

ACT ONE

EXT. CHICAGO - DAY

A cheery Christmas song plays as we establish snowy Chicago, awash in holiday cheer, a couple of weeks before Christmas.

EXT. LANSING HOME - DAY

The song continues as we establish the home of the Lansing family, a lovely house in an upper-middle class neighborhood of Chicago. Christmas decorations abound on the outside.

INT. LANSING HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The song continues as we see the living room filled with neatly organized boxes of Christmas decorations and an undecorated tree in the window.

Someone is humming along as we PAN past the decorations, many of which are lovingly tended family heirlooms.

We follow a string of unlit Christmas tree lights until we get to MAGGIE LANSING (40s, warm and enthusiastic, but focused and persistent), currently wearing a business-casual dress as she checks the bulbs on the string of lights.

She finally finds the loose one and the string springs to colorful life, blinking and casting reflections on the walls and on her - bright spots of light rippling across her face.

She smiles, satisfied with her work.

Her husband, ERIC LANSING (40s, cheery, quick with a dad joke, likes to keep things light), wearing a suit, passes by the living room looking at his phone, barely glancing up.

Eric passes out of view, then steps back a moment later.

ERIC

You're more lit up than the tree.
Should we put the presents under
you this year?

Maggie looks at herself, seeing the reflecting lights.

MAGGIE

I didn't notice that. I like it
though. I should take Christmas
lights with me everywhere I go.

ERIC

You'll need a *really* long extension cord.

MAGGIE

Maybe it's best if they just go on the tree. Speaking of which...

Their two children BECCA (16, self-confident, doesn't take things too seriously, takes after her father) and WILL (14, fastidious, focused, takes after his mother), pass by the living room, not paying attention.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Wait. Becca, Will. Come back.

The kids stop and back up to the doorway next Eric.

BECCA

(re: lights)

Should we cover you in tinsel, too?

ERIC

(high-fives Becca)

Nice. I went with putting presents underneath her.

WILL

We're late. Can we do the Lansing Family Comedy Hour tonight?

MAGGIE

No, because tonight is the Lansing Family Tree Decorating Hour.

(looks at ornaments)

Or two. Maybe three.

ERIC

Sweetheart, they're having the Christmas party at the office today, which means I have to work late to catch up. Sorry.

BECCA

Mom, it's the last day of school before winter break. I'm gonna go celebrate with Sahara and Autumn.

ERIC

I thought Autumn had to *leave*.

BECCA

You know that's why she doesn't come over here anymore, right?

WILL

And I'm going over to Danny's.
We're gonna do our practice college
applications.

BECCA

You are fourteen. Aren't you a
little young to be spending your
Friday nights doing paperwork?

WILL

You're sixteen. Aren't you a
little old to have not thought
about college, like, at all?

BECCA

I'm taking a gap year.

MAGGIE

No, you're not.

ERIC

No, you're not.

Becca sighs and walks off toward the kitchen. Will follows,
leaving Eric to look at Maggie.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Eric...

ERIC

Maggie, the tree will still be here
tomorrow... it'll be *pinning* for us.

Eric laughs at his own joke and walks toward the kitchen

Maggie follows with determination.

INT. LANSING HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Eric, Becca, and Will are already in the midst of the morning
"ballet" as they orbit around each other grabbing to-go
snacks from the refrigerator, pouring coffee, loading up back-
packs and briefcases, and so on.

Maggie enters and joins the fray, tending to her own tasks.

MAGGIE

Guys, I know that everyone is busy,
but this was on the schedule.

Maggie points at a dry erase board calendar on the wall,
which is completely covered in color-coded notations.

WILL

How can you tell?

MAGGIE

Everything pertaining to a
Christmas activity is in red.
(thinks this is funny)
Rudolph the Red Nosed Per-tain-
deer.

BECCA

Mom... leave the jokes to us.

MAGGIE

(nods)
We're going to the botanic garden
to see the lights on Tuesday...

BECCA

I have cheerleading practice.

ERIC

During winter break?

BECCA

Cheer doesn't go on break.

MAGGIE

Okay, ice skating Thursday?

WILL

My AP tutor is that night.

MAGGIE

Christmas tree lighting ceremony
Downtown on Friday?

ERIC

Dinner with a client.

MAGGIE

You guys need to put this stuff on
the schedule! All right, I know
nobody has anything for Sunday
afternoon so we can go to the
Christmas market on Daley Plaza.

ERIC

Don't you have an open house Sunday
afternoon?

Maggie is a bit abashed. Becca hands her a purple pen.

BECCA

I believe you're purple?

Maggie takes the pen and stares at the board.

MAGGIE
I will fix this. I promise.

ERIC
If anybody can, it's you.

Eric gives her a perfunctory kiss on the cheek and heads for the door.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Come on, kids. Let's make like
Santa's sleigh and fly.

Before she can say anymore, Eric, Becca, and Will are all out the door onto their busy lives, leaving Maggie looking at her schedule with concern.

INT. LANSING HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maggie comes back into the living room, where the lights are still blinking and glowing, once again casting ripples of color across her face.

She looks at the boxes of carefully laid out ornaments, then at the unadorned tree and nods her head.

MAGGIE
There's no time like the "present."

Maggie laughs at her pun then realizes there's no one around.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
I can be funny, too.

She shrugs and heads for the tree.

EXT. CHICAGO HOUSE - DAY

A very nice house in a very nice Chicago neighborhood is merrily decorated and has a for sale sign in the front yard.

INT. CHICAGO HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The expansive kitchen is festooned with Christmas cheer as Maggie sets up for an open house (laying out brochures, a guest book, etc.) with DANIELLE PORTER (40s, working mom type, funny, down-to-earth).

MAGGIE

I'm going to give everyone in my family a secretary for Christmas so I can schedule time to see them.

DANIELLE

Please. My kids aren't even 10 yet and they're busier than I am. Between school and sports and the Christmas pageant at the church...

MAGGIE

The pageant! I'm baking cookies.

Maggie takes out her phone and we see her add "PAGEANT COOKIES" to a very long "To Do" list.

DANIELLE

How'd you get roped into that?

MAGGIE

I ran into Reverend Paulson at the supermarket. I felt bad that we missed the last few Sundays.

DANIELLE

I'm sure he understands. Everyone gets busy during the holidays.

MAGGIE

You're there every week.

DANIELLE

I seem to get an extra boost of energy this time of year. Call it the magic of Christmas.

MAGGIE

Can you bottle some of that for me?

DANIELLE

You love Christmas as much as I do.

MAGGIE

Yes, but I just don't seem to have the time to stop and smell the poinsettias, so to speak.

DANIELLE

You're very funny.

MAGGIE

Thank you. Tell my family that.
(beat - grows serious)

(MORE)

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I don't know. It feels like we spend time together but we're just not... together. You know?

DANIELLE

Do you mean the kids or Eric?

MAGGIE

Both. He's working on this huge merger and you and I can't keep up with all the listings... Between all that and the kids... Eric and I have to put ourselves at the bottom of the to-do list.

DANIELLE

You know, Reverend Paulson is great at helping couples reconnect.

MAGGIE

What? Oh, no! It's not that serious. No, it's just the usual stuff that happens in every marriage. I can fix it. I just need 36 hours in every day until the end of December.

DANIELLE

It's like you're caught in a Christmas blizzard and you're too busy keeping your head above the snow to get to Santa's village.

MAGGIE

(laughs)

That's a terrible metaphor. Accurate, but terrible.

Danielle laughs as she gets back to work setting up, leaving Maggie to think about just how accurate the metaphor is.

EXT. CHICAGO OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Establishing an office building in Chicago.

INT. LAW OFFICES - LOBBY - DAY

An office Christmas party is underway - not a wild one, but the type of thing you'd expect to happen in the lobby of a law office with well-dressed, well-mannered lawyers and staff wearing Santa caps, drinking punch, noshing on Christmas cookies, and chatting while Christmas music plays.

Eric enters the room with NOAH MARTINEZ (30s, friendly and upbeat). They survey the surroundings.

NOAH

You said we have ten minutes before we have to go back to work. Should we wish the partners Merry Christmas first, then go get cookies or the other way around?

ERIC

The answer will always be cookies, Noah. It doesn't matter what else is on the list, it's always Christmas cookies first.

NOAH

And that's why you're first chair on the Peterson merger.

They walk over to the table with cookies and other snacks.

ERIC

Any big plans for the holidays?

NOAH

Nothing too big. Just every single relative on the planet is coming to our house for Christmas dinner.

ERIC

Every one, huh?

NOAH

Apparently my wife has a third cousin in Iowa that she's never met who's bringing his wife and kids.

ERIC

Start defrosting the turkey now.

NOAH

What about you?

ERIC

My parents usually fly in, but they can't make it this year, so it'll just be us and the kids.

NOAH

Maggie's family isn't coming?

ERIC

It's just her brother Paul and his daughter in Ohio. And he and Maggie aren't exactly close.

NOAH

Did I mention that my wife's third cousin that *she's never met* is coming to my house for Christmas?

ERIC

Tell them to bring the pie.

NOAH

Weren't you just in Ohio a few months ago?

ERIC

Yeah... Paul's wife passed.

NOAH

Oh, I'm sorry. The first Christmas after losing someone is always hard. How are they handling it?

ERIC

Uh... okay, I think. I don't know when Maggie talked to him last.

NOAH

So, just you and Maggie and the kids, then. What I'm hearing is that you'll have plenty of room at your dining table.

ERIC

No, your wife's third cousin from Iowa can't come to my house. I'm actually looking forward to a nice, quiet Christmas for a change. That is if we can get everyone in one room for more than ten minutes.

NOAH

Speaking of ten minutes, we're halfway through ours. We need to go say hi to the partners.

ERIC

Tell you what... it's Christmas. Take an extra ten.

NOAH

Aw, and all I got you was socks.

ERIC
You go on ahead. I'm going to make
a quick call.

Noah heads off in search of the partners while Eric takes his phone out of his pocket and exits the room.

INT. CHICAGO HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The open house is underway with Danielle talking to a couple in the background when Maggie's phone rings.

MAGGIE
Hey, there. Everything okay?

INT. LAW OFFICES - HALLWAY - DAY

In a hallway off the lobby Eric chats with Maggie. We begin INTERCUTTING between the two scenes.

ERIC
Oh, yeah. I just felt badly about
the scheduling stuff this morning.
I'm going to try to get out of here
early enough to decorate the tree.

MAGGIE
No need. I already did it.

ERIC
You decorated the entire tree? By
yourself?

MAGGIE
The next available time all of us
can get together is in February.

ERIC
We could make it a Valentine's Day
tree. How did we get so busy?

MAGGIE
We woke up and got out of bed?

ERIC
Remind me not to do that for about
a month.

MAGGIE
Maybe after Christmas.

ERIC

That reminds me, do you know what Paul is doing for the holidays?

MAGGIE

Paul? No. I haven't talked to him in... huh... It's been a couple of months, I think. Why?

ERIC

No reason. I just... it's their first one since Amy died.

MAGGIE

Yeah, I guess I should've called. I mean, I did a few times after the funeral, but since then... I haven't wanted to bother him.

ERIC

I'm sure he wouldn't think that. You guys used to talk all the time when they lived in Chicago.

MAGGIE

I know, but then dad got sick and they moved back home and it was... It's not like it's intentional. We just got busy with our own lives.

ERIC

Sounds familiar.

MAGGIE

Yeah. I should call him. I will.

ERIC

Tell him Merry Christmas.

Danielle signals from across the room.

MAGGIE

Will do. I have to go. I'll see you at home.

ERIC

Bye.

After disconnecting the call, we stay with Maggie who taps a few times on her phone to bring up her To-Do list.

At the bottom of it, she adds "CALL PAUL."

She scrolls back up to the top of the list and then pauses for a moment, thinking. She scrolls back down to look at the "Call Paul" item on her list contemplatively.

Danielle signals again so Maggie shuts off her phone and gets back to work.

EXT. CLEARLAKE - DAY

Establishing Clearlake, Ohio, a charming burg awash with Christmas decorations and authentic holiday spirit.

EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY

Establishing a warm and welcoming Midwest-style home with a big front porch that is festively decorated for the holidays.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - OFFICE - DAY

Christmas decorations continue in an office that has several shelves dedicated to the career of Paul McCormick - novels he has written, photos of him talking to crowds of people, and awards for his success as a writer and public speaker.

PAUL MCCORMICK (40s, calming presence, warm-hearted, decent), is sitting at his computer, a blank screen staring at him.

From off, we hear a kitchen timer "ding," and Paul takes a beat, takes a deep breath, and pushes away from the computer to go tend to pressing matters.

EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY

Paul comes out of the house with a wrapped plate of Christmas cookies, just as an SUV pulls to the curb.

The front passenger window rolls down and SHERRY LIN (30s, mom-type) leans over from the driver's seat.

SHERRY

Hey, Paul.

PAUL

Hi, Sherry, thanks for...

The back door opens and ASHLEY MCCORMICK (10, big smile, very smart and intuitive) jumps out with a backpack and gives her father a happy hug.

ASHLEY
You baked cookies!

PAUL
Hi, Dad! I missed you, Dad.
School was great, Dad...

ASHLEY
Right. All that stuff. Cookies!

PAUL
There are more inside. These are
for Mrs. Lin to say thank you for
taking an extra shift on school
pickup today so I could work.

Paul hands the cookies to Sherry through the window. Ashley
turns to Sherry.

ASHLEY
Thank you, Mrs. Lin.

SHERRY
You're welcome, Ashley. And Paul,
you didn't need to bake cookies.

ASHLEY
But we're really happy he did!

SHERRY
Paul, can I ask what you're working
on? Is it your next novel?

PAUL
(beat)
I am working on a new one, yes.

SHERRY
I can't wait! Did I tell you, I
got my husband Danny to read your
books? I think he's more of a fan
than I am now.

PAUL
Well, then I expect him to show up
in a Paul McCormick t-shirt at my
next speaking engagement.

SHERRY
It's a deal!
(growing serious)
We just want to make sure you guys
are doing okay.

PAUL
We're doing well. I appreciate it.

SHERRY
How are things with the holidays?

PAUL
We're really looking forward to
Christmas, right Ash?

ASHLEY
Right! Christmas carols.
Presents. Cookies... you say there
are more inside?

PAUL
You're very focused on the baked
goods right now.

ASHLEY
(shrugs)
I'm ten.

SHERRY
(laughs)
Well, Paul, anything you need.

PAUL
Thanks, Sherry. Bye.

ASHLEY
Bye, Mrs. Lin. Bye, Maya!

Ashley waves at Sherry and the girl in the backseat as the SUV drives away. Ashley turns to Paul and looks at him eagerly. Paul takes a beat.

PAUL
They're in the kitchen.

Ashley runs off toward the house. Paul laughs and follows.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Paul and Ashley enter the warm and inviting kitchen - which has lots of Christmas decorations, which we also see in the adjacent family room.

Ashley dumps her backpack and makes a dash for the plate of cookies on the counter.

PAUL
Just one.

ASHLEY

Okay, I was gonna open with three, so why don't we meet in the middle and agree on two?

PAUL

I think our next bible study lesson is going to be Proverbs 23. It's about gluttony.

ASHLEY

What's that?

PAUL

Thinking I'm going to agree to let you have two cookies before dinner.

Ashley takes a cookie, sits at the counter, and takes a bite.

ASHLEY

Mmmm. Are these the ones Mommy made every year?

PAUL

It's her recipe. I don't know if they taste as good as hers did.

ASHLEY

Almost. You just need practice.

PAUL

Is that your subtle way of saying we need to bake more?

ASHLEY

Is that gluttony, too?

PAUL

Pretty much.

ASHLEY

Okay, but Mommy loved baking Christmas cookies and she was really good at it. You don't want her looking down from heaven and seeing these "almost as good" cookies, do you?

PAUL

Your mom would be impressed that I even knew how to turn on the oven.

ASHLEY

(laughs)

True. And it makes me a little nervous about Christmas dinner.

PAUL

I'm great at grilling things. Can you grill a turkey? Oh! Grilled stuffing. Grilled pumpkin pie?

ASHLEY

(laughs)

Dad!

Paul hugs Ashley.

PAUL

I get to eat with you, so I think it will be the most wonderful Christmas dinner ever.

ASHLEY

Me, too. But I'm still going to ask God to help you out a little bit extra, okay?

PAUL

Okay.

Paul's phone rings. He looks at it and sees that the call is from Maggie. He pauses a moment, then looks at Ashley.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Ash, I have to take this. I'll be right back.

As Paul is leaving the room, Ashley turns to the cookies.

PAUL (CONT'D)

By the way, I know how many cookies are on that plate.

Paul exits and Ashley sighs, looking at the cookies.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - OFFICE - DAY

Paul comes into his office and sits at his desk as he answers the call.

PAUL

Maggie? Is everything okay?

INT. LANSING HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Maggie is working on dinner as she talks to Paul. We begin INTERCUTTING between the two scenes.

MAGGIE
Everything's fine. I'm just
calling to check in. Saying hi.

PAUL
(surprised)
Oh. Okay. Hi.

MAGGIE
You sound surprised.

PAUL
Yeah, but pleasantly surprised.

MAGGIE
(beat - absorbs that)
So, how are you? How's Ashley?

PAUL
I'm good. She's good. I made
Christmas cookies, so...

There is a beat of silence as they look for something to say.

MAGGIE
So, what are your plans for
Christmas?

PAUL
We're going to have a quiet one
this year, I think. Ashley's doing
the Christmas pageant. She's
playing a wise man.

MAGGIE
She was born for that role.

PAUL
Tell me about it. Yeah, she's
excited. So, we'll spend some time
at the church, but other than that
we'll mostly just be here at home.
Decorate the tree, make ornaments.

MAGGIE
I have all the ornaments that mom
and dad collected over the years.
I could send some to you.

PAUL

That's okay. Making them will give us some good quality time together.

MAGGIE

But what about the tree lighting in the town square? And are they doing the caroling again this year?

PAUL

I don't know. I haven't checked. Like I said, I just want to stick close to home.

MAGGIE

But going out with the family and doing fun stuff is what Christmas is all about. That's where you find the joy and the magic and spirit of the holidays.

PAUL

I think we can find plenty of joy and spirit sitting in front of the fire, stringing popcorn.

MAGGIE

When you lived here we'd go to all of the events. The lights at the botanic garden, the holiday market. We're doing all that and more.

PAUL

That's great. I'm sure Eric and the kids are very excited about it.

MAGGIE

(beat)

Yes. They are. I mean, it's hard to fit it all in the schedule...

PAUL

You put the Christmas activities in red, didn't you?

MAGGIE

Of course.

PAUL

Listen, Maggie, I think it sounds great for you and your family, but it's just not right for me and Ashley this year.

MAGGIE

(beat - thinks)

You know, you could always come visit. We'd love to see you guys.

PAUL

Thank you, but I think it's important for Ashley... and for me... to be close to home. But you're welcome to come here if you want. There's something kind of special about celebrating Christmas in the house we grew up in.

MAGGIE

Oh, that's sweet, but we're so busy. I don't know how we'd...

PAUL

I understand. But if you change your mind, just give me a call.

MAGGIE

To pleasantly surprise you again?

PAUL

(smiles)

Something like that, yes.

There is another awkward pause.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Well, I better...

MAGGIE

Yeah, me too. Merry Christmas. Love to Ashley.

PAUL

Same to Eric and the kids. Merry Christmas.

We stay with Maggie as she disconnects the call. We can tell that she is less than pleased about the way that went.

INT. LANSING HOME - PRIMARY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Maggie and Eric are performing their nightly bedtime rituals - brushing teeth in the adjacent bathroom, taking off jewelry and makeup, checking their phones, etc. - as they talk.

MAGGIE

I think I should call him again.

ERIC

What did I do with my blue tie?

Maggie looks in a dresser while continuing to talk.

MAGGIE

I'm worried that he isn't doing Christmas right.

ERIC

There's a "right" way to do Christmas?

MAGGIE

(hands him a blue tie)
Of course! You should be out doing things with the family.

ERIC

The other blue tie.

Maggie goes to a different place where ties are kept.

MAGGIE

You know, like all the fun we're going to have. We're going to have fun, right?

ERIC

Absolutely. Did you set the timer on the coffee maker?

MAGGIE

Yes. I mean, Christmas is a time when you should be open and full of joy, around people!
(hands him another tie)

ERIC

That's the one!

MAGGIE

I don't like the idea of the two of them, sitting alone, in that big old house stringing popcorn.

ERIC

Oh, popcorn! No, I already brushed my teeth.

MAGGIE

I'm worried that he's shutting out the world since Amy died.

ERIC

You said he sounded okay.

MAGGIE

Yeah, but what if he's putting on a brave face? What if he's not really dealing with things as well as he seems to be?

The two of them get settled into bed.

ERIC

But what if he is? There's no "right" way to get over a loss like that, is there?

MAGGIE

(beat)

I guess not. But I stand by what I said. There's a "right" way to do Christmas. I should call him.

ERIC

Maggie, I understand that you're worried, but maybe the best thing to do is give him the space to handle things his way. Let go and see what happens.

MAGGIE

You can't fix something if you let go of it.

ERIC

You can't fix everything.

Eric gives her a quick peck on the cheek, then shuts off the bedside lamp and settles in to sleep.

Maggie is sitting up in the bed, pondering all of this, and looking increasingly more frustrated.

After a few moments of this, she gets out of bed.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Tell him I said hi.

Maggie exits the bedroom.

INT. LANSING HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The tree is fully decorated with the family heirloom ornaments and the Christmas lights, which blaze with color.

Maggie enters the room and looks at the tree, the light once again washing across her in ways that she doesn't notice.

She goes to the tree and adjusts a slightly askew ornament and then steps back with a satisfied smile. But the smile fades and turns into a look of determination.

Maggie nods and begins taking the ornaments OFF the tree. As she does, she takes out her phone and dials.

MAGGIE

Paul? No, everything is fine. I know it's late, but listen... about Christmas...

INT. LANSING HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eric, Becca, and Will (dressed casually for a Saturday morning) are chatting indistinctly as they pass by the living room and notice that the tree is bare.

ERIC

Did anyone see a big green guy last night? Goes by the name of Grinch?

WILL

At least he left the tree.

A confused Eric, Becca, and Will head toward the kitchen.

INT. LANSING HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Eric, Becca, and Will enter the kitchen and are surprised to find that Maggie has prepared a full breakfast.

ERIC

What's all this?

MAGGIE

Family breakfast.

BECCA

Mom, I'm supposed to be at...

MAGGIE

You have time eat.

ERIC

Maggie, I have to...

MAGGIE

Have a nice meal with your family?

Eric, Becca, and Will exchange glances, sit, and start passing food around.

ERIC
Everything looks delicious.

WILL
It does, Mom.

There is a moment of awkward silence.

BECCA
So, were we dreaming when we saw
the tree fully decorated?

MAGGIE
No. I undecorated it.

WILL
Why?

MAGGIE
Because we won't be needing it.
We'll be spending Christmas in Ohio
with your Uncle Paul and Ashley.

Everyone stops passing food, surprised.

ERIC
We'll be... what?

MAGGIE
We leave tomorrow morning and come
back the day after Christmas.

BECCA
Mom! That's like a week!

MAGGIE
More like ten days. We're going to
need it because I have planned an
absolutely spectacular holiday
itinerary for the whole family.
Activities, games, excursions...

ERIC
Sweetheart, I have work...

MAGGIE
Your office is closed through
Christmas. You were going to work
at home anyway. You can just work
from Paul's home in Ohio.

BECCA
But cheer practice...

MAGGIE
They will be fine without you.

BECCA
Tell that to the pyramid!

WILL
I have my AP tutor. And I'm
supposed to...

MAGGIE
Guys, listen. Paul and Ashley need
us. We're the only family they
have and so it's up to us to give
them the most incredible Christmas
ever. One filled with fun and
magic and joy... and most
importantly hope. It's up to us.
(beat)
Are you with me?

Eric, Becca, and Will take a beat, look at each other, and
then back to Maggie.

ERIC
Of course we are.

BECCA
Absolutely, Mom.

WILL
Ohio, here we come.

MAGGIE
(beat - smiles)
Thanks, guys.

ERIC
Okay... well, I for one, have some
calls to make.

As Eric, Becca, and Will are exiting.

WILL
Me, too.

BECCA
Do you people not now how to text?

ERIC
You know what they say. Calling
will stand the *text* of time.

Becca and Will groan as they exit. Maggie sits for a moment,
satisfied once more. She smiles.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

The foyer of the McCormick house has just as many Christmas
decorations as the rest of the place. A doorbell is heard
and Paul and Ashley approach and then open the front door.

Maggie, Eric, Becca, and Will are standing on the front porch
bedecked in Santa hats. They sing one rousing chorus of "We
Wish You a Merry Christmas."

At the end, Paul and Ashley applaud and welcome them into the
house.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO**INT. MCCORMICK HOME - GUEST ROOM #1 - NIGHT**

Maggie and Eric are unpacking clothes as they chat.

MAGGIE

This is going to be a great Christmas. I think it's exactly what Paul and Ashley need. And I know you have a lot of work to do, but this is important.

ERIC

I'll figure it out.

MAGGIE

Because I'm going to be working, too. Danielle is handling all the showings and open houses, but I'm going to be doing all the contracts and offers, putting up listings...

ERIC

I'm sure it'll all be fine.

MAGGIE

And the kids will...

Eric stops unpacking and faces her.

ERIC

Maggie, you don't need to keep trying to convince me. I'm on board. It's going to be great.

MAGGIE

(deep breath)
Thank you.

Eric goes back to unpacking while Maggie goes to check her phone, but he doesn't notice.

ERIC

Besides, being here means they can't call me into the office like they did last Christmas. That'll be sheer bliss. It's *Blissmas!*
(laughs)
I've gotta remember that.

MAGGIE
 (distracted by phone)
 Yeah. Absolutely. It'll be fun.

Eric picks up his phone, still not noticing Maggie on hers.

ERIC
 And who knows? Maybe it'll be good
 for us, too. Hopefully we can find
 some time for just the two of us.

MAGGIE
 Mmm-hmmm.

The two of them type on their phones for a moment. Both
 finish their tasks and look up at roughly the same time.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
 Sorry, what?

ERIC
 I thought you said something.

MAGGIE
 I just said it's going to be great.
 This Christmas will be perfection.

ERIC
 A Christmas-terpiece, perhaps?

MAGGIE
 I can't decide if I should throw a
 pillow at you or trademark that
 phrase and put it t-shirts.

ERIC
 You could put it on pillows. Two
 birds, one stone.

MAGGIE
 It's going to have to wait until
 after Christmas because we have a
 lot to do in the next ten days.

ERIC
 How much to do?

Maggie simply smiles.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Maggie is standing in front of the assembled family - Eric,
 Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley.

She has a version of the calendar we saw in their kitchen, which is covered with notes in red about various activities.

BECCA

That's... a lot of Christmas.

MAGGIE

I did a ton of research and there's so much happening here! Clearlake has a tree lighting and caroling. And over in Bluffton they've got ice skating and sleigh rides. And in Dayton they have...

PAUL

Dayton is over an hour away.

MAGGIE

We can play games in the car!

PAUL

Maggie, this all looks fun, but I want to make sure we're spending time, together... as a family.

MAGGIE

All of these are activities for the whole family.

PAUL

Right, but how much time are we going to actually spend together doing any of them? Where's decorating the tree or baking Christmas cookies?

MAGGIE

There's plenty of room on the schedule for things like that.

WILL

(looks at schedule)
There is?

MAGGIE

I promise, this is going to be a fantastic Christmas. We're going to have a blast!

(off Paul's hesitancy)
Together! Family Christmas fun time. In fact, if we don't hurry we're going to be late for our first big adventure.

ERIC

Which is?

MAGGIE

A Christmas escape room!

ASHLEY

What's that?

MAGGIE

It's this really cool thing where you get "locked" in a room and have to solve a bunch of puzzles to figure out how to escape. Only the whole thing is Christmas themed! You're going to love it. Okay, everyone let's get going!

Maggie ushers Eric, Becca, and Will out of the kitchen but Paul and Ashley hang back for a moment.

ASHLEY

Dad, I don't want to be locked in a room. Even if it's a Christmas one.

PAUL

They don't really lock the door. We can leave whenever you want.

ASHLEY

Then why do you have to solve puzzles to get out?

PAUL

It's supposed to be fun.
(off her doubt)
Ash, but this is important to your Aunt Maggie. We don't want to disappoint her, do we?

ASHLEY

No.
(points at schedule)
But Dad... I don't see any of our Christmas stuff on there.

PAUL

I'll make sure she adds some things just for us, okay? And as long as we're together, we're going to have an amazing Christmas, right?

ASHLEY
 (beat - smiles - nods)
 Right.

They hug it out.

MAGGIE (O.S.)
 Paul! Ashley! We need to escape!

Paul and Ashley exchange a glance that indicates that they might be considering escaping themselves, but then Paul takes Ashley's hand and they head for the front door.

EXT. ESCAPE ROOM BUILDING - DAY

A storefront building has signs for various escape room games, the biggest being "Santa's Christmas Adventure!"

INT. ESCAPE ROOM - DAY

The room is set up like Santa's Village with Christmas tree, workbench, desk, toys, and much more.

Maggie, Eric, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley - all wearing fuzzy reindeer antlers - are gathered as an employee, dressed like an ELF, gives them instructions.

ELF
 It's Christmas Eve at the North Pole and the reindeer need some holiday magic to pull the sleigh around the world so Santa can make all of his deliveries.

The Elf walks over to a safe.

ELF (CONT'D)
 But there's a problem. The jar full of holiday magic is locked here in Santa's safe and he can't find the combination.

ASHLEY
 Why doesn't Santa know the combination by heart?

ELF
 Good question. He's very busy with his list of good little boys and girls. That's a lot to remember.

ASHLEY

But the list is written down. He
doesn't have to remember...

PAUL

(shakes head)
Ashley...

ELF

Anyway... the combination is hidden
somewhere in this workshop. You
have 60 minutes to find it by
solving a series of puzzles and
Christmas games.

ERIC

Oh, like... Tic Tac Ho Ho Ho?

BECCA

Duck, Duck, Christmas Goose.

ERIC

Santa Says!

MAGGIE

Guys...

Eric and Becca step back and pay attention.

ELF

Teamwork is important, so don't
forget to work together.

MAGGIE

(aside to Paul)
See? I told you this would be a
family adventure.

Paul doesn't appear certain about this.

ELF

Okay, here's your first clue...
Santa's reindeer
Like to play games
But they need to wear tags
With all of their names
Find them all
And you'll know what to do
Put them together
To get your next clue
(beat)
And go!

WILL

So, we have to find name tags for all of Santa's reindeer.

MAGGIE

Okay. What are their names?

ASHLEY

Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen.

BECCA

And Rudolph. Don't forget Rudolph.

ERIC

Okay. Everybody split up!

Eric, Becca, Will, and Ashley all go in separate directions to look for name tags. Maggie and Paul hang back and Paul looks around at everyone working separately and gives her a look that says a lot.

MAGGIE

I'm sure we'll all be working together later...

Paul forces a smile and nods, then heads off to join the hunt. Maggie takes a beat, then dives in also.

INT. ESCAPE ROOM - DAY

As jolly Christmas music plays, we see Paul and Ashley working together in one part of the room, Becca and Will in another, Maggie in yet another, and Eric off to the side surreptitiously checking his phone.

Maggie sees what Eric is doing and flags down the Elf who walks over to Eric.

ELF

I'm sorry, Sir. There are no phones allowed in Santa's Workshop.

ERIC

Oh, but no, I...

The Elf holds out a hand and Eric sees Maggie watching. He forces a smile and hands over the phone, then goes to Maggie.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You may need to be a witness when I have to tell my clients that an Elf took my phone.

MAGGIE
I'm sure they'll understand. Now,
come on. Go see if you can put
together that toy train set.

Eric goes off to do his task while Maggie returns to hers.

INT. ESCAPE ROOM - DAY

The music continues as we see Will studiously working on a Christmas themed puzzle involving math while Becca sits beside him not paying much attention.

WILL
Okay, Santa has 100 houses to visit
and there are two kids in each
house and each kid gets... Will you
help me with this?

BECCA
Nobody said there would be math.

WILL
You get straight A's in math!

BECCA
Yeah, in school, but this is like
the real world. Nobody does math
in the real world.

WILL
You're in Santa's workshop wearing
reindeer antlers. How is this the
real world?

Becca sighs and looks at the worksheet.

BECCA
Twenty-five.

Will looks at the sheet and nods, filling in the answer.

INT. ESCAPE ROOM - DAY

The music continues as we see Paul and Ashley at a Christmas tree arranging ornaments.

ASHLEY
And that one goes... there!

Paul places the final ornament.

PAUL
 Yes! Nice work.
 (to the room)
 Ashley figured out the Christmas
 tree ornaments.

Everybody else glances up and gives less than enthusiastic ad lib acknowledgment - "great," "good job," etc. - and immediately returns to their own tasks.

Paul turns back to Ashley and gives her a hug.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Well, I'm very proud of you.

ASHLEY
 Thanks, Dad. Okay, what's next?

Paul and Ashley go off in search of their next challenge.

INT. ESCAPE ROOM - DAY

The music continues. This time it's Maggie who is on her phone. The Elf comes over to her and holds out a hand.

Maggie looks up and sees Eric on the other side of the room. He waves and smiles.

Maggie forces a smile and hands over her phone.

INT. ESCAPE ROOM - DAY

Maggie, Eric, Becca, Will, Paul, and Ashley are all in separate areas of the room. The Elf steps to the center.

ELF
 You'll have to hurry. There are
 only sixty seconds left!

MAGGIE
 Okay, okay. What do we have?

WILL
 The answer to the Santa's toy math
 problem was twenty-five.

ERIC
 And I've got nine candy canes.

PAUL
 We had twelve ornaments.

MAGGIE

What do we do with that?

ASHLEY

It's like our lockers at school!
It's the combination to the safe.

They all rush to the safe. Will tries a combination.

WILL

25-9-12.

The safe doesn't open.

ERIC

Try a different order. 12-9-25.

BECCA

No, wait! December 25th. 12-25.
And there are nine reindeer. Do 9-
12-25.

Will puts in the combination and the safe opens. Everyone cheers as Will pulls out the bottle of holiday magic that will help the reindeer fly.

A person dressed like Santa Claus bursts in.

SANTA

Ho, ho, ho! Congratulations! You saved Christmas!

There is much cheering and celebration, although the most exuberant of it comes from Maggie.

EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - NIGHT

Establishing the McCormick home.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Maggie, Eric, and Paul are cleaning up after dinner as the kids play a game in the adjacent family room.

MAGGIE

Now, come on. You have to admit that was a lot of fun.

PAUL

It was, yes. And Ashley was very excited about figuring out that the numbers were the combination.

ERIC

She should be. I didn't get that.

MAGGIE

So, a family togetherness Christmas is off to a good start.

PAUL

Okay... but you know, except for the last minute or so, we were all mostly off working separately.

MAGGIE

But separately together. Right?

PAUL

I just want to make sure that we go over the schedule and put in some things that Ashley and I had planned on doing.

MAGGIE

Like what?

PAUL

The pageant, for one. And we volunteered to help make meals at the church for those in need.

MAGGIE

Oh, well, of course. Yes, we can make room for that. We can do the small things and the big fun ones.

PAUL

Christmas isn't just about having big fun. It isn't all just bells and whistles.

ERIC

Silver bells and whistles.

Maggie and Paul give a grimacing smile to that.

PAUL

All I'm saying is that I don't want to get distracted from the true spirit of Christmas.

ERIC

(joking)

Maggie is good at distractions. Especially if she can put it on a schedule.

Maggie looks at Eric with a "you're not helping" glance.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I mean that in a good way.

MAGGIE

I promise that everything I have planned will be perfectly in line with the spirit of Christmas.

PAUL

Great. I appreciate it.

WILL

Dad! Uncle Paul. Come help us with this.

PAUL

(smiles)

Duty calls.

As Paul and Eric head off into the family room to join the kids, we can see Maggie is wondering if they have a point about who she is and how she handles things.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE**EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY**

Establishing the McCormick home.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - OFFICE - DAY

The blank document is up on the computer screen but Paul isn't looking at it - he is clumsily wrapping Christmas presents as Maggie knocks at the door and enters.

MAGGIE

Hi. Need a little help?

PAUL

I need a lot of help.

Maggie comes in and helps wrap presents throughout.

MAGGIE

How's your ankle?

PAUL

Fine. I forgot that tobogganing is a full contact sport.

MAGGIE

It is the way our family does it.

(laughs)

But injuries notwithstanding, you and Ashley had a good time, right?

PAUL

Yes, we did. Thank you.

They continue wrapping gifts in silence for a moment. Maggie notices the blank computer screen.

MAGGIE

Nothing quite as intimidating as a blank page, huh?

PAUL

I've been having a little trouble getting started on the new novel.

MAGGIE

What's it about?

PAUL

I'll let you know when I do.

MAGGIE

It's understandable. It's hard to get anything done when you're sad.

PAUL

Except we're not. We're blessed.
(off her confusion)
There's a James Joyce quote I use at my speaking engagements...
"Absence is the highest form of presence." Amy is all around us all the time. And we're going to see her again.

MAGGIE

But losing someone...

PAUL

Is hard, of course. But we knew it was coming. So, we took the time to say everything we needed to say and at the end, we were ready. I thank God for that every day.

MAGGIE

Paul, I know your faith is important to you, and I'm not questioning that at all...

PAUL

It's okay to question. But you and I have a different relationship with God. With belief.

MAGGIE

I believe. But we went to church when we were kids and yet faith wasn't a big part of our daily lives.

PAUL

It became a part of mine when I met Amy. She was the church secretary, so I wound up spending a lot of time there. At first it was just to see her but then... They helped me... she helped me... see the proverbial light, I guess. That's one of God's greatest gifts.

(looks at presents)

And it doesn't require wrapping.

MAGGIE

This was Amy's area of expertise?

PAUL

Yes. And I can practically hear her laughing at me.

(beat - smile)

"The highest form of presence."

Maggie takes a beat to absorb that. Paul glances at a clock.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I have to go pick up the Christmas tree. It'll be ready by two.

MAGGIE

Eric and I can do that.

(off his hesitance)

We're here to help. Let me help.

PAUL

Okay. Thanks.

A happy Maggie exits as Paul takes a beat to process. He glances over at the blank document on the computer screen then turns his attention back to the present wrapping task.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT - DAY

Maggie and Eric are in a bustling Christmas tree lot, waiting near an office where they can pick up the tree.

ERIC

It sounds like he's handling things better than you thought.

(off her thoughtful nod)

But you're not convinced of it.

MAGGIE

I think it's more like... I'm not understanding it. And I want to.

ERIC

Amy and Paul were so... connected.

Maggie looks at Eric. He understands that she thinks he is saying that the two of them aren't. He backpedals.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I mean... It's like Santa and Mrs. Claus. I'm sure she feels his presence at the North Pole when he's off flying around the world.

MAGGIE

Yeah, but it can't be easy when Santa is so busy with work, making toys with the elves and always being jolly with his "Ho Ho Ho!"

ERIC

Okay, but Mrs. Claus is pretty busy with work, too. Making schedules for feeding the reindeer and taking the elves to cheerleading practice.

MAGGIE

Cheerleading elves?

ERIC

The pyramids are very small.

MAGGIE

I just can't help but feel... that *Mrs. Claus* feels like they aren't spending enough time together.

ERIC

Maybe Santa feels that way, too.

MAGGIE

Then what do they do about it?

There is a beat as they ponder that question, but before they can say more, a MAN approaches with a nice, but modest, tree.

MAN

McCormick? Here ya go.

The man hands over the tree to Eric and then holds out a piece of paper to sign. Maggie inspects the tree.

MAGGIE

It's so small... there's not going to be enough room for all of mom and dad's ornaments we brought. We need a bigger tree.

ERIC

Paul and Ashley picked this one.

MAGGIE

They thought it was only going to be the two of them. Now it's all of us, so we need something bigger.

Maggie goes in search of a tree. Eric takes a beat and hands the tree back to the man with a shrug, then follows Maggie.

EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY

Becca, Will, and Ashley are in the front yard of the house setting up inflatable Christmas decorations on the front lawn (a snowman, a Christmas train, etc.).

ASHLEY

That's the snowman. It goes over there. And the reindeer goes up by the front porch.

BECCA

Inflatable reindeer. Hey, maybe if we fill them with helium they can fly just like Santa's do.

ASHLEY

No, they're better on the ground because when they're all blown up and there's a breeze they sort of move around like they're dancing.

Ashley demonstrates a wavy dance - think a "tube man" at a car wash. Becca and Will can't help but be charmed by this.

WILL

You do this every year?

ASHLEY

Uh-huh. Mommy and me would always get them all set up like this and dad would come out and hook up the thingy that fills them with air. It's one of my favorite things to do at Christmas time.

BECCA

I hope it's okay that we're helping out this year.

ASHLEY

Yeah, it's great. When we were rehearsing for the Christmas pageant, Reverend Michaels said that God made memories so that we can hold onto the things we love. I have memories with Mommy and now I'll have memories of doing it with you. How cool is that?

Becca and Will exchange a glance.

WILL

It's pretty cool.

BECCA

Do you guys do the Christmas pageant at your church?

WILL

We used to.

BECCA

They were actually pretty fun. But we're too old for that now.

ASHLEY

That's too bad.

An SUV with a bigger Christmas tree on the roof pulls up in front of the house with a honk. Paul comes out, pulling on a coat as Maggie and Eric get out of the tree.

MAGGIE

(big gesture)

Ta-da!!

PAUL

What is that?

ASHLEY

That's not our tree.

MAGGIE

I know. But we weren't going to be able to fit all of the ornaments that your grandma and grandpa collected on that tree. So, we got a bigger one.

ASHLEY

But, Dad, that's not our tree.

PAUL

What Ashley means to say is that this is a lovely and thoughtful gift and we thank you for it.

It's pretty clear that isn't what Ashley was trying to say.

MAGGIE

You're welcome! Come on. Let's get this bad boy inside.

Paul helps Eric and a smiling Maggie get the tree off the roof of the SUV as the kids watch.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Establishing a brightly lit, fenced, outdoor lot with a sign for "SANTA'S SELFIES."

EXT. SANTA'S SELFIES - NIGHT

The lot is filled with a series of Instagram-worthy backdrops like a big tree with oversized presents; a group of snowmen building a snowman; Santa's sleigh; cutouts of reindeer; sparkly light backgrounds; and so on.

Maggie gathers Eric, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley.

MAGGIE

Isn't this great? You can take selfies with snowmen or reindeer or like you're in a big snow globe.

BECCA

(awed)

This is every Christmas wish I've ever had all rolled into one. My phone won't have enough storage.

Paul pulls Maggie aside.

PAUL

Maggie, this is... very cool. But remember we talked about doing some simpler things? I thought we would be decorating the tree tonight... the whole family together?

MAGGIE

This is all about togetherness. Think of all the amazing pictures we're going to have of all of us. We can put them into a photo album and look at it for years to come. We're creating Christmas memories.

Paul doesn't appear to be convinced, but smiles and nods.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Okay, guys. Where should we start?

BECCA

The snowmen are hysterical. Come on, Dad. We can make silly faces.

Becca and Eric head off in one direction.

WILL
I want to do the flying reindeer.
The science club will love it.

Will goes off in another direction.

ASHLEY
Dad! Giant Christmas cookies!

Ashley pulls Paul in yet another direction, looking back at Maggie as they go with a look that reads "you were saying?"

Everyone heads off, much to Maggie's dismay.

MONTAGE OF SCENES: SANTA'S SELFIES

A few shots of the family members, mostly alone or in groups of two or three, taking selfies in front of the different silly backgrounds.

1. Eric and Becca make silly faces with the snowmen.
2. Will and Maggie stand under the flying reindeer.
3. Paul and Ashley pretend to eat the Christmas cookies.

EXT. SANTA'S SELFIES - NIGHT

Maggie, Eric, and Ashley are in line for a selfie station that features a giant Christmas snow globe. Maggie notices that Ashley looks a little bored.

MAGGIE
You know, Ashley, a Christmas snow globe is how I met your Uncle Eric.

ASHLEY
Really?

MAGGIE
I was hosting an open house at a place that had a huge collection of Christmas snow globes.

ASHLEY
And that's where you met?

MAGGIE
That's right. He came to the open house and was looking around...

ERIC
But I was distracted by the very
pretty real estate agent...

MAGGIE
And he broke a snow globe.

ASHLEY
Oh, no!

ERIC
Oh, yes. I offered to replace it,
of course, but I didn't know where
I could find one that matched.

MAGGIE
So, he suggested we go out snow
globe shopping together.

ASHLEY
Nice.

ERIC
I thought so.

MAGGIE
The following December, he proposed
by putting a ring on top of a
Christmas snow globe.

ASHLEY
Awww! Do you still have it?

Maggie and Eric take a beat and have to think about it.

MAGGIE
Yeah. It's... Is it on the
bookcase in the den?

ERIC
No. I think it's... isn't it on a
shelf in the kitchen.

MAGGIE
I don't think so. Did we ever take
it out of the box when we moved
into that house?

ERIC
That was ten years ago.

MAGGIE
I'd forgotten all about it.

Maggie looks at Eric and realizes that this is probably a metaphor the state of their relationship.

EXT. SANTA'S SELFIES - NIGHT

Maggie, Eric, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley are approaching the head of a line for a giant candy cane selfie station.

MAGGIE

Okay, this is all of us together.
A Christmas family selfie.

ERIC

A famifie?

BECCA

Needs work.

Maggie's phone chimes. She looks at it and sees it is from Danielle saying "URGENT - CALL ME!"

MAGGIE

Oh, no... I uh... Guys, I'll be
right back.

Maggie steps away to take the call. Both Paul and Eric seem unhappy with the fact that she has left.

EXT. SANTA'S SELFIES - NIGHT

Maggie is heading back to the candy cane selfie station, finishing up the call.

MAGGIE

Danielle, I'll take care of it as
soon as I get back to Paul's.
They'll have the offer in an hour,
tops. Okay. Call me if anything
else happens.

Maggie disconnects the call just as she gets back to where her family was and they are all gone.

She looks around, dismayed and disappointed, wondering what she is doing wrong.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - NIGHT**

Establishing the McCormick home.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Maggie and Eric are both in the kitchen looking at their computer and phone respectively while Paul and Ashley are decorating the tree in the adjacent family room.

Becca is nearby texting with a friend, and Will is reading.

PAUL

Hey guys, it's a week until
Christmas and at the rate we're
going, we're not going to finish
this until January. A little help?
(no response)
Maggie?

Maggie looks up as Paul holds out a box of ornaments to her.

MAGGIE

Oh, sorry. I need to...
(off Paul's look)
Help decorate the tree, of course.

Maggie heads toward the family room.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Maggie goes to the tree and picks up an ornament that has a small crack in it. She shows it to Paul.

MAGGIE

This one is cracked. I don't even
remember where we got it.

PAUL

Albuquerque. The Santa Claus?

MAGGIE

(laughs, embarrassed)
Oh, no! Oh, I should've buried
this in the back yard years ago.

ASHLEY

What so funny?

PAUL

Your grandma and grandpa bought Christmas ornaments anytime we went anywhere. So, we were on a road trip and stopped in Albuquerque...

MAGGIE

No, don't tell this story! It's so embarrassing.

Their laughter gets Becca and Will's attention, who both come in from the kitchen to join the group during the following.

BECCA

Then definitely tell the story.

PAUL

So, we stop at a mall and there's this Santa Claus, and Maggie and I get in line with our mom. I was like, maybe, ten? So, you were around five or six?

MAGGIE

I was young and impressionable. That should be the key takeaway.

PAUL

Maggie had never seen Santa Claus in person and as we got closer, she started to get scared.

MAGGIE

I got scared because you were telling me that if I said something wrong, Santa's elves would come at night and take away all the toys that Santa ever gave me.

ASHLEY

Daddy! That's mean.

PAUL

I was just having fun.

MAGGIE

I wasn't! By the time it was my turn I was so terrified that I couldn't go up there.

PAUL

And then someone came out to see what was holding up the line...

MAGGIE

He was dressed like an elf!

PAUL

She screamed, ran away, and knocked over a Christmas tree as she went.

MAGGIE

(shows cracked ornament)
Our parents had to buy all the broken ornaments.

PAUL

We used to do stuff like that to each other all the time.

ASHLEY

But you don't anymore?

PAUL

No, sweetheart. We grew up.

ASHLEY

You guys don't have fun like that anymore and Becca and Will said they're too grown up for the Christmas pageant. If that's what it's like, I'm gonna stay a kid.

There is a beat of silence as they all appreciate that.

BECCA

Where did this one come from?

MAGGIE

Oh, now that's a story about your Uncle Paul. Eric. You have to come hear this.

At that moment, Eric's phone rings. He holds up a finger to say "one minute" and leaves the room to answer the call.

ERIC

Noah, hi. What's going on?

Maggie is obviously disappointed, which Paul notices. Maggie continues with the story.

MAGGIE

So, we were in Florida...

They continue decorating the tree.

EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Maggie is on the front porch, contemplatively sipping from a mug of hot chocolate, when Paul joins her.

PAUL

You and Eric have a lot of work.
Must be hard to find time together.

MAGGIE

It is. But, not all of us have the
luxury of leaving the page blank,
so to speak.

PAUL

A blank doesn't mean I'm not
working on it. It's a process.

MAGGIE

I know. Sorry, I didn't mean...
(beat)
But, you're right. Eric and I...
(trails off)

PAUL

Do you want to talk about it?

MAGGIE

There's not a lot to talk about.
We're busy, we don't seem to
connect like we used to. But we
both know it and that's half the
battle right there.

PAUL

The hard half is actually doing
something about it.

MAGGIE

(shakes her head)
I'm sorry. I shouldn't be
complaining about this stuff to
you. It's very minor compared to
what you're dealing with.

PAUL

It's not minor. Trust me, I know.
Amy and I went through something
very similar a few years ago.

MAGGIE

You did?

PAUL

Yeah. I got busy with book tours and speaking engagements and Amy was taking on extra responsibility at the church and Ashley was just starting school... we drifted away from each other.

MAGGIE

How did you fix it?

PAUL

We forced ourselves to make time for each other. And for our family. And I know we have different ideas about faith, but embracing ours... together... it helped us. Amy and I realized we couldn't do it on our own, so we let God lend a hand. Or two.

MAGGIE

I understand what you're saying but... I think it's easier said than done.

PAUL

(shrugs)

God's job is not to make things like faith and love and marriage and family easy... it's His job to be there for you when all those things get hard.

Paul pats her on the shoulder, then goes in the house, leaving Maggie to think about that.

EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY

Maggie, Eric, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley have all gathered in front of the house for Maggie's next Christmas activity.

MAGGIE

Are we ready for our next Christmas activity?!

The reactions are cheerful, but not exactly enthusiastic.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Yes! Okay, here it is... drumroll please... We're going on a Christmas Scavenger Hunt!

ASHLEY

What's that?

Maggie starts handing out sheets of paper to everyone.

MAGGIE

We divide up into teams and you get points for everything you get done from Santa's Christmas list.

Becca reads from the paper.

BECCA

A candy cane. A pinecone. Santa's autograph. Mom, are you going to be too scared to do that one?

MAGGIE

Ha, ha.

ERIC

A video of your team singing a Christmas carol on a street corner?

MAGGIE

That one's worth a lot of points.

WILL

Who's on whose team?

MAGGIE

Paul and Will, Eric and Becca, and me and Ashley!

PAUL

Why don't we all just do them together in one big group?

MAGGIE

Then the points don't mean anything. A little healthy competition never hurt anyone.

PAUL

Okay... but how about this? How about we do two teams - me and the kids against the two of you.

MAGGIE

Oh, I had really envisioned this as a three team game...

PAUL
 Unless you think you and Eric...
 (pointedly)
 Together by yourselves for
 awhile... can't be us.

Maggie gets what he is doing and smiles.

MAGGIE
 Okay... Eric? What do you think?

ERIC
 Challenge accepted.

MAGGIE
 Meet back here in three hours!
 Ready, set, go!

Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley head off in one direction while Maggie and Eric head off in the other direction.

EXT. CLEARLAKE STREET - DAY

Maggie and Eric are walking down the festively decorated main street of Clearlake.

ERIC
 So, what's our strategy?

MAGGIE
 I think we should do a bunch of the
 small, easy things. We can rack up
 a lot of points that way.

ERIC
 But if we do a few of the big
 ticket items we can get even more.

MAGGIE
 Yeah, but, I don't know. Do you
 really want to sing Christmas
 carols on the street in front of a
 bunch of strangers?

ERIC
 These were your ideas!

MAGGIE
 (laughing)
 It doesn't mean I want to do them.

ERIC
 Come on! It's like the stamp said
 to the Christmas card... stick with
 me and we'll go places.

Maggie laughs despite herself and they head off.

EXT. CLEARLAKE STREET - DAY

Paul, Becca, and Will stand by while Ashley gets an autograph
 from a street corner Santa's.

ASHLEY
 Thanks, Santa!

SANTA
 You're welcome. Merry Christmas!

Ashley goes back to Paul, Becca, and Will

BECCA
 Twenty points! Nice job, Ashley.

They all celebrate and head off for the next task.

EXT. CLEARLAKE STREET - DAY

Maggie and Eric come out of a café with a Christmas themed
 menu, waving back over their shoulder as they exit.

ERIC
 Thank you!

MAGGIE
 A menu with a Christmas dinner item
 on it. Fifty points!

Eric gives a hearty "woohoo" and they high five.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Becca, Will, and Ashley are standing outside a nice, suburban
 church that has a big cross above the front door.

Paul comes out of a church carrying a Christmas wreath.

PAUL
 One hundred points!

WILL

Are we going to get in trouble for taking that?

PAUL

Not if they don't catch us.
(off their reaction)
I'm kidding. They let me borrow it. This is our church. We've been going here since your mom and me were kids, so they trust me.

WILL

What was mom like back then?

PAUL

Oh, the main thing I remember is that she was very free spirit.

BECCA

You're talking about our mother?

PAUL

Yes. Whenever we'd come to a fellowship event, your mom would lead an absolutely epic game of hide and seek with all the other kids. It would go on for hours.

BECCA

They let you do that in church?

PAUL

Of course. It's not just about listening to sermons and bible study. We have fun, too. And your mom was the queen of fun.

WILL

I can't picture that.

PAUL

Oh, come on. She made up this entire scavenger hunt game.

BECCA

Yeah, but I think the main reason she did it is because it involved making a to-do list.

PAUL

(smiles)
Yeah... she does like to have a plan, doesn't she?

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

She started doing that not long after our mom passed away. I think after that she felt like she had to take care of everybody... have a plan and fix everything.

WILL

(to Becca - empathetic)
She still does.

Becca nods and put her hand on Will's shoulder.

Paul lets them have their moment, then pulls out the list.

PAUL

Speaking of your mom's lists, we better get back to work on this one. What do you say? Should we go make snow angels?

ASHLEY

Yeah!

Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley head off to do their next task.

EXT. CLEARLAKE STREET - DAY

Meanwhile, Maggie and Eric finish up singing the Christmas carol on a street corner in front of a group of people.

They applaud, Maggie and Eric take a bow, and Maggie takes her phone from someone who was filming.

MAGGIE

Thank you.

Maggie and Eric start walking down the street.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I can't believe we did that!

ERIC

I'm sure we'll be invited to perform at the tree lighting ceremony in Chicago next year.

MAGGIE

Oh, absolutely. We'll make a Christmas album. A TV special.

ERIC

Our own show in Vegas.

MAGGIE

Oh! Can we have white tigers?

ERIC

It's a Christmas show, so how about white reindeer?

MAGGIE

Deal.

Maggie puts her arm in Eric's as the walk, laughing. They both realize that this is probably the first time in awhile that has happened and they like it.

ERIC

I'm having a great time.

MAGGIE

We should do this more often.

ERIC

We're going to have to if we're going to be on TV.

The two of them laugh again, walking off arm-in-arm to meet the rest of the family.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY**

Establishing the McCormick home.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Maggie is hand sewing detail on Ashley's wise man costume for the pageant and Eric is repairing a manger for the set.

MAGGIE

It's been a long time since I've sewn a Christmas pageant costume.

ERIC

Yeah, my manger-repair skills are a little rusty. But Ashley is difficult to say no to.

MAGGIE

That face! "Please Aunt Maggie. The show is tonight!"

ERIC

Do you remember how Becca and Will used to use the "cute kid" face to get us to do things?

MAGGIE

Used to? They still do. Only now it's about borrowing the car and getting an advance on their allowance.

ERIC

When was the last time we went to the Christmas pageant at our church?

MAGGIE

(beat)

I don't know. When was the last time Becca or Will were in it?

ERIC

Yeah. That's probably not a great look, is it?

MAGGIE

We're busy. People understand that.

ERIC

We say that a lot. "We're busy."
We say it at church, we say it at
work, to our friends...

Eric looks at Maggie and she meets his eyes - the unspoken comment being "to each other." Maggie changes the subject.

MAGGIE

So, yesterday was fun. Even though
we didn't win the scavenger hunt.

ERIC

It was all the pinecones they found
at 10 points each that killed us.
I still say that was bending the
rules.

MAGGIE

Let it go, sweetie.

ERIC

But it reminded me of all the
things we did when we were dating.
At Christmas we'd take sleigh rides
and go ice skating or just take
walks in the snow.

MAGGIE

We never sang Christmas carols on a
street corner when we were dating.

ERIC

Probably a good thing. You might
not have married me if you had
heard my singing voice.

MAGGIE

(joking)
You might be right.

ERIC

But seriously, Maggie... when was
the last time we took a walk in the
snow together?

Maggie doesn't have an answer for that. She takes a beat, thinks, and looks at the costume.

MAGGIE

I'm almost done with this. And
there's plenty of snow out there.

ERIC
 (smiles)
 I'll go get our coats.

Eric starts to leave the room when his phone rings. He stops, looks at the caller ID, then at Maggie.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 I have to...

Maggie's phone chimes with an incoming text. She looks at it then at Eric. She forces a smile and shrugs.

Eric answers his phone.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 Hi, Noah. The client said what?

Eric leaves the room on the call. Maggie takes a beat then picks up her phone and starts texting.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Establishing the church we saw earlier.

INT. CHURCH - RECEPTION - NIGHT

Paul and Ashley lead Maggie, Eric, Becca, and Will into the church reception area, which has lots of non-secular Christmas decorations and other congregants. Many of them greet Paul and Ashley with warm handshakes, hugs, and big smiles.

They are approached by REVEREND JOE MICHAELS (60s, warm, jovial), who embraces Paul and Ashley, who is wearing most of her wise man costume (but not the beard yet)

REVEREND MICHAELS
 Paul! Ashley! Merry Christmas!

ASHLEY
 Hi, Reverend Michaels. I'm going to be a wise man.

REVEREND MICHAELS
 I know! I think it's one of the best casting decisions we've ever made. Elizabeth is taking everyone to the back to get ready.

Reverend Michaels points at a nearby woman, who has a few other kids with her. Paul leans down to hug Ashley.

PAUL
Enjoy yourself, okay?

ASHLEY
I will. Bye, everyone. Clap loud!

Ashley runs off to go with the other kids while the family waves and cheers her on.

PAUL
Joe, you remember my sister Maggie?
And my brother-in-law Eric and my
niece and nephew Becca and Will.

Reverend Michaels greets them all with warm handshakes.

REVEREND MICHAELS
Of course! Welcome! It's so good
to see you. Merry Christmas!

MAGGIE
Thank you. We're happy to be here.

REVEREND MICHAELS
We didn't have much of a chance to
talk the last time you were here,
but I've heard stories about your
epic games of hide and seek in this
church when you were kids.

WILL
We just heard about that, too.

MAGGIE
(to Paul, smiling)
You know, I have stories, too.

REVEREND MICHAELS
I can't wait to hear them.

PAUL
And on that note, I think we should
go find seats.

Everyone laughs as Reverend Michaels ushers Eric, Becca, and Will into the sanctuary. Paul and Maggie hang back.

MAGGIE
I love how everyone treats you and
Ashley here.

PAUL
What do you mean?

MAGGIE

Well, you know... trying to cheer you guys up by being so happy.

PAUL

That's the way it always is. They don't treat any different than they treat anyone else.

Paul points and Maggie sees everyone being warm, hugging, chatting, laughing.

MAGGIE

But you just had this big loss. I thought people would be tiptoeing around you like...

PAUL

Like you've been?

Maggie doesn't respond to that, but it hits home.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Losing someone is hard... Reverend Michaels' brother just passed a few weeks ago. But when you're here... surrounded by all this love, from people, from God... it's not loss, it's peace.

Paul heads into the sanctuary as Maggie takes one more look around at the congregants and the church.

MONTAGE OF SCENES: CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

As warm Christmas music plays, we see a montage of scenes of the Christmas pageant and the family's reaction to it.

1. This is small-town church Christmas pageant with a simple backdrop, a few props, and homemade costumes.
2. The audience is smiling and enjoying it.
3. Ashley makes her first appearance complete with beard.
4. Paul is taking video and photos, smiling broadly.
5. Maggie, Eric, Becca, and Will are all enjoying it, too.
6. One of the other "wise men" drops one of the gifts and it rolls into the audience. Ashley chases it and we see the family - and everyone else - laughing and applauding warmly.

7. The cast takes its bows as everyone cheers.

INT. CHURCH - GATHERING HALL - NIGHT

Maggie and Eric are at a table eating Christmas cookies in a gathering hall filled with congregants, Christmas decorations, food, and more. Everyone is laughing, playing games, eating, and generally enjoying each others' company.

Ashley is nearby receiving congratulations and praise from Paul, Becca, Will and others on her performance.

MAGGIE

Our kids will be amazing when they grow up, but we're all going to wind up working for Ashley.

ERIC

One hundred percent.

They appreciate the scene for a moment as they eat cookies.

MAGGIE

Does our church have this?

ERIC

(re: cookies)

Yes, but these are so much better than the ones Mrs. Fletcher makes.

MAGGIE

Not the cookies, this...

(points to room)

It's like a big family Christmas where everyone is thrilled to be spending time with each other.

ERIC

Our church does this kind of thing.

(beat)

We just don't go anymore.

MAGGIE

Why not?

ERIC

Do we need to have the "we're too busy" conversation again?

MAGGIE

No, I know. But maybe this is one of things we should be busy with.

ERIC

Your color coded schedule is going to melt.

MAGGIE

We can find a way to make it work.

ERIC

Maggie, I'm all for it. But how? If we add something, we're going to have to subtract something.

MAGGIE

Danielle and I keep saying we're going to hire someone to help with the agency...

ERIC

And...

MAGGIE

And then we get too busy to interview anyone.

ERIC

(reaches for phone)
Speaking of work, I forgot to turn my phone back on after the pageant.

MAGGIE

(reaches for phone)
Oh! Me, too.

The both pull out their phones, look at them for a moment, look at each other, then put their phones down and return to eating the cookies and watching the fellowship in action.

EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - NIGHT

Establishing the McCormick home.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Becca and Will are in the kitchen, her on her phone as usual, and Will at his laptop computer.

Maggie and Eric enter.

MAGGIE

Goodnight kids.

WILL
 (distracted)
 G'night.

BECCA
 (same)
 Goodnight. Sweet dreams.

Becca and Will return to their devices.

ERIC
 (to Maggie, but also not)
 Sweetheart, it looks like I'll need
 to translate what you just said
 into teenager.
 (to Becca and Will)
 "It's late. Go to bed."

Becca and Will know it's pointless to quibble, so they start
 collecting their things.

MAGGIE
 Did you guys have a good time
 tonight?

Becca and Will exchange a very brief glance, then turn back
 to their folks with smiles.

BECCA
 Absolutely. I didn't expect the
 pageant to be that good.

WILL
 Yeah, Ashley was great.

BECCA
 She's going to be a star, that one.

WILL
 I'd buy a ticket.

Maggie and Eric are a little suspicious of this exchange.

MAGGIE
 So... would you be open to maybe
 doing more at our church?

Becca and Will exchange another brief glance.

BECCA
 Sure.

WILL
 Yeah, that would be great.

ERIC
Really? Just like that?

BECCA
Yeah. I've always wanted to spend more time in a "room with a pew!"

ERIC
(fist bump for the pun)
Nice.

WILL
And I've been feeling like my practice college applications are light on community activities, so this could fix that problem.

BECCA
So, yeah. We're down. Goodnight.

WILL
Goodnight.

Becca and Will head off to bed. Maggie and Eric take a beat.

ERIC
That was way too easy.

MAGGIE
It is almost Christmas. Maybe they're just filled with the holiday spirit?

They take a beat and look at each other with skepticism.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
(laughing)
Room with a pew?

ERIC
(same)
Fixing his practice college applications?

MAGGIE
They're just like us.

Maggie and Eric stop and the laughter fades. They wonder if that's a good thing.

Obviously a bit troubled by this, they head off to bed.

END ACT FIVE

ACT SIX**EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - AFTERNOON**

Establishing the McCormick home.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - FAMILY ROOM - AFTERNOON

Maggie is standing in front of Eric, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley with a Cheshire cat grin on her face.

MAGGIE

You guys are going to love what I
have planned for us tonight.

She turns to a nearby box and pulls out an "ugly" Christmas sweater, holding it up to them.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Ta-da!

BECCA

We're making ugly Christmas
sweaters?

MAGGIE

No, we're wearing them! They have
a competition in Bluffton. I got
one for everybody!

She starts handing them out.

PAUL

Uh, actually Maggie, this is great,
but I was hoping we could do one of
our Christmas traditions tonight.

MAGGIE

Oh. Okay... what is it?

ASHLEY

The Christmas campfire!

MAGGIE

What's that?

PAUL

Every year, Ashley, Amy, and I go
out to a clearing in the woods
behind the house and we have a
campfire.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

We sing carols, talk about our favorite Christmas memories, share our Christmas wishes...

ASHLEY

Don't forget about snowman smores! We roast marshmallows and put them on the graham crackers so they look like snowmen.

MAGGIE

It sounds great, but... I already got the sweaters.

PAUL

Maggie, it's four days until Christmas. This is... it's important to us.

Maggie looks at Eric, Becca, and Will.

MAGGIE

What do you guys think?

BECCA

I could go for a smore.

WILL

We don't get to have many campfires in Chicago.

Maggie looks at Eric.

ERIC

(shrugs)

Looks like the votes are in.

MAGGIE

Okay... the campfire it is. But on one condition.

Maggie smiles as the others look a bit concerned.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - NIGHT

We start on the campfire in a clearing in the woods behind the McCormick house and then PAN around to see everyone wearing the ugly Christmas sweaters visible under coats.

PAUL

Okay, marshmallows ready!

Everyone holds up their sticks with marshmallows.

PAUL (CONT'D)
And... roast!

They all hold their marshmallows over the fire.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Who wants to start with their
favorite Christmas memory?

WILL
What kind of memory?

PAUL
Anything. It could be your
favorite tradition or...

WILL
Favorite present you ever got?

PAUL
Sure. Name yours and then choose
someone to go next.

WILL
Okay, uh... my favorite was the
chemistry set I got when I was
eight. I loved making slime.

ERIC
The carpeting in the living room
didn't love it.

WILL
Yeah, still sorry about that.
Okay, Mom you go.

MAGGIE
Oh, alright... let's see. I guess
it would be my first bike. I made
dad clear a path in the snow on the
street out front so I could ride it
back and forth all day.

PAUL
And it kept snowing so he ran in
front of you with a shovel!

MAGGIE
(laughs)
Yes. It was a great day. Ashley?

ASHLEY
The pony I always wanted.

PAUL
You never got a pony for Christmas.

ASHLEY
There's still time, Dad. Uncle
Eric goes next.

ERIC
I'd say... the tie Becca and Will
made for me that they painted
little gavels on.

BECCA
Really? It was so ugly!

ERIC
I loved that tie. I wore it court.
The judge didn't think it was funny
when I tried to bang it on the
table and say "No, you're out of
order." Paul, what was yours?

PAUL
That's easy. It was Christmas
morning when Amy and I found out
that we were going to have Ashley.

ASHLEY
So, I was your Christmas present?

PAUL
Best one I ever got.
(they hug)
Okay, I guess that leaves Becca.

BECCA
No contest. My first phone.

MAGGIE
Come on. Don't you have one that's
more, I don't know... personal?
Something that's more in keeping
with the spirit of Christmas?

BECCA
My phone is! When I got my first
one I remember thinking, now I can
stay in touch with my friends and
family. I can take pictures and
save all my memories. It's like I
was suddenly connected to the
community and the whole world.
What's more Christmas than that?

All of the family takes a beat and appreciates that. Ashley starts to sing a Christmas carol and everyone joins in.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - NIGHT

As Maggie, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley sing another carol at the campfire, Eric stands off watching with a smile. Paul sees him and joins.

PAUL
Everything okay?

ERIC
Just enjoying the view.

PAUL
Yeah... I know what you mean. This is why I love doing this every year. It's a great way to feel closer to the people you love. Ashley and I needed this.

ERIC
We did, too. Finding ways to feel closer should be at the top of our family's Christmas wish list. Especially for me and Maggie.

PAUL
She mentioned something about that.

ERIC
Yeah. It's so easy to get distracted from what matters.
(beat - jokes it away)
Like snowman smores.

PAUL
(smiles)
Yes, those are important. But so is making sure you're not missing out on things. You can't let the opportunity to create memories pass you by.

ERIC
(another joke)
Apparently Becca's phone is great for capturing memories, so...

PAUL
Eric...

Eric takes a beat and gets serious.

ERIC

I'm not great at talking about stuff like this. But I understand what you're saying. And I appreciate it. I just don't know what to do about it.

PAUL

Well, first and foremost I'd say that standing outside the circle watching is not the same as being a part of the circle.

Eric absorbs that.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Even if the circle is just you and Maggie.

Paul heads back to join the group. Eric takes a beat to think about what he has just heard, then follows.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - NIGHT

A little later, Maggie, Eric, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley are still gathered around the campfire.

ASHLEY

What's my Christmas wish? Did I mention the pony?

PAUL

Not a Christmas present, a wish. Preferably one that doesn't require a barn.

ASHLEY

Hmmm... okay, I wish that on Christmas morning when everyone opens their presents, they get exactly what they wanted.

MAGGIE

That's very sweet, Ashley.

ASHLEY

It's also a hint, dad.

PAUL

I got that. Becca? Will?

BECCA

How about... I wish that my brother gets into every single college that he applies for. Even the ones he doesn't really want to go to.

WILL

Okay. And I wish that my sister enjoys her gap year.

MAGGIE

ERIC

She's not taking a gap year. No gap year.

There is much laughter.

PAUL

Maggie? Eric?

They glance at each other.

MAGGIE

Come back to us. You go first.

PAUL

What's my Christmas wish?
(looks around)
This, right here.

MAGGIE

Yeah... that's a good one.

ERIC

Agreed.

They all take a beat and then Becca launches them into another Christmas carol. During this, Eric leans over to talk to Maggie.

ERIC (CONT'D)

How about that taking that walk in the snow we've been talking about?

Maggie smiles and nods then turns to the group.

MAGGIE

We'll be back soon.

Maggie and Eric get up and leave. Paul smiles as they continue to sing the carol.

EXT. CLEARLAKE STREET - NIGHT

Maggie and Eric are walking arm in arm down a street in Paul's neighborhood, passing by festively decorated houses.

Eric notices that the lights from the houses as reflected by the snow play across their faces.

ERIC

You look like a Christmas tree
again.

Maggie sees what he is talking about - she smiles.

MAGGIE

Oh, yeah. You, too.

It starts to snow lightly, creating a very romantic scene.

ERIC

We need to do this more often.

MAGGIE

I agree.

(beat - grows serious)

But... you know that taking more
walks in the snow isn't going to
fix everything.

ERIC

It might. It's like... Christmas
magic. That fixes everything.

MAGGIE

Eric, I'm serious. I think there
are things we need to talk about.

ERIC

We can walk and talk. I can chew
gum at the same time, too.

MAGGIE

(getting frustrated)

Eric, come on...

ERIC

Maggie, look around. It's just the
two of us, it's snowing, it's
Christmas. Can't we just
appreciate the moment?

MAGGIE

But that's what I'm saying. It's
only a moment.

(MORE)

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Then we'll be back with the jobs
and the kids and putting everything
else ahead of you and me. We need
to come up with a plan that will...

ERIC

(growing frustrated also)
A plan? Maggie, we love each
other, right?

MAGGIE

Of course.

ERIC

Love doesn't need a plan. You
can't make one of your schedules
for love.

(tries to joke)

And even if you did, you already
used the red pen for all the
Christmas activities.

MAGGIE

Can you be serious for a minute?

ERIC

But that's what *I'm* saying. This
really shouldn't be that hard.

MAGGIE

Then why is it?

They are both silent on that for a minute as the snow
intensifies a little. Eric looks around.

ERIC

It's starting to snow harder.

They stop, unlinking arms, as they look around.

MAGGIE

Should we head back?

ERIC

That's probably a good idea.

Maggie and Eric, no longer arm-in-arm, turn around and head
back toward Paul's house.

END ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN**EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY**

Establishing the McCormick house.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Ashley is busy working on a craft with Paul's help - an angel for the Christmas tree. Eric, Becca, and Will are, as usual, engaged in their own pursuits on their phones or computers.

Maggie enters with a box and a big smile.

MAGGIE

Who's ready for Christmas trivia?
I came up with all the questions
myself!

Maggie begins to distribute small silver bells to everyone.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Everyone take a silver bell. Get
it? Now, whoever rings in first
and answers the question right,
gets five points. Becca, Will...

Becca and Will somewhat reluctantly put away their devices. Eric does the same. Paul picks up his bell but Ashley leaves hers on the table as she continues to work on the angel.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Ashley, grab your bell.

ASHLEY

I'm not done with my angel yet...

PAUL

It's okay, sweetie. We can finish
it after the game.

Ashley takes a beat and then picks up her bell.

ASHLEY

Okay. I'm ready.

MAGGIE

Here we go. Question one. What
other name does Santa Claus go by?

Will beats Eric, Paul, and Becca who all ring their bells.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Will!

WILL

Saint Nick.

MAGGIE

Very good! I also would've accepted Kris Kringle. Will is on the board with five points. Okay, question number two. Which of Santa's reindeer has the same name as a mascot for another holiday?

BECCA

(beat - rings bell)
Cupid. For Valentine's Day.

MAGGIE

Yes! Five points!

Ashley puts down her bell and turns back to the angel.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Question three. Ashley, you ready?
I think you'll know this one.

ASHLEY

I want to finish the angel for Mommy.

MAGGIE

(beat)
You're doing that for your mom?

ASHLEY

(not sad - hopeful)
Uh-huh. It's to remind me that she's an angel and she's watching over me. Isn't that cool?

BECCA

That's very cool, Ashley. Do you mind if I help?

ASHLEY

Sure! You can put the glitter on the wings.

Becca and Will go to join Ashley.

WILL

I'll supervise. Becca always uses too much glitter.

ASHLEY
 (shakes head)
 No such thing as too much glitter.

As the kids work on the craft project, Maggie realizes what she interrupted and feels badly. She gives an aside to Paul.

MAGGIE
 I didn't know what it was for.

PAUL
 It's okay. We can play later.

MAGGIE
 Of course. This is more important.

Maggie watches for a moment, and goes into the kitchen. Eric takes a beat and follows.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Maggie busies herself in the kitchen as Eric joins her. They are out of earshot of the rest of the family - Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley - visible in the adjacent family room.

ERIC
 Are you okay? I know you worked hard on the game.

MAGGIE
 It's not about the game. It's about... I've been running myself ragged trying to come up with all these fun Christmas activities to bring the family together and none of it is working.

ERIC
 (points to family room)
 But the family is coming together.

MAGGIE
 I didn't do that.
 (rings her bell)
 I did this..,

ERIC
 Maggie, this is kind of what I was saying last night. You don't need to try so hard all the time. Maybe you can just sit back and let it happen naturally.

MAGGIE

(beat - hard to say)
I'm not great at that.

ERIC

I know. But that's why we work.
We balance each other out. I help
with the things you're not great at
and you help with the things I'm
not great at. Like singing
Christmas carols on street corners.

MAGGIE

(smiles)
That's the example you're using?

ERIC

(smiles, nods)
Okay... how about... like talking
about things that matter instead of
making jokes?

Maggie neither confirms nor denies this - she smiles, a
little sadly.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I think we work best when we meet
each other halfway, so... let's
talk. And then we figure out what
needs to be fixed...

MAGGIE

And what's already working that we
can just leave alone?

Eric smiles and puts his hand on hers.

ERIC

When we get home...

MAGGIE

No, Eric... I'm worried that when
we get home we'll just fall back
into the same pattern. We've
talked about talking before but we
never do.

ERIC

Tonight then. After everyone else
had gone to bed.

MAGGIE

Okay. Thank you.

ERIC

I love you.

MAGGIE

I love you, too.

They exchange a kiss and then turn toward the family room where Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley are all working, laughing, and having a good time.

Eric glances at Maggie and they go toward the family room.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Maggie and Eric come into the room. Becca and Will are working on their own angels alongside Paul and Ashley who are working on the one for Amy.

MAGGIE

You guys are doing your own angels?

WILL

Yeah. I'm doing one for grandpa and Becca is doing one for grandma. It was Uncle Paul's idea.

Maggie looks at Paul, who smiles and shrugs.

PAUL

We can always use a few more angels looking over us.

MAGGIE

Yes, we can.

(beat)

Need some help?

BECCA

Sure.

Becca and Will make room for Maggie and Eric.

MAGGIE

Christmas tree ornaments. Mom and Dad would've loved this.

PAUL

Are you kidding? We would've had to make so many of these that we would've needed a second tree.

ASHLEY

What was grandma like?

PAUL
(warm smile)
She was... She was the best.

MAGGIE
Especially at Christmas. She was
always singing or baking or...

PAUL
Watching Christmas movies.

MAGGIE
Yes! She loved Christmas movies.
They'd be on non-stop from
Thanksgiving to New Year's Eve.

PAUL
It drove Dad nuts.

BECCA
He didn't like Christmas movies?

MAGGIE
He said he didn't. But he watched
them, too. And he'd get choked up
at the happy endings...

PAUL
And blame it on pollen.

ASHLEY
(puzzled)
What's pollen?

PAUL
Something you don't have much of at
Christmas.

ASHLEY
Like picnics.

Maggie and Paul exchange a glance and both start laughing.

ERIC
What's so funny?

PAUL
Our parents tried to have a
Christmas picnic in the back yard
one year.

MAGGIE
It was freezing. The blanket got
all wet and the food was...

As Maggie continues the story, we shift our focus to the angels spread out in front of them.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Maggie is looking at the now finished angels on the tree. Paul walks up to join her.

Maggie straightens the ornament for their mother. Paul chuckles a little.

MAGGIE

What?

PAUL

You're just like her. She never would've tolerated a crooked Christmas tree ornament.

MAGGIE

Mom wasn't like that. She was always smiling and laughing.

PAUL

But she always had to have a plan, too. Our vacations... dad loved to take side roads and see what we might find. Mom held the map and made sure we stayed on track.

MAGGIE

I held the map after she passed.

Maggie takes a moment as this discovery sinks in.

PAUL

Thank you for coming to visit for Christmas. It's been great to have you here.

MAGGIE

I feel like I should be thanking you. If you had told me a few weeks ago that my kids would be making Christmas tree ornaments, I never would've believed it. It's the little things, I guess.

PAUL

Luke 16... Jesus said, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." God gives us what we need, even if we don't always know what that is.

MAGGIE

But isn't there also some bible verse about being self sufficient?

PAUL

Hmmm... the only one that pops to mind is Corinthians... "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

MAGGIE

So, we have to be weak for God to be great?

PAUL

No, it's more like God is perfect so we don't have to be.

MAGGIE

Well, I don't claim to be perfect, but I think it's better to rely on yourself than to hope that God will provide, so... I guess we'll just agree to disagree.

PAUL

I hear that all the time at my speaking engagements. It's what people say when they don't want to talk about things that matter.

Maggie takes that to heart, especially after her conversation with Eric earlier.

MAGGIE

Maybe your next novel should be about our family. There's probably enough material in there for a seven-book series.

(beat)

Eric's waiting for me. Good night.

PAUL

Good night.

Maggie leaves and Paul looks at his office, thoughtfully.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - OFFICE - NIGHT

Paul walks into his office and looks at the computer - the blank document is up on the screen. He appears to be formulating an idea and heads toward the desk.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Maggie walks down the hallway to the door of the room Becca is staying in, which is slightly ajar. Just as she is about to knock, she hears Becca talking to Will and stops.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - GUEST ROOM #2 - NIGHT

Becca and Will are talking in the guest room. We begin to INTERCUT between them and Maggie in the hallway, listening and reacting to what they are saying.

BECCA

Good job on the angel thing. It almost looked like you were really enjoying it.

WILL

I was using the arc of the angel wings to calculate the distance between the body and the tip.

BECCA

There's no way we are related.

WILL

It made mom and dad happy, so that's all that matters.

BECCA

They seem to be relaxing a little bit, so yeah. Pretending like we're actually into all this stuff is hard, but it's worth it.

WILL

We just have to make it through Christmas and we can get back to our real lives.

BECCA

Two more days.

Will and Becca fist bump each other and then look at their phone and laptop respectively.

Through the slightly ajar door, we see a devastated Maggie pause for a beat and then walk away.

Will looks over at Becca.

WILL
But the angels were kinda cool.

BECCA
Yeah. I guess not everything has been a bust on this trip. I liked Santa's Selfies.

WILL
And the escape room was fun.

BECCA
I think we need to go tobogganing when we get home.

WILL
I get to ride up front.

BECCA
Not if I call it first.

As they continue this, we see that they are actually enjoying things more than they say they are.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - GUEST ROOM #1 - NIGHT

Maggie, still upset, enters her guest room and finds Eric on the bed, asleep, surrounded by papers about his big case.

Disappointed again, Maggie turns and leaves.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Maggie approaches the tree and looks at the angel she created for her mother. She reaches out to touch it lovingly.

MAGGIE
Mom... how do I fix this?

We hold on Maggie as she tries to figure out what to do.

END ACT SEVEN

ACT EIGHT**EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY**

Establishing the McCormick house.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Maggie is in the kitchen working on a pie when Eric enters. He takes a beat and then tries a joke.

ERIC

What did the pie say to his wife?
I'll never *dessert* you.

Maggie gives him a look that says she's not in the mood. Eric takes a beat, then goes over to her.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I'm really sorry I fell asleep last night. I just meant to close my eyes for a minute.

MAGGIE

(beat - means it)
It's okay.

She gives him a peck on the cheek then returns to the pie. Eric looks at the recipe on the counter.

ERIC

Christmas Candy Cane pie? Did you get the recipe from Mrs. Claus?

MAGGIE

They're doing a fellowship hour after the Christmas Eve service at the church tonight. I found Paul in here earlier staring at the recipe with a look of horror on his face and took pity on him.

ERIC

You're a good sister. Can I help?

MAGGIE

Sure. You can mix the filling.

Maggie makes room and they work in silence for a few moments.

ERIC
 Maybe we can find time today...

MAGGIE
 We're taking the kids ice skating
 and then Christmas Eve dinner and
 church and the fellowship...

ERIC
 And tomorrow is Christmas...

MAGGIE
 And then it's back to Chicago.

ERIC
 So, then we'll talk when we get
 back home.
 (off Maggie's skepticism)
 We will. We won't let ourselves
 get distracted this time.
 (beat)
 But we probably should wait until
 I'm done working on the merger.
 It's just taking up so much room in
 my brain.

MAGGIE
 (beat)
 Right. And I've got four new
 properties coming on the market
 right after Christmas.

ERIC
 Becca is cheering the basketball
 team starting in January...

MAGGIE
 And Will has the academic decathlon
 coming up...

The two look at each other, unable to say what they need to
 say, so they return their attention to the pie.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - ASHLEY'S ROOM - DAY

Maggie passes by the door to Ashley's room, where Ashley has
 a bunch of different clothes spread out on her bed.

Maggie stops, knocks on the door frame, and enters.

MAGGIE
 Those are pretty dresses.

ASHLEY

I'm trying to figure out which one to wear to church tonight. The green one and the red one are Christmasy colors but everyone is going to do that, so maybe I should be different and wear blue.

MAGGIE

Well, I think you'll look beautiful in anything you wear, but... if it was up to me, I'd go with the green. It'll bring out your eyes.

ASHLEY

Good point. Green it is. Now... shoes.

As Ashley starts looking at shoe choices, Maggie looks around the room with nostalgia.

MAGGIE

You know, this was my room when I was a kid.

ASHLEY

It was?

MAGGIE

Yeah. I had the bed over here and a little desk over there. And I had this wallpaper... flowers.

ASHLEY

Sounds pretty.

MAGGIE

It was. I remember every year on Christmas Eve I would put a mountain of pillows by that window and try to stay up all night so I could see Santa Claus when he came to deliver presents. And every year I'd fall asleep twenty minutes later. Never did catch him.

ASHLEY

(sings)

"He knows when you're sleeping..."

(speaks)

I think he waits until you are.

MAGGIE

Probably.

ASHLEY

Did Becca and Will do that, too?

MAGGIE

Oh yeah. Becca would sneak downstairs after we fell asleep and set up camp by the fireplace. And Will would drag a chair into the laundry room.

ASHLEY

Why the laundry room?

MAGGIE

Something about the trajectory of the flight path and... Something. I don't know. He thought that room was going to be the best one to see the sleigh and the reindeer coming in for a landing on the roof.

Ashley laughs and Maggie does to, but then grows melancholy.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Of course they don't do any of that anymore. Now they just want to "get through Christmas."

ASHLEY

I think they like it more than you think they do.

MAGGIE

Really?

ASHLEY

Uh-huh. I think they like it more than *they* think they do, too.

MAGGIE

I hope you're right.

ASHLEY

You just have to have faith.

It's clear that Maggie doesn't believe that just having faith is enough.

Ashley glances out the window and notices something.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Oh, no!

MAGGIE
What's wrong?

Ashley rushes out and a concerned Maggie follows.

EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY

One of the inflatables has lost air. Ashley rushes over to it see what's wrong. A moment later, Maggie joins.

ASHLEY
We have to fix it.

MAGGIE
It's okay. Your dad showed me how to do this...

She inspects the inflatable for a moment.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Yeah, see... the hose just came loose. All we have to do is...

She reconnects the air hose and the inflatable starts filling with air again.

ASHLEY
Yay! Thanks, Aunt Maggie.

MAGGIE
You're welcome.

ASHLEY
This is my favorite part. When they fill up with air and start dancing like the others.

MAGGIE
Dancing?

Ashley points at the other inflatables that are moving around in the light breeze, swaying and bouncing as if dancing.

ASHLEY
They're dancing because they're excited about Christmas.

Ashley dances around them, overjoyed in a way that only 10-year-old girls can be. Maggie marvels at this for a moment.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)
Why aren't you dancing, Aunt Maggie?

MAGGIE
(beat - sad smile)
I guess I just can't hear the
music.

Maggie watches Ashley dance with a sad smile.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

Eric, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley are all wearing their finery, putting on coats at the front door. Paul calls off.

PAUL
Maggie! We're going to be late.

Maggie comes down the stairs, dressed casually.

BECCA
You're wearing that to church?
Then why did we have to get all
dressed up?

MAGGIE
You know, guys, I'm sorry... I'm
just not feeling very well.

ERIC
What's wrong?

MAGGIE
I think I had one too many helpings
of stuffing at dinner. Now I'm
stuffed. I'm just going to stay
home tonight.

ERIC
Do you want me to stay with you?

MAGGIE
No, that's okay. I'm sure I'll be
fine by the time you get back. Go.
Have a good time.

PAUL
All right. Everybody head to the
car and I'll be there in a minute.

Eric kisses Maggie and he, Becca, Will, and Ashley exit.
Paul turns to Maggie and appraises her.

MAGGIE
What?

PAUL

I'm just trying to count up in my head all the times you used the "I'm not feeling well" thing to get out of doing stuff you didn't want to do when we were kids.

MAGGIE

I have a delicate constitution.

PAUL

(smiles)

Uh-huh. Maggie... come to church with us. The Christmas Eve service is always special. I think it'll do you good.

MAGGIE

I just don't think it's...

(beat)

Everybody keeps telling me to have faith, but... If I went to church tonight, of all nights, I'd feel like a hypocrite. And what's that old saying? "Hypocrites honor with their lips, but their hearts are far away."

Paul takes a beat, nods, and then heads to the door, but stops and turns back before he leaves.

PAUL

By the way... you just paraphrased a passage from the bible. Mark 7:6.

(smiles)

Maybe your heart isn't as far away as you think.

Paul leaves as Maggie takes a moment to think about that.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

From the kitchen, we see Maggie in the family room watching a Christmas movie on TV. She pauses it and picks up her mug of hot chocolate then heads toward the kitchen.

She stops when she sees the pie she and Eric made sitting on a counter (not one that is highly visible to the room).

MAGGIE

They forgot the pie.

She takes a beat, then grabs the pie and heads for the door.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Maggie pulls up in front of the church in her car, gets out, and rushes up to the doors of the church with the pie.

She stops when she hears the congregants singing a traditional Christmas hymn. The service has already started.

A man and woman rushes up the walk. We'll call her JANET.

JANET

I told you we were going to be late. The service already started.

As they approach the door, Maggie stops them.

MAGGIE

Excuse me. Hi, my brother Paul McCormick is...

JANET

Oh, I know Paul. He's wonderful.

MAGGIE

Yes, he is. But they're inside and forgot the pie for the fellowship. Do you mind taking it in? I don't want to interrupt the service.

JANET

Sure. I'd be happy to.

Maggie hands the pie to Janet.

JANET (CONT'D)

Merry Christmas.

MAGGIE

Merry Christmas to you, too.

Janet and the man enter the church with the pie.

Maggie takes a beat then turns to leave, taking a few steps away from the church.

A light snow begins to fall and Maggie stops, looking up at the flakes wafting down.

From behind her, the sound of music coming from the church - a soloist, singing a beautiful Christmas song.

Maggie turns back to the church and listens for a moment, a small smile forming.

As she does, there is a white light that begins to ripple across her face and body, much in the way we've seen it a few times before.

This time Maggie notices it. She looks at her arms and her touches her face, the light and the snow creating a magical effect all around her.

Maggie looks for the source of the light and realizes its coming from the lit up cross on the church, which is reflecting in sparkles in the snow all around her

She takes a few moments to soak that up, seemingly surrounded by this glittering light and the beautiful music.

Maggie looks at the front doors of the church.

Then she looks away, toward her car sitting at the curb.

We end with Maggie conflicted about which way to go.

END ACT EIGHT

ACT NINE**EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT**

Establishing the church as the song continues.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Maggie enters the sanctuary and watches from the back as the singer at the head of the sanctuary continues to sing the joyful Christmas song.

Maggie smiles, enjoying the music for a moment and then begins to move - swaying back and forth to the music. She's not dancing, really, just moving.

In that moment, she finds herself transported as her heart begins to fill with the kind of joy that Ashley had as she danced around the inflatables.

Maggie enjoys the music for a moment and then sees her family in a nearby pew. Eric, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley are all obviously rapt by music - all moving, swaying, smiling.

The singer finishes the song and Reverend Michaels gets up to delivery his sermon.

REVEREND MICHAELS

Thank you, Elena. That was beautiful. What a perfect way to receive the Christmas spirit that God has sent us.

(beat)

Tomorrow is Christmas. But you all know about that. What I want to talk about tonight is the day *after* Christmas. That's when everyone starts asking, "Oh, what did you get for Christmas? What were the presents under your tree?" And of course most of the time they aren't asking because they really want to know, they just want to tell you what they got.

There is appreciative laughter from the congregants.

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)

And it's usually something much better, right? "Oh, you got a tie?

(MORE)

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)
That's nice. I got a boat! I got
a car." What else?

Ashley pipes up from the sanctuary.

ASHLEY
A pony!

REVEREND MICHAELS
Yes, a pony. A pony would be good.

Everyone laughs again as Paul hugs Ashley. Maggie, still in the back, loves hearing this.

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)
And if that happens, I want you to let them have it. I want you to let them "win." Because in your heart you will know that you got the greatest gifts of all. They aren't things you'll find wrapped in shiny paper or tied up in colorful bows under the tree. No, these are the gifts bestowed upon us by God, who gave us his only Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

The congregants respond with a warm "Amen."

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)
And from that one gift... that one precious, undeniable gift... we receive so many more. It's like we opened a present from under the tree and found it filled with more presents... So many that they're impossible to count. Innumerable. Hope. Joy. Friendship. Peace. Community. Love. Family.

With this, Maggie's eyes start to glisten as she looks at her family in the pew ahead of her.

She takes a moment, then sneaks down a side aisle and joins them in the pew. They are all surprised to see her, but also thrilled. Maggie and Paul exchange a meaningful glance.

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)
As you all know, my younger brother Steven passed away a few weeks ago. He loved Christmas. Everything about it.

(MORE)

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)

He would put so many lights on his house that people thought he was trying to warn ships away from nearby rocks.

Another appreciative laugh from the congregants.

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)

Steven was one of those gifts from God in my life. And he remains so today, and every day, because I know he's still here with me. I know he's waiting to welcome me when I make my journey home.

We focus on Paul and Ashley, who are connecting to this in a deeply felt way, smiling and appreciating it.

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)

Luckily I'll know the way because there will be so many lights.

More appreciative laughter.

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)

You see, the gifts that God gives us are the greatest we will ever receive. Better than a boat. Better than a car. And yes, Ashley... even better than a pony.

Ashley smiles and nods as Eric, Becca, Will, and Paul look at her with smiles of their own.

REVEREND MICHAELS (CONT'D)

But they're also the greatest gifts we can give. First Peter 4:10... "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's grace." Hope. Joy. Friendship. Peace. Community. Love. Family. And so many more that we're still trying to unwrap. These are the gifts I want you to remember the day after Christmas and the day after that and every day after that.

(beat)

"For God so loved the world... that he gave his only son..." What better gift could there be than that? In Jesus' name, Amen.

The congregation responds with an "Amen" as the choir gets up to sing a lively Christmas hymn. Everyone gets up and joins.

Maggie, Eric, Paul, Becca, Will, and Ashley sing along while hugging each other and smiling.

INT. CHURCH - RECEPTION - NIGHT

Everyone is gathered in the fellowship area while Christmas music plays and people eat, chat, and laugh.

Eric, Becca, Will, and Ashley are enjoying themselves while Paul pulls Maggie aside.

PAUL

What made you change your mind?

MAGGIE

I guess I finally heard the music.
(off his confusion)
It's hard to explain.

PAUL

Most good things are.

MAGGIE

Paul... I'm sorry.

PAUL

You made it here. That's all that matters.

MAGGIE

Not just for tonight... for...
(beat)
Ever since you moved back here we've been... there's been this distance between us. And not one you can be measure in miles. I'm sorry I didn't do something about that sooner.

PAUL

I didn't either. I'm sorry, too.

MAGGIE

Do you think we can bridge that distance?

PAUL

I know we can. And we're going to have to, because I'm going to need your help.

MAGGIE

With what?

PAUL

You said I should write my next novel about our family. I prayed about it and... you were right.

MAGGIE

You're going to write about us?

PAUL

Yes. Mom, dad, you, me... Christmas ornaments bought on road trips. Santa Claus at the mall. Tobogganing injuries. Amy... how she helped me find my way back to God. The kids... escape rooms and Santa's selfies. But mostly about our connection as a family, even when that connection may have been difficult to find. And our way back to each other.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

I'd read that book.

Paul draws Maggie into a hug.

PAUL

I love you, Sis.

MAGGIE

I love you, too, Bro.

They continue to hug.

INT. CHURCH - GATHERING HALL - NIGHT

Maggie goes to join Eric, Becca, and Will.

ERIC

Are you ready to go?

MAGGIE

Not quite. There's something I want to talk to you all about. When we get back to Chicago, I'm going to be more involved in our church.

(MORE)

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

And listen, I'm not going to force any of you to do anything you don't want to do, but I'm hoping... I hope you'll want to join me.

ERIC

We're going to need more pens for the schedule.

MAGGIE

No. I'm throwing the schedule away.

BECCA

What? But you love the schedule.

WILL

Isn't it bolted the wall?

MAGGIE

I'll get a crowbar.

Maggie draws them all close.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I love you guys so much. More than anything in the world. You are the best gifts. But we have work to do. I don't want to have to rely on a schedule for us to spend time together as a family. I want us to put that first.

(beat - looks around)

And I think the church might be a good place to start doing that.

They all look around... the room is filled with friends, a community, love, hope, and faith.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

This is what family is about. This is what Christmas is about. And I think we can have this all the time, not just on December 25th.

Eric, Becca, and Will all smile and nod.

BECCA

I think you're right, Mom.

WILL

Me, too.

ERIC

I can't wait to get started.

They all have a big group hug, then separate.

MAGGIE

Becca, Will... go get your Uncle Paul and head home with him.

WILL

What about you guys?

MAGGIE

(looks at Eric)

We're going to take a walk home... in the snow.

The kids head off to find Paul. Eric takes a beat, then holds out his hand. Maggie takes it and they exit.

EXT. CLEARLAKE STREET - NIGHT

Eric and Maggie walk down a festively decorated street in the light snowfall holding hands. It's quiet and peaceful.

MAGGIE

It's so quiet.

ERIC

It is.

MAGGIE

(smiles)

I was sure you were going to make a "Not a creature was stirring" joke there.

ERIC

(smiles)

If you can get rid of the schedule, I can lay off the jokes.

MAGGIE

Well... maybe just for tonight.

ERIC

Deal.

They walk for a few more moments.

MAGGIE

I've been trying to figure out how to say what I want to say.

ERIC

Me, too.

MAGGIE

But what I think it comes down is this... we spend time together. We eat together...

ERIC

Sometimes.

MAGGIE

Yes, sometimes. We talk every day. There's nobody in the world that I trust more and love with all my heart the way I love you.

ERIC

For someone who didn't know what to say, you're doing a good job.

MAGGIE

But Eric... despite being such a huge part of each other's lives, we haven't been "present" in each other's lives. It's like we're two reindeer pulling the same sleigh, but we're so busy getting Santa where he needs to go...

ERIC

... that we forget that we're going there together.

MAGGIE

Exactly.

ERIC

It's not because we don't love each other. I think we just... it's like we see each other every day but...

MAGGIE

...we stopped seeing each other.

Eric stops and turns to face Maggie.

ERIC

Listen, we can talk about what we did and didn't do and what we need to do and I think we should. But at the end of the day... I just miss you.

That hits Maggie like a ton of bricks.

MAGGIE
I miss you, too.

Maggie puts her hand to Eric's face.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Let's not miss each other anymore,
okay?

ERIC
(smiles, nods)
Okay.

They kiss as more of that magical light sparkles over them.
They pull apart and look around as they notice it.

MAGGIE
Where is that coming from?

ERIC
I don't know.
(beat - smile)
Maybe we got an early gift of a
little Christmas magic?

MAGGIE
Thank God.

They kiss again as the light continues to sparkle.

EXT. MCCORMICK HOME - DAY

Establishing the McCormick home as a Christmas carol plays.

INT. MCCORMICK HOME - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

We end on Christmas morning with the entire family around the
tree, laughing, enjoying one another, and being... present

THE END