.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE FARM CLEARING - AN HOUR LATER

Benny is fast asleep under the blankets, her head in Joy's lap and her legs on Nick's.

Joy absentmindedly brushes Benny's hair with her hand and Nick's eyes follow the movement, full of love.

Joy's phone rings and Benny shifts. She pulls it out and sees Peter's name and photo on the screen. After a moment, she declines the call and puts it away.

NICK

Who was that.

Joy waves him off.

JOY

No one. Someone from work.

(beat)

This was nice. Thank you.

NICK

You liked it?

JOY

Of course I did! This was the nicest dinner I've ever been to.

They smile at each other for a moment at Joy's words. Benny shivers and snuggles deeper into her blankets. Nick places his hand on her cheek and she snuggles into him.

NICK  
(sadly)  
I guess we should head back, then.

JOY  
Yeah. I guess.

They get up and gather everything. Nick takes all of the picnic paraphernalia. Joy gets Benny, swinging her up onto her back to give her a piggy back ride back to the truck.

INT. NICK'S TRUCK - LATER

Nick idles his truck in front of Christmas B&B.

All of the lights at both B&Bs are off, so they don't worry about being seen. Benny sleeps peacefully in the backseat.

NICK  
(quietly)  
I had a really good time tonight,  
and I know Benny did, too. Thank  
you for joining us.

JOY  
Thank you for taking me. It really  
was amazing.  
(beat)  
Well, I should get going.

NICK  
(sighing)  
Yeah. I suppose.

They look into each other's eyes.

Beat.

Nick leans in and kisses her cheek. It's spur of the moment and even Nick seems shocked by his actions.

NICK (CONT'D)  
I'm so sorry. I don't know what  
that was. I really wanted this to  
be us as friends. Please don't take  
that to mean anything.

Joy stops him.

JOY  
Don't worry about it.

Nick raises his brows in disbelief.

NICK

Are you sure? I know you're engaged.

JOY

(sighing)

I've been thinking about that and I decided that I'm going to break things off with him after the holidays.

Nick is unable to contain his excitement at this development. He tries to hold back his grin, but his lips keep turning up.

NICK

Yeah?

JOY

Nina and I were talking and she reminded me I shouldn't be with someone I'm not in love with.

There's another pause as both of them take this in. Joy finally breaks it.

JOY (CONT'D)

I really did have a great time tonight. We should do this again sometime.

NICK

I would really like that.

They both lean in this time, to hug.

Joy points to her B&B.

JOY

Let's not mention this to our parents yet.

NICK

Agreed.

(beat)

Where did all of your Christmas lights go?

The house is absolutely dark. Joy sighs with a laugh.

JOY

(shaking her head)

It seems your parents have taken to unplugging them every night after mine have gone to bed.

Nick rolls his eyes good-naturedly at their antics.

NICK  
When will it ever end.

JOY  
(laughing)  
Probably never.

Benny stirs in the backseat and sits up, bleary-eyed. She looks out the window and back to her dad, confused.

BENNY  
Dad? Are we almost home?

NICK  
(to Benny)  
Almost.  
(to Joy)  
I should...

He gestures to his own home. Joy nods and gets out of the car.

JOY  
(loud, to Benny)  
Goodnight, Benny!

BENNY  
(sleep-addled)  
Goodnight, Joy.

JOY  
(to Nick, soft)  
Goodnight.

Nick smiles.

NICK  
'Night.

She shuts the door and he drives away as she waves to them. Joy turns to her own door with a smile, content.

Joy's phone rings again as she heads toward the house. It's Peter again.

She denies the call.

INT. HAL'S DINER - A FEW DAYS LATER

Joy enters the diner, chewing on her lip. She looks around, searching for her friends sitting at a table.

After a moment, she catches sight of Nina enthusiastically waving her over. Joy smiles and waves back, walking towards them.

FREDDY LAWRENCE, late-20s, is sitting across from Nina. He gets out of the booth when Joy comes near.

JOY  
(hesitantly)  
Freddy...?

FREDDY  
Joy! It's so nice to see you! It's  
been a long time.

JOY  
(laughing)  
Yes, it has. Since senior year.

FREDDY  
At least.

He gives her a quick hug, then slides back into the booth. Joy takes the seat next to Nina. There's a pause, then-

NINA  
(impatient)  
So....?

JOY  
So?

NINA  
Tell me everything!

JOY  
(deflecting)  
What do you mean...?

FREDDY  
Nick's my closest friend. He told  
me that you two went on a date last  
night.

NINA  
And then Freddy told me.

JOY  
And now you're cornering me at  
breakfast for information?

Nina and Freddy both nod.



JOY (CONT'D)

(sighing)

It wasn't a date date, so there's not much to tell.

NINA

(cocking a brow)

I don't believe that for a second.

JOY

We just ate dinner with Benny. Nothing crazy.

FREDDY

At the Christmas tree farm.

JOY

So?

NINA

So? Benny's the only one he takes there.

JOY

(dumbfounded)

Oh.

NINA

"Oh" is right.

Joy pauses for a moment, then changes the subject

JOY

It doesn't matter. I'm pretty sure that was a one-time only thing.

The waitress comes by and deposits a round of mugs in front of everyone. She looks out the window at the clear blue sky and clicks her tongue.

WAITRESS

(to Freddy)

Hey, Fred. You hear anything about snow on the radar?

Freddy shakes his head, frowning in disappointment.

FREDDY

Not yet. The boys down at the station and I have been doing everything we can to find something.

(spreading his hands)

Nothing.

WAITRESS

That's a sure shame. I know Prince was saying it might be a Snow Machine Christmas, but I was still holding out hope.

FREDDY

You and everyone else in Verona. We've been getting calls about it all day every day for the last few weeks.

The waitress flutters her eyelashes at him.

WAITRESS

Well...

FREDDY

(laughing)

Don't worry. You and Hal will be the first to know if we're having a white Christmas.

The waitress nods and flounces off.

Joy looks bewildered by the whole exchange. Freddy smiles at her knowingly.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

I'm the town meteorologist.

JOY

(in jest)

Oh, you're the one my parents have been mad at for the last few weeks.

Freddy puffs up his chest, causing the girls to laugh.

FREDDY

That's me.

Joy's phone buzzes with a message and she pulls it close to her. Joy bites down on her lip in an attempt to suppress a smile, but doesn't do a great job.

She tries to hide the phone, but Nina catches sight of it first.

NINA

(knowingly)

Who was that?

JOY

No one.

NINA  
Mmhmm. Sure.

Before anyone can react, Nina snatches the phone and reads the message aloud.

NINA (CONT'D)  
(reading)  
"I had a great time at dinner last night and really want to see you again. Come with me and Benny to the Farmer's Market this week? I'll give you the apple pie this time."  
(to Joy)  
And you said it was nothing!

Joy snatches her phone back and lays it face down on the table.

JOY  
It's not.

FREDDY  
So you're going to go with him?

JOY  
I didn't say that.

NINA  
Come on! You have to!

JOY  
I don't know.

NINA  
You should. You really should.

Freddy finishes his drink and eyes Nina's.

FREDDY  
You going to drink that.

Nina shoots him a dirty look.

NINA  
I was planning on it.

FREDDY  
Could have fooled me.

Joy's phone beeps with another text while they bicker. No one notices and she checks it. It's from Peter and reads "Call me".

Joy ignores it, instead responding to Nick's text with a simple "I'd love that". Joy flips her phone back upside down and tunes back into what the others are fighting about.

INT. FARMER'S MARKET - LATER THAT WEEK

Nick, Joy, and Benny share a bag of donuts. Benny is covered in cinnamon sugar and they all laugh at her.

INT. HAL'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

Benny pours Joy a mug of apple cider. Joy makes a face to pretend she enjoys it. They laugh at her. When Benny and Nick look away, she takes another sip.

EXT. FOREST PATH - CONTINUOUS

Joy, Nick, Freddy, and Nina enjoy a walk through the woods together. Joy is dressed all in white, like a bride. Nick is wearing a suit of flannel. Freddy and Nina watch, looking like proud parents as Joy and Nick laugh together

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Mayor Prince cuts the ribbon on the snow machine.

Joy and Nick stand on opposite ends of the space with their own parents, but lock eyes and grin at each other.

Joy's phone rings and she ignores Peter's message once again.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE FARM CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Joy, Benny, and Nick in the Christmas tree clearing- now snow-filled from another snow machine pumping out flakes- as they have a snowball fight beneath the Christmas lights.

INT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST KITCHEN

Joy helps her mom make dinner.

Her phone rings on the counter, left behind. It stops and shows thirty-seven unread messages from Peter.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Nick, Joy, Freddy, and Nina sled together. They race, two per sled.

Joy and Nick laugh when they lose.

INT. NICK'S TRUCK - EARLY EVENING

Joy and Nick are in Nick's truck, shivering and happy. They are both covered in snow and in the same outfits as their sledding adventure.

Joy shakes her arms out, droplets of water flying everywhere.

JOY  
I'm soaked!

NICK  
You are?  
(gesturing to himself)  
Look at me!

They both laugh.

JOY  
I haven't been sledding since,  
gosh. Probably since high school.

NICK  
(grinning)  
Is it just as fun as you remember?

She grins back.

JOY  
Better. That might have been  
Freddy's best idea yet.

They pull into the driveway of the Christmas B&B. The lights are still on this time, but neither of them seem to notice.

Nick and Joy lock eyes. Something in Nick's causes Joy's breath to catch.

He leans in. She hardly breathes as his hand passes her face to instead pull something out of her hair.

He pulls back with a chunk of snow between his fingers.

NICK  
You had a bit of snow in your hair.  
I thought I'd help.

JOY  
 (giggling)  
 Thank you. I feel warmer already.

They remain like that, with their eyes on each other for a long time.

NICK  
 What are you doing for Christmas Eve?

JOY  
 Something at the Bed & Breakfast with my parents, probably. Why?

NICK  
 Would you... be able to make a little bit of time for me and Benny? Just for a bit. I know she'd love to see you.

Joy raises a brow.

JOY  
*She would?*

NICK  
 Okay, fine. I would, too.

JOY  
 (laughing)  
 That's more like it. I suppose I can make time.

There's a flicker of movement in the window. Mrs. Christmas pokes her head out with a wide-eyed gaze.

Neither Nick nor Joy notice, too engrossed in one another.

Joy moves first, leaning in toward Nick. He follows her and they share a chaste kiss over the center console.

They break apart, blushing like school children. Nick runs his hand through his beard, his dimples showing.

NICK  
 (breathless)  
 Wow.

JOY  
 Wow.

NICK  
 That was...

JOY  
Amazing.

NICK  
Yeah. That.

Joy unbuckles her seatbelt and opens the door.

JOY  
I have to... go help my mom with something. But tomorrow?

NICK  
(nodding)  
Yeah. Tomorrow. Tomorrow's good.

They smile at each other. Joy gets out of the car and closes the door, heading up to the house with a smile.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST - CONTINUOUS

Mr. and Mrs. Christmas are both waiting in the entryway, arms crossed and anger on their faces.

Joy stands in the open door. Nick's truck leaves the driveway behind her.

Mrs. Christmas seethes with barely-contained anger.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
Do you want to tell me what you were doing with that... Man...?

Joy stops short, her eyes wide in shock.

JOY  
I- I-

Mrs. Christmas holds up a hand, unwilling to let her speak for even a moment.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
No, don't tell me. I saw enough.

Mr. Christmas joins in.

MR. CHRISTMAS  
Nick White? Really? You know who his parents are, don't you?

JOY  
 (stuttering)  
 I- Yes. Of course I do.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (tutting)  
 My own daughter, sullyng her name  
 with one of *them*. I never thought  
 I'd see the day.

JOY  
 I'm not 'sullyng my name'. I just-

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 I don't want to hear it. You've  
 been lying to us for long enough.  
 Is this the reason we've hardly  
 seen you this season? Because you  
 were busy dallyng with the son of  
 the family we hate the most?

JOY  
 I'm sorry for not being around  
 more. I should have tried harder.  
 But Nick and I haven't been  
 dallyng. We-

Mrs. Christmas raises her eyes to the sky, praying for  
 patience.

MR. CHRISTMAS  
*Please* don't tell me that you love  
 him.

JOY  
 Of- of course not. Nick and I are  
 just friends.

MR. CHRISTMAS  
 Joy. We *saw* the kiss.

JOY  
 (shocked)  
 Oh. It's not- It wasn't...

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 That tells me all I need to know.  
 Nick White has seduced you into  
 betrayng your family for his own!

JOY  
 He hasn't *seduced* me!

Mrs. Christmas pats her shoulder.



MRS. CHRISTMAS

It's okay. He's a fine looking young man. It would have happened to the best of us.

JOY

(eyes wide)

No! Nick's not like that! He would never... Not after Rosie...

Their argument has drawn a crowd. Many of the boarders are peaking around from the living room and crowding the doorway to see what's happening.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(comfortingly)

You've been gone a long time, Joy. This is *exactly* what the Whites would do. Anything to ruin us.

Joy shakes her head in disbelief.

JOY

I can't believe... Nick wouldn't!

MRS. CHRISTMAS

It's okay, Honey. He would. His whole family knows your dad has been out of commission for a while. They probably planned this the moment they knew you were back in town. Take you out of the picture to minimize the competition.

JOY

(horrified)

No...

Mrs. Christmas pats her back.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

It's alright. As long as you don't love him, right?

Joy goes quiet and doesn't answer right away

MR. CHRISTMAS

(urgent)

Joy... Right?

JOY

I...

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
Honey, no. You can't. What about  
Peter!?

Joy cocks her head, confused.

JOY  
Peter?

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
*Peter?* Your *fiancé*? The one you've  
spent the last two weeks ignoring?

JOY  
How did you know about that?

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
He has our number, Joy, and knows  
you're staying with us. He called  
to make sure you were okay and  
then told us everything. About the  
engagement, you ignoring him.  
Everything. Frankly, he's about  
ready to call off the wedding right  
about now.

JOY  
(simply)  
Oh.

Mr. Christmas shakes his head in disbelief, finally entering  
back into the conversation.

MR. CHRISTMAS  
I just can't believe you never  
mentioned you were engaged to him.

JOY  
It didn't feel important.

MR. CHRISTMAS  
Not important?

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
Honey, this is your future husband!

JOY  
He's not.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
What do you mean?

JOY  
 (shrugging)  
 I've been thinking of ways to get out of it for the past few weeks.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 Because of that *man*?

JOY  
 (indignant)  
 "That man" has a name. But, no. Not because of him. I've been thinking about it for a while. Nick just made me realize I should actually go through with it. I'm going to break up with him after the holidays.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (angry)  
 Absolutely not! In fact, you are going to go back to the city to find Peter right away! This is Nick getting in your head and I won't allow it!

MR. CHRISTMAS  
 (pleading)  
 Please try to understand, Joy. He's trying to sabotage us and he's taking your life with him as he does.

Joy begins to tear up at her parents words, an inkling of doubt clawing it's way into her.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (sighing)  
 Tomorrow is Christmas Eve. As much as I would love for you to be on the first plane back as soon as possible, we need you. I'm booking a flight for Christmas Day and you're getting on it to go find Peter.

JOY  
 I *am* an adult, you know. I can make my own choices.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
 (final)  
 Not about this, you can't.

That's the end of discussion. Mrs. Christmas looks around and notices the crowd gathered. She shoos them away and wheels Mr. Christmas off.

Joy stands alone in the room for a moment longer, staring longingly into the distance, before she, too, retreats to her bedroom.

EXT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST - NEXT MORNING

Nick stands on the porch of the B&B, holding a small gift. He takes a deep breath, working up the courage to ring the doorbell. He does so after a moment, breathing through his nose while he waits for the door to open.

It opens to Joy standing there in pajamas, her hair a mess and her eyes red from obvious tears.

Nick immediately sets the present on the ground and tries to move forward to comfort her, only to stop when she takes a small step backwards.

NICK  
Joy! What's wrong?

JOY  
(sniffling)  
Nothing.

NICK  
Obviously, it's something. Can I help?

She breaks

JOY  
My parents... They found out about us and told me all about your ruse.

NICK  
(confused)  
My... What?

Joy shakes her head.

JOY  
Don't do that. I know all of this  
(gesturing between them)  
Was just to sabotage my family.  
Don't try to pretend it's not.

She tries to shut the door on him but Nick stops her.

NICK

Joy, wait.

She holds up a hand, just like her mother did before.

JOY

Don't say anything. Nothing will  
get you out of this.

Nick's face falls. He accepts her words. He picks up the gift from the ground and offers it to her.

NICK

At least take this. For me.

For a moment, it seems like Joy might crack and hear him out. But she doesn't.

She takes the gift and starts shutting the door on him.

NICK (CONT'D)

(hurriedly)

Benny says to tell you "Merry  
Christmas".

Joy pauses in her door-closing for a moment before continuing on.

JOY

Merry Christmas, Nick.  
(voice thick)  
Goodbye.

INT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST - CONTINUOUS

Joy slides down on the door, crying. She pulls her phone out and dials someone and listens for them to pick up.

JOY

(into phone)

Hi. It's me.... Merry Christmas to  
you, too... Do you mind picking me  
up? I really want to talk to you.

INT. VERONA TAVERN - AN HOUR LATER

Joy sits in a booth across from Nina and Freddy. They're the only ones in the tavern on Christmas Eve and soft Christmas music is pumped into the room. Joy is put-together now, but her eyes are still swollen with tears. She sips on a mug of apple cider.

FREDDY

What's wrong?

Joy shakes her head.

JOY

It's Nick. No, it's my parents.  
(laughing ruefully)  
Actually, it's both.

NINA

What did they do?

JOY

(devastated)  
They told me it was all for show,  
that Nick was just with me to  
sabotage my family and the Bed &  
Breakfast. I feel so silly.

NINA

What?

FREDDY

What are you talking about?

JOY

(looking up)  
My parents told me it was all fake.  
I can't believe I fell for that. I  
thought I was smarter than this.

NINA

Joy, it's not fake.

FREDDY

I don't know what your parents are  
thinking, but Nick really likes  
you. He's *in love* with you.

JOY

(voice cracking)  
What?

FREDDY

(nodding)  
He told me himself. Him and Benny  
love you. They would never sabotage  
you, no matter the feud between  
your parents.

JOY

(sniffling)  
It doesn't matter. I have a flight  
back to the City tomorrow to find  
Peter and marry him. I can't do  
anything.

(MORE)

JOY (CONT'D)

(even sadder)

Even if I could, I already told Nick I knew about his lies. He would never take me back.

NINA

I don't think that's true...

JOY

(looking up)

Do you think you can take me to the farmer's market?

NINA

(nodding)

Sure. Anything. Can I ask why?

JOY

He'll never trust me again, but I wanted to get him something nice for Christmas. A farewell gift.

NINA

Of course, Joy.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FARMER'S MARKET - A LITTLE LATER

Joy peruses the stalls, mostly picked clean for Christmas. Nina and Freddy stand together, a little ways back, watching her.

Eventually, Joy stops at a stall manned by an elderly couple. They stand close together, obviously in love, and watch over their layout of hand-carved wooden trinkets.

Joy looks over all of the sculptures, most of them of different destinations in the town. Her eyes alight on a carving of the clearing in the Christmas tree farm where she and Nick had their first date. It's the only one of it's kind on the table.

JOY

(to the couple)

I'll take this one.

They smile at her and the wife picks it up and wraps it in paper for her.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET B&B - AN HOUR LATER

Joy lingers in front of Nick's door, her lovingly-wrapped present in her hands.

She looks at the door, then to the present, then back to the door. She sighs and places the present on the welcome mat and turns back toward Nina's car.

INT. NINA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Nina and Freddy are in the front seat, idling outside of the Main Street B&B. Joy gets back into the car.

FREDDY  
He has it?

JOY  
He will. When he goes outside.

Nina furrows her brow.

NINA  
You didn't want to give it to him  
in person?

Joy shakes her head, vehemently against that idea.

JOY  
No. It's better this way.

NINA  
(sighing)  
Whatever you say.

She starts the car and they pull out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST - EVENING

Joy and her parents sit in front of the tree while children run around, screaming with festive delight. The Christmases try to participate in the festivities, but everyone is subdued thanks to Joy's somber mood.

Her parents hand her a small present and she opens it to find a personalized ornament that reads "Just Engaged!" beneath her and Peter's names. She tries to plaster on a smile, but it falls flat.



JOY  
(voice thick)  
Excuse me.

She leaves the room before her parents have time to stop her. Joy runs up to her room. She begins to pack up her things, tears silently falling down her face.

She shifts something on the bed and the gift Nick gave her rolls to the ground. She bends to pick it up. Joy looks at it for a long moment, debating if she should open it or not.

She decides against it, placing it delicately on top of her things in her backpack and zipping it away.

Joy walks outside onto her balcony where Nick visited her.

She gazes out longingly, looking to the festive lights of the Main Street B&B mere feet away, saddened beyond belief.

INT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST - CHRISTMAS MORNING

The B&B is aflutter with activity. Kids run and scream. There are families by the tree opening Santa presents while couples share mugs of cocoa over breakfast.

Joy leaves her bags at the doorway and enters the kitchen, where her parents are bustling about, trying to get breakfast together.

Her mom notices her first. She puts down the bowl she's holding and walks over to Joy, giving her a long hug.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
Thank you so much for visiting us  
and helping.

JOY  
(subdued)  
Of course. I'm sorry I wasn't  
around more.

Mrs. Christmas shushes her.

MRS. CHRISTMAS  
Don't worry about that now. Just  
focus on getting home and getting  
your life back in order.

Her mom releases her and Joy looks to her dad. She bends over and gives him a hug and a kiss on the forehead.

JOY  
Bye, Dad. I love you.

MR. CHRISTMAS  
(tearing up)  
We love you too, Sweetie. Come back soon.

She nods, a small smile on her face.

JOY  
I will. I promise.

Joy turns away and exits the kitchen, picking up her bags as she does.

EXT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST - CONTINUOUS

Nina waits outside in front of her car. She grabs Joy's suitcase and they put her things into the trunk.

NINA  
Ready?

Joy shakes her head, obviously not.

JOY  
No. Not at all. But I have to be.

They both get into the car.

INT. NINA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Joy looks out the window into the early morning scene of Verona, Minnesota. Her eyes catch onto all of the same things they did on her way in. Everything is coated in the laughter and happiness of Christmas.

They pass a group of kids having a snowball fight and Joy smiles at their excitement.

Joy has to look away. She busies herself by digging through her backpack to find her ticket. In doing so, she removes Nick's gift to her and sets it on the center console.

Nina grabs it, looking at it strangely.

NINA  
What's this?

Joy finds her ticket and sits back.

JOY  
I'm not sure. Nick gave it to me.

NINA  
(shocked)  
And you haven't opened it yet?

Joy looks up, shocked by her outburst.

JOY  
No? Should I?

NINA  
Absolutely. Open it now.

JOY  
(sighing)  
I just thought it would be too  
hard.

Nina shakes her head and picks up the present to deposit it on Joy's lap.

NINA  
(demanding)  
Open it.

Joy does what she asks with another melodramatic sigh. She carefully unwraps the paper to reveal the exact same wood carving that she had gifted Nick the day prior, only this one has miniature carved people in the middle of the clearing, sitting on blankets.

Joy takes all of this in, then realizes what she's seeing with a gasp.

Nina peers over to see.

NINA (CONT'D)  
What is it?

Joy shakes her head, tearing up.

NINA (CONT'D)  
(noticing)  
Oh. Is that the same one you got  
him?

JOY  
(nodding, whispering)  
It is.

NINA  
 (thoughtfully)  
 You should flip it over.

Joy looks at her questioningly but does as she says. On the bottom is "Nick White", carved into the wood. Joy looks up at Nina, wide-eyed.

JOY  
 What?

NINA  
 (looking at her kindly)  
 He's a wood carver. He made that for you.

JOY  
 (things making sense)  
 And the one last night...

NINA  
 (confirming)  
 He carved that one too. He sells them in the Market sometimes.

JOY  
 (softly)  
 Oh.

They pull into the airport. Nina drives her up to the departures entrance. She gets out and helps Joy with her bags.

The girls hug.

JOY (CONT'D)  
 Bye. Thank you for everything.

NINA  
 (waving her off)  
 What else are friends for. Keep in touch when you're in the city!

JOY  
 (smiling)  
 I will, don't worry.

They hug one more time.

NINA  
 Bye.

JOY  
(softly)  
Bye. Merry Christmas.

NINA  
Merry Christmas.

They disengage and Joy walks into the airport.

INT. AIRPORT IN VERONA, MINNESOTA - CONTINUOUS

Joy walks through the small airport decked out for the holidays. She's basically the only one there, every other Verona resident celebrating the holiday at home with family.

She makes her way up to the gate and looks through her bag for her ticket once again. In doing so, she comes across Nick's gift. She looks at it for a long moment.

Her head shoots up, making eye contact with the smiling flight attendant waiting for her.

JOY  
I'm sorry. I think I made a  
mistake.

Joy closes her bag and takes off through the airport back to the entrance.

Just before she makes it there, Nick grabs her and stops her. He's holding Benny and looks out of breath, like he was also running to get to her.

JOY (CONT'D)  
(in shock)  
Nick.

NICK  
(lovingly)  
Joy.

JOY  
What are... What are you doing  
here?

NICK  
I couldn't let you leave thinking I  
was a liar. I had to make sure you  
knew.

Joy's face collapses.

JOY

I'm so sorry. I figured it all out after. I should have known you would never do something like-

Nick stops her with a kiss. Joy collapses against him. They pull away.

JOY (CONT'D)

(head spinning)

What was that?

NICK

I had to make sure you knew that it was okay.

JOY

Oh.

NICK

(changing the subject)

We should go. We're going to miss our plane.

JOY

(confused)

Our?

Nick nods, smiling. He holds up his hand to show her two plane tickets.

NICK

Joy, I love you. I want to be with you wherever you are. If that means we live in the city, well, then we live in the city.

JOY

(overwhelmed)

Nick- You can't. You said you and Benny love this place.

NICK

(shrugging)

We agreed last night that we love you more than any place. If you belong in the city, we belong there, too. With you.

(to Benny)

Isn't that right?

Benny just nods enthusiastically.

BENNY

Mmhmm.

Joy laughs through the tears that have now started flowing.

JOY

Luckily, you don't have to. I decided to stay.

Nick's eyes light up.

NICK

You did!?

Joy nods tearfully in response.

JOY

I did. I don't know how. I don't have a place here, especially since I want to be with you, but I'll figure it out.

NICK

We'll figure it out. Together.

JOY

(a promise)  
Together.

They walk side by side back to the entrance of the airport, where Nina and Freddy are waiting next to Nick and Nina's vehicles. They look smug, like they expected this outcome.

NINA

I knew you weren't actually leaving.

JOY

(laughing)  
Of course you did.

Freddy and Nina get into Nina's car, and Nick, Benny, and Joy get into Nick's.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHRISTMAS BED & BREAKFAST - A BIT LATER

The exterior of the B&Bs is chaos. The streets are filled with patrons and locals alike, all yelling at each other.

Nick picks his way through the crowd, careful not to hit anyone.

NICK

What's going on here...?

They get to a point where they can't get any further and Nick parks on the side of the road. The three of them get out and Nick picks up Benny. They fight the crowd back to their homes.

Once they get close, they start to hear what's happening.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

(yelling)

It's your son's fault that this is happening! He seduced our daughter and ruined Christmas for everyone!

MRS. WHITE

*Our son?* It was *your daughter*, sabotaging us with all of these little... *thoughts!*

Joy, Nick, and Benny are finally close enough to see what's happening. Their parents have once again stopped traffic for their public blowout. Everyone is tense and ready to fight.

MRS. CHRISTMAS

That's not true! Our daughter was *engaged!* She had a *job!* She was happy before all of this. She would never...

As she's saying this, a snowball flies from behind Mrs. White and careens into the crowd behind the Christmases.

There's silence for one long moment, then:

ANONYMOUS VOICE

(yelling)

Snowball fight!

The kids in attendance break out with their snowballs. It's chaos, everyone on both sides getting pelted.

Joy, Nick and Benny make their way to the middle between Mrs. Christmas and Mrs. White, dodging snowballs as they go.

They make it there at the exact same time as Mayor Prince arrives to break them up. The appearance of all of them calls the fight to a standstill.

MAYOR PRINCE

I cannot *believe* the actions happening before me today! I thought you were better than this.

(MORE)



MAYOR PRINCE (CONT'D)

(to the whole audience)  
I thought you all were better than  
this, but I suppose not.

MR. CHRISTMAS

(explaining)  
Mayor, I'm sorry. We were just-

Prince holds up his hand to stop him.

MAYOR PRINCE

It doesn't matter. What matters is  
that you can't control yourselves.  
(with a sigh)  
It seems I have no choice but to-

JOY

(yelling)  
Wait!

They all turn to where she's standing with Nick and Benny.  
There's a murmur across the crowd as she pushes forward to  
stand in front of the Mayor.

JOY (CONT'D)

All of you need to stop. This feud  
has been going on for far too long.  
We need to work *together*- not  
against each other- to make *our*  
town the best it can be!

The crowd murmurs, agreeing with her.

MRS. WHITE

But-

JOY

No one put us up to anything. It  
was a big misunderstanding. Nick  
and I...  
(she takes a deep breath)  
Nick and I love each other, and we  
would never do anything to sabotage  
the families of those we love.

She leans into Nick and a collective "Awww" arises from the  
surrounding crowd.

JOY (CONT'D)

So... Can't we all just... get  
along?

Their parents mutter, but after a moment, Mr. White steps up  
to Mr. Christmas.

MR. WHITE  
 (begrudgingly)  
 Family?

MR. CHRISTMAS  
 (taking his hand)  
 Family.

There's a cheer from the crowd around, celebrating the end of the feud.

They all begin to disperse, everyone helping to clean up the street from the debris left from the fight.

Nick and Joy hug and Benny climbs out of Nick's arms and down onto the ground to stand next to them. As they do, the elderly couple from the wood carving stand at the farmer's market walk up to them.

Nick smiles at them, obviously recognizing them.

NICK  
 (cheerful)  
 Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. Merry Christmas!

MRS. JOHNSON  
 Merry Christmas, Nicholas!

JOY  
 Hi. I'm Joy!

MRS. JOHNSON  
 We know.

NICK  
 (confused)  
 Can I do something for you?

Mr. Johnson clears his throat.

MR. JOHNSON  
 As you know, we're getting up there in age-

NICK  
 (jovially)  
 You're not that old!

MR. JOHNSON  
 (swatting at him)  
 Oh, stop. You know we are.  
 (MORE)

MR. JOHNSON (CONT'D)

But as I was saying, we're getting older and we can't quite take care of the Christmas tree farm like we used to-

NICK

You're not going to sell it, are you!?

MR. JOHNSON

(playfully annoyed)

Boy, if you don't let me finish...

NICK

Sorry.

MRS. JOHNSON

We actually wanted to know if you wanted the farm? To own and take care of as you please.

NICK

What?

MRS. JOHNSON

(nodding)

It's time for us to retire, but we wanted to offer it to you, first.

Nick and Joy are so stunned they forget to respond.

MR. JOHNSON

So? What do you say, Son?

Nick nods quickly, a humungous smile breaking out over his face.

NICK

Yes! Yes, of course! I would love that!

MRS. JOHNSON

(smiling)

Wonderful! Merry Christmas, you two!

Nick and Joy smile excitedly at each other. They look into each others eyes before sharing a kiss.

SFX: Theme From Romeo and Juliet (1968) "A Time For Us" as a Christmas song

While they're lost in one another, a gasp of delight comes up from the crowd.

BENNY

Look! It's snowing!

They break apart to look up. Sure enough, it's snowing on them.

Benny jumps around with her mouth open, trying to catch a snowflake on her tongue. Nick holds out a hand and waits a moment for one of the flakes to land on him.

He looks from the snowflake in his hand to Joy.

NICK

First snow of the season. It's a white Christmas, after all.

JOY

I'm counting it as a sign.

They smile and kiss again.

SFX ENDS

FADE TO:

TITLE CARD: ONE YEAR LATER

SFX: INSTRUMENTAL JINGLE BELLS

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE FARM - EVENING

Nick and Joy are closing up the farm for Christmas Eve. They are smiling as they lock the doors. Benny is with them, drinking hot cocoa. Nick unplugs the lights and Benny turns on a flashlight, giggling.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NICK'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

They pass the Bed & Breakfasts, which now have new signs out front that read "Verona Bed & Breakfast I" and "Verona Bed & Breakfast II". They smile at each other and then at Benny in the backseat, content.

DISSOLVE TO:

## INT. VERONA BED &amp; BREAKFAST II

Nick and Joy sit on a loveseat together, in front of the tree. Benny sits at their feet, unwrapping presents. They hold hands showing off their new rings, marking them as married.

Nina and Freddy are there, on another loveseat. Nina rests her head on Freddy's shoulder and he puts his arm around her, pulling her close. They both smile softly without looking at each other, happy to be in this place in this moment.

Mr. and Mrs. Christmas and Mr. and Mrs. White sit on different chairs across from them. Despite the lack of sound, it's obvious they're still bickering good-naturedly with each other.

Outside the window, snow falls softly, coating the ground in a thick layer of white that catches the warm golden light coming through the window.

## EXT. VERONA BED &amp; BREAKFAST II - CONTINUOUS

Nick and Joy kiss through the window, warmed by a fire and the glow of family.

THE END