

A CHRISTMAS FOR THE BOOKS

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EXT. CHICAGO - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Lively, festive, hearts aglow Christmas music plays over the sight of snow falling on The Windy City--

-Holiday REVELERS enjoy the Navy Pier Winter Wonderfest
-Bundled up SHOPPERS clutch bags on Michigan Avenue
-FAMILIES and COUPLES enjoy ice skating at Millennium Park
-The harmonies of a CHOIR ring out at Cloud Gate

It's a magical reminder that Santa Claus is coming to town.

Signs of Christmas abound with lights, garland, ornaments, and window displays. All through the city PEOPLE walk, wander, and run through the winter metropolis.

One of those people, a YOUNG WOMAN, moves down the street to--

EXT. TV STUDIO - DAY

A CROWD is outside the window. They peek and stand on tiptoes to watch "Wake Up, Chicago!" tape before their excited eyes.

INT. TV STUDIO - STAGE - DAY

The stage is decked out for Christmas with a big screen that reads, "Loving the Holidays with Joanna Moret."

JOANNA MORET, 30s, pretty, and accessible stands behind the desk. She's a woman you want to be friends with. Someone you trust. She's a good person and it shows.

Next to her is host SARA SHERIDAN, 30s. Impeccably dressed with a smile for days, she has the charm to match.

In front of them are bulbs, pine cones, ribbon, glitter, and more. With gusto, Sara brings the show back from commercial.

SARA

We're back with someone who can seemingly do it all. She's a lifestyle wonder and romance guru who can show you how to pull off the perfect celebration and make sure you aren't alone while doing it. She's with us now to help keep things bright and put an end to holiday loneliness. Joanna Moret, good morning and happy holidays.

Joanna is a natural. She just sparkles.

JOANNA

Merry Christmas, Sara. I'm so thrilled to be here.

SARA

And congratulations on your new bestseller, "The Love Audit."

JOANNA

Thank you. It's a great feeling to know readers are responding.

SARA

And dating! It has amazing, practical thoughts on finding and keeping love.

JOANNA

Because love is practical. We're inundated with fairy-tales of being swept off our feet, but I believe love is work. Whether you're a knight in shining armor or a princess in need of a kiss, you've gotta be ready to get on the horse or do some sweeping.

Smart stuff. Sara eyes the camera.

JOANNA

Don't wait for love to find you. Head out there and go find it.

SARA

"Love is practical." "Love is work." "Go find it." Bold ideas.

JOANNA

Speaking of ideas, I'm here to share one of the best things you can do with that special someone to show you love the holidays.

Joanna holds up a pretty, homemade ornament. It's a pine cone dipped in red and green glitter paint, with bells and ribbon.

SARA

This is beautiful.

JOANNA

And simple and fun! From pine cones to glass bulbs, sprigs of spruce to yarn, it just takes inspiration, creativity, and some holiday magic.

Joanna deftly transforms a plain stick of pine, holly, bells, and glitter into an ornament. Sara joins in with her own creation, but is definitely more all-thumbs.

JOANNA

I usually say there's no wrong way to do this, but here we are!

SARA

Hey!

JOANNA

Just kidding, you're doing great. And this is a wonderful thing couples can do. You can make them as gifts for others, or each other, to remember milestones in your lives. It shows you recognize the special moments that you've shared.

SARA

Speaking of couples, your boyfriend's identity is famously unknown, but what's in store for your Christmas?

(throws it in)

And what's his name!?

Sara laughs at her quick try. Joanna blanches for a second.

JOANNA

Oh, Sara. You know, I like to say "Mystery makes the heart grow fonder." But it's no secret our Christmas will be filled with snow, a beautiful cabin, and lots of Christmas spirit.

Sara almost melts. Joanna smiles brightly. She then holds up her ornament. It's the picture of holiday perfection.

SARA

And there we have it. Beautiful ornaments and advice on finding love and staying festive for Christmas with the one and only Joanna Moret.

JOANNA

Thank you, Sara, and thank you everyone. Merry Christmas!

Sara turns back to the cameras.

SARA
Coming up we'll be visiting the
"Countless Toys for Christmas"
drive. This is Wake up, Chicago.

INT. TV STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - DAY

Joanna moves from the stage. She starts to undo her microphone as Sara rushes past her, turning.

SARA
So good to see you!

Before Joanna can reply, Sara is off. Busy, busy. A friendly, eager production assistant, CAMERON, 20s, moves to Joanna.

CAMERON
Ms. Moret? I'm Cameron, Ted's
assistant. Let me help you.

He works to undo the mic, pack, and wires.

JOANNA
It's nice to meet you. Who's Ted?

Cameron nods behind him.

CAMERON
Producer extraordinaire.

Joanna eyes TED SUMNER, 30s. He's handsome and looks great in jeans, t-shirt, and sport coat. His version of "dressy."

JOANNA
Hmm, we haven't met.

CAMERON
He's great. Busy. Lots of I's to
cross and T's to dot.

A little joke. He's endearing. Cameron grabs the equipment.

CAMERON
You're set. Hang out and you can
chat with Ted when he's done.

Cameron walks away. Joanna moves closer to Ted and Sara, within earshot. She grabs her phone and looks at it.

SARA
I'm concerned about the author
special. Is it too--

TED

Broad? What if we narrow the focus
to holiday books? Keep it festive.

Joanna listens with interest. She's not eavesdropping. But she's not, not eavesdropping, either.

Ted's phone buzzes. He looks at it, hesitates, then puts it back in his pocket.

SARA

And I need your pitch for the post-
holiday fitness segment.

Ted's phone rings again. He grabs it, swipes the call.

TED

Yes, I'm just waiting to confirm--

His phone rings. Again. He grabs it. Sara is about to say something, but he stops her.

TED

One sec, I better--

Sara nods, but there's a hint of "we've got work to do" that Ted doesn't notice. Joanna does. Tough crowd.

TED

(into phone)

Hey-- I didn't get a chance--
Sweetheart, I don't-- you're right--

Ted peeks at Joanna. She nods, smiles. Ted is focused on the call and turns a bit more to cover what he's saying.

TED

(into phone)

I'll work on items twelve,
seventeen, one, two, three. No, I'm
not saying that to be sarcastic.

Ted turns to Joanna and smiles as if all is okay. She smiles back, letting him know she knows everything's not okay.

Sara moves into his eyeline, pointing at her watch. He nods.

TED

(into phone)

I gotta go. We'll talk about how
I'm behind in points. I don't mean--
you're what? You're breaking up--

Click. He's been hung up on.

TED
(softly)
With me.

Oops. Joanna's eyes go wide. It's clear Ted was not expecting that. Nor was Joanna expecting to overhear such a thing.

Ted turns to Sara, who is obliviously engaged with her phone.

SARA
Everything good?

TED
(not really)
Yeah.

He looks at Joanna who quickly looks to her phone, then turns around. She yelps when she bumps into--

GOLDIE TURNER, 50s. Perfect hair, manicured nails, and knows how to comfortably dress for success. She's as smart as she is shrewd as she is put-together.

JOANNA
Goldie! You're--

Goldie goes in for the cheek-to-cheek kiss.

GOLDIE
Late. I'm sorry. My office said you were fantastic. I had them record it so I can not watch it and tell you what I thought later.

Only Goldie. Joanna loves her.

JOANNA
I figured you were simply power-breakfasting somewhere fabulous on my behalf.

Joanna again eyes Ted and Sara. Ted catches Joanna's look, but the connection breaks when he looks to his ringing phone.

Sara notices. That's Ted's cue to ignore the call. Again.

Goldie takes Joanna's arm and leads her to--

INT. TV STUDIO - HALLWAY - DAY

It's festive, but subdued. Goldie and Joanna walk together.

GOLDIE

Honey, I remember when you were just starting out with crafty at-home get togethers. That led you to a web business that took off faster than Santa can shake his belly. You quickly became the go-to for how-to on so many subjects, wrote best-selling books on life and love, and have done more guest appearances on morning shows than I can count. Joanna Moret, my dear, is no longer just a name. She's a brand.

Joanna isn't sure where this is going. They stop.

GOLDIE

Your fans love you. We get letters all the time about how much more fulfilling their lives are.

JOANNA

Don't forget how much less single, too.

GOLDIE

I won't argue with millions whose Christmas parties go from so-so to spectacular, or who find the love of their life, get married, and have two-point-five kids.

JOANNA

So, what? You want me to write another Christmas book?

GOLDIE

I want to make you a star.

Joanna chuckles, incredulous. Yeah, great idea, why not?

JOANNA

Oh, sure, let me check my schedule--

GOLDIE

MacAllen Entertainment.

JOANNA

The TV producer?

Goldie nods. A wry smile. Joanna catches on. Thrill rising.

GOLDIE

The TV producer. I met with their head of development and production, and he may have mentioned they think you're ready. For your own show.

Joanna is over the moon. She hugs Goldie. Then, pulls back.

JOANNA

I'm sensing a "save the hug for later" vibe.

GOLDIE

It's not a done deal. They love what you do, but it's a three-step process, starting with a seminar.

JOANNA

I feel change-in-topic challenged. My what?

GOLDIE

They're sponsoring the "Christmas in the Air" festival. And it so happens they need another speaker.

Joanna raises her hand, smiling. She's got this.

GOLDIE

You'll give a quick talk and dazzle the audience with your knowledge and techniques in finding and keeping love.

JOANNA

Seminar? Check. Step two?

GOLDIE

MacAllen's Holiday Gala.

JOANNA

The one written up in magazines?
Where people clamor for an invite?
(playing it cool)
I've heard of it.

GOLDIE

Good. You'll be planning it.

Joanna smiles, shocked. Did she hear that right?

JOANNA

That's in less than a week.

GOLDIE
You'll also be a guest, so no more
clamoring.

JOANNA
That's on Christmas Eve.

GOLDIE
Details, details.

JOANNA
Goldie!

GOLDIE
Non-negotiable. They're considering
it your audition. Joanna Moret
using her skills, creativity, and
"make-it-workedness" to pull off
their event of the year and show
them what you're made of, so they
can help you show that to millions
of television eyeballs across
America. Every. Single. Day.

Joanna thinks. It's a lot. It's exciting. Overwhelming.

GOLDIE
There's still step three.

JOANNA
How could it possibly get crazier?

GOLDIE
It's funny you say that. They want
you to attend with your-- you know,
your--

JOANNA
My?

Goldie is sheepish. But, here goes--

GOLDIE
Boyfriend?

If step two was shocking to Joanna, this is electrocution.

JOANNA
Oh. Oh! Wow. Okay, I can give a
speech. I can plan a party. But,
how do I-- what will people think--

Goldie goes to Joanna, close. Motherly. Caring. Sweeps some
hair from Joanna's face. Holds her chin.

GOLDIE

If they discover the man who's checked every box in your foolproof guide to love no longer exists?

JOANNA

It sounds so much worse when you say it out loud. Goldie, Brian and I broke up months ago. What he did, the ruse. I was afraid of this.

GOLDIE

Women all over look to you on how to find and keep the perfect relationship. What would they have thought if-- well, you--

JOANNA

Had to deal with the shattered pieces of a messy breakup?

GOLDIE

It was messy. I have the tear-stained shoulder to prove it.

Joanna smiles. Goldie is very good to her.

GOLDIE

We talked about this. It just wasn't the time to risk that revelation when you were launching the book. But let's face facts. There are worse reasons to have to find a boyfriend for Christmas.

JOANNA

A seminar, planning the event of the year, and finding love. I'm not sure Joanna Moret can do that.

GOLDIE

I am.

JOANNA

I also hope you're planning to call my mother to tell her I won't be home on Christmas Eve. You know how important that is to her. And me.

GOLDIE

I'm your agent, not your therapist.

Goldie eyes her expensive watch.

GOLDIE

And I've gotta go. This is your big break, honey. Everything you've done has led to this. I'm so excited. You will be, too, just wait. Remember, three steps: speak, plan-- and find a man to play a man who no longer exists to convince everyone long enough that you actually do know what you're talking about. Hug!

Goldie embraces her effusively, then looks her in the eye.

GOLDIE

Now, go get 'em! Literally, go get him.

Goldie's cell phone rings. She turns to leave as she answers. Joanna sighs, then smiles. What else can she do?

INT. TV STATION - LOBBY - DAY

Joanna moves to a cart decked with holiday treats. She eyes them, contemplating. She grabs a cookie and takes a bite as--

TED (O.S.)

To sweet, or not to sweet?

Joanna turns to see Ted behind her. She's caught chewing a mouth full of Christmas cookie. Tries to stop. It's cute.

TED

By all means, enjoy. Hi, I'm Ted Sumner.

His eyes are beautiful. His smile disarming. He's so genuine. Joanna reaches her hand out. He takes it as she chews.

TED

And you're Joanna Moret. Author, romance, and Christmas guru.

Joanna has finished the cookie bite.

JOANNA

You're familiar with my work.

TED

Not really, I just produced the segment.

Joanna eyes him. Okay.

TED
Kidding! Oh, I know your work,
believe me. And thanks for being on
the show today.

There's a moment of awkward silence. Where to go from here?

TED I have to tell you-- JOANNA Well I should probably--

They both stop. Smile. Ted motions for her to speak.

Joanna is about to, but Ted's phone dings with a text. He
peeks at it. Then to Joanna. Then back to it. Sighs.

TED
Uh, my-- someone wants me to remind
you what a fan she is and to thank
you for all of your advice.

JOANNA
That's very kind. Who is this
someone?

TED
My ex-girlfriend. That sounds so
much worse when I say it out loud.

Boy, can Joanna relate.

JOANNA
Now I know how you know my work.
Can I amend my "thanks" with a
"sorry?"

He's trying to make light of things.

TED
I'll play it safe and say I've
certainly had less eventful days.
Besides, if I got into hot water
saying things to her, I can't
imagine what'll happen if I say
certain things in front of you.

JOANNA
I've come to realize in my work
I've created what some view as a
love lifesaver, while others might
see me more as--

She weighs the words, but Ted jumps in. Trying to couch his
reality with a lightness. It's charming.

TED

The unhinged aunt at Thanksgiving
who'd rather tell you why you're
single than just enjoy her dinner?

JOANNA

Nailed it. And it's okay, because
I've heard it all. But what I want
people to know is I really believe
true love is more than a feeling.
More than a philosophy.

TED

More than checklists and points?

Joanna softens for him. Puts him more at ease.

JOANNA

Correct me if I'm wrong, and I'm
making a very educated though not
by intentionally eavesdropping
guess, your ex is not happy with
your inability to follow a certain
author slash romance expert slash
Christmas guru's system of finding
and keeping true love?

Ted is impressed. Joanna feels good, too.

TED

There were hints, but never the big
"B."

Joanna questions him with a look.

TED

Breakup. Kinda puts a kink in
Christmas.

JOANNA

Oh, well, then, what exciting
things will you plan for yourself?

TED

Is a horror movie marathon too on-
the-nose?

Joanna hates to hear that. Ted tries to stay positive.

TED

Do you like hot chocolate?

JOANNA

Does Santa have eight reindeer?

EXT. TV STUDIO - ATRIUM - DAY

Snow falls outside the glass-covered space. PEOPLE eat and chat as Ted and Joanna are next in line for the drink cart.

TED

Nine.

JOANNA

Excuse me?

TED

Santa has nine reindeer. Rudolph.

Joanna thinks on this as Ted looks to the CART WORKER.

TED

Two hot chocolates, please. With whip cream.

He gets the drinks and they sit at a table.

JOANNA

Eight.

Ted looks at her. What? He hands her a cocoa.

JOANNA

Traditionally, Santa has eight reindeer. Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner-- originally Dunder, and Blixen-- originally Blixem. Rudolph with his nose-so-bright was actually a twentieth-century addition.

TED

(smiling)
Show off.

JOANNA

Hey, knowing I wanted whip cream? That's an extra point right there.

Ted smiles, but then turns a bit more stoic.

TED

Whip cream and reindeer aside, can I be honest?

Joanna nods.

TED

What is it about the point system?

JOANNA

I believe it's a fair way for each person to get what they want by giving of themselves. You do things for your partner, you get points to use for what you want or need. You don't do things, then no points. It's up to both people to decide what they want and what it's worth.

TED

But points and checklists and perfectly romantic, romantic gestures--

JOANNA

Don't forget the forehead kiss.

TED

See! Every time I think I have it figured out there's something else. I try to keep up, but isn't it all too much to do? Too much to not do? Too much pressure?

JOANNA

That's a lot to unpack over cocoa.

TED

That's why I got us whip cream. She was playing by your rules. And sometimes, no matter how hard I tried, and I did try, I felt like I was just on the bench.

JOANNA

Are you asking me how you can get back in the game with her?

Ted goes for it. Part exasperation, part hurt, but all true.

TED

No. Yes. I don't know. It's just, I mean-- what about you and this unnamed, mysterious man of yours?

Joanna ever-so-slightly flinches at the mention.

TED

This pillar of perfection who stands in direct contrast to flawed men, like me I guess, that your readers are apparently putting up with.

(MORE)

TED (CONT'D)

All based on rules according to Valerie-- that's my ex-girlfriend-- according to you-- their creator-- that can spell the beginning of the end for a relationship.

JOANNA

My question-- was there a question?

TED

I get it, love doctor humor.

JOANNA

Nope, just grammar.

TED

You sound just like Valerie.
(revelation)
Or she sounds just like you!

JOANNA

Is it so difficult to believe someone could follow my advice? Advice that's worked for a lot of people, by the way. Is it because you don't want to follow my rules? Or is it because, according to Valerie, you simply can't?

TED

I guess sometimes I felt like following Valerie's-- your-- rules would make me into some sort of
(he uses air quotes)
love robot.

Joanna stares. Really? And air quotes?

TED

It's like you're telling people to input everything you've ever expected out of someone into them, hoping this magical, potentially non-existent person will appear dressed in a tux waiting under the mistletoe for the perfect kiss.

JOANNA

I don't see what's wrong with that.

TED

I don't think that person exists.

Joanna listens carefully to each and every point he mentions.

TED

I'm a reasonably normal, affable guy. I work hard. I have great friends. I love my family.

Joanna's mind is percolating.

TED

I get along with dogs and cats, and kids think I'm a jungle gym. I used to think that would check off a lot of boxes. But now? Because of my apparent inability to check, count, gesticulate, whatever, I'm suddenly single, which is going to make the most wonderful time of the year a lot less wonderful.

Joanna leans in, mesmerized with what he is saying.

TED

What happened to the days where you liked someone, and you thought they liked you, so you just went up to them and simply asked--

JOANNA

Will you be my boyfriend!?

TED

Exactly! Wait, what?

He heard exactly what she asked. And the part crazy, part *what-have-I-just-done?* smile shows Joanna meant it.

What neither of them saw is Cameron, eating lunch at the table behind them. His eyes might be wider than Ted's. He surreptitiously gets up and goes back inside.

JOANNA

It's not what you think. And it's a long, sordid story. But, I have a proposal for you.

TED

Is this because I'll be watching scary movies alone on Christmas?

JOANNA

Hear me out. MacAllen Entertainment expressed interest in creating a show for me. As an audition I have to give a seminar and plan their annual Christmas gala.

(MORE)

JOANNA (CONT'D)

But, they don't just want to get to know my work. They want to know me. Me, me.

TED

And that includes your oft-mentioned, never seen boyfriend.

JOANNA

Exactly.

TED

And you want me to play said oft-mentioned, never seen boyfriend?

JOANNA

It's complicated, but yes.

TED

You're aware how crazy this sounds.

JOANNA

More than you can possibly imagine.

TED

I'm not an actor.

JOANNA

I don't want an actor.

TED

I'm also not great at make believe.

JOANNA

You create things for your show everyday that don't exist, and I think they're pretty believable.

TED

Touché. All right, let's say I go along with this. And I'm not saying I'll go along with this--

JOANNA

Wait. You agree to play my ever-loving, perfect boyfriend and I'll do everything I can to help you understand the "Love Audit" system so you can fix things with Valerie.

Ted is thinking on it. And thinking. Joanna clarifies.

JOANNA

It's only about a week. I do the seminar, impress MacAllen, and sign on the dotted line. Once you and Valerie are back in the arms of love, we'll break up. Then, I'll have a press release drawn up that--

Ted regards her. That what? She thinks on her feet.

JOANNA

That the pressures of our careers were too much strain on our romance and we decided to part ways, but will remain the best of friends. And, of course, we'll ask for privacy during this very difficult time, blah, blah, etcetera, blah.

Ted eyes Joanna. She came up with that quickly. He smiles.

TED

I feel so used.

JOANNA

Is that a yes?

Ted says nothing. Joanna grabs a sharpie from her bag and writes on a napkin. She holds it up to him-- I NEED YOU!

JOANNA

That's your first lesson.

TED

That's a napkin.

JOANNA

But the recipient sees what I call a "love gesture," something to let them know you care and are aware.

She hands him the napkin and he takes it.

JOANNA

I think there's someone you should be giving that to. Oh, and before I forget, lesson one part two-- read.

She hands him a copy of "The Love Audit" from her bag. He eyes her. She means it. But she can't read him just yet.

TED

Give me your hand.

Joanna wonders, worried, but obliges. Ted holds it, serious.

TED

Look, I'm really sorry. This is nuts and there's no other way to say this, but--

Joanna is ready for the bad news.

TED

If we're going to do this, it has to be convincing. And there's no time to start like the present. Right? My little cabbage?

Joanna is relieved, then gives him a look.

TED

It's French. And I know some of the rules. Number six trillion and something, give or take a trillion. "A pet name for your partner shows you know them, understand them, and want them."

JOANNA

"A" for effort, but a cruciferous vegetable doesn't scream romance. And you're sure about this?

He nods his head yes, though--

TED

Nope. But, wouldn't you know, my holiday suddenly opened up and, as my father would say, "Take the risk." Actually, he'd scream, "You're szalony!" That's polish for insane. Hey, you win some, you lose some.

Ted grins. Joanna chuckles. There's something there.

JOANNA

All right then. We'll start tomorrow at the festival and seminar. So, you better buckle up your sleigh. Partner.

They smile and clink their hot cocoas together as a toast. Still, deep down, Joanna wonders just what she has done.

INT. JOANNA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's a very nice place, decorated for Christmas in a tasteful and elegant way.

Joanna is on the couch in a set of pajamas, holding an iPad.

On the device is her mother, ELAINE, 50s. The woman has bright eyes and a put-together look. She's making a handsome gingerbread house.

JOANNA

But it's Christmas Eve.

ELAINE

It's the event! You can surprise everyone on Christmas. We'll put you in a box and when you pop out Uncle Norman will jump out of his Santa hat.

JOANNA

Mother, that's crazy. I'm crazy. This whole thing is crazy, right?

ELAINE

Do you want my mom opinion or my professional opinion?

JOANNA

Both scare me. Start professional.

ELAINE

You got this. You get to do what you love and show it to the world. And secretly rekindling a romance? I think he did you a favor.

JOANNA

And as my mother?

ELAINE

Oh, sweetie, you're a mess.

Joanna can't help but laugh. Maybe even agree a little.

ELAINE

But your father and I love you.

JOANNA

I love you, too.

ELAINE

He's cute though, right?

JOANNA
Goodnight, mother.

Elaine smiles.

JOANNA
I love you.

She hangs up, looks around, then yawns. Her eyes are heavy.

JOANNA
I can do this. I can do this. Can I
do this?

INT. JOANNA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Joanna's still on the couch, slowly waking up. Hair a mess, makeup smudged. She looks at her watch. What? Looks again. Adrenaline rush. She's late! Really late. She jumps up!

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

A "Christmas in the Air" banner hangs near the entryway of the indoor festivities. There is Christmas decor, booths selling decorations, and more.

There are a few WORKERS dressed as Santa as CUSTOMERS mill about the festive splendor.

Ted, dressed in jeans and a sweater, watches in awe.

JOANNA (O.C.)
Sorry, sorry, sorry!

Ted turns as Joanna rushes up. She's pulled it together and is dressed in a fantastic power suit. She holds a notebook.

Ted looks at his watch. Joanna glares at him. He smiles. Charismatic.

JOANNA
Do you ever wear a suit?

TED
Do you ever wear jeans?

She thinks about that for a moment.

TED
So, this is where they relocated
the North Pole.

JOANNA

It's a fantastic event. Come on,
let's get inspired.

They start walking through the festivities.

TED

You got it, honey. Better, right?

JOANNA

You'll keep trying, won't you?

Ted grabs two stockings sewn together, meant for a couple.

TED

If the stocking hung by the chimney
with care fits.

As they walk, they take in the incredible Christmas displays
and holiday merchandise.

Joanna focuses as she speaks. Holding up garland, looking at
ornaments, signage, and more. It's all giving her ideas. She
writes things down. Ted peeks over.

TED

To everything there is a list.

JOANNA

The MacAllen event is important.
It's family, friends, and
colleagues, but I want to find a
way to combine those aspects so it
doesn't feel like either business
or pleasure, but a magical
integration of both.

TED

I'm pretty sure this will help.

Joanna looks up from her notebook and turns to Ted. He's
wearing antlers, a collar with bells and, yes, a red nose.
She can't help but chuckle.

JOANNA

We need to work on your definition
of "help."

Ted removes the items and puts them back.

TED

Your concept is amazing. I think it
might be bigger than figgy pudding.

JOANNA
Do you like figgy pudding?

TED
Yum!

JOANNA
Are you always so silly?

TED
Are you always so serious?

Hmmm, Joanna thinks. Then, a woman, BARBARA, dressed in a sweater that has a Christmas tree on it with working lights, runs up. She holds "The Love Audit" in her hands.

BARBARA
Joanna? Joanna Moret!?

Joanna smiles. Ted watches with interest. Some others pay attention as well. It's not a scene, but it's not unnoticed.

JOANNA
Well, hi there.

The woman is excited.

BARBARA
I saw you and had to say hello.
(eyes Ted)
Ooh, is this him? Him, him?

Ted is surprised. Joanna is, too, but she covers, leaning in.

JOANNA
Let's keep that between us right now, okay? Our little secret.

Barbara couldn't be happier. She stifles a giggle. Winks.

BARBARA
Our secret? Wow. Would you sign my book? I mean, your book? I mean, you know what I mean.

JOANNA
I would absolutely love to.

The woman hands Joanna a Sharpie. She eyes Ted. Smiles.

BARBARA
My name's Barbara. And your book and advice have changed my life.

Joanna inscribes something, nodding as Barbara explains.

BARBARA

I practiced everything, made my boyfriend go through the love checklist, we figured out the point system-- he was behind-- and he's even totally mastered love gestures.

JOANNA

Really. Wonderful. Tell me more.

Joanna eyes her, then Ted. See.

BARBARA

I just did what you wrote and made my own checklist. Two columns-- "Must have" and "No way." And you were right. I'm allowed to have some deal breakers, even if they seem superficial to some people. They were important to me. As you've said, I should be important to me.

Ted is taking it in. Joanna is happy. So is Barbara.

JOANNA

I'm so glad to hear things have changed for the better.

BARBARA

I mean, he's someone I didn't know I wanted to be with until he transformed into a totally different person!

Joanna stops for a split second. Interesting. Maybe not what she wanted to hear just then. Ted notices.

Joanna hands the book back to Barbara.

JOANNA

Here you go, Barbara. It was so nice to meet you.

BARBARA

Thank you!

She runs off, elated. Joanna can feel Ted about to say something, so she heads off talk of the exchange.

JOANNA

Now, where am I speaking?

In a small turn of events, she holds her hand out for Ted to take. He looks at it, her, then holds it as they walk.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - OUTSIDE MEETING ROOM - DAY

Joanna and Ted look at the session sign, a Photoshop job of Joanna, garland around her neck, and a calendar with Christmas and New Year's circled.

TED

That's one way to go.

JOANNA

To clarify, I'd never wear garland.

TED

No. The title. "Christmas Romance, New Year Wedding?" Sounds rough.

JOANNA

Don't knock it. Pay attention and you and Valerie could be planning a honeymoon.

Ted cocks his head. Really?

JOANNA

Ted. Dear, dear Ted. Watch and learn. Muffin.

TED

Note to self. Baked goods are on the table.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - MEETING ROOM - DAY

Joanna readies herself and walks in. She looks and feels good, smile turned on. Ted takes a seat in the back corner.

The room is filled with PEOPLE eager to hear Joanna speak. They applaud as she takes the stage and grabs a microphone.

JOANNA

Hello! Thank you for being here with me today. Now let's jump right in and talk about love, how to find it and, more importantly--

She eyes Ted. He catches it.

JOANNA

--how to keep it. By showing up today you've succeeded in taking the important first step. Because if you don't get out the door--

Joanna holds the microphone to the audience--

AUDIENCE

You don't get the date!

Ted's eyes go wide. This just got real. Joanna is polished.

JOANNA

It's what you do next that's the difference between Christmas turkey with future in-laws or TV dinners alone.

Ted is taken in by how well Joanna gets her message across.

JOANNA

That's why I've created the "Love Triangle"-- evaluate, concentrate and designate. First, evaluate your potential mates as objectively as you can. Are they right for me? Am I right for them? As two, are we a better "one?"

Joanna commands the stage. Ted watches, caught up.

JOANNA

Next, you concentrate on your romantic goals. Am I looking for a mad dash weekend, or marriage? And, can one lead to the other?

Ted sees the audience taking the words in. Hanging on them.

JOANNA

Finally, you must designate what's important to you. And that means making hard choices. Is the other person fulfilling me? If I don't like something, can I tell them? What can I live with and, most importantly, without?

AUDIENCE

Nothing!

Ted practically jumps at the quick, staccato response.

JOANNA

Because you're worthy of love. But I see you asking me, "love by Christmas? Marriage in the new year? How, Joanna?" Easy. Can you all do it? Yes! Open your heart is not just a song by Madonna. Take a look around. See who's nearby.

The audience does. Ted does.

JOANNA

Your very own "meant to be" could very well be right next to you. Remember, you never succumb to loneliness. You conquer it!

Applause! It's the Super Bowl of love.

JOANNA

Thank you! I'm Joanna Moret and you've just passed The Love Audit!

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ted walks up to Joanna, who is swarmed with fans. She shakes hands, hugs, signs autographs, and poses for photos.

When the last attendee leaves Joanna sits. Ted still stands.

JOANNA

They were great. Really in tune, don't you think?

TED

Yeah. Sure. Definitely.

JOANNA

Okay, let's hear it. I can take it.

TED

Hear what?

Joanna pats the seat next to her. Ted sits.

JOANNA

You came, you saw, now I'd really like to hear what's on your mind.

TED

It seemed a little-- surface? Cold, maybe?

(MORE)

TED (CONT'D)

That if something isn't working
it's just move on without trying to
fix it. You say it's a path to
love, or marriage, but some might
say it's--

He hesitates. Joanna eyes him. Go on, say it.

TED

Selfish.

JOANNA

Is Valerie being selfish for going
after what she wants?

TED

That's different. She's different.

JOANNA

Is it? Is she? Is it better to not
be honest with yourself or your
partner for the sake of a
relationship that isn't going well?
To settle for second best than
being with someone you privately
feel is first loser?

TED

I just believe people are--
perfectly imperfect. That flaws can
be charming and make you smile.
That you need the spark.

JOANNA

Imperfections add up, cause rifts.
One person's charming flaw is
another's irritating fail. I don't
understand why you think telling
people they should strive for the
best is wrong.

TED

Because the best is an illusion.
Sometimes it's not the "power
suit," but the old pair of jeans,
with a rip in the seam and a hole
in the knee, that makes you realize
you're comfortable with who you
are. And who you're with.

Ted gazes at Joanna. Is she understanding? Joanna looks down,
takes a deep breath, and looks him in the eye as she stands.

JOANNA
 "Comfortable is complacent."

Ted rubs his forehead, tries to find the words, but realizes maybe there aren't any.

Knock, knock, knock!

Ted and Joanna look to see GEORGE MACALLEN. 50s, impeccably dressed, and delightful. Nothing haughty about him at all.

JOANNA
 I'm sorry, the session just ended.

Joanna now sees who it is. She stands. Ted does as well.

GEORGE
 I know, I was in it. I stepped out to take a call, but was hoping you'd still be here.

JOANNA
 Mister MacAllen, such a pleasure.
 Joanna Moret.

She puts her hand out for him. He takes it.

GEORGE
 Please, call me George.

Joanna keeps her excitement in check.

JOANNA
 This is Ted Sumner. My boyfriend.

He and George shake hands.

TED
 Wonderful to meet you.

GEORGE
 If you have a moment, I'd love a quick chat.

He sits, which signals Joanna to. Then, Ted does as well.

GEORGE
 I'm thrilled that you-- the two of you-- will be joining us for our Christmas Eve gala. Everyone at MacAllen is very much looking forward to what you are able to do to make it special. Extra special.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

We want the best Joanna Moret has to offer in decor, food, music, and the holiday feeling only you can bring. Frankly, what you show to us is what we are hoping to show everyone, everyday, in living rooms across the country.

TED

No pressure!

Ted smiles. So does Joanna, gently nudging him. Not now.

JOANNA

George, I am thrilled with the opportunity to give your event every bit of my passion, creativity, and Christmas magic.

GEORGE

Perfect. We're prepared to have you both up tomorrow afternoon.

JOANNA

I won't let you down.

He smiles. It's warm, personal.

GEORGE

I believe you won't.

George stands. Joanna and Ted follow the lead.

GEORGE

Joanna, the pleasure was mine. I'm excited about our collaborating. Very nice to meet you as well, Ted. I look forward to getting to know the both of you more.

George shakes their hands.

JOANNA

Absolutely. Us as well.

George turns and leaves.

TED

Wow, he's good. Hey, are you okay?

JOANNA

Less than a week.

TED
To be perfect.

JOANNA
To be perfect.

Joanna looks right into Ted's eyes.

JOANNA
Time for us to get to work. We have about twenty-nine hours to learn enough about each other to convince MacAllen we're meant to be, less I'm found to be a fraud.

TED
I've had a year with Valerie and, clearly, it wasn't enough time.

JOANNA
We'll work on that. And, speaking of time, another lesson: quality over quantity. Time wasn't the issue, it's what you did with it.

TED
How so?

JOANNA
Well, for instance, it's better to give one, perfect rose in a week, than a wilted one every day.

TED
Dandelions count, right?

JOANNA
This'll be tougher than I thought.

TED
Twenty-nine hours, huh?

JOANNA
Give or take.

TED
Does that leave time for a drink?

INT. JOANNA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Joanna and Ted walk in and he sees how simply, but perfectly decorated the place is.

TED

I stand corrected. The North Pole
relocated here. Like, right here.

INT. JOANNA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Joanna and Ted stand at the Christmas tree. It's elegant,
bright, and festive. Ted examines a picture frame ornament.

JOANNA

You learn a lot about someone from
their tree. That's my parents and
I, taken when I came home for
Christmas after I left for school.

TED

You all look happy.

JOANNA

We were. I barely made it because a
flight was delayed and I almost
missed my connection. It felt good
to be home. Christmas was, is,
important to my family. Relatives
come in from all over, and my
parents and I cook, there's music,
dancing, kids, and a lot of
presents. What about you?

TED

Oh, your parents didn't mind if I
never made it back for Christmas.

He smiles. Joanna gives him a look-- come on. Tell me.

TED

I'm an only child. The rest of the
family is scattered and my parents
retired to the sunny side of
Florida. They go on a holiday
cruise to the Bahamas, which
doesn't exactly scream "winter
wonderland" to me. But as a kid I
couldn't get enough of being with
family, the snow, the lights--

JOANNA

The big tree.

TED

The big tree.

Their eyes meet. Understanding.

TED

As I got older most of the time was spent with friends in the city. We called ourselves "holiday orphans." Then people would get adopted out as they met someone and found a family to spend Christmas with.

JOANNA

Like what happened with you and Valerie?

Ted thinks on this. Looking at the tree, focusing on it.

TED

Her family is great. Very open. Very loud! But it was a whirlwind. Seeing friends she wanted to catch up with, last-minute errands. Sometimes I thought it would've been nice to have some quiet time with cocoa and a fireplace.

JOANNA

Did you ever tell her this?

TED

No. And-- I don't know.

JOANNA

Then that leads us to another lesson-- Christmas cards. They're a great way to tell people you love the things you love about them.

INT. JOANNA'S APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - DAY

Joanna and Ted sit at the table, surrounded by envelopes and cards. She works on one as Ted seals, stamps, and stacks.

JOANNA

That's for Uncle Louis, my mom's brother. He's a museum curator. Nice guy. Very funny. Perpetually single.

TED

My Aunt Joyce, my father's sister, never married. She's a history teacher and volunteers at an antique shop.

Ted and Joanna look at one another. An idea.

TED

Maybe Uncle Lou and Aunt Joyce
should get together and go bowling.

JOANNA

Now you're getting it. "Interesting
people find interest in each
other." See, some things in The
Love Audit aren't so bad.

TED

Audit. It just sounds so
perfunctory.

JOANNA

It is a systematic and independent
examination.

TED

Are we talking people or profit and
loss?

He smiles. She regards him with a raised eyebrow. There's a
moment of quiet between the two. Then--

JOANNA

That was the last one.

TED

This was all an elaborate ruse to
get me to help you with your
Christmas cards, wasn't it?

JOANNA

You've found me out.

TED

I'll forgive you on one condition.

JOANNA

Name it.

EXT. CAFE - NIGHT

A cute place, spruced up for Christmas. Joanna and Ted exit,
each holding a cup of steaming cider and a cookie.

TED

There's nothing cider and a cookie
can't fix. Well, almost nothing.

Joanna waits, knowing he has more to say.

TED

We used to be so in tune. At least I thought we were. And then, kapow. That's the officially recognized term for breakup, by the way.

Joanna smiles and nods in agreement. Of course.

JOANNA

Don't give up on you and Valerie. Not yet. Remember, you have a secret weapon. Me.

TED

How it is you became so powerful.

JOANNA

I loved creating and baking and fixing things. I went to design school and started a tiny little business, if you can call it that, in my living room. I helped people plan parties, family events, and, of course, Christmases. And being a good listener I realized my clients had more on their mind than how to perfectly string lights. I started offering advice, they started asking, and then I met Goldie. That's when things took off. Right place, right time.

TED

And meeting Mister Perfect was in there somewhere?

Joanna wasn't prepared for this question, but she nods.

TED

And how does he live up to the, dare I say, almost impossible standards you've set? If comparison is misery, color me miserable. I'd like to meet him one day, if you'd be okay with that. And if I can get over the fear.

Joanna looks to the ground.

JOANNA

Fear is a very strong word in this context.

She looks back to Ted. Sincere. Helpful.

JOANNA

I'm going to help you open your eyes to what it is Valerie wants, what you want, and how to get it. You'll see.

Ted smiles at her. Snow starts to gently fall as they reach--

EXT. JOANNA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

TED

I had fun today. Thank you.

JOANNA

I should be thanking you. It's not everyday you learn so much for the first time about the boyfriend you've supposedly had for years.

TED

No, I guess it's not.

There's a quick, silent moment between them, but it breaks when they hear THREE CAROLERS singing classic Christmas songs across the street. Joanna waves at them and they smile.

It helps complete a nearly perfect day.

TED

Well, you better get inside before enough of this stuff falls. I make a pretty mean snowball.

JOANNA

I hope to see the day.

TED

Good night, Joanna.

JOANNA

Remember, tomorrow afternoon. I'll see you there. Game time.

Ted gives her a thumbs up. He watches as she enters the building, then he turns and walks down the lamplit sidewalk.

He doesn't see Joanna peeking down at him from her top floor window. She watches him, then looks to the evening sky.

EXT. MACALLEN MANSION - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The sun hasn't set, but is low on the horizon, shining on the large, beautiful home. It's a structure of clean lines, ledge stone, and wood. Ample windows and leaded glass complete it.

The property and its gardens are covered in a pristine blanket of snow as Ted's car pulls up behind Joanna's. He parks, gets out, opens her passenger door, and climbs in.

INT. JOANNA'S CAR - DAY

She's dressed, again, quite well. Ted isn't dressed up, but he isn't dressed down. He looks at the house in wonder.

TED

This is what creating hit TV gets you. Good to know. Um, what are we waiting for?

JOANNA

Remember, we play couple, I do business, I get show, we break up.

TED

When you say it like that it makes me wonder how anyone can think romance is dead.

JOANNA

You're right. This is never going to work. Why did I think it could? How could it?

She puts her head down on the steering wheel.

TED

It will work because you know how to make it work.

She looks at him. He's sincere.

TED

The things you can do are special, because you're special. If you weren't, you wouldn't be here.

She thanks him with a smile. But then--

Ted is surprised as she practically jumps from her seat and turns to the back. She's looking for something amongst papers, a briefcase, blouses, decor, and more.

TED

You really do have a lot of stuff.

Joanna stares him down. Not now.

JOANNA

I need a book.

Joanna faces forward holding a dog-eared novel. She closes her eyes. Ted watches her, no idea what she is doing.

TED

What--

JOANNA

Shh!

Joanna opens the book randomly, moves her finger around, and points at a passage. Her eyes open.

JOANNA

It's a "finger book fortune," an old trick my grandmother taught me. Let the words speak to you.

Ted nods. Yeah, sure, okay. Joanna looks down. She focuses. Reads. Then starts to smile. She's happier. Ted tries to read as well, but Joanna pulls the book away.

JOANNA

This is my message. Get your own.

Fine. Ted looks in the back quickly. No books. Looks back to Joanna and her book. She shakes her head. But he has an idea. He opens the glove compartment and grabs the owner's manual.

TED

A trick from my auto shop teacher.

JOANNA

You took auto shop?

TED

Never.

Joanna watches, ready to laugh. Ted opens the manual, closes his eyes, and points. He opens his eyes and reads.

TED

Hmm. Interesting. Very telling.

JOANNA

Care to share?

TED
It's my message.

JOANNA
It's my car manual.

TED
Fine. If you must know what the
fates have in store for me--
(reading dramatically)
"The vehicle may hydroplane while
driving at a high speed on a wet or
slick road."

Silence for a moment, then they laugh. Tension-breaker.

TED
Now, are you ready?

JOANNA
As I'll ever be. Thank you.

EXT. MACALLEN MANSION - PORCH - DAY

Joanna and Ted stand staring at the door. Just waiting.

TED
I've heard stories that it helps
when you ring the doorbell. Or, if
you're old school, you can knock.

JOANNA
I'm thinking.

TED
I see. You're willing George to
throw open the doors and whisk us--

The double doors fling open! George stands there, smiling.

TED
(to Joanna)
Nice work.

George steps forward to shake Joanna's hand. She accepts it.
He then shakes Ted's hand.

GEORGE
Wonderful to see both of you again.
Please, come in, come in.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - FOYER - DAY

It's a classic lodge combined with tasteful luxury. There's certainly money all around, but nothing ostentatious.

JOANNA

It's absolutely stunning.

She looks around to notice--

JOANNA

(quietly, to Ted)

And not decorated. At all.

George turns and welcomes them into--

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - DAY

Joanna thought it couldn't get more grand, but her eyes are drawn to an enormous floor to ceiling window. The afternoon sun beams in and she can already tell--

JOANNA

The tree will go right there.

She points near the windows. George smiles. Joanna writes things down in her notebook.

JOANNA

Thank you for having us. I must say ideas are already flowing and I can't wait to start.

GEORGE

I'm glad. I have a feeling this is the start of something wonderful.

DEL (O.C.)

I couldn't agree more.

George, Ted, and Joanna turn to the location of the voice, the top of the grand staircase.

They see DEL MACALLEN, 30s. Buttoned-up, all business, and incredibly handsome. Favoring corporate over personal success causes one to question if there are feelings under the suit.

Joanna is taken by his appearance. She turns to Ted, quiet--

JOANNA

Now that's a suit.

As Del walks to meet them, Ted hides a hint of worry in Del's perfect appearance.

GEORGE

Please meet my head of development
and production, and my son, Del.

Del moves right to Joanna. He doesn't brush Ted off, but he doesn't make eye contact with him, either.

DEL

Joanna Moret, brilliant, creative,
love expert. The pleasure is most
certainly mine.

JOANNA

It's very nice to meet you.

His eyes are striking. Joanna blushes. It appears Del might be ready to kiss her hand? Ted steps in, offering his hand.

TED

Hey, I'm Ted.

Del lingers a moment looking at Joanna and holding her hand. He then slowly turns to Ted and shakes his hand.

TED

Joanna's boyfriend.

Del gives Ted a once-over. Gazes at Joanna, then back to Ted. Ted does the same. It's a silent, eyeball showdown.

DEL

I wasn't sure who to expect. You've
been shrouded in secrecy. This, the
perfect, yet elusive boyfriend.

What does he mean, "this?" Ted pulls Joanna close. He grins.

TED

Elementary, my dear Watson.

Joanna slightly nudges Ted. Ted straightens up. Sorry.

Del regards him again, then looks to his father and Joanna. George is no dummy. He senses something and gamely steps in.

GEORGE

Del has proven himself to be quite
the star at running things with
bristling competence. And should we
finalize this deal, I've no doubt
that will not change.

Ted leans in to Del.

TED
No pressure.

DEL
No worries. I'm a closer.

Del winks. Ooh, he's good! Joanna can't believe it. Stops the "boys" from going further. Looks to George, then to Del.

JOANNA
I'm just thrilled that you're interested in me-- I mean my work.

DEL
There's more than interest.

Ted catches that. Was there more there?

DEL
We've run the figures and the facts. Joanna Moret is great business. Loyal fans and a solid readership. We'd like to turn that into viewership and not only expand your horizons, but shatter them.

JOANNA
That sounds truly incredible.

Ted mumbles. This guy.

DEL
And doable. Your ad revenues increase year-to-year, and your awareness level among prospective viewers is nothing short of a dream. We'll keep it a reality.

GEORGE
Now that Del has nicely laid the groundwork, what do you say we have a quick bite to eat? I'll have your things brought in and taken upstairs so we can enjoy ourselves.

JOANNA
That would be wonderful.

TED
It would be darling, darling.

DEL
Great. Follow me.

Ted and Joanna are about to, but then Joanna hesitates.

JOANNA
Actually, Del, if Ted and I could
just have a moment.

DEL
Of course. The dining room is down
the hall and to the right.

JOANNA
We'll be right in.

She smiles as Del turns to leave. He looks back. Joanna waves
as she and Ted watch him round a corner and go out of sight.

Joanna smiles her way through a moment of frustration. She is
sweet, almost saccharine as she pulls him into--

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - LIBRARY - DAY

The room is dimly lit and lush. Tables, couches, and books
for days. A gorgeous fireplace enhances it all.

JOANNA
What was all that for?

TED
What was all what for?

JOANNA
What are you doing?

TED
What am I doing?

JOANNA
Stop it. You're going to blow our
cover and derail this.

TED
I just didn't like how mister three
piece suit was talking to you. He's
so-- so--

Ted squints, can't find the words. Tries hard. Joanna crosses
her arms as she listens.

TED

Smarmy.

(aha!)

Robotic.

Ted folds his arms as if he's won a debate.

JOANNA

Or, an executive doing his job to get to know a potential client.

Ted grins. There's so much more, isn't it obvious?

TED

Oh, Joanna, ugh. Really?

JOANNA

Ugh? You're a producer. You meet people every day and put them at ease before they're on television.

TED

There's a big difference between looking at someone with respect and looking at them like, like--

JOANNA

Ted, I appreciate this. I do. But, I-- we-- need this to work.

TED

The way he talks, and acts. It feels so calculated. So perfect.

JOANNA

Is someone jealous?

TED

Jealous? Ha. Let me point out that I'm your boyfriend.

JOANNA

No, not really, but--

TED

And he's named after a computer!

Joanna is about to say something, but stops. A grin spreads across her face. Ted's, too. Then, they laugh. They had to.

JOANNA

Let's pull ourselves together before they wonder what happened.

(MORE)

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Then, I can get started on the gala, which puts us a step closer to my helping you with the start of your second--

Ted shakes his head. Points up.

JOANNA

Third--

Ted grimaces. Points up again. Joanna grimaces, too. Okayyy.

JOANNA

Whatever number romance with Valerie. How does that sound?

TED

Fine. But I still don't like the way he's acting.

JOANNA

If need be, I'll call you to be my Christmas knight in shining armor.

TED

If I don't answer, look around. I've seen enough Scooby-Doo to know this kind of place must have one tucked away somewhere.

JOANNA

What have I gotten us into?

They start walking from the library to dinner.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - DINING ROOM - LATER

Leaded glass windows let the setting sun wash in. It covers a vast oak dining table. George, Del, Ted, and Joanna sit on one end. They clearly enjoyed a wonderful meal.

GEORGE

Del was a handful, especially at Christmas. Don't let him tell you otherwise.

DEL

I plead the fifth and kindly ask my father to, as well.

GEORGE

In fairness, he did find an outlet for his energies with the company.

TED

You produce some wonderful content.
It's impressive.

GEORGE

Thank you. And thank Del. He's
worked hard, though I do believe
there are times he prefers his
development reports to people.

DEL

You always know where you stand
with facts and figures. I'm a big
fan of to-do lists.

Joanna catches Del throwing a small glimpse her way.

TED

But it's such fun putting the shows
together, wrangling the elements,
being a part of the little moments
you weren't expecting.

Ted feels he is on an island.

TED

Right?

Del considers this, then peeks at Joanna. She had his eye as
well. Ted, without thinking, moves his hand over Joanna's.

JOANNA

Reports, facts, lists. You're
speaking my language. And my
language here is the gala.

DEL

Down to business. I like that.

So does Joanna as she opens her notebook. Ted doesn't truly
understand that.

JOANNA

I'd love to get started right away.
I'll admit I was surprised, given
the grandeur of the event, that the
mansion hadn't been decorated. Not
even a tree?

George and Del give each other a quick look. Nothing wrong,
just ready to impart less-than-enthusiastic information.

DEL

Yes, well, my mother handled the interior. It wasn't the start of the holidays without her voice echoing, "More garland, brighter lights, bigger ornaments."

Del smiles. George peeks at him, understanding. Joanna and Ted fear they know, sadly, what is coming next.

GEORGE

Mrs. MacAllen passed away earlier this year. Just after the holiday, after a long battle.

JOANNA

I am so very sorry for your loss.

TED

Our sympathies, truly.

GEORGE

We both appreciate that very much.
 (to Joanna)
 And, my dear, she happened to be quite the fan of yours. In fact, your being here is as much a request of ours as it would have been a wish fulfilled for her.

JOANNA

I am beyond flattered, thank you.

DEL

Well, if you'd like to get started there's no time like the present.

Del looks to George, who approves with a slight grin. Del stands, as do Joanna and Ted. Polite, George gets up as well.

DEL

Joanna, Ted, if you'll follow me.

Del leaves the room with them in tow. This leaves George alone. He moves to look out the window at falling snow.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - CHRISTMAS ROOM - NIGHT

The looks on Joanna and Ted's faces says it all.

JOANNA

Ted, stand corrected again. This is where the North Pole relocated.

TED

Uh, yeah.

The room is a Christmas sanctuary. Red, green, silver, and more sparkle. Lights, garland, ornaments, life-size figures. You name it, it's here.

Joanna is in event-planning heaven. She looks around at everything in wonder, filled with joy. Ted watches her with a smile. Del watches, well, without one.

DEL

I suppose I'll leave you to it.

JOANNA

Why don't you stay?

News to Del. And Ted.

JOANNA

Things will go faster with you as our guide.

Del considers it. That would be nice. But he quickly gets back into business mode.

DEL

Of course. Efficiency is key.

Joanna nods in agreement, but Ted smirks. Really? Joanna starts looking around at the wonders.

JOANNA

I just cannot believe how much is here. It's all so gorgeous. Some of these items look vintage.

DEL

Mother always believed in adding each year, never taking away. She always said, "The Christmas of the past--

DEL

--is its own Christmas present."

JOANNA

--is its own Christmas present."

JOANNA

Your mother sounds like a wonderful woman. I'm so pleased she was able to find anything I said helpful.

DEL

In a way, it was the two of you who made Christmas special.

That makes Joanna happy. There's a moment of understanding between Joanna and Del. It does not go unnoticed by Ted.

TED

Why don't we bring down as much as we can. Del, perhaps we can stage things in the main hall.

DEL

Spoken like a producer. I think that would be fine.

Producer? Del's noticed. Joanna smiles. "Not so bad, is he?"

TED

Great, then let's get nut cracking. Get it? Nutcrack-- okay.

Ted picks up a set of boxes. Looks to Del.

TED

After you.

Del understands, grabs some things, and heads out. Ted moves to Joanna, who is looking at something, lost in thought.

TED

All this lifting and carrying. Looks like my outfit is perfect for the occasion. Hey, you all right?

JOANNA

So much history. All these memories. I'm fine. You know what, better than fine. I just figured out my theme.

She writes in her notebook, closes it, and picks up items.

JOANNA

After you.

Ted laughs and moves out. Joanna follows, but steals one more glance behind at the holiday treasures.

And the item she was looking at? A beautiful, silver-framed ornament with a photo of a younger George and his late wife. Underneath it, inscribed in red-- "Our First Christmas."

INT. TV STUDIO - TED'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Cameron is finishing things up at the computer. The door opens and he looks up, surprised to see--

VALERIE. 30s and pretty, but with a dramatic, funky edge. It can be alluring or off-putting, depending. She's a wild card, but there's a subtlety even in her overtness.

CAMERON

Valerie.

VALERIE

Where is he?

CAMERON

Uh, not here?

She steps in toward him with purpose. She is going to get what she wants from him. It's not that Cameron is afraid of her, but he's not, not afraid of her, either.

VALERIE

Cameron. Cameron, Cameron, Cam--

CAMERON

(quickly)

Joanna Moret asked him out and he must have said yes because he took a few days off to spend with her and then went to George MacAllen's mansion to help her on a project.

That's all she needed. She squints. Thinks.

VALERIE

Did he now?

Oops. Cameron closes his eyes, then opens them. Valerie is gone. A good thing for him. Maybe less so for Ted. Gulp.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

Ted and Del bring in the last of the items. Joanna is buried in her notebook, furiously writing ideas down, invigorated as she surveys the space. She nods her head, looks at Del.

JOANNA

This is good.

DEL

My mother ran the decorating staff like a well-oiled machine.

(MORE)

DEL (CONT'D)

They will, of course, be at your disposal. This event really was as much my mother's as my father's. And I know he's hoping-- we're hoping-- you do it justice. For her.

It's a tall order. Ted can also understand the feeling.

DEL

It would give us a reason to--

JOANNA

I won't let you down.

DEL

I believe you.

Del, a bit sullen, exits. Ted moves to Joanna.

JOANNA

No pressure is right.

TED

Hey, you can do this because it's what you do. Create moments and memories. Besides, "It's never just business when people are involved."

Joanna gives him a sly, knowing smile.

JOANNA

You're reading my book.

Ted pinches his thumb and index finger. Maybe a little.

TED

I'm gonna leave you and your notebook to work up some Christmas magic. You know what they say? Three's a crowd.

Ted can always find a way with words to make her smile. She then goes back to her notebook and thoughts.

TED

Good night, Joanna.

Joanna doesn't look up. Ted knows she's not being rude. She's just in a whirlwind of inspiration. He smiles and leaves.

Joanna again looks through all of the incredible decor, writing more and more. She then gets an idea--

MONTAGE

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - FOYER - NIGHT

She holds garland and moves to the grand staircase. She puts it against the railing, then writes notes down, and sketches.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Joanna stands at one end of the long table. She has sketched what the setting will look like-- holly centerpieces, candles, and lights around the large windows.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

She has sketched where the tree will go. It will be large, beautiful, a showstopper.

Also in the sketch is a table near the tree that has the word ornaments in capital letters and circled. Clearly important.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - KITCHEN - NIGHT

It's a wonderful space with a lot of room to work. Joanna makes notes of what is available, and lists of what she'll want to make from scratch--

Pies, cookies, cakes, cider, cocoa.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - FOYER - NIGHT

As Joanna moves through she makes notes. Looks up and around for where things can be hung and placed.

She doesn't see that Del was watching her. Thinking. Perhaps longing for the past.

END MONTAGE

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

Joanna sits on the floor, going through the boxes of decorations, organizing things by color, type, size.

Making sure there's a place for everything and everything has a place. It's been a lot of work. She yawns.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - TED'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ted's bed overflows with throw pillows. He starts removing things, catching a glimpse of himself in the standing mirror. No suit, but it's fine. Right?

THWACK! Did something just hit the window? He opens it, about to look down as something flies past him.

He picks it up. A pine cone? He looks out and down, his eyes wide. This can't be good.

EXT. MACALLEN MANSION - NIGHT

Ted rushes out of the front door, his coat half on and off. He moves toward Valerie, who is bundled head to toe.

TED

Valerie?

VALERIE

Two-timer.

She throws a tiny pine cone at him. He artfully dodges it.

TED

Hey! Two-timer?

VALERIE

Just when were you gonna tell me?

TED

Tell you what?

VALERIE

The secret to your grandmother's rice pudding. That you've been dating Joanna Moret!

Oh no. How could he not have thought this would happen? She throws another pine cone at him. He dodges again.

TED

Val!

VALERIE

Don't you "Val" me.

TED

It's not what you think, Valerie. Wait, why are you here? You broke up with me.

VALERIE
No, no. I stepped back.

TED
Let me quote, "It's over, we're
through, I'm breaking up with you."

VALERIE
I needed space.

TED
You said that because you needed
space? What, all of it?

VALERIE
Yes. Probably when you crowded our
relationship with another woman!

She tosses another pine cone. It wiffles to his feet.

TED
Will you stop that?

VALERIE
Don't tell me what to do, Romeo.

Romeo? Valerie pushes past Ted and moves toward the house.

TED
Where are you going?

VALERIE
To give a little advice of my own.
I'll bet she never saw this coming
in her love gestures.

Ted thinks on that for a split second. Woah!

TED
No, stop!

He starts after Valerie, then realizes her car is running. He
turns it off, shuts the door, and runs to the house.

TED
(loudly whispers)
Valerie!

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - FOYER - NIGHT

The massive door opens and Valerie steps in, ready for the
showdown. But then takes a moment to look at the place.

VALERIE

Wow.

Ted enters and shuts the door behind him. Faces Valerie. She stares him down, removing her gloves, finger by finger.

TED

Just let me explain.

Valerie peeks around, running her fingers along things.

TED

Please don't touch anything.

She stops and shakes her head. So, she turns to Ted and starts in on what she came to do, in what wouldn't be called the quietist voice.

VALERIE

So, where is she?

TED

Just let me explain.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

Joanna still sits, working. She's tired, but also excited as she sketches and handles to-do lists. But her head snaps up from her work when she hears voices. Yes, Ted and--

VALERIE (O.C.)

Oh, believe me, by all means, I
can't wait to hear!

A woman?

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - FOYER - NIGHT

TED

I was going to tell you before I
left, but it all happened so fast.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Joanna moves down the hall, trying to figure out who it is and what is happening.

VALERIE (O.C.)

These things usually do!

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - FOYER - NIGHT

TED
Keep your voice down!
(he whispers)
Please.

Lights come on. That did it. Ted is mortified.

GEORGE (O.C.)
What is going on down there?

George enters from one side, regal in his night clothes. Del moves in from the other side, still in a suit. Shocker. Joanna appears from the hallway.

George and Del want answers. Valerie stares forward, tapping her foot. As the names fly, everyone's eyes follow.

TED
George. Del.

VALERIE
Joanna!

TED
Valerie!

JOANNA
Ted?

GEORGE
Now that we've established names,
can someone please tell me who this
woman is and why she's in my foyer?

Joanna enters. Valerie is about to talk, but Ted puts his arm around her, hoping she'll stay silent.

TED
Valerie is-- you know-- she's--

JOANNA
My assistant!

News to Valerie and Ted.

TED
She is? She is!

Joanna moves to Valerie and Ted. Del, George and especially Valerie watch the back-and-forth.

TED

Yes, it's funny, actually. Valerie was trying to reach Joanna to get some things signed for Goldie--

JOANNA

That's my agent--

TED

But cell service was spotty and she couldn't reach her, so she decided to drive out here--

JOANNA

Because Valerie is a go-getter--

TED

It just ended up being later than she anticipated because she got a little lost.

JOANNA

Isn't all that right, Valerie?

Hint, hint. Ted, eyebrows raised, hopes. Valerie is unsure, but smiles.

VALERIE

(a statement and question)

Yes.

JOANNA

We're all sorry for the intrusion and this slight change in plan.

Del isn't completely sure about this, but accepts it.

DEL

As long as things are sorted out.

GEORGE

Wonderful. Then I bid you all a good night. Again.

George leaves. Valerie eyes Del.

VALERIE

Nice suit.

Del looks down, then slightly grins. Ted is chagrined. Del looks at Valerie. She eyes back, throwing the slightest bit of attitude. Or flirtation. Did he catch it?

Ted starts moving her toward the stairs.

TED

Great, it's settled. Now let's go get you everything you need and get you back to the city. As soon as humanly possible.

DEL

There's a room made up next to Joanna's. I suggest you stay. Safer than driving back in the snow.

Ted shuffles Valerie up the stairs. Just at the top she gives Joanna a look that says, "We need to talk."

Then, Valerie turns back, switches gears, and throws another grin down to Del. This time he picks up on it, gamely smiles back, but isn't sure exactly what to think just yet.

Valerie is pulled around the corner out of sight.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - JOANNA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joanna is inside. Ted and Valerie enter. He shuts the door. Valerie moves in front of Ted and Joanna, pacing.

TED

Assistant?

Joanna shrugs. Valerie looks at her. Sizes her up.

VALERIE

Seductress.

Joanna blanches.

TED

It's better than two-timer.

Joanna puts her game face on. She's got this. She better.

JOANNA

Valerie, first of all, it's very nice to meet you.

Not what Valerie was expecting.

JOANNA

And let me assure you none of this is what you think it is.

VALERIE

That's exactly what he said.

TED

Because it's true!

JOANNA

Ted, let me handle this. Actually,
would you mind stepping out?

Is she serious? Joanna nods. Okay. Ted opens the door. Turns back to make absolutely sure. The women look at him. They're sure. He leaves and shuts the door.

JOANNA

All right, here's what's really
happening.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ted paces. Looks at his watch. Listens at the door and hears their voices. Loud, soft, heated. What is going on in there?

He paces again. Then grabs the door handle, about to go in. Thinks better of it. Grabs it again. Maybe now. Maybe not.

He checks his watch, then realizes he hears nothing. He puts his ear to the door. Nothing. It's too much for him, so he grabs the door handle and throws the door open.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - JOANNA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

To see Valerie, with a wide grin, hugging Joanna. Joanna looks to Ted. What have we gotten ourselves into? Valerie lets go of Joanna and stands, turning to Ted.

VALERIE

I can't believe you went out with
another woman just for me. It's so--

TED

(obviously)
Insane.

VALERIE

(smitten)
Romantic!

Ted eyes her. Huh?

VALERIE

It's like, what, a hundred points?
The fact that you-- Joanna Moret--
would bother to take any kind of
interest in Ted--

Joanna is enjoying this.

TED
I'm right here, you know.

VALERIE
--and me, to try to help.

She throws herself into Joanna for another hug.

JOANNA
Wow! What can I say?

TED
That it's going to be a long night.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - THE NEXT MORNING

It's early, but Joanna is in full work mode. She and HOUSEHOLD STAFF have already made nice progress decorating the room. It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - KITCHEN - DAY

Joanna works multiple things at once. There's flour, eggs, mixing bowls, cutters, confections. Cookie essentials. She's in her element. Some cookies are done and look incredible.

She preps another batch and doesn't see Del watching.

DEL
One of my favorite Christmas moments.

JOANNA
Del! Good morning.

DEL
As a kid I'd watch my mother and the staff bake. I'd grab a cookie, thinking she didn't see. And she'd let me, pretending she didn't see.

JOANNA
There is nothing more Christmas than baking cookies. But if you steal one, I will see.

Del gets back to business.

DEL
We do have people to do this.

JOANNA

And they've been amazing. Your staff has been helping me decorate inside and out. But, you know what? Some things you just want to do yourself.

She puts an apron on him and around his neck. They are close. Very close. She moves back and gives him a cookie cutter.

DEL

This is new territory. Me and a cookie cutter could be dangerous.

JOANNA

I have faith in you. Besides, I'm making extras.

She smiles and so does he. She motions for him to give it a go on the rolled out dough in front of him.

JOANNA

It helps to think you're making more than a cookie. You're making a memory. Something to savor. And you're allowed to have some fun.

Joanna can't tell if he's enjoying it. Del looks up, done.

JOANNA

All right, let's see.

Joanna looks at his work. She cocks her head as Ted walks in.

TED

Good morning.
(re: the cutouts)
Poor reindeer. Is that snowman missing a head?

JOANNA

Don't listen to him. You certainly have created something to remember.

The cutouts are a bit stretched and pulled.

TED

Put some silver whatchamacallits on them and they'll match your suit.

Joanna glares. Ted shrugs. Worth a try.

DEL

I think this proves I'm better at banking than baking.

JOANNA

Well, there's more where this came from. By the way, the menu is confirmed, the printer is shipping placards, and the music is set. That part I'm keeping a surprise.

TED

When did all that happen?

JOANNA

Efficiency is key, remember?

She eyes Del. Ted isn't enamored about it. Valerie enters.

VALERIE

Good morning! Nice cookies, Del. So, when we are trimming the tree?

Ted and Joanna are surprised to see her. Del glances her way. She looks better in the light of day.

TED

Valerie. You're-- still here. Shouldn't you be on the road?

VALERIE

It can wait.

TED

(another hint)
You didn't bring anything with you.

VALERIE

I had a bag packed with some things from my last trip.

(to Del)

I'm a whiz at adjusting to new and surprising situations. Besides, Joanna doesn't mind her awesome, number one assistant helping out.

(to Joanna)

Isn't that right?

JOANNA

How could I say no?

Valerie eyes Ted who eyes Joanna who eyes Del who eyes them all. Time to get moving and end the conversation.

JOANNA

Okay, let me finish here. I need to get these in the oven and some pies prepped before the tree cutting.

That was an attention-grabber.

TED/VALERIE/DEL

Tree cutting?

JOANNA

Consider me old-fashioned, but that's usually how you get one of them out there in here. And with it the gorgeous smell of fresh pine.

VALERIE

They sell that, you know. Trees, too.

JOANNA

Oh, Valerie, you know not everything comes from the internet.

VALERIE

It doesn't?

That gets a small laugh from Del. Ted notices. Interesting. Del clears his throat.

DEL

We have people to help with the tree, too.

JOANNA

I know. I'm one of them.

She smiles.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - JOANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Joanna sits at a small desk. She is compiling a stack of small photos, all of which are Christmas themed. We can't tell exactly what they are or all mean just yet.

She checks her list, crossing out "to do" items-- invites, cookies, desserts, catering, music, photos, ornaments. The tree is next.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - JOANNA'S CLOSET - DAY

Joanna enters the spacious walk-in. She screams when she sees Valerie, who also screams.

JOANNA

What are you doing in my closet?

Valerie is giddy as she pulls Joanna to a door on the opposite end and opens it. It's Valerie's adjoining room.

VALERIE

You mean our closet. Roomie. Isn't it the coolest thing ever?

JOANNA

It's something. Listen, you enjoy all of this and I'm gonna go down and handle the tree.

VALERIE

Oh, I'm coming with you. We all are, I think.

Joanna turns. It's going to be a long day.

EXT. MACALLEN MANSION - DAY

Joanna is bundled up, but the pants she wears are not jeans. There is a bag of tools at her feet. She directs staff as they put up lights, garland, and wreaths on the Mansion.

She checks her watch as Del, Ted, and Valerie come outside.

JOANNA

Are we ready to go over the hills and through the woods?

TED

(joking)

Are you wearing a suit under that coat, Del?

Del eyes him and opens the coat. No suit. Ted smiles.

TED

Just checking.

Joanna grabs her bag and starts off. She hides her smile. The others give one another a look.

EXT. WOODED AREA - DAY

The group has been walking a ways. Valerie and Ted walk together just a bit behind Joanna and Del.

JOANNA

I can't believe you've never really explored your property. I can't get enough of it.

Del points out a potential tree.

DEL

What about that one?

JOANNA

Too small. I have probably seen more of your house than you have.

DEL

And in record time. Far as I can remember I felt I was busy. When most kids played tag, I played TV producer. I thank my dad for that. But, it worked out in the end.

(points at a tree)

That one, right there.

JOANNA

Too wide. I'm enjoying my time here, that's for sure. Things are going more quickly than I could have hoped. Your staff is amazing. It's all falling into place. Maybe it's a Christmas miracle.

DEL

I don't know. I've seen you with your lists, notebook, schedules. Making sure there's a place for everything, everything in its place. I like that in a partner.

Joanna wonders if that was a slip. Perhaps she doesn't mind.

DEL

With the people I'm working with. "Complimenting your partner is, in itself, a big compliment."

JOANNA

Ah, chapter four. Kissing up, huh?

Del shrugs. Maybe a little. He points at another tree.

DEL

How about--

Joanna shakes her head. It's almost become a game.

JOANNA

Uh, nope.

Joanna likes that Del might be having some fun. Did he just smile back at her. Ted notices. So does Valerie.

VALERIE

They're having a good time.

TED

He's probably talking to her about spreadsheets.

VALERIE

At least he's talking to her.

TED

Talking was never our problem. It was me saying the wrong things.

VALERIE

Joanna says--

Ted stops walking. Stops her.

TED

Val-- Valerie-- sometimes I wonder if that wasn't our problem. "Joanna says." Maybe I needed to hear what you were thinking. What you wanted.

VALERIE

Just because I was following advice from someone else doesn't mean I wasn't feeling those things. Whether "Joanna says" or "Valerie thinks," it's still me looking.

Ted takes a deep breath. He's trying. Valerie starts to walk.

TED

Valerie?

She stops. Turns. Now what? He is holding the napkin that says "I Need You!"

Joanna looks. Her eyes go wide. Ted sees her reaction. Oh, wait, Del! He looks as Ted pulls the napkin behind his back.

Everyone is near each other again. They're a little more tired. Del wonders, but then points to another tree.

DEL
Okay, what about--

Joanna stops him, looking sorry.

JOANNA
Del, it's important to know that I'm not-- you're not-- just getting a tree. That's branches and leaves.

DEL
So what are we getting?

Ted and Valerie listen carefully as well. This is Joanna Moret. This is what she knows, feels, and lives.

JOANNA
A greeting. A symbol. A tradition. Something to remind people of cherished memories. Of childhood. To reflect the Christmas spirit and the love of family and friends, those with us and those gone.

A powerful statement. Valerie wipes an almost tear and reaches to hold Ted's hand. Also caught up, he returns the gesture. Perhaps things are turning.

Del nods, perhaps understanding the sentiment. Perhaps just understanding the need for a tree. Joanna can't tell which.

Del looks to Ted and Valerie. Ted pulls his hand away. Did Del notice. No matter, because Ted points in the distance.

TED
There. There it is.

They all look and see the setting sun beaming through a beautiful tree. Truly evergreen, ready to be made special. Joanna smiles. Nods.

Valerie moves ahead with purpose.

VALERIE
Give me the tools.

Uh, is she serious? She holds her hand out. She sure is. Ted looks confused. Del, he kinda likes it.

EXT. MACALLEN MANSION - ESTABLISHING - EVENING

Lights are strewn around windows, eaves, and doors. Even the surrounding trees are aglow. There is also garland and strategically placed wreaths on the porch rail.

The mansion absolutely dazzles in the evening snow.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - EVENING

The bare tree is now up, situated in the perfect place for all to see when they enter. It's enormous and wonderful.

Joanna is alone, going through boxes of ornaments, getting things ready. Del enters.

DEL

I think that will make a statement.

JOANNA

It's not even decorated yet. That's the fun part. It will only get more beautiful.

DEL

Things are already beautiful.

Joanna catches that one. How could she not? She blushes. Del moves closer to her and kneels down. He, too, looks through ornaments. Some are regular bulbs, but many are handcrafted.

Del picks a sleigh made of tiny birch tree branches, two silver bells, and a sprig of spruce.

Joanna can see him admiring it. He's lost in thought.

JOANNA

You made that, didn't you.

DEL

How did you know that?

JOANNA

I know that look.

DEL

I used to love coming here for the holidays. Most of the year we were at the house in the city. But as Christmas got closer I would get more and more excited. I knew that being here meant vacation and sledding. And cookies.

JOANNA

Used to? What changed?

DEL

School. Life. Work. I took on more and more responsibility. I still love coming here, but it's more about the business now. I guess I grew up.

JOANNA

If there's one thing I've learned, it's that we may grow up, but we don't outgrow Christmas. Follow me.

She offers her hand. He takes it. She leads him to the tree.

JOANNA

Right there, I think.

She lifts his hand with the ornament to put it on the tree.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ted is about to enter, but hears them talking. He sees they are close. Very close. He pulls back, not wanting to interrupt. He listens.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

DEL

Joanna, you see things in such an interesting way. You're prepared, you're precise.

JOANNA

I was a girl scout.

DEL

There are very few people like you, at least that I've met. It's why I--

JOANNA

What?

DEL

Wanted you. The show. All of this. You've opened my eyes even more to what the possibilities can be.

Joanna wonders, is he talking about the gala? Or more?

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ted closes his eyes on those words, so much running through his mind. Opening them, he walks away.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

JOANNA

So this is all your fault.

DEL

One person's fault is another's--
Christmas miracle?

Is he flirting? Is Joanna falling for it?

JOANNA

Well, it is a magical time of year.

DEL

That brings people together.

Even closer. Then, he stops, pulls back, and straightens up.

GEORGE (O.C.)

It's beginning to look a lot like
Christmas.

Joanna, too, turns on her more professional mode.

JOANNA

George. Hello.

He enters the room and surveys all the decorating that has been done thus far. It's close to being done.

GEORGE

I thought I would stop in and see
how things are going. I'm happy to
say it looks like very well.

JOANNA

I believe so. There's more to do,
of course, not the least of which
is the tree. The heavy lifting will
start in the morning. I've informed
the decorating and wait staff of
what I need and when. Yes, I think
tomorrow you'll truly see the
transformation.

GEORGE

I can see Del has been keeping an eye on things, running a tight ship, as always.

DEL

Joanna has quickly proven she needs little guidance. She has that rare quality of knowing what she wants and, better, how to get it.

A pointed comment. Joanna knows that. Perhaps George, too.

GEORGE

All good things, for this and other projects. I'll leave you to it.

George starts out, then turns back.

GEORGE

I do want to point out I'm especially looking forward to the tree. It was always one of my wife's greatest achievements and I'd want her to be proud. Considering she followed your lead for many years, I'm sure it's in good hands.

Joanna knows what she can do. Confidence is key.

JOANNA

It is, indeed. I don't promise what I can't deliver. And I would never want to let any of you down.

George appears to like that. He leaves. It has clearly broken whatever moment was percolating between Joanna and Del.

But it's something she feels the need to address, at least at the moment.

JOANNA

Del, about what--

DEL

I should get back to my work and leave you to yours.

Joanna smiles weakly as Del heads out.

She watches him go, slightly torn. She then goes back to her list. Items and times are crossed out as things progress.

But there is still one other thing added--

Ted/Valerie. That one might be the most difficult of all.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - TED'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ted and Valerie sit, silent. They don't look angry, but they aren't looking at one another, either. They're waiting.

Knock, knock! Valerie answers the door. It's Joanna.

JOANNA

Good morning.

VALERIE

We'll see.

Valerie crosses her arms. Ted looks at her, then to Joanna.
"See, this is what I mean."

JOANNA

I don't want to start with a lot of, "How are you feeling?" "How are you doing?" We wouldn't be here if we didn't know those answers. And we wouldn't be here if you didn't want to fix them.

TED

Well, I'm ready.

VALERIE

And I'm not?

TED

I didn't say that.

VALERIE

You didn't not say it, either.

Joanna watches the verbal tennis match and has to jump in.

JOANNA

All right. Let's look at this. Valerie, you feel Ted is not doing enough and doesn't understand what it is you are looking for.

Valerie looks at Ted and nods.

JOANNA

Ted, you seem to not understand what to do or what not to do for fear of getting it wrong, so you end up doing nothing. Right?

Ted looks at Valerie and nods.

JOANNA

Okay, then we're off to the races here. What we want to work on are some core concepts: respect, love, understanding, and passion. So first, we're going to talk about what we see in the other person. But to keep it as objective as possible, you will not be saying them to each other. You'll say them to me, as if I'm your partner. Because sometimes the things you can't say to someone's face are the most honest. Valerie, you're first. You'll face me and Ted is going to turn away as you speak.

This should be interesting. Valerie steps up to Joanna as Ted turns around, facing the window.

JOANNA

Okay, tell me-- Ted-- what it is you're feeling. Remember, respect, love, understanding, passion.

Valerie does not have to think hard on this.

VALERIE

All right, fine--
(she turns for a moment)
--Ted.
(back to Joanna)
Sometimes I wish you would respect the fact that all I'm asking you to do is try a little harder to take things more seriously. I feel like you're more interested in being silly than sensible.

Joanna finds that interesting. But Valerie isn't done.

VALERIE

And I'd love if you planned ahead more. This whirlwind, drop of a hat, let's go to the zoo, or let's watch a movie stuff.

(MORE)

VALERIE (CONT'D)

It's always so sudden. Sometimes I want to know the who, what, when, why and where before I make a decision. I can do spontaneity, as long as I know about it beforehand.

Joanna nods. Okay. She looks at Ted, still staring outside.

VALERIE

Oh, and I wish you'd understand that sometimes my work just comes first.

(breaks to Joanna)

I'm a paralegal.

JOANNA

I didn't know that.

Makes sense, sort of. Valerie smiles, then is back into it.

VALERIE

And passion? I guess, love the love gestures more? That napkin was a nice touch. You can do that more often. A lot more often. That's it, I'm done. Wow, that felt great!

She hugs Joanna, then turns to Ted. Kind of oblivious.

VALERIE

Your turn, honey.

Valerie kisses him on the cheek and faces the window. Ted isn't sure what to make of everything. Did she hear herself.

Joanna is as sympathetic as she can be without words.

JOANNA

Ted, same thing. The core concepts. Tell me what you're feeling.

Ted sighs. Loosens up. He doesn't look Joanna in the eye right away. He looks down.

TED

I-- I just want you to look at me and see who I am. Inside. I'm not perfect. And I love being silly. I just want to be the best person I can be. Part of that is making you laugh. And seeing you smile.

He looks to Joanna's eyes. They are locked on his.

TED

I love the element of surprise, but never at the expense of your feelings. And I can see how important your work is to you, really, but does that mean we can never throw caution to the wind to have what might be unexpected and wonderful moments? If I've learned anything it's that life isn't one big, solid picture. It's a series of those moments, incredible slices of silly, and serious, that capture our hearts in ways we sometimes can't understand. And that's okay. I just want you to love those moments with me, no matter how big or small.

Is Ted still talking to Valerie? Maybe even he's not sure.

TED

I want to make you happy, especially when you're not. I want you to know that my shoulders are strong enough to hold your laughter or your tears. That when you find yourself at a crossroads, I will guide you. And that everything I do will shine a light on how even in the harshest of winters, you are my invincible summer. I may not always succeed, but I will always try, even if I am--

Joanna hangs on the words.

TED

--perfectly imperfect.

Wow. Their eyes are still locked. They'd stay there, too, if--

VALERIE

I mean, I guess.

The connection, the moment, is broken.

JOANNA

That was-- good work. Both of you.

Joanna watches as Valerie moves to Ted. Sweetly, with nothing but her way of showing affection.

VALERIE

Sweetie, you'll get there. You just have to really work the system.

She turns to Joanna.

VALERIE

We're doing the tree today, right!?

Valerie bounds out of the room. Ted looks at Joanna, wondering what he just did and said.

TED

Joanna.

JOANNA

I better get downstairs. There's a lot going on today.

Ted can only nod. Joanna gives a weak smile and leaves. She almost stops, but doesn't.

Ted stands there, thinking. What to do. What not to do.

EXT. MACALLEN MANSION - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Trucks are being unloaded, from final decor, to catering, and seating. Joanna watches with a keen eye, checking things off, signing for items, and directing staff.

A DELIVERY PERSON moves to her with a box.

JOANNA

Oh, thank goodness, I've been waiting for this!

She signs and he gives her the package.

JOANNA

Merry Christmas!

He smiles and is off. Joanna moves inside as well.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - FOYER/HALLWAY/MAIN HALL - DAY

Joanna walks in and through to see that the place has truly come to Christmas life. It's stunning, festive, and bright.

She moves into the main hall to see the finishing touches being put on the tree. Staff on ladders handle the higher parts, as others work below. It's looking magnificent.

She even smiles when she sees Valerie having a great time helping out. Better that than trouble. But seeing Valerie also gives her pause.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - LIBRARY - DAY

Ted sits alone, hot chocolate nearby. He's reading something--

Joanna's book. He's almost done. He doesn't see her peek in. She leans on the entryway, admiring his interest.

Ted turns, sensing someone, but when he looks no one's there.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - JOANNA'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT DAY

Joanna works with a pile of materials, including the photos from earlier, red ribbon, and some silver objects. We can't see exactly what she's doing, but she's creating something.

There's a tinge of melancholy in her right now.

She then stops when she hears something. Voices. They get a little louder. She moves toward her closet. Louder. She opens the door and realizes it's Valerie and Ted, talking.

Arguing.

She hears Valerie's door slam. Then, across the hall, Ted's.

This is not how Joanna thought this would go, but there's a part of her that has to wonder if that's all right.

She is about to try the closet door to Valerie's room.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - TED'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ted is standing at the window. He's watching Del talk to a staffer when he hears a knock at the door. He doesn't turn.

TED

It's open.

The door closes. He doesn't turn around.

TED

I know what you're going to say.

JOANNA

That's pretty amazing since I don't.

He turns to face her. He's surprised.

TED
I thought you were Valerie.

JOANNA
I get that a lot.

Somehow, Ted doesn't even crack a smile. It hurts Joanna.

JOANNA
Ted, for the first time in a long time I feel like I don't have control over every aspect of my life.

TED
Is that so bad? Not always knowing exactly where things are headed?

Joanna thinks on this. Dare she bring it up?

JOANNA
It was when Brian-- when he and I--
She's having trouble and Ted can see that.

TED
Joanna, I'm not him. You've reminded me of that, remember?

JOANNA
I know. And maybe that's what scares me. The things I'm used to and the things I think I want and need. All of the things you said to Valerie. To-- me?

Ted doesn't confirm or deny, but they both know.

JOANNA
I didn't just hear them. I listened.

TED
It's one of your many amazing qualities.

JOANNA
They excited me. But they scared me, too. I don't now what the future holds, and I--

TED
(blurts it out)
I think we should break up.

Joanna did not expect that. At all.

JOANNA
Ex-- excuse me?

TED
Joanna, this whole thing is becoming a disaster. The illusion was supposed to be fun and easy. Manageable, at least. But you can't control feelings. That's the illusion. I'm not an expert, and I figured that out. You wrote a book about it and you haven't. You had this grand plan and, "You don't make plans to break them, you make plans to be them."

Joanna hears her own advice. This time she doesn't smile.

TED
I'm not sure I really know what that one means, but I know this--

He's thought about this. A lot. He cares. But, really--

TED
I can't be the boyfriend who's never seen for you when I'm trying to be the one who is for Valerie. Where does that leave me? If, well, you both leave me.

Joanna moves toward him, but he instinctively takes a step back. He's not sure what else to do.

It's hard, but Joanna knows she now must be honest.

JOANNA
Not never seen. Doesn't exist.

TED
What are you saying?

JOANNA (CONT'D)
He did. But it ended months ago. I ended it after he-- it was bad. And he wasn't perfect. He wasn't any of the things I needed him to be. That's why I made them up.

(MORE)

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I came to the realization it wasn't love. It was-- I guess I don't know what it was, other than not working.

TED

I don't believe this. You had this whole thing planned out from the beginning? I was a ruse--

Joanna is stung. That word.

TED (CONT'D)

So you could publicly leave the boyfriend you already did and none of your fans would be the wiser. I certainly wasn't.

JOANNA

I'm so sorry. And I'm not leaving. I don't want to. And Valerie's not-- or, if she is-- Ted, is this what you really want?

TED

Don't you see? You're on the cusp of your dotted line. You're going to get your show and do amazing things, with or without a boyfriend who may, or may not, be real.

JOANNA

Ted, listen--

Ted has to keep going. Get it all out. Now, or he may never.

TED

I see how Del looks at you. I told you about it the moment he saw you. And watching you together, you with your lists and philosophies, him with his spreadsheets and savvy. And suits. Can't forget the suits.

Ted laughs in spite of himself. Joanna doesn't.

TED

It's a match made, if not in heaven, on paper. And that's more real than what you told me I was pretending to be for you.

Joanna hears this. Is that what she has been looking for?

TED

You'll be free to pursue Del, Valerie and I can work on whatever it is we're working on, and George will be as thrilled as ever. You created the perfect boyfriend, someone who thought like you, wants success like you, isn't frivolous. The list goes on and on. Believe me, I've finally read them all. I don't know that I'll ever be all those things, or even most of those things, for you, for Valerie, or anyone, but you can have that. For real. He's outside right now. It's win-win.

Joanna is upset. Of course she is. But there's a part of her that doesn't fully understand why just yet. But she can see how hurt Ted is. How what she has done caused that hurt.

JOANNA

It sounds like you have it all worked out.

Ted really looks at her. There's only one thing to say.

TED

I learned from the best.

That hurt a little more than she thought it would.

Ted kisses her. On the forehead. He leaves. Joanna moves to the desk in the room. On it is "The Love Audit."

Joanna isn't sure what to think. About his offer, about Del, about her future.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - KITCHEN - EVENING

Joanna sits at the island. In front of her are the cookies Del cut out. Even frosted, they've seen better days. She stares at them, thinking.

George walks in.

GEORGE

My guess is they taste better than they look.

Joanna tries to smile. Trying to shake her melancholy.

GEORGE

You may be able to pull off the impossible with my gala, but turning Del into any kind of cook isn't in the cards for anybody. I must say, though, you've gotten farther with him than I had anticipated.

JOANNA

How so?

GEORGE

It's no secret he can be somewhat, let's say, staid, when it comes to dealing with others. But together you seem to be two gears grinding away toward the pillar of success.

Joanna raises her eyes. There's that word again. Success.

JOANNA

I'm certainly doing my best to make sure your event is a success and you are both happy.

GEORGE

That's appreciated. Now, may I ask, are you happy?

Joanna doesn't say a thing. She pushes a cookie around.

GEORGE

Joanna, some unsolicited advice from someone who is older. Wiser. And who understands love and loss. I see what goes on around me. And I've learned many times that you have to take a chance on the thing that might be right in order to find out that it was always wrong.

He hopes she understands what he's intimating. He walks away and lets her have a moment.

She looks down at the cookie she was pushing. A heart.

With a crack in it.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - DEL'S OFFICE - EVENING

Del sits working diligently at his desk when he hears a knock at the door. He looks up.

DEL

Joanna. Everything all right?

She steps in. She's in a better mood, or seems to be.

JOANNA

Yes. Well, not really. Do you have a little time? There are some things I need to get before the event tomorrow and I thought we could go into town together.

Del puts his pen down, straightens his jacket, and gladly gives her his full attention.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - VALERIE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Valerie is reading. Ted sits on the couch looking out the window when he sees Del and Joanna get into one of his vehicles and drive away.

He takes a deep breath.

TED

What do you say we get out of here for a little while?

Valerie looks up. She wasn't paying attention.

VALERIE

Huh?

Ted sees she was reading "The Love Audit." Oh, brother.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - EVENING

The street and shops are Christmas ready, full of lights, good will, and good cheer.

Del and Joanna walk down the street holding cups of coffee.

DEL

I have to say these past few days have certainly been interesting.

JOANNA

That might be an understatement.

DEL

Well, you had come here to plan our Christmas event-- something that we weren't sure could even be done-- and somehow we ended up making cookies, talking about our pasts, and getting to know one another more.

JOANNA

I've been busy, haven't I?

DEL

The topper just might have been your somewhat unorthodox assistant arrive unannounced late one night.

JOANNA

I can go with unorthodox.

Del thinks on this for more than a second.

DEL

I will say, there's something about her. I can't put my finger on it.

Joanna wonders where that train of thought was headed.

DEL

At any rate, it's definitely not been as routine as any of my previous business opportunities.

Joanna smiles at the thought of all of those things. They were unexpected. Fun.

JOANNA

I guess I like to keep people on their toes.

DEL

Perhaps, but, like me, I also know what preparation, routine, and appearance mean to you.

Is that how he sees her? Is that how everyone sees her?

JOANNA

I can't disagree that a lot has happened that wasn't planned. But, Del, I've certainly appreciated our time together and, well, there's something I think I should mention.

(MORE)

JOANNA (CONT'D)

That you should know. Ted and I aren't actually-- well, we're--

Can she say it yet? Should she?

JOANNA

Things aren't going well.

News to Del's ears. Potential good news.

DEL

Is that so?

JOANNA

I don't want to get into the details, but no matter what happens between he and I, I want you and your father to know that it will in no way affect my ability to produce the work with every ounce of professionalism, insight, and creativity you are expecting of me.

DEL

I can't say I'm surprised. By either of those statements. I mean, your work is you. In a short time I have gotten to know you through that as well. What is it? "Evaluate, Concentrate, and Designate." I wouldn't be honest if I didn't admit I don't see Ted as the kind of guy to put those concepts into practice.

She shakes her head. Could she agree?

DEL

And how many points is he really scoring by doing the things that you need? Is he even thinking of just the "you?"

"Points." "You." Wow. Is that what it sounds like?

DEL

Is he even able to put into practice any of your tactics?

JOANNA

You make it sound like I wrote a military handbook.

DEL
 Whatever works, right? Get people
 to step in line.

He chuckles, as if everything he said was completely okay.

Joanna nods her head in some sort of agreement. But, my goodness, is this what she sounds like? Really believes in?

Maybe now, not so much.

INT. BOOKSTORE - EVENING

Ted blindly follows Valerie as she walks slowly down the shockingly long aisle of relationship advice books.

She has a large shopping bag and grabs book after book after book and throws them into it.

TED
 That's a lot of books.

Valerie turns to him, quickly. Face-to-face.

VALERIE
 We have a long road ahead of us,
 Ted. If we ever want to get back to
 that perfect place we were in--

Perfect place? That's news to Ted.

VALERIE
 You're going to have to work at it.

He's going to have to work at it?

VALERIE
 But I'm here to help. Ooh! "The
 Business of Love." That's perfect.

She turns back to the shelves. Eyeing books. Ted stops.

TED
 I'm never going to be good enough
 for you, am I?

Valerie keeps scanning through titles.

VALERIE
 But it's more than reading. I'm not
 ruling out seminars or therapy.
 Have you ever tried hypnosis?

TED
You're not listening.

She turns to him. Serious.

VALERIE
You're right.

TED
(a breakthrough?)
I am?

Valerie holds a hand to his face, sweetly.

VALERIE
You can barely put your socks on in
the dark, how are you going to
hypnotize yourself?

TED
No.

VALERIE
Honey, I've seen it. One blue, one
brown. Not a good look.

TED
I mean no to listening to people
who don't know me telling me how
and when to feel so we can get back
to a place that was not only never
perfect, but probably never
existed.

VALERIE
What are you saying, Ted?

TED
Val, I think you know.

VALERIE
Don't "Val" me.

TED
Valerie, if this is going to work,
if we're meant to be, then we have
to find that place again on our
own. Without "The Business of
Love."

Valerie looks saddened by that.

TED
And without "The Love Audit."

THUNK! Valerie's very heavy bag of books drops on the floor.

VALERIE

What!?

Yes, everyone in the store heard that. Everyone. Ted looks around and tries to play it off with a smile.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

George is at the head of the table. He watches as Joanna, Ted, Valerie, and Del eat in silence. The mood may be colder than outside. At least the decor in the room is warm.

As food is passed and eaten, Joanna steals a glance at Ted, who, when she isn't looking, steals a glance at her.

Valerie glares at Ted, making sure he sees it. He shifts his eyes. Valerie then peeks over to Del, who does not avert his focused gaze on her. She smiles.

And looking at all of them, is George. He settles on watching Joanna. He doesn't have to wonder what she is thinking.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - STUDY - NIGHT

Even this room has been given Joanna's Christmas touch. George reads in front of a wonderful fire. He then sees Joanna pass by the door. He puts the book down.

GEORGE

Joanna?

She stops and looks in.

GEORGE

Please, join me.

She enters. He motions for her to sit and she does.

GEORGE

I've discovered that one of my
fireside chats is much better when
I'm not alone.

Joanna grins. George is a good man.

GEORGE

I'd like you to know, and I would
never say this lightly, that I am
quite pleased with the events of
the past week.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

The house has never looked better in such a short time. Dare I say what you have accomplished here, well, Mrs. MacAllen would be proud. And you should be, too.

JOANNA

That means the world to me, thank you. I want nothing more than to make sure you and your guests are pleased. No matter what.

GEORGE

No matter what. That signals to me that there just might be something the matter. I'm never one to beat around the bush, so with your permission I'd like to speak freely.

JOANNA

I insist.

GEORGE

Ted's a good man. I like his energy and what he's done in his career.

JOANNA

You've done your research.

GEORGE

I'd say he is a man on the way up. I may even be able to help lift him.

JOANNA

He would appreciate that more than you know.

GEORGE

I'll make sure to tell him myself. Now, business aside, I don't think I'm too far off in saying that the two of you have hit a rough patch.

Joanna nods. More than George could know. Maybe.

GEORGE

No one ever said the road to love and happiness was paved.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I'm guessing you two have been through quite a lot together, and I'm willing to bet that each of those things makes you stronger, together. I actually see a lot of you and Ted in my late wife and I.

This strikes a chord in Joanna. This isn't flippant advice. It's from his heart.

GEORGE

I might be getting myself into hot water saying this to an expert such as yourself, but having been around the sun more times than I'd like to admit, sometimes love doesn't have hard and fast rules. If it did, Mrs. MacAllen and I would have thrown them to the wind in the midst of taking our leap together. We didn't need a guidebook, lists, or a point system.

He playfully touches her knee.

GEORGE

Del gave me the digest version.

Joanna smiles.

GEORGE

We just needed each other. A hand to hold and a heart to love. To tell us what we already knew. What we felt. What, I believe, you feel for Ted. And what he feels for you. Love, my dear, is, and will always be, a gamble.

Joanna stares into the fire, her eyes just about glistening.

JOANNA

What if you take that chance and lose? What if the hand you are looking for pulls away? How can I not look at this relationship through the lens of my own advice? The things I'm telling everyone else to do? Shouldn't I be doing them, too? If I don't, am I not the real Joanna Moret they think I am?

EXT. MACALLEN MANSION - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Neither of them see that Ted has walked up and stands, listening, hanging on each word. Hopeful.

JOANNA (O.C.)

It would be impossible for me not to. When we met, he was sarcastic, I was serious. He was dressed for the mall, I was dressed for success. He focused on everything around him, I focused on my future. How in my world could that have ever worked?

Ted looks down. If only he could have never heard that.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - DEN - NIGHT

JOANNA

I know who I am and what I want. At least I thought I did. How can I try something at this point that others might think is a lie?

GEORGE

Because happiness is never a lie. To yourself or others.

Joanna sighs.

GEORGE

You asked me what happens if you take a chance on love and you lose. I believe that's the wrong question. Ask yourself instead, what happens if you never take a chance on love at all?

George stands and leaves Joanna to stare into the fire and make a decision.

EXT. MACALLEN MANSION - HALLWAY - NIGHT

George walks through the entryway. Ted is not there. He turns back to Joanna.

GEORGE

Another piece of advice, from one businessperson to another-- don't start negotiations until you've figured out exactly what you want.

Joanna regards him. Thinks on the words. Then starts toward the stairs as George heads off in the opposite direction.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Joanna starts down the hall after Ted, who runs up the stairs. She is surprised when she bumps into Valerie.

JOANNA
Valerie, hi.

Joanna did not want to stop. She looks past Valerie, who is not oblivious this time as to what may be happening.

VALERIE
Are you looking for Ted?

JOANNA
Yes. I had something I needed to tell him.

There's an awkward beat of silence. One of these women wants Ted. One of them thinks they do.

VALERIE
I was going down to get a snack.
It's been kind of a strange day.

JOANNA
That's an understatement. Valerie,
I want you to know I'm glad you
came. It's also important that you
know I never meant to do anything
to hurt you. Or Ted.

VALERIE
I know. "Good intentions are not
safe from complex execution."

Joanna knows that quote. It's hers. She looks past her to the top of the stairs. Valerie is starting to understand.

VALERIE
I think he's leaving. And I think
I'm okay with that. I don't know. I
think I've done too much thinking,
to tell you the truth. You spend so
much time with someone, looking for
them to be what you want, instead
of enjoying who they are.

JOANNA
Believe me, I know.

VALERIE

Do you also believe in, I guess,
like at first sight? With someone
you don't really know? Is that
crazy? Is it wrong?

Joanna takes a moment to think and really answer, not with
aphorisms, but with her own feelings. Her heart.

JOANNA

I believe I do. Like, love,
interest, whatever the feeling, my
advice is do whatever will make you
happy. Forget the lists. The
scorecards. The advice. The suits.
Go for the spark.

Joanna smiles. Valerie wonders as Joanna goes in for a hug, a
real one. Valerie appreciates it, then pulls back.

VALERIE

I kinda like suits.

The two women smile at each other.

VALERIE

I'm not angry, I want you to know
that.

JOANNA

I'm not, either. And I'm glad
you're here.

Joanna winks. The two women have come to an unspoken
understanding, even though they may not know the outcome.

Valerie gets back on her way to the kitchen.

JOANNA

There's some extra cookies, you
know. Reindeer and snowmen you
might enjoy.

Valerie gets it. Joanna heads upstairs.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - TED'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joanna enters ready to lay it all on the line.

JOANNA

Ted, listen to me--

She doesn't see him right away.

JOANNA

Ted?

She looks around the room. Definitely not there. She also realizes his bag is gone. She moves to the window.

His car drives away, tail lights fading. She's too late.

She lays on the bed, staring into nothing before finally closing her eyes.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - SUN ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Del sits at the table with a coffee tray. He's working, going over a stack of papers as he sips a mug of coffee. Joanna knocks. Del looks up.

DEL

Joanna, good morning. I was just thinking of you. Coffee?

JOANNA

No, I'm fine, thank you. Del, I need to talk to you.

DEL

Wonderful, I also have some news.

Joanna waits. Del slides a small stack of papers toward her.

JOANNA

What is this?

DEL

The contract for your very own show. I thought you'd like to see it. My father is far more interested in surprises than I am, so try to look just so when he announces. My hunch is that will be at the gala, in front of everyone.

It's everything she's worked for. She sits down and looks over the papers.

DEL

In terms of scheduling, I think we'll want to get started on concept and development as soon as possible in the New Year. We'll also simultaneously schedule meetings with marketing--

He can see Joanna has a lot on her mind.

DEL

Am I missing something? Perhaps in the summary? I thought you'd be thrilled.

JOANNA

Del, no. It's incredible. In fact, it's the best news I've had in a long while. But, I'm afraid I-- there's something you should know before we go any further.

Del stops. Joanna isn't looking at him.

DEL

Excuse me?

Joanna looks him in the eye. Calm, resolute. Sure.

JOANNA

It might cause you to rethink this. I'm afraid it might even cause me to say, "no."

Del is shell-shocked, as if Joanna morphed into someone else.

DEL

I think you should take a moment and really think about what you're saying.

Joanna stands up, moves around.

DEL

It's everything you've wanted. It's everything you've worked for.

JOANNA

Is it, because I didn't realize what it would take. Since being here I've learned more about myself, my desires, and love, than I have since writing for a college newspaper no one read. Del, I don't know that I've ever been in love. And the man I wrote about never existed. He was the version of someone I wanted and hoped for, not what I ended up with, which was a relationship based on anything but true love. And Ted-- Ted and I were never in a relationship.

(MORE)

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I brought him here selfishly to prove to you and your father that I could have it all, that I was an expert in life and love. I lied to a lot of people, including myself, to trick you into doing what you just did. I'm not proud of it, and I can't continue it. So, if that's the woman you're looking for, I'm sorry, lifestyle television will have to survive without my life.

Joanna is out of words. She watches Del for a reaction, any reaction, as he sits silently. He can't believe it.

DEL

Unbelievable. Joanna, that's--

She waits for the barrage of whatever she fears is coming.

DEL

Amazing. You're incredible!

That was not it. He's excited, but she can't understand why.

JOANNA

You're not upset? Not angry?

DEL

Are you kidding me? You've executed an incredibly brilliant marketing strategy. I can see the billboards-- "When Love Comes Clean." You can tell this story in the pilot. Love, loss, and redemption. Your fans will devour it.

She can't comprehend his thinking. It's like he is a robot. Del stands and takes her hands in his.

DEL

You came here to do a job, and you've done it. The spirit of Christmas and of my mother has come back. Whether or not Ted is really your boyfriend has become irrelevant. We're now in the business of Joanna Moret, dating or otherwise. And, frankly, otherwise is fine with me.

JOANNA

I don't think you're--

DEL
Have dinner with me.

Joanna is shocked. She's not sure she knows what he means.

JOANNA
To discuss the show? A date? Del--

DEL
It makes sense. It adds up. You, me, us. It's a partnership with unlimited potential.

JOANNA
I'm sorry, but, no. I see why you're thinking what you are, but--

Now it's Del who doesn't get it.

JOANNA
I'm not looking for a lucrative business transaction. I thought I had that once, and maybe I did, but it wasn't love. I want love.

He doesn't react.

JOANNA
Romance.

Again, he gives her nothing.

JOANNA
Del, what I've learned is you need a spark. Being someone's "meant to be" is a feeling deep inside. It's more important than being a-- well, a match made on paper.

Del doesn't answer except to avert his eyes, sit down, and go back to his paperwork. Business first, always.

DEL
I understand. I can't say I'm not a bit disappointed, but I can say I still make deals, Joanna. And yours is on the table. Don't pass it up because of my misunderstandings. You're too good a businesswoman, and person, to let it go. Don't let it be the one that got away.

Interesting phrasing. She takes the paperwork.

JOANNA

What about your father? Will he
feel the same?

DEL

I'll talk to him. You've already
proven yourself in so many ways,
and it's clear he likes you and
your work. He'll be thrilled if you
say yes.

JOANNA

Thank you. Then, yes.

DEL

But it would be great PR if you and
Ted were to break up before the
premiere.

Joanna stops him with a look.

DEL

Doing my job. We'll talk about it.
Now, back to my spreadsheets.

Del actually smiles. So does Joanna.

JOANNA

I look forward to our working
relationship. Now, if you'll excuse
me, I have a gala this evening.

Joanna leaves, happy she has come clean, happy she is getting
everything she wants. Then it hits her. Almost everything.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - JOANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Joanna enters, puts the contract on the bed, and goes to the--

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - JOANNA'S CLOSET - DAY

Joanna opens the door and screams! Valerie screams!

JOANNA

Oh, Valerie, you--

She notices Valerie wearing an elegant, holiday dress.

JOANNA

Are wearing my dress.

VALERIE

I am? It is? Joanna, I had no idea!
It was just hanging up and I didn't
bring anything fancy to wear--

JOANNA

Valerie--

VALERIE

Because I had no idea there'd be a
party and when I found out there
was a party--

JOANNA

Valerie, you--

VALERIE

I grabbed the only thing I saw,
which was this dress, your dress,
and I'll stop talking and take it--

JOANNA

Valerie!

Valerie stops. Listens. Unsure of what will come out next.

JOANNA

You look beautiful.

VALERIE

I do?

JOANNA

Stunning. I'd go so far to say that
dress was meant to be worn by you.

VALERIE

I don't know what to say. Well,
except-- what will you wear? Wait.
Don't say a thing. Just come with
me. I'll handle this. Roomie.

Joanna takes Valerie's hand. Sincere, meaningful.

JOANNA

Friend.

Joanna winks. Valerie melts. The two walk to Valerie's room.

VALERIE

Don't make me cry all over my--
your-- our-- dress.

The door shuts.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - FOYER - NIGHT

This is it. The gala. GUESTS are arriving, dressed up-- way up-- and immediately enchanted by the enchanting decor.

It is sparkling, inviting, perfect holiday magic.

A quintet of string musicians plays soft holiday music as staff move about with silver trays of champagne and hors d'oeuvres. Each flute and bite has a holly berry accent.

Every detail has been thought of.

George and Del, in tuxedos and looking quite dashing, stand at the foot of the staircase, greeting people and shaking hands. As they do, they slip in their own conversation.

GEORGE

This is incredible. By the way, have you seen Joanna?

DEL

I have not, yet. I know she had one last thing to do.

GEORGE

She's already done quite a job for us. I can't imagine what's left.

DEL

You didn't seem very surprised when I told you about her and Ted. You knew, didn't you?

George considers his response.

GEORGE

Let's just say I sometimes have a sixth sense about who belongs with whom.

He eyes Del, whose own look is slyly questioning.

DEL

Do you know something I don't?

GEORGE

I'm your father. It's my job to keep you on your toes.

Del notices a few people look over and above his shoulder. He turns back to see Valerie standing at the top of the stairs.

She is a vision of beauty to everyone. And, yes, to Del.

Joanna then moves in next to her. Though she is not dressed in what one would call perfect, gala-ready attire, she looks very pretty, festive and comfortable--

In a pair of dark jeans, a beautiful, flowing top, and one of her loveliest jackets. She is holiday ready.

A tasteful silver belt and jewelry from Valerie complete the look. Her makeup is also far more striking and impeccable, completing a look that is stunning in its simplicity.

Joanna is nervous, but she is more than pulling it off. She and Valerie descend the stairs.

Del takes Valerie's hand and gazes at her.

DEL

You look absolutely stunning, Val--
I mean Valerie. Excuse me.

VALERIE

Thank you. You can call me Val.

Oh, really? Val?

Del takes her hand and does, indeed, kiss it. Valerie is smitten with the attention.

VALERIE

But this is actually--

JOANNA

What she couldn't wait to wear all
week for such an important event.

Valerie silently thanks Joanna, who turns to George. She is more than a tad worried about her look.

JOANNA

George, Del, I apologize.

GEORGE

One never need say sorry for
delivering on every promise, and
then some, while finding a way to
do it so beautifully. Isn't that
right, Del?

DEL

Without question.

JOANNA

Thank you, both. For that. For
understanding. For everything.

George holds his arm out.

GEORGE

Now, would you accompany me to the main hall. I suppose I should make my entrance.

JOANNA

I'd love to.

Joanna takes his arm and they move off.

Del and Valerie stand a moment. Yes, she is going to make the move. She offers her arm. Del takes it and they also walk.

INT. MACALLEN MANSION - MAIN HALL - DAY

Guests have filled the room and it is clear the foyer was but a small indication of the holiday magic.

The main hall is beyond festive. Tables are lined with crisp linens, and each chair has a tasteful red cover with silver accents. The china and silverware are sparkling.

And the tree has become a sight to behold. From floor to ceiling it shines and dazzles all who look at it. And there are many who cannot help but look at it.

On the dance floor, couples are lost in each other's eyes as three carolers, the same from Joanna's neighborhood, sing beautiful Christmas music.

Taken all together, the room and its effect are breathtaking.

George and Joanna walk in. He is clearly taken by the entire scene and moment. His eyes reveal what his heart is feeling.

GEORGE

Thank you for all of this. The house and our hearts are more alive than I could have dreamed.

That is what Joanna lives for. The feeling she has given him.

JOANNA

Well, remember when I said I might have a surprise in store? Follow me. I want to show you something.

She leads him to the front of the room, close to the tree and near a table with small name placards for each guest.

JOANNA

You've kept this home, this event,
and your wife's memory, alive in
your heart and that is such a
special gift. It was something you
were brave enough to share with me.
I thought I would return the favor
by allowing you to share it with
everyone, so they, too, could
relive cherished memories.

She moves aside and he sees a gorgeous plaque in the center
of the table that is etched with the words, the Gala's theme--

"First Christmas, Forever Memories"

George is almost overcome with emotion when he sees the
"First Christmas" ornament of he and his wife.

Also, in front of all the name cards are similar, silver
picture frame ornaments. Each one contains an image from a
guest's first Christmas.

People who mill about and notice them are struck by the
sentiment. They adore it. They smile.

GEORGE

How?

JOANNA

A lot of phone calls, printing, and
cutting. And a touch of Christmas
magic.

Joanna smiles. George is so appreciative.

GEORGE

This will always be a Christmas to
remember. Because of you.

It's what Joanna truly hoped would happen. And it has.

People have started to notice George. He straightens himself
up and moves in front of the tree. He holds court as guests,
Joanna, Del, and Valerie listen.

Joanna takes her cue, grabs a flute and spoon, and clinks the
glass to get everyone's attention.

The music and carolers soften, then stop, as George starts to
speak in front of the tree.

GEORGE

I want to thank all of you,
friends, family, and colleagues,
for taking the time to spend
another glorious Christmas Eve with
us. As many of you know, a very
important part of this event, the
holiday, our lives, has gone.

Valerie looks to Del and sees it hits him. She leans her head
on his shoulder and squeezes his hand. He likes that.

GEORGE

My beautiful wife is no longer here
in the way my son and I have always
hoped she would be. However,
someone she believed in has helped
us realize she will always be in
our hearts. Please join me in
thanking the woman at the helm of
this incredible occasion, and who
will soon be at the helm of her
very own show to share her gifts.
Ladies and gentlemen, the star of
"Living and Loving," Joanna Moret.

The guests applaud. They love it, and her. Joanna is over the
moon. Speechless. She steps toward George, hugs him, thanks
him, then turns to the guests and shows her appreciation.

The guests again mingle and the music and singing start.
George and Joanna walk from the front of the room.

JOANNA

Living and loving, huh?

GEORGE

I was thinking on my toes.

JOANNA

I like it. And I believe we will do
our best to show everyone with a
television how to do both.

GEORGE

You'll figure it out. Five times a
week. You know, you just might need
some help.

Joanna thinks on that. Realizes his meaning.

JOANNA

I wish Ted were here to see all of
this. To hear the news.

She's melancholy, but it ends when--

TED (O.C.)

He is.

Her expression lifts. She looks to George. He winks.

GEORGE

Christmas miracles.

He heads off into the crowd.

Joanna turns and sees Ted. He showed.

He is dressed in a tuxedo and looks more handsome than ever. Joanna breathes in deeply. She hoped for this moment.

They walk toward one another. It's taking a lot for both of them to keep their feelings in check.

Joanna tries to play it cool.

JOANNA

Nice tux.

TED

Nice jeans.

Silence as they take each other in. Joanna gets real.

JOANNA

I was afraid I wouldn't see you again.

TED

I was afraid you wouldn't want to. Joanna, what you've done-- you're amazing. You look amazing.

JOANNA

Valerie thanks you on my behalf.

Ted isn't quite sure what that means.

TED

Well, I think we can tell her later. She looks a little busy right now.

They see Valerie and Del dancing together. Valerie is having a wonderful time and Del is smiling more than he has.

JOANNA

It's the spark.

Joanna is glad to see the two of them enjoying each other. She turns back to Ted.

TED

And all without a system, or points, or spreadsheets. Okay, maybe the spreadsheets.

JOANNA

It just goes to show all you have to do is look around and, who knows, you might be right next to your meant to be.

Ted looks around. To the left. The right. Then to Joanna.

TED

I've searched. And, lately, I always seem to land back to you. I'd call that fate.

He moves a piece of hair from her face. Gentle, caring.

TED

By the way, what did your "finger book fortune" say when we first arrived here?

Joanna thinks on it. She can tell him. Now.

JOANNA

"Follow your heart."

TED

Now that is good advice.

JOANNA

I do have one, very important question for you.

TED

What's that?

JOANNA

Will you be my boyfriend? For real. Absolutely no lists, no points, just us.

TED

Then, absolutely, yes. Merry Christmas, Joanna.

JOANNA

Merry Christmas, Ted.

They melt into each other's arms for the kiss that's meant to be. And, though they don't know it, they are under mistletoe Joanna hung throughout the room with care.

As they kiss the magic of Christmas swirls around them in love and light.

THE END