

THE CHRISTMAS KLUTZ

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FADE IN

EXT. PENNSVIEW MANOR GROUNDS - DAY

It's snowing, and the pretty PENNSVIEW MANOR retirement community is all dolled up for Christmas with twinkling lights on the buildings, festive wreaths on the windows, colorful reindeer figures on the lawn and more.

Older couples and small groups of seniors stroll the winding paths, chatting happily as they enjoy the winter scenery.

INT. PENNSVIEW - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Activities Director EMMA KLUTZ (late 20s), a plucky little fireball, addresses Pennsview's top staff at a long table.

The others have tablets and neatly organized files in front of them. But overloaded Emma has a haphazard pile of paperwork and brightly colored folders.

And her name badge reads "EMMA N. KLUTZ."

EMMA

(pumps them up)

Also, just a reminder -- Our Christmas concert is a week from Saturday! Our biggest benefit of the year!

Everyone whoops and claps, making Emma grin.

EMMA (CONT'D)

As you know, the concert is crucial to our activities budget. Now more than ever.

Emma and her boss, RAY WICKES (40s, non-binary), the firm but fair Executive Director at the head of the table, exchange glances and nod.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Our major donors will be there -- and let's not forget our potential donors will be there. But we still need volunteer greeters and ushers, so please let me know what you can do. Thanks!

Emma sits and exchanges smiles across the table with TODD CRANDALL (early 30s), a proud jock and the energetic Director of Physical Therapy who always dresses like a football coach.

RAY

Thank you, Emma.

(to everyone)

By the way, I stopped in at yesterday's rehearsal. And I have to say our tireless activities director has once again done a fantastic job with our Pennsview Manor Senior Choir. They sounded terrific.

Everyone applauds and cheers Emma, who jokingly wipes her brow in relief.

RAY (CONT'D)

Finally, I'm sure you're all aware Dr. Palmer is taking an extended leave following his surgery.

This gets some sympathetic nods.

RAY (CONT'D)

But our temporary physician, Dr. Liam Buckley, will be arriving later today to fill in.

Emma writes the name on a pad already chock full of notes.

RAY (CONT'D)

Dr. Buckley comes highly recommended by his mentor Dr. P, so please give him a nice welcome when you see him, Okay? Thank you, everybody!

While everyone else rises and chatters, Emma haphazardly shoves all her things into a giant expanding folder.

INT. PENNSVIEW - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Todd runs to catch up with Emma as she rushes away with a cart overflowing with board games, art supplies and files.

TODD

Emma?

She turns as he comes over and nervously plays with the electronic stopwatch around his neck.

TODD (CONT'D)

Wanna come to my hockey practice tonight?

(MORE)

TODD (CONT'D)

I know it's a little soon to ask for another official date, but I thought afterward --

EMMA

Actually, I can't tonight, Todd. I have the knitting circle at my sister's B&B.

TODD

Sorry, the what?

EMMA

The knitting circle. Every Christmas the auxiliary knits caps for the newborns at the hospital. It's tradition.

TODD

(pretends to remember)
Oh yeah, you mentioned that.

He hesitates, turns serious and nods toward a window.

TODD (CONT'D)

Hey, I don't know if you saw. It's, um -- It's snowing out there.

EMMA

I did. It's beautiful.

TODD

Well -- I realize you're busy and everything, but -- you're gonna be careful, right?

EMMA

What do you mean?

TODD

(a playful reminder)
You know... Snow? Christmas?

His meaning finally sinks in.

EMMA

Oh my gosh -- Todd! You don't think I'm... Really?

He moves closer.

TODD

Em, I have to get back to physical therapy.

(MORE)

TODD (CONT'D)

But listen -- I know how much you
love caroling on Christmas Eve.

He jokingly makes air quotes about himself.

TODD (CONT'D)

And -- "Coach Todd" -- wouldn't
want you to miss it again this year
because of some crazy little-

EMMA

(interrupts with a
chuckle)

Hey --

(air quotes)

"Coach Todd" -- I'm late for
rehearsal, okay?

She turns back to her cart and smiles over her shoulder.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Besides, I'm way too swamped to let
anything happen!

Todd watches her go, concerned, then heads back up the hall.

Emma smiles to herself as she hurries away with her cart.

Then EVAN MENDZIK, a funny old rascal, approaches.

EVAN

Morning, Emma! Are you and

(air quotes)

"Coach Todd" an item now?

She smirks at him.

EMMA

Morning, Evan!

EXT. B&B - FRONT - DAY

A bed and breakfast, operated by Emma's sister and
beautifully decorated for Christmas, with a sign out front
reading "CEDAR RUN B&B."

At the curb, the affable, soft-spoken DR. LIAM BUCKLEY (early
30s) grabs his luggage out of a taxi.

As the taxi pulls away, he takes a look up and down the
quaint little street. Then at his new temporary home. And
sighs in relief.

Smiling now, he starts up the path to the porch.

INT. B&B - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Liam looks around the festive holiday surroundings.

INT. B&B - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

As he wanders in, his eye catches a gorgeous old upright piano in a corner.

Delighted, he goes over and runs his hand over it. Then quietly plays a few notes -- and lets the sound fade.

Emma's steady and warm-hearted sister STACY (30s) comes in.

STACY

Do you play, Dr. Buckley?

LIAM

(a little sadly)

Ahh, I used to, but not anymore.
And it's Liam, please.

He quickly changes the subject.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hey, thanks again for making room
for me on short notice --
especially right before Christmas.

STACY

Oh, it's our pleasure. My sister
Emma actually works at Pennsview
Manor, so you'll meet her. She's
the activities director.

Stacy points to a PHOTO on the wall of the two of them.

STACY (CONT'D)

That's her on the left. My little
sis Em. She lives just up the
street from here.

Liam looks and nods politely.

Stacy shows him an Army portrait of her husband.

STACY (CONT'D)

This is my husband Matthew. He'll
be celebrating Christmas overseas
this year.

LIAM

That's too bad. Is he a captain?

STACY

Major now, actually. Missing some holidays and birthdays comes with the territory. You know, the life of a military wife. But we're all super proud of him. The whole town is.

She moves to an older photo of a young Emma and Stacy with their grandparents.

STACY (CONT'D)

And here's Emma and me with our grandparents. She actually started volunteering at Pennsview when our Nana Bess was a resident, and she's been working there ever since. Our grandfather lives here with me, though. This was our family home, and now it's also our B&B.

LIAM

You grew up here?

STACY

We did. They raised us from an early age -- so we were very lucky. After everything we've been through, Pops still says,
(imitates him)
"Life can push you in the right direction if you get out of your own way!"

She chuckles. Liam nods and takes this in.

And looks at the photo of the sisters again -- Emma, in particular.

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Rehearsing onstage, the talented Senior Choir sings a lively, contemporary version of "Angels We Have Heard on High."

Emma accompanies them on piano, singing along and directing them with head-bobs and facial expressions.

She plays one-handed momentarily, pointing to her grin and calling over the music --

EMMA

Smile, everyone! Happy happy!

The seniors obey and loudly lean into the joy of the song.

But Evan, clowning in the back row, shoots a goofy, exaggerated grin at MARQUES "SPIFF" ROBINSON, a cap-wearing retired baseball player with a cane, and they both crack up.

Emma notices and frowns at them, never missing a note.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Evan and Spiff! What did I tell you?

They wave an apology and get back to business.

When the group reaches the end, Emma gets up from the bench.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Nicely done! Great job, everyone. Ladies, don't be afraid to belt it out, okay? And guys, you kind of fell apart on the "Glorias." Watch me and stay together, please.

EVAN

(to Spiff)

Yeah, try to keep it together, will ya, Spiff?

Spiff snickers breathlessly now, making the others laugh.

EMMA

Do I need to separate you two or do you just need a protein bar?

SPIFF

We're sorry, Emma.

EVAN

We love you, Em!

This gets groans and an "Oh brother!" from the women.

EMMA

(smirks)

I love you, too, boys.

(to everyone)

Okay! Just a week-and-a-half till the concert! Please keep in mind our activities budget for next year really depends on it. So we need to put on a good show.

MARIANA FLORES, the motherly Resident Council President, needles Emma a little.

MARIANA
No pressure, though, right?

EMMA
None whatsoever!

Everyone laughs.

EMMA (CONT'D)
I'll see you all tomorrow.

As the seniors scatter, Mariana comes over to the foot of the stage.

EMMA (CONT'D)
You ladies sounded terrific up there, Mariana!

MARIANA
Aww, thank you, chica.
(hesitates)
Uh -- Emma? Did you see it snowing?

EMMA
I did. It's gorgeous, isn't it?

MARIANA
I just wanted to, um...

EMMA
Wanted to what?

MARIANA
(gently)
To remind you to be careful.

EMMA
Careful?

MARIANA
You know... The snow?... It's nearly Christmas?

It takes a moment, then Emma gasps.

EMMA
Mariana! You too?

EXT. PENNSVIEW - ENTRANCE - DAY

Dressed in scrubs now, Liam comes to the building entrance.

A couple of older women watch, admiring the new doctor, and beam at him as he passes.

He smiles back and goes inside.

Then the women look at each other, wide-eyed and impressed.

INT. MUSIC STORE - DAY

Emma waits by an enormous box on the counter labeled "1,000 ASSORTED JINGLE BELLS" while the store's owner, AUSTIN (50s), finishes ringing her up.

AUSTIN

By the way, Rachel's mother asked if she could switch piano nights after the holidays.

EMMA

Sure, I'll give her a call.

AUSTIN

Any thoughts on doing more lessons?

EMMA

Oh, I don't know, Austin. I'm so overloaded these days.

AUSTIN

(chuckles)
You? I'm not surprised. Hey, are you bringing
(air quotes)
"Coach Todd" to caroling night?

She gasps.

EMMA

Does everyone know we went out last weekend?

Austin shrugs. Then picks up the box and gives it a good shake, producing an impressively loud JINGLE.

AUSTIN

You need a hand with this?

EMMA

No thanks, I'll be fine.

She lifts the heavy box, and can barely see over it as she takes a couple of steps.

Then Austin remembers something, but hesitates.

AUSTIN
Oh! Emma? Be careful, okay? 'Cause
it's -- it's snowing.

She hears the now-familiar reminder and stops in her tracks.

She turns slowly and eyes him suspiciously.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
(gently)
And, ya know -- it's almost
Christmas.

Her jaw drops.

EMMA
Oh, come on! Am I really that
helpless and predictable?! Jeesh!

With that, she spins around and heads for the door, wobbling a little as she goes.

Austin looks like he wants to help, but wouldn't dare.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Emma struggles as she lugs the box up the sidewalk.

She glances at all the festive shop windows with their frosted glass, blinking lights, etc. But instead of enjoying the Christmas spirit, she's a bit overwhelmed.

Then her "O Christmas Tree" ringtone goes off in her pocket.

She groans and stops walking. Then holds the box one-handed, pulls out her cell, glances at it and answers.

EMMA
Hi, Todd.

INTERCUT - INT. PENNSVIEW - PHYSICAL THERAPY - DAY

Todd's on his cell next to a resident on a recumbent bike.

TODD
Hey, Em! Everything good?

EMMA
 Yep, just picking up a few things.

TODD
 Okay, good to know.

She shifts the box and changes her grip.

And spies the overhanging CUPPA LOVE CAFÉ sign ahead.

EMMA
 I just need to make one more stop
 and then I'll be back.

TODD
 Cool. Hey, the new doc just got
 here. Dr. Buckley? He's jumping
 right in, getting to work.

EMMA
 Oh good, I'll stop and say hi.

TODD
 And Em, be careful out there, okay?

EMMA
 (tsks)
 I will! See ya in a bit.

She shakes her head, hangs up and puts her cell away.

Then adjusts the box and heads up the sidewalk.

Now she eyes the café sign with determination.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 (to herself)
 You need cocoa, Emma. A tall, hot
 cocoa. With marshmallows. And
 cinnamon! Mmmmm...

Just then --

she steps on a PATCH OF ICE --

her feet FLY out from under her --

her big box of jingle bells goes AIRBORNE --

and DOWN SHE GOES with a thud.

The box lands next, falling open with a raucous JANGLE as
 1,000 multi-colored holiday bells spill onto the sidewalk.

Lying among them on her side, Emma groans.

Then rolls onto her back, holding her right wrist in pain.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 (near tears)
 Ow. Ow-ow. Not again... Not again!!

And several concerned folks quickly surround her.

INT. PENNSVIEW - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Sitting grumpily in the Pennsview clinic, Emma holds a Santa Claus ice pack on her wrist.

Stacy keeps her company.

A couple of elderly people wait their turn, too.

EMMA
 Thanks for driving me back to work.

STACY
 (teases)
Someone has to look out for you.

EMMA
 Oh stop.

STACY
 Four years in a row, Emma!

Emma holds up her injured limb.

EMMA
 I am painfully aware that it's four years in a row, Stacy.

She drops her arm down hard and winces.

STACY
 What is it with you and Christmas?

EMMA
 Nothing! I'm just a klutz, okay?
 Klutz by name, klutz by profession.

They sit quietly for a moment.

STACY
 You haven't met Dr. Buckley yet?

EMMA

No, I thought I'd wait until I have a humiliating jingle bell injury to show him.

STACY

He's nice. A little quiet. Shy. And he smells really good.

She nudges Emma, who gives her a sour look.

STACY (CONT'D)

I think you'll like him.

EMMA

I went out with Todd for the first time Saturday, you know that.

STACY

Sure! Todd's a catch, too -- for someone we've known all our lives.
(air quotes)
How is "Coach Todd," anyway?

EMMA

He warned me, Stace. Todd and a couple other people. Like everyone held a meeting about me and decided to intervene. But did I listen?

Stacy looks at her sympathetically.

INT. PENNSVIEW - EXAM ROOM - DAY

Emma sits on the exam table, staring mournfully at her swollen wrist.

Liam's on a stool facing away from her, entering something on his tablet.

As he taps away, Emma surreptitiously leans forward and sniffs his cologne. Then tilts her head and nods approvingly.

But he suddenly turns and wheels over, startling her and nearly catching her in the act.

He takes a holiday-themed elastic bandage out of its box.

LIAM

Okay. Ready to wrap this thing?

Despite the pain and humiliation, she can't help enjoying the company of her intriguing new co-worker.

EMMA

I still can't believe I did this.

LIAM

Yeah -- What's this I hear about the holidays being kind of rough on you lately?

EMMA

Ohh, it's too embarrassing.

LIAM

You can tell me. I actually like embarrassing medical histories.

EMMA

I doubt you've heard one like this.

LIAM

Then let's not call it a medical history. Let's call it a -- "wacky Christmas misadventure."

She chuckles, already liking this guy.

As he begins wrapping --

EMMA

Okay...

EXT. PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK

A large group laughs and cheers as they run around pelting each other with snowballs.

EMMA (V.O.)

Three years ago I was dating a guy who took me to a snowball battle in the park.

From behind a snow fort, Emma leaps up yelling, ready to hurl a snowball.

But then an oversize chunk of snow and ice SMACKS her right in the face.

INT. B&B - LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK

Emma sits on the floor with unopened Christmas presents, forlornly wearing an eye patch.

EMMA (V.O.)
I scratched my cornea and got an
eye patch for Christmas.

BACK TO SCENE

EMMA
Then two years ago I went sledding
with a new, sorta boyfriend.

EXT. SLEDDING HILL - DAY - FLASHBACK

Emma comes flying downhill, a frightened grimace on her face.
She takes a wicked turn, hits a bump and goes airborne --

EMMA
Aaaarrggghhh!!

-- and disappears into a grove of snowy trees with a CRASH.

BACK TO SCENE

She points at her head.

EMMA
Concussion. A mild one, but I had a
headache all through Christmas.
Then last year --

EXT. SKI SLOPE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Emma hurtles downhill on skis, too fast and out of control.

EMMA (V.O.)
-- I went skiing with another guy I
liked.

She takes a nasty WIPEOUT into a barrier fence --

EMMA
Nooooooooooooo!!

-- and ends up in a twisted pile, where she moans.

BACK TO SCENE

Points at her leg --

EMMA

Just about wrecked my knee. Had to use crutches halfway into January. And now this!

Still wrapping, Liam tries to hide his amusement.

EMMA (CONT'D)

(chatters now)

Two years in a row I can kinda understand. Three I thought, okay, bad luck streak over, right? But four years?? Maybe Christmas is trying to send me a message.

Without thinking, Liam quietly quotes her grandfather --

LIAM

"Life can push you in the right direction if you get out of your own way."

EMMA

(astonished)

My grandfather always says that!

Liam realizes it and covers with a self-conscious shrug.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Huh. That's so strange... But maybe I really am just a klutz.

LIAM

Aww, don't be so down on yourself.

EMMA

(chuckles)

My name is Klutz.

LIAM

Okay, that sounds like one of those words that maybe we shouldn't use.

She pulls her name badge out from behind her sweater.

EMMA

I'm serious. It's my last name.

He stops wrapping and looks at it, amazed.

EMMA (CONT'D)

It originally meant a block of wood in German or something.

LIAM

Hm. What's the middle initial for?

EMMA

The N? Are you ready? Noel.

LIAM

(says it slowly)

Emma - Noel - Klutz...

EMMA

(matches his cadence)

I'm a - Christmas - Klutz. That's what they call me! Some people...

He finally gives in to a chuckle. And resumes wrapping.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Even so, I've never missed the holiday concert. Until now.

(groans)

You don't know how big this benefit is for us, Dr. Buckley. Over half of my activities budget comes from it! And if we have to cancel, I'm gonna let everyone down!

(re her wrist)

I mean, look at this! I can't play piano like this!

For some reason this makes Liam nervous as he finishes up.

LIAM

N-no, I -- I guess not. Not for a couple of weeks anyway.

Emma sighs.

EMMA

You don't know anyone who plays, do you?

Liam looks up at her, eyes wide. Suddenly awkward, he stands.

LIAM

All done! Ummm...

(clears his throat)

I'm sorry -- I have other patients that I should, uh -- But I'm sure I'll see you around the building. Just grab your instructions on the way out, okay?

Emma watches him go -- wondering what just happened.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Emma walks carefully up the sidewalk, eyes down, comically going around anything that looks even vaguely hazardous -- rocks, sticks, even a blowing piece of gift wrap.

EXT. B&B - FRONT - CONTINUOUS

She turns up the path to the porch and proceeds with caution.

INT. B&B - KITCHEN - NIGHT

She holds out her newly bandaged wrist for Stacy to examine.

EMMA

Just a sprain, thankfully.

Stacy hugs her.

STACY

Awww, Emmy -- How are we ever going to break you out of this holiday curse?

EMMA

Didn't Pops go through something like this?

STACY

The Christmas Klutz thing? I don't remember the whole story, but yeah. For a couple years.

EMMA

I should ask him about it.

STACY

You should. In the meantime, try to forget it. Tonight's all about fun and doing a good deed. Everyone's out in the living room, so --

(realizes)

Wait a minute! How are you going to knit caps for the babies?

She turns and eyes the counter full of Christmas goodies.

STACY (CONT'D)

Still have your waitressing skills?

Emma grins.

INT. B&B - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's a cozy setting around the fireplace, where volunteers knit, chat, munch holiday treats and drink warm beverages.

Faint PIANO MUSIC comes from somewhere -- a jazzy version of "Good King Wenceslas."

Holding her wounded arm behind her, Emma offers a cookie platter to a guest.

Then she notices the music -- listens -- and her jaw drops.

EMMA

Oh my gosh!

She glances around.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Stacy! Where's that music coming from? Is someone playing your piano?

Stacy listens -- hears it -- and shrugs.

Emma sets the platter down and hurries to the parlor.

INT. B&B - PARLOR - A MOMENT LATER

She rushes in and finds Liam at the old upright, his back toward her, playing quietly -- almost secretively.

She listens open-mouthed for a moment, shocked to find the answer to her concert conundrum right in front of her.

She approaches cautiously, watching as he plays.

And the moment she gets next to him --

EMMA

Holding out on me, Dr. Buckley?

He STARTLES and jumps up.

LIAM

What?! What are you --? What do you mean holding out on you?

She takes a step toward him, grinning mischievously, which makes him retreat a step.

EMMA

This afternoon when I asked if you know anyone who plays piano, you never mentioned that you do!

LIAM

I'm sorry. I-I really don't. Not in public anyway. I used to.

EMMA

But you're so good! That was some mighty nice Christmas jazz!

She takes another step, and he backs up another.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Look -- This concert in a week-and-a-half? It's such a huge deal. I know you're new in town, Dr. Buckley, but --

LIAM

It's Liam. Please. And I'm not just new, I'm temporary!

She paces slowly toward him now, which only makes him back up and eye the doorway.

EMMA

No matter! Everyone will be there!

She holds up her wrist and points at it.

EMMA (CONT'D)

And if the Senior Choir doesn't have a fully functioning pianist to sing along with, they'll be all over the place! They can't hear well enough to sing a cappella! Believe me, Liam, I've tried!

LIAM

I just -- Hey listen --

EMMA

You work for us now, my friend. And your employer, temporary or not, needs you to step up. Please?

They both stop walking.

It's a stand-off.

Then Liam straightens up and gathers himself.

LIAM
I'm sorry, Emma. But I can't. I
just can't. Okay?

With that, he ducks out of the parlor and goes upstairs.

Shocked and disappointed, Emma sighs.

EMMA
(to herself)
Nice going, Christmas Klutz. You
scared him off.

Then Stacy rushes in.

STACY
What's going on? Is everything
okay?

EMMA
Yeah... I think I just found my
piano player.

Now her wheels are turning.

EMMA (CONT'D)
And I'm gonna make it happen.

INT. PENNSVIEW - RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Ray taps their fingers on the desk, while Emma slumps in a chair, sheepishly covering her wrist.

RAY
You know how much we need this
funding, Emma. The activities
budget shouldn't depend so much on
the Christmas concert, but that's
the way it's always been.

Emma nods sadly.

RAY (CONT'D)
Without the ticket sales and
pledges you can forget all about
your museum trips, your new pottery
kiln -- the pickleball tournament.
I could go on and on.

EMMA
(stricken)
Oh, please don't cancel the
pickleball!

RAY

So what's your game plan? A karaoke track? Seventy-five minutes of Christmas a cappella?

Emma closes her eyes in a "God forbid" moment.

EMMA

I'm working on it, Ray, trust me.

Ray looks at her wrist and gives her a sympathetic look.

RAY

How's it feel?

EMMA

Aside from being swollen to four times its normal size and throbbing out a salsa rhythm? It's fine.

RAY

I'm worried about you, Emma. Four Christmases in a row?

She nods sadly again.

Ray leans forward.

RAY (CONT'D)

(gently)

You know my background is in psychology, right?

Emma tilts her head, wondering where this is going.

INT. PENNSVIEW - PHYSICAL THERAPY - DAY

Liam and Todd get to know each other by the weight rack while several residents have their P.T. sessions nearby.

LIAM

(chuckles)

So one of the residents started it?

TODD

Yeah, you'll meet him. Ex-ballplayer called Spiff. Bad hip from his playing days. He'd get so mad at me for making him exercise.

(imitates him with air quotes)

This ain't spring training, "Coach Todd!"

LIAM
He actually did the air quotes?

Todd nods.

TODD
(again)
I'm not gettin' in the whirlpool,
"Coach Todd!"

They laugh.

Emma walks in and starts over to them, eyeing Liam tentatively in light of last night's fiasco.

TODD (CONT'D)
It was all in fun. But it caught on, and now it's kind of a thing around here.

He turns to Emma and puts an arm around her.

TODD (CONT'D)
Hey, Em.

Liam clocks this.

TODD (CONT'D)
(re the wrist)
You keeping it immobilized?

EMMA
Trying.

TODD
I have to go help Mr. Fry do his squats. He wants to be able to play on the floor with his grandkids on Christmas.

She looks off in Mr. Fry's direction, touched.

EMMA
Awwwww...

TODD
Nice meeting you, Dr. Buckley. And thanks again for helping out my girlie here yesterday.

Todd offers a fist-bump and Liam accepts.

Emma forces a smile.

LIAM
It's just Liam. You too.

Todd winks at Emma before jogging away.

Liam clocks this as well.

And now it's awkward.

EMMA
I guess I owe you an apology.

Liam looks at his feet.

LIAM
Not at all. I get it.

Emma studies him, not sure what to say.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I wish I could help out, but --

EMMA
(chuckles, hands up)
Hey -- no more pressure from me!

LIAM
Okay.

They smile bashfully at each other.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I should run, too. My waiting room
is probably filling up.

He waves and turns to go.

EMMA
See ya!

A tad wistful, Emma watches him walk away.

INT. PENNSVIEW - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Liam comes in to find Evan and Spiff waiting for him.

LIAM
Gentlemen? How are we doing?

Evan gets up, but Spiff stays seated, holding his belly.

EVAN
Spiff ate something he wasn't
supposed to.

LIAM
Spiff?

Evan points to him.

EVAN
Marques "Spiff" Robinson. The
ballplayer. Played in the American
League for years.

LIAM
(to Spiff)
Oh, right! Someone was just telling
me about you.

Liam crouches next to him.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Did you go off your diet?

Spiff groans.

LIAM (CONT'D)
(to Evan)
What'd he eat?

EVAN
A whole bunch of Christmas cookies.

LIAM
A whole bunch, huh?
(to Spiff)
Well, I can understand why that
might upset your stomach a bit.

EVAN
That's not the worst of it.

Spiff groans again.

EVAN (CONT'D)
They were meant to be tree
decorations.

LIAM
Decorations?

SPIFF
Who sprays cookies with hairspray?!

EVAN
 Emma's crafting class, that's who!
 (to Liam)
 To preserve them.

LIAM
 And you ate some?? How many?

EVAN
 Close to a dozen before someone
 finally stopped him. He saw them in
 the lobby and thought they were for
 anyone.

SPIFF
 Do I have to go to the hospital?

LIAM
 Well, let's have a look at you
 before we take any drastic
 measures. Why don't you come on
 back?

Liam and Evan help him to his feet.

EVAN
 (laughs)
 I'll tell ya, this old shortstop
 thinks he has an iron gut from
 eating ballpark food all those
 years!

Spiff groans louder now as they lead him back to the exam
 room.

INT. B&B - PARLOR - DAY

Emma sits with her grandfather POPS, otherwise known as
 STANLEY KLUTZ (80s), a sweet, plump old guy in a red sweater
 with a white beard and glasses who chuckles frequently.

POPS
 Now, kiddo -- These things have a
 way of blowing over.

EMMA
 But I feel like I'm the talk of
 Pennsview Manor right now! How long
 were you a -- you know. Was it just
 a one-time thing?

POPS

A Christmas Klutz? Oh, darlin',
that went on several years.

EMMA

Really? Just like me.

POPS

Yep. Around your age, too. Right
before the holidays I'd somehow
find myself up to my neck in a snow
bank, or writhing in pain at the
ice-skating pond...

EMMA

Yikes.

He laughs at her reaction.

POPS

And after a while, I wondered if
fate was trying to tell me
something. That I was too busy, too
distracted at Christmas, or not in
the right place romantically --

EMMA

Really?

POPS

Absolutely -- And that maybe I
needed to slow down and pay
attention to the signs.

EMMA

Right now I need a sign that this
concert is going to happen.

POPS

This fella you mentioned. The new
doctor.

Is this a gleam in her eye when she says it?

EMMA

Dr. Buckley.

POPS

Don't tell him how badly you want
him to play. Show him he's needed.

EMMA

But how?

He thinks this over for a moment.

POPS

He's a man of medicine. Exhibit the symptoms of your problem and let him figure it out!

He laughs loudly at this.

Emma's wheels start turning again.

EMMA

Pops, I think you just gave me an idea...

START BRIEF MONTAGE

Emma meets clandestinely with some female residents around the Pennsview campus.

They laugh and enjoy concocting their scheme --

-- in the LIBRARY;

-- outside a RESIDENCE;

-- and in the SALON.

END MONTAGE

INT. PENNSVIEW - EMMA'S OFFICE - DAY

Emma ushers Liam into her office.

EMMA

So Spiff went to the E.R.?

LIAM

Yeah, I rode along to make sure he was okay.

EMMA

Hairsprayed sugar cookies. Yikes. Next year I'll keep them under lock and key.

She sits behind her desk, but he remains standing.

LIAM

Well, the other thing I wanted to discuss is a bit more concerning.

EMMA

Okay. Sit.

LIAM

I'll just be a minute. See -- all afternoon I've had female residents coming to me with a whole variety of complaints.

EMMA

That's not unusual, is it?

LIAM

No, but -- They seem to have a common denominator.

INT. PENNSVIEW - EXAM ROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Liam sits across from an older southern belle -- the one Emma met in the library -- who flirts with him, bats her eyes and turns the charm up to 10.

LIAM (V.O.)

The first one said she was feeling anxious lately. And when I asked why, she said she was worried her favorite event here at Pennsview might be cancelled.

BACK TO SCENE

EMMA

And what event is that?

LIAM

Your Christmas concert.

Emma cocks her head innocently.

EXAM ROOM - FLASHBACK

Liam uses a scope to check the eyes of a woman -- the one Emma met outside a residence -- sitting coquettishly on the exam table.

LIAM (V.O.)

Another one said she couldn't sleep. I asked if anything was troubling her, and she said she's very concerned about your activities budget.

(MORE)

LIAM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 That it'll be slashed if the
 concert patrons don't come through.

Liam lowers the scope and studies her.

BACK TO SCENE

EMMA
 Uh huh...?

LIAM
 And then --

EXAM ROOM - FLASHBACK

Liam hands a tissue to a woman -- the one Emma met in the
 salon -- crying in the chair, and she dabs her tears.

LIAM (V.O.)
 Another patient actually cried,
 asking what would happen to "dear
 Emma's job" without the concert.
 And she said the whole mess was
 giving her "tummy trouble."

BACK TO SCENE

Emma rests her chin in her good hand, feigning ignorance.

EMMA
 Really...

EXAM ROOM - FLASHBACK

The crying woman is still talking.

LIAM (V.O.)
 Then she said --

His voice over her lips --

LIAM (V.O.)
 "Did I hear a rumor that you play
 piano, Dr. Buckley?"

BACK TO SCENE

Emma clears her throat nervously.

EMMA
Dr. Buckley --

Liam lifts a finger to correct her.

She realizes.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Liam. Sorry.

She smiles sheepishly.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Listen, you know how people talk.
One person gets a silly idea in
their head and then... If you don't
mind, let me look into this and
I'll get back to you.

LIAM
(smirks)
Thanks.

And Emma just nods politely -- knowing that he knows.

INT. PENNSVIEW - LOBBY - DAY

Evan, Spiff and several other men hover over a model train display that's elaborately decorated for Christmas.

Spiff mans the controls with two noisy trains running.

They speak loudly over the racket.

EVAN
You've been on it long enough,
Spiff!

SPIFF
I gotta make sure it's working!

EVAN
It's working already! Give someone
else a turn!

The others continue bickering over the din.

INT. PENNSVIEW - HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Just down the hall, with the sound of the trains clattering, Emma tapes signs to the Auditorium doors announcing "AUDITIONS" for the Christmas concert.

It specifically states that "ANY INSTRUMENT WILL DO."

But then she hears a loud COMMOTION with crashes and shouts coming from the lobby.

And sprints off in that direction.

INT. PENNSVIEW - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

A derailed model train lies on its side.

EVAN

You should be banned, Spiff!

SPIFF

Oh, like you never crashed it,
Evan!

The men continue squabbling as some reset the train and others nudge Spiff aside.

Emma rushes over in full mom mode, ready to break this up.

EMMA

Boys! Hey! If you can't take turns
and behave, we're gonna turn it off
and put it away!

EVAN

Aww, Emma...

EMMA

No! I mean it! Figure this out!

The guys grumble and Spiff acquiesces, letting the next man take his turn.

As the trains roll again, Emma sees Todd on the other side of the lobby waving her over.

She goes, and they glance around to see if anyone's watching as they head down the hall.

INT. PENNSVIEW - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

From the lobby, and with the sound of the TRAINS clattering, we can see Emma and Todd by the Auditorium doors formulating some kind of plan --

Todd pantomimes walking past the doors, then stops, turns in faux surprise, backs up to the doorway, looks inside and covers his ears in horror.

Emma laughs, then steps into the doorway, pantomimes pulling her hair out, screaming, and waving her arms in surrender.

They have a good laugh over their little demonstration, give each other a left-handed high-five, and go their separate ways.

INT. PENNSVIEW - LIAM'S OFFICE - DAY

Todd sticks his head in Liam's door.

TODD
Hey, buddy. You wanna grab lunch?
I'll walk over with ya.

Liam looks at his watch.

LIAM
Sure, I have time. Let's go.

And jumps up.

INT. PENNSVIEW - RESTAURANT - ENTRANCE - DAY

As the guys enter, they see several residents carry out bigger and bigger instrument cases for a flute, a trumpet, a saxophone, a trombone, and a tuba.

The tuba player and Todd surreptitiously do the finger-aside-the-nose sign from "The Sting" as they pass each other.

Liam turns to Todd, nearly catching him.

LIAM
You have a band here?

TODD
(innocent)
Umm, I think there's some kind of
audition going on.

LIAM
Audition for what?

TODD
Something for the Christmas
concert? Emma would know. I try to
steer clear of the activity
director's business.

Liam glances at him and smirks, not buying it.

INT. PENNSVIEW - RESTAURANT - TABLE - DAY

Liam and Todd chat as they eat.

TODD

Emma and I have known each other since we were kids, actually. Went to the same schools, have a lot of the same friends.

LIAM

Nice. You have roots here. Connection.

TODD

I do. I always knew I wanted to come back after college. Serve the community, do something useful.

Liam nods thoughtfully.

Now Todd turns up the heat on his not-so-subtle pitch.

TODD (CONT'D)

Yeah, around here we think it's important to answer the call when you're needed. If you have a particular talent or skill, and someone asks for help, you do whatever you can.

Sensing the real reason for the meeting, Liam shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

TODD (CONT'D)

Know what I mean?

LIAM

Oh, absolutely. I couldn't agree more...

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - DAY

A group of residents with instruments wait their turn to audition.

Onstage, a woman leans in close and plays a Christmas tune on the piano -- slowly and badly -- while fighting to read her sheet music.

Emma, Mariana and Austin from the music store sit together up front, notepads in their laps, nodding encouragement.

INT. PENNSVIEW - HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Todd and Liam pass the open Auditorium door as they return. According to plan, Liam hears the bad piano music and stops. Then backs up, goes to the doorway and listens. And cringes like he feels every wrong note in his gut. Todd joins him and glances over with a smirk.

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

Emma turns and spots the guys in the doorway. Todd discreetly gives her the thumbs-up. But Liam notices the exchange. And, guessing what's going on, he chuckles to himself at their subterfuge.

BEGIN AUDITION SEQUENCE

A succession of candidates follows, some with marginal talent, others just awful, playing Christmas songs on --

QUICK SHOTS:

-- guitar;
-- flute;
-- and screechy violin.

Liam comes in and leans on the back wall, entranced, while the judges up front take notes and call out "Next!"

More candidates come and go, poorly but earnestly playing --

QUICK SHOTS:

-- blues harmonica;
-- accordion;
-- and xylophone.

Liam finally moves to a rear seat and listens, shocked and amused, as more folks butcher Christmas tunes with the --

QUICK SHOTS:

-- autoharp;
-- sitar;
-- and didgeridoo.

On the last one, Liam can't take anymore, so he gets up snickering and walks out.

Emma turns and sees him go --

-- and shares a stealthy air-punch with Todd.

END AUDITION SEQUENCE

INT. PENNSVIEW - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Amused by their efforts, Liam laughs as he heads up the hall.

INT. CUPPA LOVE CAFÉ - DAY

Emma enjoys her much-loved cocoa with marshmallows and cinnamon at a table full of scattered paperwork.

At the counter, Liam pays for his coffee.

He sees Emma sitting by herself -- hesitates -- then ambles over.

LIAM
(chipper)
Hello, Ms. Klutz!

But he flinches when he hears himself say it.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I --

Emma lets him dangle for a moment.

EMMA
(teases)
It's my name, Dr. Buckley. My actual name. What exactly are you sorry about?

LIAM
Nothing, it just sounded -- All of a sudden, I -- Can I start over?

She smirks at him.

EMMA
Why don't you sit instead?

As he does, he glimpses Emma's messy workspace, and carefully makes room for his cup.

LIAM

Hey, this reminder you sent everyone about Ugly Christmas Sweater Day? I think I've heard of it, but I don't quite-

EMMA

-You've never --? Oh my. Well, the more outrageous and over-the-top the Christmas sweater, the better.

Stacy walks in and notices Emma and Liam sitting together.

EMMA (CONT'D)

The best one in each category wins a prize, and then there's a best-of-show award for one resident and one staff member.

LIAM

And this is something I have to do?

EMMA

Of course you do! Come on! Get in the Christmas spirit, Buckley!

Stacy gets in line and eavesdrops.

LIAM

Actually, I don't think I own any ugly sweaters, let alone a Christmas one.

EMMA

Tell you what -- I know a store that sells tons of them. Why don't I take you shopping?

LIAM

Really? You'd do that?

EMMA

Why not? I always keep some in stock for the residents. Plus, come on -- A chance to shop?

LIAM

Okay. You're on.

He looks at his watch and gets up to leave.

LIAM (CONT'D)

For now I'd better get back.

EMMA

Wait --

He stops and looks at her.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Not before you tell me which
musicians you'd pick for the
concert.

Caught off guard, he's speechless.

Stacy watches, loving the flirtation.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Don't pretend! I saw you hiding
back there!

They have a short stare-down, wondering how much the other
knows about the game being played.

LIAM

Well -- my favorite was the
accordion player.

EMMA

You liked her, huh?

LIAM

Sure. She'd be a great accompanist.

As he turns to go --

LIAM (CONT'D)

Just tell her to stay away from ice
patches on the sidewalk, okay?

EMMA

Wha--?

Then he smiles over his shoulder --

-- and she shoots him a faux angry look.

Meanwhile, Stacy's amazed and delighted by the whole
exchange.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY - MINUTES LATER

Emma and Stacy come out of the café together and stroll up
the sidewalk arm-in-arm.

STACY

Oh, come on, you were so flirting with him.

EMMA

I was not!

STACY

Please -- He's a nice guy! What's not to like?

Stacy suddenly points at the sidewalk in front of them.

STACY (CONT'D)

Em, watch out! A crack in the concrete!

Emma halts, open-mouthed -- so Stacy drags her around it.

STACY (CONT'D)

(growls playfully)
Come on, Emma Noel...

And the sisters continue up the street, laughing and chatting.

EXT. PENNSVIEW - COURTYARD - DAY

Bundled up and in formation by a large Christmas tree in the courtyard, Emma and choir prepare to rehearse a complicated, a cappella arrangement of "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen."

Emma turns and looks behind her at an office window, then back at the choir.

EMMA

(to no one in particular)
Are we close enough? Do you think he can hear?

THROUGH THE WINDOW we see Liam working at his desk.

EVAN

(calls from the back row)
Go for it!

EMMA

Okay, last chance, folks. This oughtta convince him.

She blows a pitch pipe to give them the key.

Then raises her hands -- bandaged wrist and all -- to conduct.

And on the downbeat, the choir bursts into song.

They do surprisingly well at first.

And Liam immediately comes to the WINDOW to see.

The singers go on for a bit --

-- then gradually, inevitably, go off-key and lose their place.

And as they look around helplessly at Emma and each other, the song descends into chaos.

Finally, Emma waves her arms to cut them off.

Then cues Spiff, who yells:

SPIFF

We need a piano player, Emma!

Which is the other members' cue to voice their discontent:

OTHERS

This is terrible! / We can't sing
without a pianist! / Cancel the
concert! / Goodbye budget! / Etc.

Barely able to contain a smile, Emma turns to see if Liam's listening at his window.

But he's not.

Disappointed, she turns back to the choir with a frown.

Just then --

LIAM (O.S.)

(calls)

Okay, okay!

Everyone turns to see Liam, who's been watching their pitiful display from the sidewalk.

And just as Emma predicted in the hallway with Todd, he waves his arms in surrender.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I'll do it!

With that, the choir erupts in cheers.

Emma and Liam catch each other's eye.

And smile sweetly.

INT. PENNSVIEW - HALLWAY - DAY

Emma and Todd pass in the hallway, Emma pushing her cart with the giant taped-up box of jingle bells and other assorted crafting supplies.

TODD

Hey, Cuppa Love Café after work?

EMMA

Actually I'm taking Liam ugly Christmas sweater shopping. Can you believe he's never worn one?

TODD

Maybe they don't have them in the big city. Where you off to now?

EMMA

My jingle-bell door-hanger class, and then I'm meeting Mariana.

TODD

Cool. Just don't let the doc get an uglier sweater than mine!

They give each other a left-handed exploding fist-bump, exchange "Later," and head off in opposite directions.

INT. PENNSVIEW - RESIDENT COUNCIL ROOM - DAY

Sitting at a table with pictures of ugly Christmas sweaters, Emma and Mariana already have a bad case of the giggles as they make up absurd contest categories.

Mariana points at a photo.

MARIANA

How 'bout -- How 'bout -- "Most Overuse of Red Yarn?"

Emma howls, puts her head down and smacks the table.

They both try to recover.

EMMA

Wait, wait...

She points at one, too.

EMMA (CONT'D)
"Scariest Depiction of a
Gingerbread Man."

They're in tears now, rocking in their seats.

Mariana points at another.

MARIANA
"Least Stripes!"

EMMA
"Least Stripes!?" What does that
even mean??

It almost puts them on the floor.

They try to pull it together, wiping away tears even as some giggles continue to erupt.

MARIANA
Oh my goodness, mija...

EMMA
I need to get a grip!

MARIANA
Maybe when you take Dr. Buckley
shopping you can find one with a
medical theme.

EMMA
Something to match his scrubs!

They laugh again.

MARIANA
I like his scrubs. Dr. Palmer
always wore a nice suit, but Dr.
Buckley looks like a TV star.

EMMA
He does, doesn't he?

They give each other a meaningful sidelong glance and nod.

And start laughing again.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

On opposite sides of an aisle, Emma and Liam excitedly rummage through long racks of Christmas sweaters.

EMMA

So how does a big city G.P. end up temping at a small-town retirement village anyway?

LIAM

You know Dr. Palmer was my mentor in medical school, right?

EMMA

I do, yeah.

She finds a candidate -- some kind of reindeer atrocity.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Here.

Liam turns around so she can hold it up against him.

LIAM

Well, when he told me he needed someone to fill in for him, I was glad to do it.

EMMA

He's such a sweet guy.

LIAM

He really is...

She scrunches her nose, puts it back, and they continue to look.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Actually I come from a community a lot like this one. My dad was the local doc.

Surprised, Emma glances over her shoulder at him.

EMMA

So you're really a small-town boy?

LIAM

Oh, believe me, I have fireman's carnival funnel cake coursing through my veins.

She laughs.

LIAM (CONT'D)

No, the minute I got to your family's B&B, I felt like I was home. Like I could breathe again.

This touches her, and now she's really intrigued.

EMMA

Was your father the reason you went into medicine?

LIAM

He was. Seeing the way he took care of people in our hometown? It was inspiring.

Impressed by this, Emma nods.

Then Liam discovers a possibility -- a garish, grinning Santa Claus. He holds it against himself and turns to her.

LIAM (CONT'D)

How about this?

She turns, straightens it on him, then dismissively shakes her head, and they get back to it again.

EMMA

What about music? Where'd that come from?

LIAM

My mother. She was the musician in the family. She taught piano to me and just about every kid in town.

Emma finds another outrageous specimen and spins around.

EMMA

Hey.

He turns and she holds it against him.

LIAM

In college I wasn't sure which I wanted to do -- music or medicine. So I was a double-major for a bit. But eventually I turned pre-med.

She tsks and puts this one back, too, but smiles playfully over her shoulder.

EMMA
 You're a man of many talents,
 Buckley.

They keep searching. And after a moment, Emma spies a winner.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 Ohhh! This is it.

They turn to each other, and Emma holds up an ornate,
 hideous, music-themed Christmas sweater.

LIAM
 No.

EMMA
 Yes!

LIAM
 No, come on, I'm not wearing that!

EMMA
 I'm telling you it'll win first
 place!

Liam turns and makes his escape up the aisle --

LIAM
 No way! Unh-unh. Nope! I'm done.

Emma hurries after him with the sweater.

EMMA
 Just try it on!

LIAM
 Nooooo...

EMMA
 Liam!!

INT. PENNSVIEW - DINING ROOM - DAY

It's a high-spirited event with a few dozen residents
 finishing dessert at their tables.

They're dressed in ugly Christmas sweaters of every kind,
 with sequins, snowman appliquéés, rows of garland and more.

Among them are Evan and Spiff with their buddies in sports-
 related sweaters.

Along the wall, Emma and Liam chat with other staff -- Emma in her own ugly sweater and Liam in the one she picked.

On the other side of the room, a resident disapprovingly unrolls the sleeves of Todd's gaudy sweater she made for him.

And up at the head table, a panel of judges hands a decision to Mariana, who then goes to the mic.

MARIANA

And finally, in our last category, the winner of the Ugly Christmas Sweater Award for the Pennsview staff is...

She looks at the slip of paper and laughs.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

Oh my goodness... We have a tie!

The audience gasps and laughs.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

It's between Todd Crandall, wearing the sweater made by Mrs. Peters...

Todd and the resident look at each other, surprised.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

...and Dr. Liam Buckley!

As everyone applauds, Emma cheers and playfully punches Liam in the arm.

Which Todd notices.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

So, Emma -- What do we do now?

As she hurries up front --

EMMA

We have a tie-breaker! Everyone gets to vote between
(air quotes)
"Coach Todd" and Dr. Buckley.

MARIANA

(to the crowd)
A tie-breaker! Right! So everyone get out your pads again and write down your choice!

Emma comes up to the mic as Mariana joins the judges to collect the votes.

EMMA

And remember -- you're voting on the sweaters only! Not on these good-looking men! Although it would be a tough choice, wouldn't it?

This gets generous laughs from the residents.

Surprised by the response, Emma glances at Liam, and they grin at one another.

Then she glances at Todd in the other direction and they grin, too.

Then, from opposite sides of the room, Liam and Todd suddenly find themselves grinning at each other as well --

-- so they instantly drop their smiles, and give each other a macho 'Sup nod.

Emboldened now, Emma clears her throat and decides to stretch some time with a little DIY standup comedy.

EMMA (CONT'D)

While we're voting, let me tell you some of the other exciting categories we considered for this year's Ugly Sweater Contest.

The residents gab loudly now as they write down their picks --

-- but Emma soldiers on, enjoying herself.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Let's see. There was "Most Reindeer on One Sweater." With extra points if they're frolicking, of course. What else?

As she speaks, a quiet chant starts at a back table.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Uh -- "Hardest Working Elves." I'd like to see that one, actually. Oh yeah! And my personal favorite -- "Most Colors Not Found in Nature."

Now the chant grows --

TEAM TODD

Coach Todd! Coach Todd!

Emma glances around the room, not noticing it yet.

EMMA

I see some of you definitely would
have qualified for that one.

As folks at other tables join in and get louder, they even
add the air quotes --

TEAM TODD

"Coach Todd!" "Coach Todd!"

Realizing no laughs are forthcoming, Emma finally hears the
chant and looks around, confused.

As does Todd.

Then Spiff rises and loudly switches up the chant, still with
the air quotes --

SPIFF

"Team Todd!!" "Team Todd!!"

And the other members of Team Todd quickly follow suit.

But now, as alliances are formed, a new, competing chant
begins --

TEAM LIAM

Team Liam! Team Liam!

It grows quickly, not with air quotes, but with table smacks.

Evan is among the new group, and directs his yells at Spiff.

TEAM LIAM (CONT'D)

Team Liam!! Team Liam!!

Now the crowd is clearly divided as the residents playfully
face off against each other.

Flustered, Emma motions for Liam and Todd to join her.

And they hesitantly make their way up front.

Meanwhile, the judges hustle the fresh ballots up to the head
table and sit down to count them.

As they count, the noise in the room fades to silence,
encouraged by some loud shushing.

And all eyes are now on the judges' table.

Liam and Todd stand tightly on either side of Emma.

Wide-eyed and a little shaken by the ominous quiet, the trio looks out over the strangely mute residents and whispers:

LIAM

Have you ever seen them do anything like this?

EMMA & TODD

(in unison)

Never.

They continue to eye the crowd.

EMMA

Am I the only one who's a little afraid right now?

LIAM & TODD

(in unison)

No.

EMMA

Good to know.

Mariana gets up from the judges' table and steps to the mic.

MARIANA

Folks, we have a winner.

Silence.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

This year's staff member with the Ugliest Christmas Sweater is...

You can read the suspense on the residents' faces.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

...Dr. Liam Buckley!!!

Half of the crowd goes wild, cheering and applauding --

-- while the other half groans and applauds grudgingly.

Embarrassed, Liam grins shyly.

Then Mariana presents him with a Pennsview coffee mug full of chocolates, which he waves to the audience.

MARIANA (CONT'D)

(at the mic)

Thank you, everyone, and please enjoy the rest of your day!

Liam heads back to his spot by the wall, where the other staffers shake his hand and pat his back.

Emma runs to catch up with him.

EMMA

I told you that sweater would win!

LIAM

You did!

They laugh, and instinctively go in for a hug.

This surprises them both -- and they're a little embarrassed and awkward as they separate.

Some of the residents and staff spot this unexpected display and nudge each other.

Still hovering up front, Todd catches it, too.

Then, as he anxiously watches the couple enjoying themselves, Evan and Spiff come over and join him.

EVAN

Looks like you might have a little competition there, bubba.

Then Spiff slaps him on the back.

SPIFF

But hey! We're rootin' for ya!

Todd just turns to them and smiles. Then goes.

As soon as he does, Evan smacks Spiff on the arm.

EVAN

"We're rootin' for ya!" Speak for yourself!
 (indicates Emma and Liam)
 This isn't about ugly sweaters anymore! And I'm Team Liam, all the way!

Spiff turns his cap backward and, hands on hips, gets in Evan's face like he's arguing with an ump.

SPIFF

And I'm Team Todd! Deal with it!

With that, he mimes kicking dirt on Evan's shoes.

Then stomps out, leaving Evan stewing.

And as Liam gallantly offers Emma a piece of chocolate from his prize mug, we can see their infatuation growing.

INT. PENNSVIEW - RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Liam meets with Ray.

RAY

I can't say I'm surprised. Dr. Palmer has talked about retiring for a while, so his leave will simply become permanent. I'm very happy for him.

LIAM

I am, too. He's earned it.

RAY

He has. And, as I say, Liam, if you're interested in the job...

LIAM

(hesitates)

Well, to be honest, Ray -- My facility offered me a promotion right before I came here. A good one. I haven't accepted yet, but I thought my time at Pennsview might help me -- figure a few things out. Career-wise and personally.

RAY

You're in demand. I get it. I'll just say this: You'd be an excellent fit here, and we'd love to have you come on board permanently. So I hope you'll consider it.

Liam nods thoughtfully.

LIAM

How soon do you need an answer?

INT. PENNSVIEW - COMMUNITY KITCHEN - DAY

Emma opens and closes cabinets, talking to herself as she looks for something.

She reaches in a cabinet with her good hand and struggles to shift things around.

EMMA

Arrgh! Why wasn't I born left-handed?

Then something falls onto the counter and she groans.
Some residents playing cards at a nearby table glance over.
As she puts the item back --

EMMA (CONT'D)

Why couldn't I land on my other wrist??

Growing impatient, she switches to the drawers.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Why did I have to fall at all?! Oh, that's right! I'm cursed!

The residents look at each other and grin.
Emma stands in one spot now and glances around for clues.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Has anyone seen my gingerbread man molds? We have a baking class today.

Ray comes over.

RAY

Where'd you put them after last Christmas?

EMMA

I don't know, Ray. Maybe Mr. Barnes is swiping things and selling them online again.

RAY

Did you hear about Dr. Palmer?

EMMA

I did! Good for him, retiring finally. I'll miss him, though.

RAY

Everyone will.

An idea enters Emma's head, but she tries to play it cool.

EMMA

So, uh -- Who's gonna replace him?

Ray walks away shaking a finger.

RAY
Too soon to say, Emma. But I'm
working on it!

Emma watches Ray go, wondering.

Then turns back to her task and roots through a storage
shelf.

EMMA
Maybe we'll make a Christmas
pizza...

INT. B&B - PARLOR - DAY

Stacy dusts the piano while Pops sits in his reading chair
behind a newspaper.

STACY
Have you heard Dr. Buckley play?
He's so talented.

POPS
I'm sorry to say I haven't yet.

STACY
And he's such a nice guy.

POPS
(chuckles)
Stacy the matchmaker.

STACY
Hardly, Pops.

POPS
Didn't you say Emma just went out
with Todd Crandall?

STACY
Only once.

POPS
Well, Todd's nice, too, isn't he?

STACY
He is...

He sets the paper down.

POPS

Hmm. I remember something similar with your mother. She was dating a local fella around Christmastime. Nice enough guy. Solid job. But then a new fella came to town. Good looking. Had seen a bit of the world. And for a while there she wasn't sure what to do.

He puts the paper back up.

Stacy looks over at him, waiting.

STACY

So what happened??

POPS

She married one of 'em.

STACY

(laughs)

Wait a minute. Was Dad the local guy or the worldly guy?

He puts the paper down.

POPS

(sagely)

He was the one who made her happy.

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Emma, left, and Liam, right, share the piano bench, reviewing sheet music for the concert.

LIAM

Really? Evan's the soloist on "O Holy Night?"

EMMA

Ya know, despite his clowning around, he has a beautiful tenor voice and takes it very seriously. Except when he needs some carbs.

LIAM

Can't wait to hear it.

She gets out another piece.

EMMA
 "The First Noel." Pretty standard.
 No surprises.

She puts another piece on the music rack.

Then stops and hesitates.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 Liam... Can I ask you something?

LIAM
 Sure.

EMMA
 Why didn't you want to play for us?
 I get it if it's too personal. I
 just thought maybe you didn't want
 to lower yourself to play for some
 small retirement village concert-

LIAM
 -No, no, that's not it. Not at all-

EMMA
 -Or maybe you don't like Christmas,
 or you have stage fright, or
something, ya know?

LIAM
 I'm sorry I gave that impression.

EMMA
 Well, you ran out of the room
 pretty fast when I asked you.

He laughs.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 And then I practically had to trick
 you into playing.

LIAM
 You practically had to?

Now it's her turn to laugh.

LIAM (CONT'D)
 Okay... Truthfully, it's kind of
 silly... Last Christmas was pretty
 rough. I'd been playing in a jazz
 quartet on the side for a while,
 and -- I had feelings for the
 singer.

(MORE)

LIAM (CONT'D)

Strong feelings, as a matter of fact. But, for a variety of reasons, I never said anything. Then she wound up liking the bassist, who was a friend, so... I stepped aside, being the noble soul that I am.

Emma grins at this, but she's touched that he's opening up.

LIAM (CONT'D)

And last Christmas -- they got married. At that point I lost all interest in playing, and I haven't been in a band since. So yeah, I wasn't exactly looking forward to this Christmas either. But when Dr. P. asked me to help out, I thought it'd be a chance to get away for a bit -- from the memories, the job, the city. And do some thinking.

EMMA

That's not silly at all, Liam.
(with hope in her eyes)
Has it helped?

LIAM

(tenderly)
It has.

They stay in the moment, bashfully looking at each other.

But then she shocks herself back to reality.

EMMA

Okay! Well, thank you. I'm glad we settled that.

She clears her throat and looks at the piece on the rack.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Now, what's next? Ever play "Dona Nobis Pacem"?

LIAM

(recovers)
Uhhh... We sang it in high school.
"Grant Us Peace."

Just then, Todd quietly comes into the doorway at the back -- and is disheartened to see them together again.

EMMA

We do it as a round, a little
uptempo. Wanna try it?

LIAM

Sure. Do you want to do it as a
duet for now? I'll play up here and
you play down there, okay? Let's
see what ya got there, Lefty.

EMMA

(giggles)
Okay! Start us off, Buckley.

Sitting close together and reading the score, Liam begins the
piece with his right hand, then Emma joins in with her left.

Todd watches them, pondering the situation.

And as they make their way through the song -- smiling,
nodding to the rhythm, even singing along quietly --

Todd turns and walks away.

BEGIN MONTAGE

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - DAY

A gang of folks decorates for the upcoming concert -- hanging
wreaths, attaching big ribbons to the aisle seats, etc.

Onstage, Emma and Liam grin at each other as she wraps her
music stand in garland and he sets candles on the piano.

Noticing the looks as they build a poinsettia tree, Evan
gives Spiff a self-satisfied nod on behalf of Team Liam --

-- while Spiff responds with a vehement head shake from Team
Todd.

INT. PENNSVIEW - PHYSICAL THERAPY - DAY

Emma and Todd have an animated conversation next to a group
of residents in Santa hats riding decorated exercise bikes.

Pedaling away, Spiff motions toward the youngsters and shoots
a smug look at Evan --

-- who does a big eye-roll.

INT. PENNSVIEW - COMMUNITY KITCHEN - DAY

At a baking class, Liam takes a perfect batch of gingerbread men out of the oven and shows them to Emma, who cheers and puts an arm around him.

Standing with the students, Evan sees this and laughs at Spiff --

-- who glares at him and gives him a thumbs-down.

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Emma and Todd munch popcorn among the residents while a Christmas movie plays on the big screen.

Behind them, Spiff nudges Evan --

-- who gives him an elbow-shot back.

END MONTAGE

INT. PENNSVIEW - WAITING ROOM - DAY

It's empty except for Liam, who hangs off a step ladder fixing a string of Christmas lights.

Todd comes in and sees him.

TODD

Whoa! Careful, Doc! We don't need you winding up in the E.R.

LIAM

Ha! What can I do for you, Todd? Everything good?

TODD

Yeah, you know. Had a break in the action. Thought I'd come down, see how you're getting along.

He sits in one of the chairs as Liam works.

LIAM

Good, good.

Todd looks around.

TODD

This little place must be kind of slow compared to what you're used to in the city.

LIAM
 (an understatement)
 Ohhh, it's a bit more relaxed.

TODD
 Still -- You probably miss all the excitement and fun back there. The restaurants, concerts, sports. I'll bet you can't wait to go home.

LIAM
 Oh, I don't know. Why do you ask?

Happy with his repair, Liam climbs down the ladder.

TODD
 Just curious. Although I did hear about Dr. Palmer retiring. And I guess I kinda wondered what that might mean for you.

Liam laughs nervously and leans on the ladder.

LIAM
 Word gets around quick in this place.

TODD
 Eh -- It's a small town. And Pennsvie Manor is a small town inside a small town. You can't put your sneakers on around here without 10 people knowing where you're going.

Liam ponders this.

TODD (CONT'D)
 I'm sure everyone's wondering if Ray offered you the job, Doc. If you're staying. The residents, me, the rest of the staff... Emma...

Again Liam senses what this is really about.

He half-smiles at Todd, looking for the right words.

LIAM
 All I can say, Todd -- is that I have options.

He folds the ladder with a crunch.

LIAM (CONT'D)

And I'm gonna consider all of 'em.

He shrugs, and as he carries the ladder away --

LIAM (CONT'D)

Talk to ya later, buddy.

Unsure how to take this, Todd lets it sink in.

INT. B&B - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Stacy takes wrapped gifts from an oversize shopping bag and arranges them under the Christmas tree.

Emma rushes in putting on her coat.

EMMA

We have to run, Stace. It's our final rehearsal for the concert.

Liam follows, taking his time.

Stacy spins around and hides the bag behind her.

STACY

Listen, you two -- No snooping through the gifts! No shaking, no weighing, and no holding them up to see through the wrapping paper. I double-wrapped them anyway.

LIAM

You double-wrapped them?

EMMA

She does that.

STACY

Around here you have to!
(a stern warning to Emma)
It discourages spies and -- and --
present-pirates!

Emma scoffs.

STACY (CONT'D)

You need to know some things about her, Dr. Buckley.

He looks wide-eyed at Emma, playing along.

LIAM
Oh really?

Emma tugs his arm.

EMMA
Okay, well, we're in a hurry. But
we'll be back soon to run the gifts
through Liam's x-ray machine.

Emma spins him around, and as they go --

LIAM
Actually I'm not sure that's
covered under your plan.

EMMA
Shh!

Turning back to her task, Stacy calls to them distractedly --

STACY
Good luck at practice! Can't wait
for the concert...

EXT. B&B - PORCH - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Emma and Liam come out to the porch, where Pops fixes a chain
on the old wooden swing.

Emma shivers.

EMMA
Darn, I left my scarf at work.

Pops starts removing his own plush Christmas scarf.

POPS
Here, borrow mine, kiddo.

EMMA
Aww, I can't take the one Nana
knitted for you.

POPS
Why not? It's always brought me
good luck...

He hands it to her.

POPS (CONT'D)
Maybe it'll rub off on you.

EMMA

Really?

She reluctantly puts it on.

EMMA (CONT'D)

How did it bring you luck, Pops?

POPS

She said it would remind me that
"Life can push you in the right
direction if you get out of your
own way."

Emma halts.

And Pops beams at her.

EMMA

Wait. Nana said that?

POPS

Sure she did! Where do you think I
got it from?

Chuckling, he heads to the front door.

Emma and Liam watch him go in.

Then look at each other, smile, and start down the steps.

EMMA

My grandmother said it! And all
this time I thought it was his
quote.

LIAM

It's a good one...

EXT. B&B - PATH - DAY - CONTINUOUS

LIAM

I wonder what's behind it.

EMMA

It had something to do with, um...
(she ponders this with a
head shake)
a string of bad Christmases he
had...
(so oddly familiar)
sort of all in a row...
(MORE)

EMMA (CONT'D)
(absently)
until he...

Just then --

she SLIPS ON A PATCH OF ICE --

but this time Liam is there --

and CATCHES HER.

His arms around her in a dip, they're close enough to kiss.

And they look like they want to.

Really want to.

But instead --

They smile warmly.

And straighten up again.

Then he slowly, wordlessly offers his arm.

She takes it.

And they stroll down the path together.

EXT. B&B - PORCH - SAME TIME

Meanwhile, behind the curtains in the front door window, we see Pops watching --

-- with a joyous, knowing smile.

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - DAY

It's nearly rehearsal time, with some choir members onstage and others still chatting in the aisles.

At the piano, Liam puts the sheet music for "What Child Is This?" on the rack.

He plays the first few measures, then stops and leafs through, studying it.

Emma comes over and nods toward the back.

EMMA
We have an audience.

Liam turns and sees Ray, Todd and other staff bringing in a dozen or so residents in wheelchairs.

EMMA (CONT'D)

We like to give some folks a preview.

LIAM

Then I guess we'll have to put on a good show!

EMMA

What were you so deep in thought about?

LIAM

I was just remembering. I used to do a gorgeous arrangement of "What Child Is This?" A mellow, kind of jazzy version that my mother loved. Every Christmas she'd ask me to play it for her.

She leans on the piano.

EMMA

Do you remember it?

Liam thinks it over, then quietly starts to play.

The choir members stop talking and come closer -- and hear just how good a musician their young Dr. Buckley is.

Emma, in particular, is carried away by it, gazing at Liam as if seeing him for the first time.

From the back, Ray watches, too, impressed.

To no one in particular --

RAY

Amazing. How can we get this guy to stick around?

Todd comes over and stands next to Ray.

TODD

Do you think he might?

Ray looks around to see if anyone's listening.

RAY

Well, you didn't hear it from me,
but he has a tempting offer back in
the city. A nice promotion.

Ray shakes their head and sighs.

Todd's surprised by the news. And hopeful.

RAY (CONT'D)

What would make him stay?

And Todd can't help noticing how Emma looks at Liam.

A BIT LATER

The rehearsal is over and most everyone has gone.

At the piano, Liam puts his sheet music away.

Emma comes over.

EMMA

Ya know, I don't believe I ever
thanked you properly for agreeing
to do this.

LIAM

No need. But you're welcome.

They smile at each other.

EMMA

Hey, what are you doing Christmas
Day?

LIAM

Honestly, I haven't really thought
about it. I figured I'd be in the
office part of the time. Or on call
at least.

EMMA

Spend it with us. At the B&B. We
open gifts, play games, watch a
movie. And Stacy really goes all
out for dinner -- turkey, ham,
three kinds of potatoes, a couple
of pies --

LIAM

You had me at three kinds of
potatoes.

She laughs and sits on the bench.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I appreciate the invitation.

EMMA
Well, considering you're staying there it would be rude not to let you join us.

LIAM
True!

He sits, too.

EMMA
We wouldn't want you whimpering for scraps by the table!

Now it's his turn to laugh.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Where will your family be?

LIAM
Scattered, like usual. My parents are in Florida. My brother and sister are both on the west coast with their families.

He hesitates to ask.

LIAM (CONT'D)
What about Todd?

EMMA
Oh my goodness. He has a huge family, and they all get together at his uncle's house. So no, he won't be there.

LIAM
I thought maybe since you two...

EMMA
We've only been out once. For the record.

LIAM
But you've known each other, like-

EMMA
-All our lives.
(chuckles)
(MORE)

EMMA (CONT'D)

And we've worked together for a while now, so... I don't know. Todd's a good guy.

LIAM

He seems like it.

She gets up quickly.

EMMA

Well, I really should run.

He stands, too.

LIAM

Emma?

She turns to him.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I don't know what I was expecting when I came here. A chance to help Dr. Palmer. Clear my head a bit... But you've been a nice surprise.

She lets this land.

EMMA

So have you.

They smile sweetly at each other.

Then Emma goes down the steps -- grabs her trusty cart full of stuff -- and pushes it up the aisle.

Liam watches her go.

And on her way out, she says good night to a couple of people.

INT. PENNSVIEW - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Todd leans against the wall, waiting for Emma.

As she comes through the doorway --

TODD

You need a hand, Em?

EMMA

(startles)

Oh, Todd! Sorry. Thanks, I'm good.

TODD
The choir sounds terrific.

EMMA
Thank you! Yeah, I thought it went well.

TODD
(hesitant)
You and Liam seem to make a good team.

And now she's uncomfortable.

EMMA
Yeah -- he's, um -- he's fun to work with.

TODD
I thought maybe he'd wind up being Dr. P's replacement.

EMMA
Yeah?

TODD
Yeah. But it turns out he has some big promotion waiting for him back home. A nice one.

Emma tries to hide her surprise at the news -- but it stings.

EMMA
Oh really? I -- I didn't know about that.

TODD
Sure. I mean --
(chuckles nervously)
-- why would a big city boy want to move here?

Todd watches her for a reaction.

TODD (CONT'D)
Right?

Emma glances through the door and sees Liam go out the stage exit.

EMMA
Right, yeah... I guess you never know what some people want, do you?

Todd gazes at her.

But she turns to go.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Okay, well, I'll see ya tomorrow,
Todd. Good night.

And as she wheels her cart up the hall, she looks like she could cry.

BEGIN HOLIDAY FAIR SEQUENCE

Plays out in real time.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Looking glum, Todd shuffles up the sidewalk in something like a ratty old reindeer costume, complete with droopy antlers.

He adjusts the too-tight costume as he goes, while CHRISTMAS MUSIC coming from somewhere gets louder.

Finally he arrives at the annual HOLIDAY FAIR, now in full swing on the downtown's sidewalks.

Shoppers explore the festival, buying gifts and sampling goodies at the food stalls -- and eyeing Todd with amusement as he passes.

CRAFT TABLES

At a line of craft tables, Evan, Spiff, Mariana and other Pennsview residents sell the items they've made in Emma's classes -- ceramics, sewing projects, toys and more.

EVAN & SPIFF'S TABLE

As Todd ambles up, adjusting his antlers, Spiff frowns at him and stands.

SPIFF

What in the name of Dancer and
Prancer...?!

Cracking up, Evan hurries away.

LIAM'S TABLE

Nearby, Liam, looking uncomfortable, mans the "Holiday Health Tips" table --

-- which seems to have attracted a line of women.

INTERCUT - STACY'S TABLE

Standing cross-armed at Stacy's baked goods table, she and Emma eye the women waiting to see Liam.

EMMA

Stacy, tell me the truth. Did I read the signs wrong? Did I misinterpret things?

STACY

I don't know, sweetie. He sure seemed interested.

A young woman at the front of Liam's line giggles loudly.

EMMA

I can't interfere if he has other plans, ya know?

STACY

I know.

EMMA

Some big promotion back in the city? Come on.

STACY

I know.

EMMA

Should I just back off? I mean, how can there be anything between us when he's leaving?

STACY

Why don't you talk to him, Em? Ask him how he feels.

EMMA

Yeah, right.

(silly voice)

Excuse me, Dr. Buckley, but -- I like you, do you like me? Please check the box on my medical form.

The next woman in line touches Liam's arm as she speaks.
Emma and Stacy see this and roll their eyes at each other.

INTERCUT - EVAN & SPIFF'S TABLE

While Evan watches nearby, Spiff leans on the table studying Todd.

Then, curious, follows Todd's gaze to Emma.

Then cranes his neck to follow her gaze to Liam.

And tsks at all the romantic intrigue.

SPIFF
Crandall.

Todd doesn't hear him.

SPIFF (CONT'D)
Hey, Crandall.

Still nothing.

SPIFF (CONT'D)
(air quotes)
"Coach Todd!!"

Todd snaps out of it and turns.

SPIFF (CONT'D)
I know it's Christmas. But why are
you dressed like a reindeer?

Todd looks at himself like he's forgotten the costume.

TODD
Oh. I'm not a reindeer actually.
I'm the vice president of the local
Caribou Lodge. They asked me to
represent them today.

Spiff rubs his face in frustration.

SPIFF
This doesn't help Team Todd, man!
You know you're supposed to attract
the woman you like, right? Not
repel her.

Evan tries not to laugh.

Spiff grabs a cocoa out of a cup carrier and holds it out to Todd.

SPIFF (CONT'D)

Here. Take this cocoa over to little Emmy, okay? She loves cocoa. Drinks it like it's -- like it's -- cocoa. Just talk to her, for crying out loud!

TODD

Yeah, at this point? I don't know. We really only went out one time.
(air quotes)
"Officially."

Spiff slaps his air quotes away.

SPIFF

Enough with the air quotes already! Now, I'm gonna let you in on some informal polling around Pennsvew, okay? Team Todd is losing, and you need to step up your game. And I mean now! You understand?

They regard each other a moment.

Then, buoyed by the pep talk, Todd snatches the cocoa, nods at Spiff determinedly, and strides away toward Emma.

SPIFF (CONT'D)

Atta boy!

Spiff watches him go, then --

SPIFF (CONT'D)

Well at least take the antlers off!

In the meantime, Evan slinks over near Liam's table, where a woman recites her many health complaints.

Liam doesn't hear her, though, because he's watching Todd deliver the cocoa to Emma.

He sees Emma take the cup, smile and hug him, and then blithely chatter away.

Startled by his own jealousy, Liam turns back to the complaining woman and tries to snap out of it.

Then --

EVAN

Psst! Doc!

Liam turns, and Evan motions for him to come over.

LIAM

(to the woman)

Excuse me just a moment. Sorry.

He goes to Evan, who leans in and speaks quietly.

EVAN

Have you ever lost someone forever,
Doc? Because of circumstances?
Fear? Because you were too afraid
to take a chance?

Liam hesitates, then nods.

LIAM

I have.

EVAN

Me, too.

Evan glances around -- then looking Liam in the eye, he chooses his words carefully.

EVAN (CONT'D)

In fact, for some of us... Men like
me?... Of a certain age?...

He lets Liam absorb this revelation.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Fear was a regular thing... And
nobody should ever lose out on love
for such a silly reason as that.

He leans toward Liam again and says, almost in a whisper,

EVAN (CONT'D)

When... Are you going to tell that
sweet girl... How you feel...?

This lands on Liam like a truth-bomb.

It takes a moment, but he straightens up, clears his throat,
and nods at Evan --

-- who offers him a friendly fist-bump.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Hey... Team Liam.

Liam reciprocates with a grin.

LIAM

Team Liam.

Then he turns and looks for Emma at Stacy's table, but only sees Stacy and Todd.

So he starts walking through the crowd to find her.

Meanwhile, Todd stands stock still, holding up his droopy antlers as Stacy assesses his costume.

STACY

No, I'm pretty sure no one's going to confuse you for the real thing, Todd. Even out in the woods.

MARIANA'S CRAFT TABLE

While Mariana waits on a customer, Emma sorts through some of her sewing projects.

Liam approaches cautiously.

LIAM

Emma?

She glances at him, then goes back to sorting.

EMMA

(distant)
Enjoying the fair?

LIAM

I am, yeah. Hey, I-

EMMA

-You should be. You seem to have a lot of fans at your table.

Even now she can't help teasing him a bit.

And he doesn't know how to respond.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Lots of gals in need of "Holiday Health Tips" -- Dr. Buckley?

LIAM

Wait. That was your idea -- Ms. Klutz. I didn't even want to do it, remember?

She knows it's true but it takes her a second.

EMMA

I suppose.

Done with her customer, Mariana sees what's happening and pretends to check her inventory.

LIAM

Okay, what I wanted to say...

He hesitates.

EMMA

Yes?

LIAM

I wanted to talk about...

EMMA

About what?

LIAM

(struggles for words)

I have some -- job options. Career choices. Pretty nice ones, actually, and --

She turns and interrupts him with feigned enthusiasm.

EMMA

I heard! Congratulations! I couldn't be more happy for you, Liam. Seriously. We're all going to miss you around here.

LIAM

(dumbfounded)

Um... Thanks.

EMMA

I'll see ya at the concert tonight, okay?

She walks away.

Wounded, he watches her go.

And Mariana observes all of this.

After a long moment, Liam walks to an empty spot on the sidewalk -- takes out his phone -- and calls his boss.

LIAM
 (on cell)
 Hey, Steve, it's Liam. How are you?

He listens. Hesitates.

LIAM (CONT'D)
 Good, good. Hey, about the
 promotion...

He drops his phone to his side.

And takes a moment to glance around at the community and
 people he's come to love:

-- the decorated little downtown;
 -- the shoppers enjoying the holiday season;
 -- the Pennsvview residents selling their wares.

Then puts the phone up to his ear again.

LIAM (CONT'D)
 I've made my decision.

Mariana hears this and spins around like she wants to say
 something --

But he's already walking away.

She watches him go.

Then a customer comes up, and she goes over to help.

END SEQUENCE

INT. CUPPA LOVE CAFÉ - DAY

Emma and Todd sit together in a corner booth.

EMMA
 I should have said something
 sooner, Todd. I'm sorry.

TODD
 Don't be. We've been friends all
 our lives, and I'm cool with that.
 It was only one date!

EMMA
 (sweetly)
 Thank you.

TODD
How'd you find out the doc is
leaving?

EMMA
Mariana heard him at the festival,
talking on the phone with his boss.

TODD
Em... I know you don't want to
interfere in his life, but -- Don't
you think you should say something?

EMMA
What's the point? He didn't tell me
how he feels, he only wanted to
talk about his job options! So,
no... I just want to get through
the concert tonight.

INT. B&B - PARLOR - DAY

Pops is in his reading chair, a book in his lap, and Emma
sits on the piano bench across from him.

EMMA
You said it went on several years?
The Christmas Klutz -- curse? --
thing?

POPS
(chuckles)
It was never a curse. It was just
me being careless, and in a hurry,
especially this time of year.

EMMA
So what happened exactly?

POPS
Well, one December I was dating a
girl I thought I liked, but I guess
she didn't care for me so much.

EXT. PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK

A large group -- including YOUNG POPS (N/S) -- laughs and
cheers as they run around pelting each other with snowballs.

He climbs a snow fort -- is instantly bombarded -- then falls
through and gets stuck up to his neck.

BACK TO SCENE

POPS

The girl ran off with the group,
and it was ages till someone came
back for me. I wound up sick in bed
over Christmas and New Year's!

EMMA

That's horrible!

POPS

The next year I went skating with
another girl I was seeing, and she
talked me into trying the barrel
jump.

EXT. ICE SKATING POND - DAY - FLASHBACK

As a group of onlookers cheers, Young Pops skates as fast as
he can toward a line of barrels.

He flies over the first couple of barrels, CRASHES hard on
another one and does a flip onto the ice.

BACK TO SCENE

POPS

Broke my tailbone for Christmas.

Emma cringes.

POPS (CONT'D)

She's the one who got people
calling me Christmas Klutz.

EMMA

I never knew about this, Pops!

POPS

There were other girlfriends, other
mishaps. The next year I cut my leg
down at the saw mill. Had 20
stitches most of December and
January.

She holds up her wrapped wrist.

EMMA

So how did you break the spell? I
have to know!

Pops chuckles again.

POPS
No spell. Your Nana was just in the
right place at the right time...

EXT. DIRT STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Pops pulls a wooden cart full of groceries.

POPS (V.O.)
I was delivering for Fidler's
grocery store over the holidays,
and I guess like usual I wasn't
watching where I was going...

He starts across the street, when suddenly an old pickup
comes flying toward him, HORN BLARING.

Someone shoves him from behind, and he sails out of the way.

Lying on a pile of snow, he rolls over and sees sassy YOUNG
BESS (N/S) standing over him, hands on her hips, grinning.

BACK TO SCENE

POPS
And that's when she said it.

EMMA
(quiet)
"Life can push you in the right
direction --"

BACK TO FLASHBACK

Emma's voice over Young Bess' smiling lips --

EMMA (V.O.)
"-- if you get out of your own
way."

BACK TO SCENE

POPS
And she was my life. I never had
another klutzy holiday accident.

Emma reaches over and squeezes his hand.

POPS (CONT'D)

She taught me to slow down, to stop
being so hard on myself -- and to
really enjoy each and every
Christmas.

And with a twinkle in his eye, he chuckles.

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Residents, family members and VIPs chat excitedly as they take their seats.

Then the house lights fade, and the stage lights go up.

Onstage, to rousing applause, the Pennsview Senior Choir files out from the wings and onto the risers.

Then Liam comes out, also to applause, and sits at the piano.

Next, at the back of auditorium, Todd opens his followspot --

-- just as Emma enters from stage right wearing a sparkling, Christmasy, gold and green sequined gown, and gets a nice round of applause.

Liam watches her, entranced, as she walks to center stage.

So entranced, in fact, that he suddenly remembers where he is, and quietly plays a note to give the group their pitch.

And on Emma's downbeat, they jump right into a spirited version of "Joy to the World."

BEGIN CONCERT MONTAGE

Throughout the choir's impressive performance, we see:

- Emma having fun conducting;
- Liam following Emma's lead as he plays;
- Emma and Liam making sad puppy eyes at each other;
- and Ray, Todd, Stacy and Austin enjoying the show.

Among the tunes:

- "O Holy Night," with a beautiful solo by Evan;
- "Riu Riu Chiu," in Spanish with a lovely solo by Mariana;
- "Up on the Housetop," with Pops appearing as Santa;
- and a "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" sing-along finale.

END MONTAGE

A SHORT TIME LATER

Ray addresses the audience.

RAY

Next, please give a warm round of
applause to Dr. Liam Buckley, who
courageously filled in on piano!

Liam rises and acknowledges the applause, plus a few whoops
and cheers from the choir.

RAY (CONT'D)

And finally we need to thank our
intrepid Activities Director, who
put all this together, and does
more for Pennsview Manor than
anyone knows. Emma Klutz!

Holding a bouquet, Emma curtsies comically, getting a laugh
in addition to the applause and cheers.

RAY (CONT'D)

Again, thank you for supporting our
activities program. And for making
this our most successful concert
ever. Now I hope you'll join us in
the lobby for Christmas cookies and
refreshments. Good night, everyone!

More applause.

Emma turns to congratulate Liam, but he's already gone.

She tries to spot him in the crowd -- then gives up and turns
back to celebrate with the choir.

INT. PENNSVIEW - LOBBY - NIGHT

Todd and Ray chat among the lively post-concert crowd.

RAY

Well, I'm disappointed to hear
that. I thought Liam would be the
perfect replacement for Dr. Palmer.

TODD

(surprised)

Wait... Did you offer him the job?

RAY

You bet I did! As soon as Doc
Palmer announced his retirement.

Ray waves at someone and hurries away.

TODD
 (thinks this over)
 So he had a choice.

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Emma walks up the aisle, looking around at the stragglers.
 She passes Austin, who's gabbing with someone.

EMMA
 Austin, have you seen Dr. Buckley?

AUSTIN
 No, hon, I haven't, sorry.

INT. PENNSVIEW - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Emma passes Mariana in the hall.

EMMA
 Mariana, any idea where Liam is?

MARIANA
 I think I saw him go out to the
 courtyard. Is everything all right?

EMMA
 Guess I'll find out...

EXT. PENNSVIEW - COURTYARD - NIGHT

Liam gazes at the brightly lit Christmas tree.

Emma walks toward him, and looks up at the starry December sky.

EMMA
 (quietly)
 Help me out here, Nana.

She comes up alongside Liam.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 I wanted to say thanks, but you
 left so quickly.

Liam turns.

EMMA (CONT'D)

The concert would have been a disaster without you.

(keeps it light)

An a cappella catastrophe!

He half-smiles.

LIAM

I still think the accordion player would have been fine.

Emma smirks.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hey, I need to say something. I've made a decision --

EMMA

Let me go first, okay?

He acquiesces.

She takes a deep breath.

EMMA (CONT'D)

(fumbles for words)

Um... Oh boy... I know you're leaving to take the promotion, but I really care about you, Liam.

(chuckles nervously)

An awful lot. And I'm sorry this --

She motions between them.

EMMA (CONT'D)

-- this -- wasn't something more...

She gauges his face for a reaction.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I just had to get that out there.

Liam's just about to respond, when --

EVAN (O.S.)

Hey Doc!!

Liam turns and sees Evan near the front entrance.

Evan cups his hands around his mouth and yells.

EVAN (CONT'D)
Mr. Cusick fell again!! We're
calling an ambulance!!

LIAM
Okay! I'll be right there!

He checks his watch.

Then turns around --

-- and sees Emma walking away.

Frustrated, he watches her go.

Then turns back and sees Evan hustling back inside.

Then looks at Emma again like he wants to chase after her.

But turns back and starts to head in.

As he goes, Todd suddenly appears and intercepts him.

TODD
Hey, man, what's wrong with you?

LIAM
Excuse me??

TODD
You turned down Ray's offer to
stay? And took the promotion back
in the city?! Don't you see the way
Emma looks at you? I can see it!
Everyone can see it!

LIAM
Wait a minute! The promo -- What
are you talking about?

TODD
Mariana heard you at the festival!
Talking on the phone with your
boss!

Liam thinks back.

FLASHBACK TO THE FESTIVAL

Liam's on his phone.

Mariana watches nearby.

LIAM

Hey, about the promotion...

He drops his phone to his side.

Looks around the little community.

Then notices Mariana hovering and listening in.

So he puts the phone up to his ear again --

LIAM (CONT'D)

I've made my decision.

-- and walks away for some privacy.

BACK TO SCENE

Brow furrowed, Liam realizes what happened.

LIAM

I need to fix this.

He looks toward the entrance.

LIAM (CONT'D)

But first I need to take care of
that.

And he runs toward his emergency --

-- leaving Todd scratching his head.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

As Liam strides up the sidewalk, he sees someone who looks like Emma ducking into the Cuppa Love Café.

He goes to the front window and looks in.

Then Austin comes out with his morning brew.

AUSTIN

You looking for someone, Dr.
Buckley?

LIAM

Oh, hi, Austin. I've been trying to reach Emma for ages. Have you seen her? I could have sworn I saw her walk in here a second ago.

AUSTIN

Nope, haven't seen her. Hey, that was some concert last night! You were terrific. Everyone was.

LIAM

Aw, thank you. I appreciate it.

As he heads up the street --

AUSTIN

We'll be sorry to lose ya!

Liam nods politely.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Merry Christmas!

LIAM

Merry Christmas!

(to himself)

I guess the town rumor mill is working overtime again.

Just then, Evan and Spiff pass him.

SPIFF

Morning, Doc!

Liam startles, and wonders if they heard his comment.

LIAM

Oh, hey guys...

Spiff aims a quiet, wicked chuckle at Evan --

SPIFF

Heh heh heh...

-- who frowns back at him.

Liam catches this.

SPIFF (CONT'D)

Who won? Oh that's right --

Then, quietly and in sync with his footsteps --

SPIFF (CONT'D)

Team Todd, Team Todd, Team Todd...

Liam just rolls his eyes.

And crosses the street.

INT. CUPPA LOVE CAFÉ - DAY - SAME TIME

At a booth, Stacy cranes her neck to see Liam out the window.

STACY
Okay, he's gone.

Scrunched down across her seat, Emma sits up and looks, too.

STACY (CONT'D)
(scoffs)
Hiding from him on Christmas Eve!
How old are you?!

Emma buries her face in her hands.

EMMA
Arrrgghhh. I've never been so
confused in my whole life.

STACY
Look, I'm proud of you for being so
brave and pouring your heart out,
but why didn't you wait to hear
what he had to say?

EMMA
There was a medical emergency, like
I said. Plus I didn't want to get
shot down, Stacy!

STACY
I take it back about being brave.

Emma sneers at her.

STACY (CONT'D)
Do I really need to get into the
whole better-to-have-loved-and-lost
thing with you?

EMMA
Hey, you're talking to the
Christmas Klutz here! I wrote
"Better to have loved and lost --"
(she fades)
"than --" however it goes.

Stacy looks at her with big-sisterly shame.

EMMA (CONT'D)
He took the promotion and he's
going home. That's all I need to
know.

EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY - SAME TIME

Liam comes out of the store where Emma took him shopping.

Looks up and down the sidewalk.

And then his phone rings.

LIAM
(answers)
Dr. Buckley.

He listens.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Okay, I'll be right there.

He takes one more look up the street, then heads toward Pennsvview Manor.

INT. B&B - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Stacy sets out refreshments for their annual caroling night.

She suddenly turns to Emma.

STACY
What do you mean you're not going?!
It's our neighborhood caroling
night!

Emma plops down in a chair, groaning.

EMMA
My heart just isn't in it, Stace.

STACY
But every year you live for this!
Ever since you were little it's
been one of your favorite things!

EMMA
I know, I know.

STACY
What would Pops say if he walked in
right now and saw you like this?

Emma imitates him, chuckling and doing his voice.

EMMA
"Now, kiddo -- These things have a
way of blowing over."

STACY
 (surprised)
 That's actually really good.

EMMA
 I've heard it a lot lately.

STACY
 Okay -- And what would Nana say?
 Before Pops borrowed it.

Bored now, Emma sighs and says it by rote --

EMMA
 "Life can push you in the right..."

-- but then something occurs to her.

STACY
 "In the right..." Come on, say it.

EMMA
 (distracted)
 "The right direction."

STACY
 "If you..." Come on! "If you..."

EMMA
 (elsewhere now)
 "Get out of your own way."

STACY
 Exactly. Now the carolers are going
 to be here any minute, so I suggest
 you pull yourself together and-

Emma stands up, interrupting.

EMMA
 -I have to talk to him.

STACY
 Huh?

EMMA
 I have to talk to Liam, Stacy.
Really talk to him, or I'll never
 forgive myself. I have to get out
 of my own way!

Stacy nods excitedly.

They hear the front door open.

POPS (O.S.)
Everyone's here, ladies! Let's go
caroling!

STACY
Coming, Pops!

She looks at Emma, who seems to be frozen in place.

STACY (CONT'D)
Em?

Emma doesn't answer.

EXT. B&B - FRONT - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Stacy hurries out, putting on her coat, and runs down the
steps to the path.

Twenty or so carolers have gathered in the front yard,
including Pops, Todd and Austin.

POPS
Where's Emma?

STACY
She's trying to get hold of
someone, Pops. She'll catch up.

Todd looks at her, questioning, and she shrugs.

POPS
(chuckles)
Well, since we're only going five
blocks that shouldn't be too hard!

He starts handing out lyric sheets.

POPS (CONT'D)
Okay, folks, here's our repertoire!
Everybody grab one! We'll warm up
first, okay?

INT. B&B - PARLOR - SAME TIME

Emma sits at the piano on her cell, listening to Liam's
outgoing message.

LIAM (V.O.)
Hi, this is Dr. Liam Buckley.
Please leave a detailed message and
I'll --

She hangs up and texts him instead.

INTERCUT - HER PHONE

EMMA (TEXT)
I'd love it if we could talk.
REALLY talk.

Her finger hovers over the send button.

But then she presses it -- looks fearful momentarily -- and watches for a response.

Three blinking dots appear.

She waits impatiently.

The dots keep blinking -- then disappear.

She sighs -- and sets the phone on the piano where she can see it.

She opens the sheet music for "What Child Is This?" -- the song Liam played at the final rehearsal.

And quietly plays the melody left-handed as she waits --

EXT. B&B - SIDEWALK - NIGHT - SAME TIME

-- while simultaneously out on the sidewalk, the carolers sing the words in sync with the piano.

INT. B&B - PARLOR - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Back in the parlor, Emma continues playing -- a little teary, a little dreamy.

She closes her eyes.

And then -- a hand appears next to hers and quietly plays along.

For a moment it barely registers.

But then Emma gasps, stops playing and turns --

-- while Liam, sitting to her right in his scrubs, continues playing with both hands now.

He stops. Then turns to her.

LIAM

What's this I hear about the holidays being kind of rough on you lately?

Emma gazes at him, full of hope.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Meet the new doc at Pennsview Manor.

She beams.

And they kiss.

The tender, happy, healing kiss they've both needed.

EXT. B&B - SIDEWALK - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Outside, the carolers start strolling up the sidewalk, singing a cheery, upbeat "Good King Wenceslas" -- the song Liam played at knitting night.

Pops, Stacy and Todd bring up the rear, singing along happily.

INT. B&B - PARLOR - NIGHT - SAME TIME

The kiss continues --

-- and ends in an embrace.

EMMA

I thought you were leaving. Mariana heard you tell your boss you made your decision.

LIAM

I did make my decision. What Mariana didn't hear was me telling my boss that I found a new home. In a town like the one I grew up in.

He leans back and looks deep into her eyes.

LIAM (CONT'D)

And that I was staying to be with the girl I love -- no matter how long it takes to win her heart.

They embrace again.

And after a moment, with her head on Liam's shoulder --

EMMA
Yay, Team Liam...

They both crack up.

Gaze in each other's eyes.

And kiss again.

EXT. B&B - SIDEWALK - NIGHT - SAME TIME

The carolers continue singing their way up the street.

When suddenly, at the back of the group --

Todd steps on a PATCH OF ICE --

his feet FLY out from under him --

his lyric sheet goes AIRBORNE --

and DOWN HE GOES with a thud.

Pops and Stacy gasp and rush to him.

Todd looks up at them, stunned.

But none the worse for wear, starts to laugh.

With a sly grin, Pops looks at Todd out of the corner of his eye --

-- and helps him to his feet.

POPS
(growls playfully)
Come on, Christmas Klutz...

The three of them chuckle as Todd brushes himself off.

Then look back at the B&B, curious...

And turn to catch up with the carolers.

FADE TO BLACK.