

OH, CHRISTMAS TREE

written by

Brian Herald, Brandon Gray, Daniel Thompson

ACT 1

FADE IN:

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - GREENVILLE, MAINE - DAY

CHIRON: Many winters ago...

In a quiet, snowy residential neighborhood, we see a street view of two houses side-by-side. One of the houses has a large fir tree in the yard.

The shot PUSHES IN to the yard with the TREE, where we see YOUNG ELLIE (12, cheerful, considerate, inspired) and YOUNG JOSH (13, spry, rambunctious) helping Josh's AUNT RUTH (55, thoughtful, calm, completely present) decorate the tree.

Aunt Ruth pulls an ornament from a box of decorations. The ornament says "3 DAYS 'TIL CHRISTMAS."

AUNT RUTH

Here kids, place this one together,
please.

Ellie and Josh add it to the tree together. Ruth's heart is full.

Josh is ready to go inside. He squints looking up towards the sun as Ellie disappears to grab another ornament.

YOUNG JOSH

Aunt Ruth, can we go inside and
have hot chocolate now?

Ellie shows Aunt Ruth a new ornament she's made. It shows the year "2008."

YOUNG ELLIE

See, Miss Ruth, this is the one I
made for this year.

AUNT RUTH

Oh, dear, it is magnificent. It
belongs nowhere else but on our
tree.

In the background, Josh prepares a few snowballs. Aunt Ruth continues to wax on verbosely as she admires the ornament and ultimately places it on a tree branch.

AUNT RUTH (CONT'D)

The craftsmanship of this
decoration is inspiring.

(MORE)

AUNT RUTH (CONT'D)
It represents so much of the
Christmas spirit we need these
days. There. It's perfect.

Josh loads a snowball into a snowball launcher and shouts to
the sky like he's in an arena full of onlookers.

YOUNG JOSH
(stadium announcer voice)
And now. Going for the world record
of longest snowball throw...Josh
"McNasty" Hanson!

Josh launches a snowball near the Christmas tree and it plops
into the ground.

YOUNG JOSH (CONT'D)
And the crowd goes wild!
This one with extra whipped cream!

Josh prepares another snowball and launches it in the same
direction. It plops into the ground around the same place.

Ruth grabs hold of Ellie's shoulders and turns her so the two
are face-to-face. She looks and speaks intently into Ellie's
eyes.

AUNT RUTH
Ellie, dear, this will always be
our tree. Your tree. Your special
Christmas tree.

YOUNG ELLIE
(wistfully)
My special Christmas tree.

In the background Josh launches another snowball and we
faintly hear him call out a warning.

YOUNG JOSH
Incoming!

Simultaneously we hear the SPLAT of a snowball and the screen
goes BLACK.

Ellie now has snow on her head from being struck by a rouge
snowball. She is stiff, cold, and angry. She shrieks and then
chases after a giggling Josh.

Ruth smiles as she continues decorating the tree and begins
singing an out-of-tune version of "Oh, Christmas Tree."

AUNT RUTH
"Oh, Christmas tree...oh, Christmas
tree...how lovely are thy
branches..."

FADE TO:

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

CHIRON: 15 years later...

ELLIE (now 27, empathetic, thoughtful, caretaker), is alone in Aunt Ruth's yard decorating the same tree from the opening scene while humming "Oh, Christmas Tree."

She adds her custom ornament for that year showing that it is "2023."

Ellie's mom, EVELYN (65, witty, matter-of-fact, wheelchair bound), calls from the house next door, and then Ellie dashes out of view.

EVELYN (O.S.)
Ell-ee! Time to come home!

ELLIE
Coming, mom!

INT. EVELYN'S HOUSE - DAY

Inside Evelyn's modest, clean kitchen, there is at least one window with a view of the fir tree in Aunt Ruth's yard. Ellie is preparing coffee when smoke starts to stream out of a toaster, Ellie reacts quickly and light-heartedly.

ELLIE
Ohmygosh, save yourself, Mom. I got
this.

Ellie grabs burnt toast from the toaster and drops it onto a plate for her Mom.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Mom, you try to do too much. I'm
here to help with things like this.

EVELYN
Well, a new toaster might be
helpful...

Evelyn re-positions herself so she is looking out the window at the tree Ellie was decorating.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

The tree is looking nice, El. All that time you're spending out there decorating is paying off.

Ellie gazes out the window towards the tree.

ELLIE

Aunt Ruth and I started decorating that tree together the first Christmas we moved here. And we've done it every year since. I feel like it's the least I can do for her right now, you know?

Ellie snaps back to reality and back to her optimistic self.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

And when she gets home from the hospital, she'll have a beautifully decorated tree waiting for her.

EVELYN

And she'll love it, dear.

EXT. GOLIATH INVESTMENTS - DANVERS, PA - DAY

Establishing shot of multi-story commercial office building. A lighted sign on the exterior of the building says GOLIATH INVESTMENTS.

INT. GOLIATH INVESTMENTS - DAY

Inside the busy office space, we move down the aisle between cubicles. Employees dressed in business professional attire gather to chat while others peck away at their keyboards or field phone calls. There is not a foosball table in sight.

We hear the voice of JOSH HANSON as we get closer to his desk. He is patiently fielding a phone call from MRS. LEWIS (70's, spry) a long-time client.

JOSH (V.O.)

Yes, Mrs. Lewis, click the button that says "Reset My Password."

MRS. LEWIS (O.S.)

It's hard to remember so many passwords...

JOSH

I know. I know, Mrs. Lewis. It is
hard to remember so many passwor--

We land at the cubicle of JOSH HANSON (28, dressed in a suit, career-driven, easy-going, persistent). The name plate at his desk says "Joshua Hanson - Senior Financial Investments Planner." Over his shoulder, we see internet search results for "available office space for personal finance business" with a number of available office spaces for lease.

MRS. LEWIS (O.S.)

Well, now, do you have a
suggestion?

JOSH

How about a pet's name? Or a former
address?

MRS. LEWIS (O.S.)

I've lived at the same address my
whole life.

JOSH

Really? Wow. You're whole life,
huh?

Josh's boss JERRY (40's, sharply dressed with slick looking hair, arrogant, uninterested in listening) strolls up to Josh's desk. He's holding a mini football that he's fiddling with. Josh acknowledges Jerry and motions that he'll be just one minute.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Well, I'm sure you can come up with
something. Just don't choose
something like "Password 1 2 3."
That's one of the most commonly
stolen--

MRS. LEWIS (O.S.)

(typing)

Password..1..2..3..that worked!

JOSH

Oh, that worked, huh? Ok, well,
I'll do my best to forget this
conversation. You have a great day
now, Mrs. Lewis. Buh-bye.

Josh turns to face Jerry as the mini football comes flying towards his face.

JERRY

You helping a client reset their password again, Joshua?

Jerry motions with his hands for the ball.

JOSH

Well...

Josh tosses the ball to Jerry.

JERRY

You gotta send that stuff to the call center, my man!

JOSH

I just think that--

Jerry points at Josh with the football.

JERRY

I pay you too much to do that kinda work.

Jerry tosses the ball to Josh.

JOSH

Yeah, but Mrs. Lewis, she's an elderly woman, and one of my longest standing clients.

Jerry signaling for the ball. Josh continues holding it.

JOSH (CONT'D)

She has the majority of her investments with this firm. And I just feel that she deserves the utmost attention, no matter the question. You know what I mean?

Jerry weighs Josh's argument in his mind, hemming and hawing with skepticism. Still signaling for the ball.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Plus, the online system can be very confusing when it's getting redesigned every month.

Josh tosses the ball to Jerry.

JERRY

Hey. Those are standard maintenance updates. And you gotta keep it fresh, Josh!

(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)

That's what I hear on all the business podcasts over and over. But listen, I need to talk to you about something. Listen. I noticed that you sold a handful of general market funds over the last couple months.

Jerry tosses Josh the ball. Josh nods in agreement, but is unsure where this is going.

JERRY (CONT'D)

You're supposed to be pushing the new Goliath-branded funds. They're going to give the investors those returns they're looking for. Tech is SO hot right now.

Josh places the ball down on his desk. Jerry's eyes follow the ball like a puppy follows a treat.

JOSH

Goliath-branded funds have higher fees than other market funds and they just didn't meet the needs of those clients. They were looking for a more diverse portfolio of investmen--

JERRY

Yeah, yeah...more diverse portfolio of investments Yeah. Sure. You sound like my old Teddy Ruxpin doll. Except all you talk about is your clients' needs and your
(does air quotes)
"fiduciary responsibility."

JOSH

Hey, that's a real thing, you don't need to use quotes. The Employee Retirement Income Security Act protects--

Jerry quickly swipes the football off Josh's desk.

JERRY

Goliath's funds are so diverse. They might be the *most* diverse-- This gives me an idea. What if I created a new fund that is all about diversity...

Jerry starts walking away, transfixed in thought.

JERRY (CONT'D)
Diversity is SO hot right now...

Josh sighs a slightly aggravated, exasperated sigh. His cell phone rings.

JOSH
Hello, this is Josh.

Inaudible voice from phone. We can tell he's hearing somber news.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Oh no...is she...of course. I'll get there as soon as possible.

FADE TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - GREENVILLE, MAINE - DAY

The funeral crowd disperses from in front of Aunt Ruth's gravestone. Her headstone reads: "Ruthanne Matthews 1956-2023 Beloved sister, aunt, friend."

As Josh makes his way through the crowd he spots Ellie in the distance and starts to make his way towards her. JASPER MCGILLICUTTY (60's, consummate professional, socially awkward), Ruth's estate lawyer, steps in his path.

JASPER
Pardon, sir...Joshua? Joshua Hanson, I presume?

JOSH
Yes, hi. Do I know you?

JASPER
Hello. Hi. No, sir, not yet. My name is Jasper McGillicutty. Esquire. My fiends just call me Jasper. My clients do, as well. Really everybody I meet calls me Jasper. You're welcome to as well...

Jasper digs through various pockets looking for a business card.

JASPER (CONT'D)
As I was saying. I'm glad I ran into you.
(MORE)

JASPER (CONT'D)

I'm a lawyer here in town and I have some papers related to Miss Ruth's...your Aunt Ruth's, estate that I need you to sign. Do you think you could find the time to pay a visit to my office before you leave town?

Jasper hands Josh his business card and points in the direction across the street.

JASPER (CONT'D)

My office is just over that way.
The sooner the better.

With a warm smile and a nod, Jasper is gone. Josh looks beyond the lawyer where he spotted Ellie before, but she's now gone.

EXT. MAIN ST. SIDEWALK - DAY

Josh examines Jasper's business card as he walks down the festive-feeling Main Street, where store fronts are decorated for the holidays. Across the street he notices the sign for JASPER L. MCGILLICUTTY ATTORNEY AT LAW.

Josh finds the nearest crosswalk. When the WALK sign lights up, Josh steps into the crosswalk and has to jump into the road to avoid a cyclist who's run through the RED traffic light. Typical cyclist.

During all this commotion, the crosswalk signal has changed to DON'T WALK and the traffic signal has turned GREEN, but Josh doesn't notice this. He's in the road blocking traffic. The second car waiting at the traffic light honks a quick BEEP-BEEP at an exasperated Josh.

JOSH

I'm sorry! My life just kinda flashed before my eyes! I'm a little shook up--

Josh does a double-take at the driver in the first car waiting at the light. Josh squints at the car for a closer look.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Ellie? Is that you?

Ellie pops her head out of her compact SUV car window and Josh makes his way over to her car.

ELLIE
Joshua Hanson??

JOSH
Wow, I can't believe it! How are you?? You know, I saw you at the funeral. I tried to say hello but...I'm really glad to bump into you-

The car behind Ellie honks their horn. Ellie is starting to feel anxious and looks into her rear view mirror.

ELLIE
Yeah, me too! This is nice...um...I uh...I saw you at Aunt Ruth's service, too--

BEEP! BEEP!

Both look at the car behind Ellie.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I've-

JOSH
I know, you gotta go. I'm going to pop over to Aunt Ruth's house tomorrow. Maybe you can stop by?

ELLIE
Ok, yeah! That sounds good. It's really nice to see-

BEEEEEP! BEEEEEP!

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Okie dokie...

Josh steps away from the car so Ellie can pull away.

JOSH
Later gator!

ELLIE
Not if I see you first!

Ellie drives past Josh.

As the car behind her passes Josh, the driver, SHELBIIE (25, sharply dressed), rolls down her window to address him.

SHELBY
 (sarcastically)
 In a while, crocodile...

Shelby continues to roll past Josh and offers one final soft BEEP-BEEP.

CUT TO:

INT. JASPER L. MCGILLICUTTY ATTORNEY AT LAW OFFICE - DAY

A bell jingles atop the door as Josh enters the law office. The office space is small, with just a couple of desks each with a laptop and papers scattered on them. Filing cabinets and legal boxes line walls and create mini towers around the office. There is no one in sight.

JOSH
 Hello? Jasper? Anyone here?

Jasper rushes out from a back room with his sleeves rolled up and a napkin tucked into his collar, still chewing whatever he was eating in the back room. He recognizes Josh right away.

JASPER
 Yup, yup, yup. I'm here. I am here.
 Oh! Joshua! I am so glad you are here.

JOSH
 Hi, Jasper. Is now a good time? I saw your sign and just thought I'd stop in.

JASPER
 Yes, this is great. Thank you for coming by. Um...it was a beautiful ceremony today. For Miss Ruth. Your Aunt Ruth.

JOSH
 Mmm...yes...yes, it was...

JASPER (CONT'D)
 Mmm.

A quiet moment passes.

JASPER (CONT'D)
 Well, there is no good way to transition into this so I will just do it, if it's OK with you now?

Jasper yanks the napkin out of his collar, then makes his way to a DESK and opens the laptop. He points at a chair to invite Josh to sit.

Josh sits down in ONE of the TWO empty seats across from Jasper.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Your Aunt Ruth appointed me the trustee of the assets in her Will. So I have the duty, but also the pleasure and the honor, of helping distribute the items from her trust to the proper recipients.

We hear the door jingle again and Jasper looks up to see Ellie standing in the office now, too.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Oh! You made it, as well!

Josh turns around and is surprised to see Ellie. He jumps to his feet.

JOSH
Ellie! Wow! What are you doing here??

Ellie is also surprised to see Josh here. This is the first time they are seeing each other in person in a situation where they can properly interact.

ELLIE
Josh?? This is so funny!

JASPER
Come on in, please. Come in.
I assume you both know each other--

Ellie and Josh step towards each other and share a warm, extended embrace, which ends with a lingering handhold and some smoldering eye contact.

JASPER (CONT'D)
Well, now, I suppose you do know each other indeed. Very well. I do suppose.

Jasper attempts to clear his throat to subtly interrupt the moment, but ends up in a coughing fit when something is temporarily lodged in his throat.

ELLIE

Oh my goodness! Are you choking??
Let me help--

As Ellie moves closer, Jasper swallows whatever was blocking his breathing and begins to catch his breath again.

JASPER

Phew...sorry about that folks.
Thought that was the big one for a second there.

ELLIE

I'm just glad you're okay.

JASPER

I guess I need to chop up that tuna salad a bit more finely next time.
That was close...

Jasper motions towards the chairs in front of him.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Please. Take a seat. Let me explain why we're all here.

Josh pulls back a chair for Ellie before he sits.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Your Aunt Ruth made herself a video of her last Will and Testament.

(trailing off)

So many people doing that these days. Hers is a hoot, that dear Miss Ruth...
But I digress. Your Aunt Ruth, rest her soul...

ELLIE

May she rest in peace...obviously.

Josh nods solemnly with pursed lips.

JASPER

Well, she also made some additional recordings to be played for specific people. And so I have one for you. It's for both of you, actually.

Jasper turns the laptop to face Josh and Ellie and plays a video for them. In the video, AUNT RUTH (55, upbeat, animated) sits on a couch in her house talking directly to the camera.

Josh and Ellie get emotional when they see her.

AUNT RUTH

Well, if you're seeing this,
(looks down solemnly then
up fiercely)
I've been selected for a secret
task force with a mission so
critical to the survival of the
planet it would melt your ears.
(breaks with a smile)
Not really.
(seriously)
But if I had, I couldn't talk about
it.
Anyway, while I'm gone...
(winks)
I'd like you to have my house. But,
there's a catch. Well, a few. More
than a few.
(looks off camera)
What's shorthand for like, 6
things? More than a handful...oh,
half a dozen. Duh.
(looks back at camera)
But I've got half a dozen things
you need to do first. I've put
together a Christmas scavenger hunt
of sorts around town: caroling to
embarrass my friends, baking my
favorite cookies, volunteering at a
toy drive, and a couple more. Some
sort of food challenge like on TV
when they have to eat a live
scorpion, but it doesn't have to be
alive or even a scorpion, just
something a little off-putting.
But first, the tree.

Josh and Ellie share a nervous glance.

AUNT RUTH (CONT'D)

Josh. You and Ellie need to decide,
collectively...
(looks off camera)
Can it be considered "collectively"
if it's just two people?
(looks back at camera)
You two need to decide together
what to do about the tree in my
yard. It's an important tree,
Joshie. I cared immensely about
that tree...
(MORE)

AUNT RUTH (CONT'D)

Maybe I still do, while I'm
covertly collecting enemy secrets
off the shores of the Galápagos
Islands...

(holds a finger to her
lips)

So I want to know that proper
thought and attention is given to
what should happen with this tree.
I know that this tree is important
to Ellie, too, and she will want to
know that it's going to be taken
care of for years to come. Once you
two sort out the future of our
Christmas tree, then, the house is
all yours, Josh. If you don't want
it, or for some reason you can't
handle all this right now, then the
property will just be auctioned off
and proceeds donated to my favorite
charity. Jasper can handle all
that.

Jasper pauses the video. Josh lets it sink in for a few
seconds, then shakes his head back to reality.

JOSH

What am I supposed to do with a
house?

JASPER

Live in it, sell it, say that it's
haunted and rent it out to ghost
hunters...whatever you want. She
owned the property free and clear,
so it is really up to you.

JOSH

This is all so unexpected.
So...let me get this straight.
Aunt Ruth wants me to have her
house, but we need to do a bunch of
Christmas traditions first...?

JASPER

And don't forget about the tree.
You and Miss Ellie need to come up
with a plan for it.

Josh and Ellie look at each other and nod knowingly.

JOSH

Well, I feel like that's pretty
straightforward, right?

Josh and Ellie look straight towards Jasper and speak simultaneously.

ELLIE	JOSH (CONT'D)
We should donate it as the town's Christmas tree.	We should keep it up and treasure it forever.

They snap towards each other, surprised at the other's response.

JOSH (CONT'D)
You want to cut it down??

ELLIE
And donate it to the town, Josh! As the community's Christmas tree! To honor Aunt Ruth!

JOSH
Cut it down like some infected pine and leave it to die on display in front of the whole town??

ELLIE
Yeah...I guess it's not as romantic as I first thought. But now would be a good time for it. I mean, the tree is showing some signs of decay, and could easily be infected by bugs. But, maybe you're right. Maybe keeping it would be a more honorable memorial to Aunt Ruth.

Josh thinks about the concerns Ellie's raised and is now feeling pensive.

JOSH
Hm. Those are pretty valid concerns. Tree maintenance could be an unpredictable expense. It's an uncertainty that could be avoided.
(trailing off)
In the name of risk avoidance, limiting exposure to asset hazards and the consequences of unforeseen and unplanned for--

ELLIE
So you're team Town Christmas Tree, now?

JOSH
I...don't know...

JASPER

Well then. It appears you two need a little more time vis-à-vis the topic of the tree.

Josh is stressed out by this situation. Ellie notices this.

ELLIE

This is so exciting! It could be fun. Plus, it's for Aunt Ruth. We're gonna figure it out, and it's gonna be fun.

JOSH

Right. Fun. It could be fun.

Jasper puts away the laptop and shuffles through papers on the desk to find a manila folder.

JASPER

I will share a link with you to Miss Ruth's video. And here is a copy of the paper work.

Jasper hands Josh the folder.

JASPER (CONT'D)

You and Miss Ellie need to both agree on what to do with the tree, then you both need to sign a form with your agreed upon intention. I can be the witness. Just let me know when you are ready.

JOSH

Do we need a notary to witness the sign-offs or anything like that?

Jasper shakes his head in frustration.

JASPER

It's like "esquire" means nothing anymore...

Josh and Ellie stand up then Jasper escorts them towards the door.

JASPER (CONT'D)

Look, after you complete the Christmas traditions and get this tree business sorted, I don't know whether you intend to keep the property or sell it, but I can recommend the real estate agent a few doors down if you are thinking of selling.

JOSH

I appreciate that.

Jasper looks down at his watch-less wrist.

JASPER

I do have another appointment so I have to skedaddle. You don't have to leave but you can't stay here!

Josh and Ellie share a knowing glance, both catching that Jasper misstated the saying.

JOSH

And thanks for taking care of all this. We'll talk soon.

The door jingles again as they leave.

EXT. MAIN ST. SIDEWLAK - DAY

Josh and Ellie stroll the sidewalk down Main Street. The downtown is decorated like a little Winter Wonderland; shops have Christmas lights and wreaths in their windows and light posts have been transformed into giant candy canes with white, red, and green ribbon wrapped around them.

JOSH

So...the tree...

ELLIE

Yes...the tree. I think we'll figure it out. It sounds like, assuming you do want to inherit the house, we can just get started with the Christmas traditions while we argue about the tree.

JOSH

Right. We can do that. I'll be in town for probably a week or so. Are you just visiting for the funeral or...

ELLIE

Actually, I am living back in Greenville now.

JOSH

Oh? really? Did you come back after college?

ELLIE

No, I moved back here a little over a year ago. I'm back at my mom's house.

(exasperated)

A bunch of stuff happened...she needed to transition into a wheelchair to help her get around...I got laid off from my job...it was just a good opportunity to come home, reset, help my mom...

JOSH

That's really nice. Well, I'm sorry about your job, and that it's been tough for your mom. But it's nice that you can be around like this.

ELLIE

Right. Yeah. I've also been working with Taylor at her coffee shop part of the time--you remember Tay.

JOSH

Of course.

ELLIE

She's great.

JOSH

She is great.

ELLIE

And sometimes I pick up freelance graphic design gigs here and there, so I can keep the resume fresh, you know?

Ellie takes a deep breath and sighs.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Christmas is going to be so different this year without Aunt Ruth.

(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)

I wish we had just one more year
together. A little bit more time.

Josh nods solemnly.

They come upon a bench on the sidewalk in front of the office
for TURNKEY REAL ESTATE.

Josh motions that they sit down. We see a plaque between them
that says: "THIS BENCH GENEROUSLY DONATED BY JANNIE TURNKEY
AND HER CONTRACTOR HUSBAND TUCKER. VALUABLE AND RESPECTED
MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY."

JOSH

I know. She loved this time of
year. I'll miss her. It's kind of
special that we have this little
assignment to work on in her honor,
though.

(looking around)

And it feels good to be back here.
I feel closer to her here. Lots of
good memories.

ELLIE

Honestly, I'm still a little
shocked to be sitting here with THE
Joshua Hanson. In the flesh.

JOSH

You didn't think I'd come back
here, even to honor my favorite
Aunt?

ELLIE

No, no, no...that's not it. Of
course you'd come back for this.
But I just can't imagine you
staying very long. I would think
that you'd be trying to get out of
town and get back to work.

JOSH

You know me, work-work-work.

ELLIE

Probably right on track to
conquering the investment world,
right?

JOSH

Yeah...well...I've sort of been in
a rut lately, you know? With work.

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

I'm looking forward to clearing my head a bit while I'm here. I need to go through some things at Aunt Ruth's house so it should be a nice change of pace.

ELLIE

Are you thinking of making a change?

JOSH

I don't know, seems a little soon to be thinking about making changes to the her house--

ELLIE

No, I mean in your LIFE. You said you're in a rut. Are you going to be making any changes in your life?

JOSH

I don't know, maybe? I don't really know what that would even look like. To have something like this happen, Aunt Ruth passing away, inheriting a house, it kind of opens up some new possibilities, I suppose.

Ellie looks sharply at Josh.

ELLIE

Are you thinking of selling the house?

JOSH

I mean, it would be fiscally irresponsible not to explore the market. That's just the nerdy finance guy in me. It's who I am. So, I'll have to look at that.

Josh softly looks at Ellie.

JOSH (CONT'D)

But, in the name of thoroughness, I should probably consider staying here, too.

ELLIE

That is, assuming you have a house to stay in.

Ellie smacks Josh on the leg and stands up.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

We still have to agree on what to
do with Aunt Ruth's tree.

Josh stands up, too.

JOSH

And apparently some cookies to bake
and some carols to sing...

ELLIE

And don't forget about the
scorpions!

Josh and Ellie both laugh at the memory from Aunt Ruth's
video.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Well, I've gotta run. I told Tay
I'd help her at the coffee shop
this afternoon.

JOSH

It's great to see you, Ellie.

They hug, a familiar, comfortable embrace. They briefly hold
hands again as Ellie step backwards.

ELLIE

Later, gator.

Josh smiles as Ellie turns and walks away.

Josh notices that the store window behind him is plastered
with properties for sale and those that have recently sold.
He pops into the real estate office.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

EXT. TAY'S HOT CHOFFEE SHOP - MORNING

Establishing shot of Tay's Hot Choffee Shop. It's one of the stores along Main Street. The window display features a coffee cup and a hot chocolate mug.

INT. TAY'S HOT CHOFFEE SHOP - MORNING

The local hot chocolate and coffee fusion shop is decorated for Christmas with limited-time holiday drink specials listed on the menu next to regular menu items. The shop is bustling with activity.

While a line of customers orders drinks and pastry, TAYLOR (27, female, café owner, laid back, confident, kinda hippie/nerdy) operates the espresso machine. Ellie adds milk, whipped cream, and festive sprinkles to drinks nearby. We drop in on them mid-conversation about a wild sci-fi movie...

ELLIE

...and I was like, it's a *robot spider!* In the desert!

TAYLOR

I know, right?? It just never gets old. Speaking of old friends, Josh stopped in here yesterday...

ELLIE

I know. I heard. I saw him afterwards. It was the craziest thing. Aunt Ruth's estate lawyer asked both of us to visit his office, and we both showed up, at like, the same time.

Ellie and Taylor both stop working on drinks and turn to face each other.

TAYLOR

Really? That's odd.

ELLIE

Right? It turns out that Josh inherited her house.

TAYLOR

Ohmygosh, that's so nice!

ELLIE

Yeah, but, there are a few conditions.

Ellie smiles and stares into space imagining the Christmas traditions with Josh.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

We have to complete a bunch of Christmas traditions like baking Aunt Ruth's favorite cookies, caroling around town, and some other--

TAYLOR

Wait, what do you mean "we?" Both of you have to do it?

ELLIE

That's the bonkers part! Aunt Ruth's Will says Josh and I have to do these Christmas traditions together, and we both have to agree on whether or not to keep the Christmas tree in her yard. Even from heaven she's found a way to have a special impact on this holiday season.

TAYLOR

Playing matchmaker from heaven.

ELLIE

Hey! It's not like that!

TAYLOR

It sure seems like that! Look at you, all smiles and giddy again.
(mockingly)
Oh, Joshie...my Joshie-poo...you're so cute and good with numbers...and--

ELLIE

That was just a summer fling! We were both home for college break. Everyone has one of those.

TAYLOR

Right...so what happens if you don't finish all of the conditions?

ELLIE

The house goes to auction. I can't imagine anyone else living in that house.

TAYLOR

What will he do when he inherits the house?

ELLIE

I don't know. I assume he'd live in it? But he already has a life somewhere else. He did say he's kind of in a rut and may be looking to shake things up?

TAYLOR

HA! Yeah! That's the Josh Hanson we all know. The one who likes to,
(shaking her hands)
Shake things up.

ELLIE

Maybe we'll have such a magical time that he won't be able to imagine his life anywhere else.

TAYLOR

Just like one of those made-for-TV Christmas movies. Maybe Marcus Rosner could play Josh? He's a delight.

ELLIE

Maybe he would stay...

A line of customers who are waiting for Ellie and Taylor to make their drinks has grown, and the groans become audible.

IMPATIENT CUSTOMER

(clearing throat loudly)
Ahem!

Taylor and Ellie return to working at their stations.

TAYLOR

Ellie, do you remember that time in high school when the class president was going to get rid of the vending machines that had those really gross but delicious brownie cakes? And you were dead set against it? Does you remember what you did?

Ellie smiles fondly at the memory.

ELLIE

I offered to help him. And I made sure we ate so many snacks out of those vending machines that he couldn't bear to do away with them.

TAYLOR

Exactly. So you do the same thing. You crush Josh's plan with kindness. Swoon him with sweetness.

Taylor hands Ellie two to-go coffee cups. One says "Joshie" written on it, the other says "JBRML."

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

And it starts with coffee.

Ellie smiles as she grabs the coffees. She heads out on her way to win over Josh. As she walks away, the customers waiting for their drinks collectively groan and throw their hands up in the air.

EXT. TURNKEY REAL ESTATE OFFICE - DAY

Establishing shot of the front of Turnkey Real Estate. The office is on Main Street and has a bench out front. The front windows are plastered with "for sale" property listings and a few that have recently sold.

INT. TURNKEY REAL ESTATE OFFICE - DAY

The Turnkey Real Estate office is tidy with a small reception area that doubles as a storage area for "FOR SALE" and "SOLD" signs, and a life-size cardboard cutout of JANNIE TURNKEY (50, a bigshot businesswoman who typically has an earbud in to catch the frequent phone calls she receives about real estate deals).

SHELBY TURNKEY (25, sharply dressed, uneasy but trying to exude confidence) is at her desk nervously putting together papers for a meeting with a potential new client: Josh.

Jannie is pacing in front of her and coaching her up for her appointment.

JANNIE

You've got to be a killer. You know this market better than anyone. This is your deal.

Shelbie nods affirmatively.

JANNIE (CONT'D)
It's a huge deal. This is no time
to be timid.

Shelbie shakes her head "No."

JANNIE (CONT'D)
Walk in there like you own the
place. You know what needs to be
done and you just need to tell them
what it is.

Shelbie stands up confidently. Jannie makes a circular motion with one hand and then excessively sprays perfume in Shelbie's direction with the other hand as Shelbie twirls around and around and around.

Shelbie marches confidently towards the door with her bag and paperwork, protected by a thick layer of Estee Lauder armor.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Ellie rings Aunt Ruth's doorbell with a coffee in each hand and after a beat Josh opens the door.

JOSH
Ellie! What a pleasant surprise.

ELLIE
Good morning!

JOSH
I hope you're not drinking one of
those Jingle Bell Reindeer Mocha
Lattes...

Ellie quickly turns her cup so he cannot see the writing.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Come on in.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Josh has a number of Aunt Ruth's old boxes out on the countertop in a sparsely decorated kitchen/dining room. He has been looking through old photographs.

Ellie sees this and crosses to the old pictures.

ELLIE
Ohhh... you found Aunt
Ruth's old photos.

JOSH
Yeah, I've been going down memory
lane a bit here.

Ellie picks up a photo of 10-year-old Ellie and Josh during wintertime. Both kids smiling at the camera, all dressed up in snow pants and winter coats.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Remember that?

ELLIE
How could I forget? That's the year
we met.

Ellie picks another photo of them at about the same age during summertime being sprayed with water from a hose.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
She soaked our clothes right
through.

JOSH
Every chance she got.

ELLIE
Then she'd have us change into
pajamas and dry our clothes outside
on the clothesline. We'd sit around
the fire pit and make s'mores.

JOSH
My clothes would smell like the
smoke from the fire for a week.

Josh reaches into a box and pulls out a photo of Ellie and Josh holding the "2008" ornament (from the opening scene).

JOSH (CONT'D)
Who knew these crazy kids would end
up back right back here in this
kitchen...

ELLIE
She probably did. I'm going to miss
that about her. I'm going to miss
how it always felt like she knew
exactly what she was doing. She
always seemed to be doing exactly
the right thing.

Josh puts an arm around Ellie's shoulders and pulls her in for a side hug.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Thanks, Josh.

Ellie makes her way to the dining room table and sits down with her coffee. Josh follows.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Looking at photos of these two smiling kids, I felt so optimistic back then and so sure of what was to come. Now? I feel completely unsure about what I'm supposed to be doing. I don't feel the way that I thought I would.

JOSH

Well you've made some tough choices. I think that's to be expected. Sometimes it's easy just to stay the course and not make a change. You're living in this space where you're balancing lots of plates. Of course it feels a little uneasy. I think Aunt Ruth would be really proud of you.

ELLIE

Enough about me. Let's hear about your deepest insecurities.

JOSH

HA! Well, my biggest flaw is that I care too much.

Ellie plays along pretending to be conducting the mock job interview.

ELLIE

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Both chuckling. Josh's smile slowly fades and he makes his way back to the photos on the kitchen counter.

JOSH

You know, everything has been going according to plan for me, career-wise. I always anticipated this feeling of elation when I, quote-unquote...

(does air quotes)

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)
"made it" and became...
"successful."
But, now I am at a point I always
dreamed of and I still feel like I
am chasing something.

Ellie is listening intently.

JOSH (CONT'D)
I've started having this weird
desire to scale back, work more
closely with people, more one-on-
one, more conversations and setting
people up for a secure future.
Maybe starting my own investment
firm? Getting back to the fun
stuff, for me anyway.
It's funny, the timing of
everything. Selling this house
would really provide a big cushion
and the opportunity to invest for
the long-term.

ELLIE
Do you really need to sell the
house to do that? Just start a
podcast like everyone else. You'd
never have to change out of your
pajamas. Better yet, start a
podcast about something fun like
reviewing Christmas movies.

JOSH
Talk about a Hindenburg of an idea.

Their conversation is interrupted when the doorbell RINGS.

The real estate agent Shelbie lets herself in before Josh can
get to the door. Her bubbly personality and pungent perfume
add a whole new dynamic to the room.

Shelbie tosses a wreath at Josh as she makes her way into the
kitchen.

SHELBYE
Hang this on the front door.
Potential home buyers love to see
Christmas decorations.

Shelbie notices the kitchen oven and it sparks a thought.

SHELBYE (CONT'D)
Do you bake? Nevermind.

Shelbie moves the boxes of photos on the counter over and places a stack of real estate listings down.

Ellie feels a little awkward and does not want to be part of this conversation.

ELLIE

Well, I think it's time for me to get going.

Josh is enthralled in conversation and hardly acknowledges her leaving as she sees herself out.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Ellie stands on the doorstep for a moment. Feeling very alone, and literally shut out.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - MORNING - NEXT DAY

Ellie is feeling a renewed motivation to convince Josh to keep the house. As she walks up to the front door with a coffee in each hand, she gives herself a little pep talk.

ELLIE

Be nice, Ellie. Be super nice.

Ellie places the coffee cups down on a railing, puts her hair in a high ponytail, takes a deep breathe, and rings the doorbell.

When Josh opens the door, we see a brightly smiling Ellie with one arm extended holding out a coffee for Josh.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Morning!

JOSH

Two days in a row, huh? Did I sign up for a coffee delivery service I don't know about?

Ellie hands Josh his coffee and enters the house.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Inside Aunt Ruth's kitchen, Ellie spots the stack of real estate listings on the counter top and begins her niceness campaign.

ELLIE

So, how did it your real estate meeting go?

JOSH

Oh, fine. Got some good information about the market. Definitely have some things to think about.

Ellie nods along, almost waiting for him to finish talking so she can move on to the real reason she is here.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Hey, about that, I'm sorry I didn't say goodbye when Shelby showed up for our meeting.

Ellie dismisses it.

ELLIE

It's fine, really. But, if you are going to dip your toes into the market and have people looking at the house, I think she has a point. People really should see it decorated for Christmas.

JOSH

Yeah? I didn't think you'd be onboard with the idea of listing the house for sale.

ELLIE

Cards on on the table...I am not. And what better way to ruin it than from the inside? But seriously, even if you decide not to sell it, you still need some decorations around here.

JOSH

True. It could feel a little more festive around here, couldn't it?

ELLIE

We could go to the Christmas market and start looking around. We can go, like, tomorrow?

JOSH

I wouldn't dare decline, especially since you're rocking the high pony.

ELLIE
It's a date.
(excitedly)
Jinx!
Pinch poke, you owe me a
Coke!
You're in a pickle, it's a
pretty big dill!

JOSH (CONT'D)
It's a date.
(excitedly)
Jinx!
Pinch poke, you owe me a
Coke!
You're in a pickle, it's a
pretty big dill!

Ellie and Josh end up in an intense stare down.

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3

EXT. DOWNTOWN CHRISTMAS MARKET - DAY

Josh and Ellie walk by a sign that says "DOWNTOWN CHRISTMAS MARKET." Its an open market that is set up at a downtown intersection that has been shut down to car traffic. Vendor booths line the sides of the road (such as Homemade Gift Wrap, Handmade Decorations, Roasted Chestnuts, Hot Chocolate and Cider, Make Your Own Decorations, etc.). The market is not very busy with visitors.

JOSH

Not a very popular destination, it is?

ELLIE

It's just getting going for the season! Wait 'til you see it in full swing in a couple weeks. At night, the whole market is lit up, people sipping hot chocolate, shopping for the perfect gift for someone, holiday music in the air, the scent of cinnamon and fried dough--

JOSH

(take a deep breath in)
Ahhh...cinnamon and friend dough.
The way God intended.

Ellie and Josh stop at a table with handmade decorations.

ELLIE

See, this is the type of stuff you need. Take a look here.

Josh finds a wreath he likes and buys it. As he is paying, Ellie is already on to the next booth.

ELLIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Ohh! Look at this, Josh!

Josh joins Ellie at the "Make Your Own Ornament" crafting table, which is littered with crafting materials. A CHILD (8) is working on their own ornament at the table.

As the shot goes across the table, the supplies get increasingly excessive. Popsicle sticks, glue, tinsel, glitter, small wood shapes, paint, and then escalates to hammers, nails, a ratchet set, a nail gun, eye protection, a level.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

I think we've stumbled upon our first tradition.

JOSH

Ah, yes...Aunt Ruth wants us to make a handmade ornament. Well, Looks like we've got everything we'd need here.

Josh makes a star with popsicle sticks and Ellie a snowman with wooden circles. In the midst of working on her ornament, Ellie stops to help the CHILD tie a ribbon, then returns to working on her snowman. Josh notices this, but doesn't say anything.

Ellie and Josh hand their ornaments to the vendor.

ELLIE

You can sell these and keep the profit.

As Ellie and Josh are walk away from the table, someone buys Ellie's ornament before the vendor can even put it down.

Ellie and Josh continue to slowly stroll through the market.

JOSH

You know, I saw you help that little kid with their ornament.

ELLIE

Oh, yeah. You would've done the same.

JOSH

Ehh...I am not so sure. If I even noticed they needed help at all. I would probably then think about about how I'd need to stop my own work, lose progress there... What if they don't even want the ribbon tied? What if I tie it wrong and mess up their ornament? What if I break their ornament? There are just so any considerations.

Ellie ignores this and points to a flier for the Town Lighting Display the next night. The flier also says "\$5 eggnog samplers."

ELLIE

We should do that! Do you want to check out the Lighting Show together?

JOSH

Um, yes. Obviously.

Josh walks towards the flier and points to the Eggnog section.

JOSH (CONT'D)

But only if we can do this, too.
Hear me out...instead of
scorpions...eggnog chugging
contest.

Ellie cringes but starts to come around to the idea.

ELLIE

Alright...ok...out of respect for
the scorpions, we can do an
eggnog...

(searching for words)

Let's call it a speed sampling.

JOSH

That's way better.

ELLIE

It's a date.
(excitedly)
Jinx!
You owe me--

JOSH (CONT'D)

It's a date.
(excitedly)
Jinx!
You owe me--

Without another word, they both begin walking again.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Sooo...how would you feel about a
real date? Maybe tonight?

ELLIE

(smiling to herself)

I think that would be lovely.

JOSH

(smiling to himself)

Cool. Very cool.

ELLIE

I have to work with Tay for a
little bit, but swing by my Mom's
tonight and we'll head out?

JOSH
Sounds great. I have to meet
Shelbie at Taylor's, actually.
Could I catch a ride with you?

INT. ELLIE'S CAR

Ellie is driving Josh in her compact SUV as they are performing air instruments while listening to the Trans Siberian Orchestra.

FADE TO:

INT. EVELYN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

We hear a doorbell DING-DONG.

Josh stands on the doorstep dressed in a collared shirt, blazer for their date. Ellie invites him in. She's dressed in the same clothes from earlier in the day.

ELLIE
I'm almost ready. Let me go get my
coat.

Ellie hurries away and Josh makes his way into the kitchen. Evelyn and Josh greet each other warmly and hug.

In the kitchen, there is a view of the tree in Aunt Ruth's yard, and we can see the lights illuminated through the window.

EVELYN
It's so good to see you, Josh.

JOSH
You too, Mrs. Holden.

Evelyn busies herself in the kitchen preparing something. We don't see that she is making ants on a log (with celery, peanut butter, raisins and cranberries).

EVELYN
You know, your Aunt Ruth will be
missed so much. I'll miss talking
with her.

As Evelyn is talking, Josh notices Aunt Ruth's tree out the window and walks over to observe the tree.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

She was such a great listener. She was such a great listener that she made me a better listener.

JOSH

Yes, I know what you mean. It was like she listened so much that you realized how much she wasn't talking. And it made you stop talking so much.

EVELYN

Ellie tells me she left you her house?

Josh turns to face towards Evelyn.

JOSH

She did. She did...mighty generous of her, huh? It comes with some strings, though.

EVELYN

(chuckling)

I heard that, too. Isn't that just like Ruthie? Keeping you on your toes even as she's getting fitted for her wings. Well I can't imagine it going to a better person. I know you have some decisions to make about it, but I trust you'll make the perfect choices.

Ellie appears with her coat in hand and she's changed into a fancy dress.

JOSH

Well, that makes one of us.
I hope I--

Josh notices Ellie and he loses his train of thought when he sees how beautiful she looks. She takes his breath away.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Wow...

Ellie smiles coyly. Mission accomplished.

Evelyn puts the final touches on the dish she's preparing and then brings the dish to the table.

EVELYN

I am so glad you two are spending time together again. I remember making this for you almost every afternoon when you were here together. You two would build tents with blankets and watch movies inside the tent like you were camping.

This memory melts Ellie's heart. She places her hand on her heart.

ELLIE

Aw, Mom...

EVELYN

Oh, it's nothing. Just a little something before you two head out.

Ellie is torn because she and Josh had plans, but the nostalgia of the moment is getting to her. Josh can see how meaningful this moment is to Ellie.

JOSH

So thoughtful. What a great memory.

Josh unbuttons his shirt sleeves, rolls them up, and digs in. He nods and winks at Ellie as if to say "we aren't going anywhere tonight."

ELLIE

You know, since we're in a kitchen, how about we tackle another one of Aunt Ruth's traditions?

Ellie begins to gather ingredients for cookies in the kitchen.

EVELYN

Oohh...what's left to do?

ELLIE

Well, we made homemade ornaments...

JOSH

Tomorrow we'll do a food challenge, - an eggnog sampling - then we have to go caroling, bake cookies, and have a gift wrapping race of sorts.

Ellie tosses an apron at Josh from across the room.

ELLIE

Let's bake.

MONTAGE: JOSH AND ELLIE BAKING COOKIES

We see a brief baking montage showing the differences in how Ellie and Josh operate in the kitchen:

- Josh carefully leveling flour in a measuring cup while Ellie scoops flour from the package and ends up with a heaping cup full;
- Josh carefully adding small amounts of vanilla extract to a measuring spoon to make it exactly 1 teaspoon;
- Ellie bumps Josh's elbow so he spills the whole teaspoon into the mixing bowl;
- Josh breaks an egg with his hands and expertly adds it to his mixture;
- As Josh breaks his second egg with his hands, Ellie places her bowl over top of Josh's bowl so that the egg he cracks goes into her bowl instead of his.

END OF MONTAGE

CUT TO:

Ellie and Josh standing behind their baked cookies with Evelyn in front of them.

EVELYN

Alright, moment of truth. Let's see who's second best around here.

ELLIE

Second best? You mean first best.

EVELYN

That's me, hon. You're both playing for second.

Evelyn takes a bite of one of Josh's cookies. Her deadpan reaction gives nothing away.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Hm. Interesting.

Evelyn takes a bite of one of Ellie's cookies.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Yup. Just as I suspected. I cannot pick a favorite.

ELLIE

Come on, mom! It's me, right? It has to be me.

Evelyn reaches for a second cookie from Josh's plate and winks at him as she turns away.

EVELYN

I'll never tell.

Josh and Ellie each grab a cookie from the other's tray and both seemed impressed with the quality.

ELLIE

I'll take these down to Taylor's tomorrow. Otherwise I will eat every last one of them.

EVELYN (O.S.)

You kids up for a movie tonight?

Ellie and Josh look at each other simultaneously and quote the same line from a well known Christmas movie.

ELLIE

"Buzz, your girlfriend, woof."

JOSH

"Buzz, your girlfriend, woof."

FADE IN:

EXT. EVELYN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Establishing shot of Evelyn's house on a quiet morning in the neighborhood.

We hear a cellphone ringing.

CUT TO:

INT. EVELYN'S HOUSE

Josh sleeps on Evelyn's couch, fully dressed, covered in a blanket.

As his cellphone continues to ring, Josh opens his eyes quickly, disoriented. He pats around for his phone and finally comes across it on the floor, and sits up as he speaks.

JOSH

Hello?

SHELBBIE (O.S.)

Josh. I'm glad I'm caught you. Were you sleeping?

JOSH

Oh, hi, Shelbie. How are you--
(defensive)
No...me? I was just--

SHELBBIE (O.S.)

Sure. Listen, I'm holding an open house at your property in 30-minutes. So give the house a once over and make sure it's ready to show. I'll be there in a few to set up.

JOSH

Oh, wow. This is...an open house??
Today??

SHELBBIE

Get out of bed and get dressed,
Josh. We are selling this house
today!

Shelbie hangs up and Josh places his phone down, and then looks at himself fully dressed.

JOSH

I am dressed...

Ellie enters the room holding two coffee mugs. She is optimistic about the possibilities of the day ahead.

ELLIE

Rise and shine!

Josh is tying his shoes and appears in a hurry to get out of there.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

What's going on? Is everything ok?

JOSH

Shelbie called. She's having an open house this morning. I gotta get home and get the house ready.

ELLIE

What?? An open house? Like, for just anyone to come shop for the house?

Josh stands up and grabs a coffee mug from Ellie's hand. She's distracted by the idea of the open house so she doesn't notice him reaching for her mug.

JOSH

Yes, apparently she wants to get a jump on the holiday rush and thinks offers will roll in today.

Josh takes a sip from the coffee mug and grimaces at the extra sweetness of it.

ELLIE

Isn't this moving a little fast? I mean, you aren't even sure you want to sell the house, right?

Ellie swaps coffee mugs with Josh.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Sorry. That must be mine.

EVELYN (O.S.)

Ellie, could you come help me.

Ellie's flustered since Josh is rushing out for a pop-up open house and now her mom needs her help. She's not fully able to process this news.

JOSH

I gotta go. I'll bring this mug back to you later!

As Josh shuts the door behind him, Ellie struggles to hold it all together in this moment.

ELLIE

Bye...

EVELYN (O.S.)

Ellie? Are you there?

FADE TO:

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Establishing shot of Ruth's house with some festive lights and decorations outside.

Ellie gets out of her car and, in Aunt Ruth's driveway, she sees Josh meeting with Jannie Turnkey and Jannie's contractor husband TUCKER (60's, holding a clipboard with a "Turnkey Construction" sticker on it).

Ellie zones out and stares off into space.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY [FLASHBACK]

CHIRON: 20 years ago...

It's warm outside. YOUNGER ELLIE (now 7 years old) is playing in her yard. Next door, AUNT RUTH (now 50 years old) is puttering around her yard. Ruth notices Ellie and WAVES.

Ellie's attention turns to the big fir tree in Ruth's yard. Ruth notices this.

AUNT RUTH
It's like a big Christmas tree,
isn't it?

Ruth begins walking closer to Ellie until they are just a few feet apart.

AUNT RUTH (CONT'D)
It looks like it belongs in the
center of town decorated with
lights and ornaments. But it's
right here for us to enjoy. It was
probably here even before this
neighborhood. It's lovely. My
name's Ruth. What's yours?

[END FLASHBACK]

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ellie staring off into space, slowly coming back to reality. Ruth's words echo in her head. Josh calls out to her, his voice muffled at first but gets progressively clearer as he says Ellie's name louder and louder.

JOSH
Ellie? Are you OK?

AUNT RUTH (V.O.)
 (distant)
 What's yours...what's
 yours...what's yours...

JOSH (V.O.)
 (clearer)
 Ellie?
 (even clearer)
 Ellie?
 (clear)
 Ellie?

Ellie snaps back to reality when Josh is right next to her.

JOSH
 Ellie? Are you ok?

Ellie's mom's nurse TANIYAH (50's, dressed in scrubs but casual with a cardigan over top) rushes out of Evelyn's house and shouts for Ellie.

TANIYAH
 Ellie! Come please! It's your Mom!

Ellie and Josh rush towards Evelyn's house.

ELLIE
 I'm coming!

INT. EVELYN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ellie closes her Mom's bedroom door and makes her way into the kitchen where a concerned Josh waits with Taniyah to hear an update.

ELLIE
 She's fine. She just gets
 frustrated and overwhelmed
 sometimes and has a tough time
 calming down. But she's good now.

JOSH
 Oh, good. I was worried.

TANIYAH
 She'll probably just sleep. I can
 stay late. You know they are doing
 the lighting display downtown
 tonight? You two should go.

Ellie and Josh look at each other. Josh is onboard but Ellie needs a little convincing.

JOSH
 We did plan on doing that. And that
 eggnog's not getting any fresher.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CHRISTMAS MARKET - NIGHT

Establishing shot of the Christmas market decorated with lights and a number of active vendor tables. A crowd is moseying around. A sign by the entrance says, "Downtown Christmas Market."

CUT TO:

EXT. VENDOR BOOTH - NIGHT

Josh and Ellie are next in line at the Hot Chocolate Bar. The vendor hands them each a cup of hot chocolate and they make their way over to the toppings.

JOSH

So what's your strategy here? Keep it simple or go hard with the toppings?

Ellie adds a few marshmallows into her cup.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Oh, I see. Boy, I almost fell asleep watching you create the most boring hot chocolate I've ever seen in my life.

ELLIE

So you're the "go hard with toppings" type, I presume? You used to be a just whipped cream kind-of-guy.

Josh goes wild with the add-ons — shreds of white chocolate, mint chips, candy cane pieces and then tops it with whipped cream.

JOSH

If by, "go hard" you mean make my hot chocolate delicious, then yes. I've grown a lot these last few years.

Josh then sprays some whipped cream on top of Ellie's cup when his is overflowing.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Hold on to that for me, would ya?

Ellie smiles.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CHRISTMAS MARKET - NIGHT

Ellie and Josh mosey into the crowd with their cups to make their way closer to the lighting display event.

They stop to listen to an acapella group sing a sentimental Christmas song (maybe I'll be Home for Christmas or The Christmas Song).

Transfixed by song, Ellie and Josh's arms become interlocked and Ellie's leans her head on Josh's shoulder.

A few feet away, a group of THREE TEENS (13-sh) carries a Mobile Mistletoe - a short stick with a decorative plant dangling from one end. One of the teens holds a sign that says "Mobile Mistletoe - \$2 donation for the kids."

Josh catches their attention and gives a slight nod to signal them over his way. The giggling kids break Ellie's trance and she realizes she and Josh are standing underneath the mistletoe. She looks at the kids' sign and then looks at Josh, who is smiling sheepishly.

JOSH
It's for the kids.

The two kiss. A sweet, lingering kiss that gets interrupted by the kids teasing them.

MISTLETOE TEENS
OoOOoohh!

Ellie and Josh chuckle as Josh deposits \$5 into the donation can.

JOSH
Here you go. Make sure all of this goes to the kids.

ELLIE
That was sweet.

JOSH
Oh, you know, I'm sure it's going to a good cause. I should have asked for my tax receipt.

ELLIE
I wasn't talking about the donation.

Ellie gazes deep into Josh's eyes and then she kisses him again. This time, more passionately and uninterrupted.

In this moment, it's just them in each other's world. The background blurs and the acapella singing is indistinct and atmospheric.

As they lean back from each other and regain their focus, the world around them comes back into focus, too.

JOSH

Do you think one of their parents
has some blank charitable
contributions forms printed out in
the car or...

Ellie smacks Josh's chest and then they continue walking.

Josh points out the booth with the Eggnog Sampler Flights.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Oh! Look!

ELLIE

Do you know what time it is?

Josh is a bit confused by this seemingly random question.

JOSH

I don't...but, I can check for
you...?

ELLIE

It's nog o'clock, boi!
Let's go!

JOSH

Of course. Of course it's nog
o'clock. What other time could it
be...

EXT. VENDOR BOOTH - NIGHT

Ellie and Josh stand in front of two eggnog flights, each with five 4-oz. cups of eggnog.

JOSH

So, what do you think? Go left to
right or...?

ELLIE

That seems the most logical.

JOSH

Um...so, I know we're calling this a "speed sampling," but we don't really need to emphasize the speed do we? It's just that, in these conditions, dairy, and especially egg yolks--

ELLIE

GO!

Ellie begins shooting the first eggnog and quickly moves onto the second cup. Josh scrambles to catch up.

BEGIN DOUBLE-TIME SEQUENCE (SPED UP) OVER TRAN SIBERIAN ORCHESTRA MUSIC.

- They drink the third cup together.

- They take a pause, holding the fourth cup, Ellie catching her breath and Josh clearly struggling a bit. They appear to do a countdown together ("3, 2, 1..") before drinking the fourth.

- They reach for the last cup. Josh is nearly doubled over. Ellie is pounding her chest like she is getting stronger. They cheers to the final cup. Ellie drinks it without issue. Josh sips his and ends up handing Ellie his cup to her to finish.

END DOUBLE-TIME SEQUENCE.

Ellie and Josh continue strolling through the market.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

We really NOGGED that out, huh?

Josh is feeling the effects a bit more than Ellie, feeling a bit queasy.

JOSH

Yup. Another tradition in the books.

ELLIE

You did EGG-cellent.

JOSH

Your eggnog puns are making my stomach hurt.

ELLIE

Sorry.

(after a beat)

I'll nog it off...

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. LIGHTING CEREMONY STAGE - NIGHT

The stage is being set for the lighting display. Volunteers adjust sound equipment and arrange decorations on the stage. The town's mayor, MAYOR MATT MAYER (42, spunky, cooperative, a bit shallow) stands at a podium for a sound check.

The Mayor is flanked by his MAYORAL ASSISTANT (65-ish, she's Matt Mayer's Mom, maternal to everyone around her) and his mayoral photographer GREG GRUNGBERG (the actor Greg Grunberg, who is taking a break from acting to reinvent himself and hone his craft as a photographer).

TODD (29, quirky, jovial, loves working for this town more than anything in the world) is straightening power cords near the back of the stage. Todd gives a thumbs up to the Mayor that everything is ready to go, and then makes his way over to the podium where Mayor Mayer is about to announce the lighting countdown.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

(to Todd)

We'll countdown from 5, right?

TODD

I think maybe we start with 11?
Give everyone a chance to get their
footing and really get going at 10.
Then it's smooth sailing into
single digits.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

You think?

A crowd starts to fill in near the stage anticipating the lighting display.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)

(to crowd)

Good evening Greenville!

A burst of applause.

Mayor Mayer signals with a nod of his head for Todd to get off the stage. Todd interprets this as a standard head nod and nods back affirmatively, not taking the hint.

Mayor Mayer then gives Todd the "get outta here" thumb gesture and Todd finally gets it and rushes off the stage.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)

It's time for one of our favorite traditions. But first, let's take a walk down memory lane and talk about what this means to our town, shall we? In 1914--

INTERCUT WITH:

Shelbie bumps into Ellie and Josh as she is walking by them in the Christmas Market.

SHELBBIE

Oh, hey guys!

JOSH

Hey, Shelbie! What a surprise. What are you up to?

SHELBBIE

I'm just getting some hot chocolate for my Mom and me.

JOSH

Aren't you worried about missing the lighting?

INTERCUT WITH:

Mayor Mayer is still talking about the history of the town. He's at a very passionate point in his speech.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

(bangs fist on podium)

And the language could not have been Slavic. I knew it...

INTERCUT WITH:

Shelbie talks with Ellie and Josh. We still hear Mayor Mayer's voice vaguely in the background before it fades out.

SHELBBIE

Oh, no, he'll be at this for a while. I have plenty of time.

(looks at Josh)

By the way, the decorations you've added to your Aunt's house are a nice touch.

ELLIE
Way to go, Josh!

SHELBIE
But my Mom says to go easy on the
garland - it makes you look
desperate. I say the more the
merrier, though.

Josh shrugs as he casually scoops some whipped cream off
Ellie's cup for his hot chocolate.

JOSH
That's garland for ya.

SHELBIE
Oh, before I go, the open house
went well and we just may have a
buyer.

Ellie and Josh both look surprised. Ellie's disposition
escalates to nervous and then to concerned as she processes
this news.

SHELBIE (CONT'D)
Yeah, he seems really serious and
wants to see the house again, this
time with his whole family.

INTERCUT WITH:

Back on stage, Mayor Mayer is wrapping up his speech
preparing to start the countdown. The crowd is getting a
little distracted as he's clearly veered off track.

MAYOR MATT MAYER
...and that was the last time I
used my airline credit card for an
online purchase. Well, I believe
it is time for the countdown.

A few jeers from the audience.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
Alright, count with me now...11..10

Crowd looks confused. A few voices start joining in at 9.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
...9...8...

Mayor Mayer realizes this countdown is taking too long so he
speeds through 7-4.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
7,6,5,4...

He raises his hands as if he's conducting an orchestra.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
3!

Whole audience joins in to countdown...

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
2!
1!

Todd flips a switch near the back of the stage and the lights illuminate in the shape of a giant tree.

The crowd applauds and cheers. When the roar quiets down, someone in the crowd taunts the Mayor.

HECKLER (O.S.)
Too bad it's not a real tree!

Mayor Mayer immediately looks in a particular direction from on stage as if he knows exactly who said that.

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Clam it, Melvin!

The crowd begins to sing "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and the singing swells and drowns out the Mayor, who is literally shouting at Melvin from a pedestal.

We see Josh scooping more whipped cream from Ellie's hot chocolate mug.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
It's like you don't even appreciate
all the technological advancements
I've brought to the holiday light
display. The UV emissions alone--

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT 3

ACT 4

INT. TAY'S HOT CHOFFEE SHOP - DAY

Ellie and Taylor wipe down tables and clean up around coffee shop. Ellie is talking through the Josh/house scenarios, partly to tell Tay, partly just to hear it all out loud.

ELLIE

We have to do Aunt Ruth's traditions or else Josh doesn't get the house. If we do all the traditions, he could end up selling it anyway if he chooses to.

TAYLOR

But if he keeps the house, then you could both live there together happily ever after.

They both stop cleaning to talk near a table of ELDER LADIES who are drinking coffee and eating muffins.

Ellie and Taylor don't notice that the elder ladies are very interested in the conversation, even making eyes at each while listening in.

ELLIE

This is real life, Taylor. This isn't a fairytale where the boy and girl, who spent summer and winter breaks together for years and years, come back together after a long time apart to complete a bunch of holiday traditions so the boy can inherit the house and change his life for the better and then their lives are perfect and magical for the rest of time. It's just not like that, Tay.

Ellie realizes that the ladies are listening to her tirade and are now swooning at the idea of the happily ever after love story.

TAYLOR

(to ladies)

I think she should just tell Josh she'd like him to stay. Just put it out there.

Ellie continues, a bit stressed, now she is including the table of ladies in the conversation.

ELLIE

But that can never happen if Josh doesn't inherit the house so we definitely have to complete all the traditions. And then there's the tree! We need to agree on what to do with the tree in--

The door chimes as Josh enters the coffee shop with the leftover cookies that he and Ellie baked. The ladies, Ellie, and Taylor simultaneously look at the door. Taylor breaks into a smile.

TAYLOR

Hi, Josh.

The table of ladies look at Ellie.

ELLIE

Hi...Josh...

The coffee shop ladies are giddy with excitement.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Shelbie is showing the house to the potential home buyer, HUSBAND (40's, animated), his WIFE (40's, interested), and their CHILD (excited).

Shelbie is talking to Josh on the phone while the potential buyers are in the living room posing by the fireplace, imagining a family photo in front of it.

SHELBBIE

Yes, we are here now.
I think it is going well.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. TAY'S HOT CHOFFEE SHOP - DAY

Josh talks on the phone while Ellie continues to hand out cookies.

JOSH

Oh, good. Thanks for the update, Shelbie.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

The HUSBAND disappears. Through a window, we see him reappear outside the house at the tree in the yard. He is excitedly yells to his family about the tree. We can't hear him because he is outside.

SHELBY

Boy, he loves that tree. I expect
an offer this afternoon.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. TAY'S HOT CHOFFEE SHOP - DAY

Josh hangs up the phone and updates Ellie.

JOSH

Well, Shelby thinks there will be
an offer on Aunt Ruth's house
today.

ELLIE

Wow...really? That's so...soon.

Josh continues to hand out cookies. Ellie look at Taylor, who mouths the words, "Tell him to stay" to encourage Ellie to tell Josh. Ellie doesn't want to bring it up, and she expresses this to Tay via a tiny tantrum that only Taylor would understand.

JOSH

Hey, have you been to the Town Hall
lately? I saw Todd at the lighting
ceremony, looks like he still works
for the Town. I'd like to drop by
and say hello. You want to come
with?

Ellie purses her lips as if holding back a secret and nods affirmatively that she'll join him.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Establishing shot of the Town Hall. A brick building with a post office box or some type of donation box out front. A sign in front says GREENVILLE, MAINE TOWN HALL.

INT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Ellie and Josh walk into the Town Hall. It's a small reception area with a long countertop spanning the width of the room. The sign above the countertop says "DEEDS, GOAT PERMITS, ZONING." Along the wall where the entrance is, portraits are hung of the past mayors and current mayor.

Josh rings the bell at the empty counter.

Todd pops up from seemingly below the counter. He's sporting a large Christmas tree pin on his sweater.

TODD

Well, hello, folks. Welcome to the
Greenville Town Ha--
Is that who I think it is? Handsome
Josh Hanson??

Todd vigorously shakes Josh's hand.

JOSH

It's just Josh these days, Todd.

ELLIE

Handsome Josh Hanson? How have I
never heard this?

Todd proudly points to his name plate which says: ASSISTANT
TOWN CLERK - TODD SAMSONITE ZBM., CPCM.

TODD

Well, these days I'm known as
Assistant Town Clerk Todd.

JOSH

ZBM? Is that some kind of public
service accreditation?

TODD

Zoning Board Member. And Christmas
Planning Committee Member.

JOSH

Ahh...good for you, Todd.

TODD

Livin' the dream here, my man!

There's a commotion near the entrance that draws Ellie's attention.

MAYOR MATT MAYER, his ASSISTANT, and the town PHOTOGRAPHER enter the Town Hall.

TODD (CONT'D)
Hi, Mr. Mayer!

The Mayor is standing beside his own portrait hanging on the wall.

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Hi Todd. I've told you, you don't
have to call me Mr. Mayer.
Call me Mr. MayOR.

Ellie fakes a laugh. This draws the the Mayor's attention,
and he tries to place the familiar face.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
Hi. You look awfully familiar. Have
we worked together on something
recently?

ELLIE
I actually helped with some of the
digital designs for the Christmas
displays downtown last year. That's
quite a good memory you have.

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Well, the Christmas display is one
of my crowning achievements. So,
it's super important to me, as are
all the individuals who contribute.
What are you doing down here today?
Signing up to help out with this
year's display? Do you have any
bright ideas floating around in
your head? We could always use some
fresh ideas.

Ellie thinks about Josh selling the house, thinks about the
buyer who wants the house...then BAM an idea pops into her
head. She holds her hands high above her head.

ELLIE
The town should have a real tree
again!

Josh is confused by this. The Mayor is a bit taken aback by
this.

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Now, you know there's a formal
process for this and we decided
years ago to make the switch to an
LED light show extravaganza.
(MORE)

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
It's great for the environment and
the economy. Tourism is up every
year to come see our displays.

The Mayor turns to face his photographer who promptly snaps a
few photos of him.

ELLIE
Right, I understand that. I just
think that a real tree, from our
own town, could instill such pride.
Even more pride. Never can have too
much, am I right?

The Mayor is skeptical. Ellie is scrambling for more words.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
And it opens opportunities for a
Christmas Tree Search, which you
could start early in the Fall. So
it really expands the window for
the Christmas season if you think
about it.

The Mayor is distracted by his Assistant showing him
something on a phone.

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Hm. Do you have a tree in mind?

ELLIE
Yes, as a matter of fact I do.

Ellie pulls out her phone and shows a picture of the tree in
Ruth's yard from a previous year, all decorated and covered
in lights.

Josh is caught off guard by this and struggles to interject.

JOSH
Well I don't know if that's such a
good--

This gets the Mayor's attention. And he is impressed.

MAYOR MATT MAYER
That's a nice tree.

JOSH
Um...I don't think--

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Todd, look at that tree.
Probably fine from all sides, too.

Ellie flashes the phone towards Todd, who admires the tree.

TODD

That's a 360-degree opportunity
right there. 300 and 60-Tree-grees,
if you will.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

HA!

Ellie's phone rings with a call from her mom's nurse,
Taniyah.

ELLIE

Excuse me, I have to take this.

Ellie steps aside to take the phone call while the Mayor and
Todd brainstorm about the tree idea.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

We could convene a Christmas Tree
Subcommittee to regulate the tree
specifications and submission
requirements.

TODD

The TV station could make a whole
series on it. Lots of radio
appearances. Definitely a ribbon
cutting when the final tree is
chosen.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Obviously, Todd. I mean, come on.

Ellie rejoins after her phone call.

ELLIE

I'm sorry, I need to head home. It
was nice seeing you all.

Ellie walks towards the door. The Mayor calls to her.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

We may have an opportunity for you,
another consulting role on our
Christmas Planning Committee, if
you're interested. I'll have my
people reach out.

The Mayor and his posse rush off and we're left with Ellie, who looks a bit giddy as this prospect, eyes full of optimism; Todd cautiously excited as his eyes dart between Ellie and Josh; Josh left in their wake holding his hands in the air as if to say what the heck just happened here?

ELLIE

(to Todd)

Was that Greg Grunberg?

END OF ACT 4

ACT 5

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Establishing shot of the Town Hall.

INT. TOWN HALL - DAY

CLOSE ON ELLIE AND JOSH AS THEY TALK.

Ellie and Josh are still in the Town Hall. Todd is still behind the counter but we do not see him at first.

JOSH
Why'd you offer my tree?

ELLIE
Um, it's still Aunt Ruth's tree.

JOSH
Right. Of course. It's not my tree.
But it's even more not your tree.
Especially to offer as the town's
Christmas tree?

ELLIE
Right. I know.

Ellie nods in agreement. She becomes more agitated as Josh speaks.

JOSH
I mean, if there's an offer on the
house I assume it would be
contingent on the tree remaining.
Big changes like that could--

Ellie can't hold it in any longer so she finally bursts. And this completely disarms Josh as he did not know she felt so strongly.

ELLIE
I don't want you to sell the house
and leave! OK?

JOSH
What? You don't?

ELLIE

I know this sounds ridiculous, but it's been so nice spending time with you again. And I miss Aunt Ruth. And I can't imagine anyone else in that house. There's just so much all at once.

Josh reaches out to grab Ellie's hands.

JOSH

It is a lot. I'm just trying work my way through it all. My mind's racing.

(after a beat, calm)

You know, if Aunt Ruth's tree is picked for downtown, it could ruin an easy sale for me.

ELLIE

You seem really chill about this. Like, more chill than you should be.

Josh takes a step closer to Ellie so they are about a foot apart. It looks as if they are about to kiss.

JOSH

And I'm enjoying this time with you, too.

Todd is staring at them, mouth agape, eyes darting back and forth between Ellie and Josh. A smirk forms.

TODD

Classic Handsome Josh Hanson.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY - NEXT DAY

Establishing shot of the Town Hall. A few people are dressed in winter clothes and are doing Cold Yoga in the snow out front.

INT. TOWN HALL - DAY

When Ellie enters the Town Hall Todd is behind the counter and he notices her right away.

TODD

Good morning, Ellie. You here for Cold Yoga? They just got started out front.

(MORE)

TODD (CONT'D)

It was just a little idea I had. A little alternative programming to sitting inside all winter.

ELLIE

Hi. Cold Yoga? No. Good idea, though. Do you remember our conversation yesterday with Josh and the Mayor about doing a real Christmas tree downtown?

Todd flips through a notebook he has within reach.

TODD

Let me check my notes...

ELLIE

Notes? You took notes...?

TODD

Ah! Yes! I have it right here. You said, and I quote, "The town should have a real tree again."

Todd closes the notebook and looks up at Ellie.

TODD (CONT'D)

And then you stuck your arms up into the air like this.

Todd holds his arms into the air above his head.

ELLIE

That doesn't sound like me...

Todd opens his notebook again and shows her the page with his notes.

We see the handwritten text Todd just read and a hand drawn sketch that resembles a decent courtroom sketch showing Ellie with her hands above her head in the shape of a triangle.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

That's actually pretty good.

TODD

I was on a jury once and sat near the court artist. I spent a good bit of the time watching them and the rest of the time doing my own sketches.

ELLIE

Oh, cool.

TODD

Yeah. The defendant was guilty as sin. Unfortunately I got caught sketching so much they called a mistrial.

Ellie's eyes go wide with surprise.

TODD (CONT'D)

ABC. Always be sketchin', right?

ELLIE

Yeeeahh...So. Todd. Per our last conversation, I was just wondering if there was some other way to move along the conversation about picking a real tree for downtown.

Todd reaches for a plot map book from a shelf somewhere under the counter.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Specifically, the tree I showed you. Is there any way to speed up the process? Maybe we could draw an easement? Maybe we look at eminent domain? Maybe we--

Todd plops a large plot map book onto the counter and opens it right up to the street where Aunt Ruth's property is.

TODD

Whoa whoa whoa...we don't use those words around here anymore. There's a lot of red tape, so this type of thing can't happen over night.

In the plot map book, the property map shows property lines and one large triangle labeled "TREE."

TODD (CONT'D)

Ah. Here we are. Yup, the tree is clearly on her property. But guess what?

Todd looks up at Ellie sincerely. Ellie listens intently.

ELLIE

What?

TODD

I'm doing a tree survey.

ELLIE

Great! How can that help?

TODD

It can't. I just wanted you to know. You know, get all the potential conflicts of interest out of the way up front.

ELLIE

This tree means so much to me. Aunt Ruth and I would decorate it every year with lights and ornaments. And I'd make a new ornament every year that we'd add to the tree. It was one of my favorite traditions. She just passed, so I want to do something to honor her and share this memory with the community. Something big. Something that's big like her life. She was such an influence in my life. I feel like she deserves a monument. What's the process for designating historical monuments? Is there a donation amount that would preserve it? Anything?

TODD

I'm sorry to hear about your Aunt Ruth. She sounds like a great person. I am totally onboard with all of this. Unfortunately, I'm powerless.

Ellie sighs heavily, feeling sad and missing Ruth.

TODD (CONT'D)

But if there's a petition I can sign, I'll definitely sign it. And if it's any consolation, the Mayor seemed pretty psyched about this real tree idea.

Todd pulls out his phone to show a text exchange with "Mayor Mayer." There is a text message to Todd from the Mayor that simply says: 🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲🌲.

TODD (CONT'D)

Hopefully his tree wasn't on fire.

Ellie cracks a skeptical half smile.

INT. TAY'S HOT CHOFFEE SHOP - DAY - LATER

Ellie sips coffee with her Mom while the shop bustles around them. Taylor works behind the counter.

ELLIE

So, Mom, I heard about a freelance graphic design job with some company in Ohio.

EVELYN

Oh? That sounds fun. Would you need to relocate? You know it's ok if you did. I am doing just fine--

ELLIE

No, it's remote. I am not sure I'd want to work any place other than here. It feels like my whole world is right here.

EVELYN

Well, they would really benefit from your skills. I know that.

ELLIE

Ooh! I just had an idea. Hold my latte.

Ellie stands up and hands her cup to her Mom, who promptly puts it back down on the table.

Ellie then leans over to talk to a group of older folks at a nearby table. The folks seem intrigued and giddy at what she is saying.

As Ellie moves behind the coffee shop counter near Taylor, she pulls out her phone and begins working feverishly on something as she speaks.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Tay, I have an idea, but I'm going to need your help.

TAYLOR

O-kaaay...does it involve a horse?

Ellie continues working on her phone.

ELLIE

No.

TAYLOR

Does it involve the beach?

ELLIE

No.

TAYLOR

Does it involve a timeshare?

ELLIE

No.

TAYLOR

Can you tell I'm thinking about a warm vacation?

Ellie taps her phone one last time and then looks up.

ELLIE

No. There. Done.

On her phone, we see a simple but catchy "garage sale" style flier design that Ellie has just created. It says "Greenville Finance Roundtable Today @ Tay's Choffee Shop."

Ellie taps the "Print" icon on her phone screen and the printer behind the coffee shop counter spits out multiple copies of the flier.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

I am going to invite Josh down here for this afternoon's Finance Roundtable.

Taylor is un-phased by this idea. Ellie hands her a flier.

TAYLOR

What Finance Roundtable, Ellie.

ELLIE

The one you're hosting here in a few minutes.

TAYLOR

Ellie, you know I'm always down with your cosmic ideas - they're out-of-this-world! I just need to know what this is really about.

ELLIE

Alright. Fine. I had this idea that maybe if Josh could experience what it would be like to work here in this community then maybe he would want to stay here.

(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)

I just need some people to ask him some investing questions and then he can be his regular helpful self. Hopefully he'll find it rewarding and fun and he'll want to stay.

Taylor takes this in for a moment and then nods affirmatively as she addresses her customers.

TAYLOR

Alright people, get out your finance documents. Get your 401k's, your w9's, your icd10's, your chapter 11's, it's investment roundtable time.

Ellie makes a vague phone call to Josh to lure him down to the coffee shop.

ELLIE

Hey, Josh, could you swing by Taylor's? There's like, this investment gettogether happening and I think you'd really like it.
(after a beat)
Ok great. See you soon.

In the shop, we see that a few tables have been pushed together and a group of elder folks are sitting around them and smiling back at Ellie.

CUT TO:

INT. TAY'S HOT CHOFFEE SHOP - DAY - LATER

Josh walks through the front door of the coffee shop and spots Ellie.

JOSH

So, what's this all about?

Ellie hands Josh a flier.

ELLIE

Thanks for coming, Josh. So there's this investment get together, just like, a real casual thing with some folks who love to talk investing.

JOSH

Oh, cool. Great!

ELLIE

Yeah! And it's today. Can you believe it? I thought maybe you could join the conversation, answer some questions, you know, do some of the stuff you like to do.

JOSH

Sounds like fun!

Ellie pulls out an empty chair at the table for Josh and he sits to join the group of elders. One of the older ladies makes eye contact with Ellie and winks at her. Josh dives right into the conversation.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Alright. So, did anyone hear about the proposed annuity changes that the SEC and the FIRA are working together on...

MONTAGE: JOSH AND THE ELDERLY FOLKS TALKING INVESTMENTS

As upbeat Christmas music plays, we see clips of Josh explaining the HECK out of some investments to the group around the table. Ellie is watching on as she's making coffees. We see:

- Josh grabbing papers from different people while talking to others, fully in the zone, as much as a finance person can be.
- Somehow, there's an old school desktop calculator with the receipt paper, and Josh is furiously punching numbers into it.
- Another shot of Josh with the desktop calculator, this time he's wearing an old timey green accountants visor.

END OF MONTAGE.

CUT TO:

Ellie and Taylor stand behind the counter and watch Josh fully in his element dole out investment advice.

TAYLOR

You're bad, sister.

ELLIE

Josh can sell the house any time. Why right now? He should give this place a chance.

(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)

He talks about his plan and how he's always been working towards his plan, but then when he talks about the stuff he'd like to do that he hasn't had a chance to do, he lights up. So before he continues on this pre-defined, narrow path, he should at least look at other ways to go.

TAYLOR

I know that everyone grieves in their own way,
(raises hand to stave off interruption)
but I just hope that this is at least 51% inspired by you genuinely wanting the best for Josh.

Ellie doesn't respond. She's watching Josh and taking to heart Taylor's comments.

We see Josh at the table having a grand ol' time.

EXT. MAIN ST. SIDEWALK - DUSK

Ellie and Josh mosey down the sidewalk with coffee cups in their hands. The town shops around them are decorated beautifully. Josh is all pumped up after helping people with investment advice.

JOSH

I feel so energized right now.

ELLIE

You're glowing.

JOSH

And I have you to thank. What are the odds, right? That That I'm here for a random, pop-up investment chat? It was fun.

Guilt is swelling up inside Ellie and she decides to just tell Josh the truth about the investment group. But Josh surprises her and throws her off track.

ELLIE

Yeah...about that--

JOSH

You know, it might be a sign that I should stick around a while.

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

Maybe I should call Shelbie and let
her know I'm not ready to sell--

Josh's phone DINGS with a text message from his boss JERRY.
He casually checks his phone and then does a double-take.
He's intrigued.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Hm. That's strange.

We see a text message from Jerry that says: "There's
something we need to talk about. And it rhymes with
'demotion'."

ELLIE

What is it?

JOSH

Ahh...just a text from my boss.

Josh's phone DINGS again with another message from Jerry:
"Was trying to rhyme. Bad example. Let's talk about a
promotion. Everything you talked about. Total autonomy."

Josh is caught off guard by this, especially from someone
like Jerry who isn't typically onboard with the things Josh
cares about. This could be everything Josh has ever wanted.

Ellie and Josh are nearing a few street vendors selling hot
pretzels, hot chocolate, hot dogs, etc.

ELLIE

Would you like anything to eat
here? Pretzel? Hot dog?

Josh is distracted trying to process what Jerry said as well
as these new feelings of motivation he's experiencing from
the impromptu community investment chat.

Ellie notices he's not listening to her.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Uni? Shark fin soup? Wild unicorn?

Josh is still distracted.

JOSH

Sure, that sounds fine.

Josh starts to type a reply to Jerry: "Sure, would love to
talk"

He stops and deletes what he wrote. Thinks for a second and
then types: "Can we talk tomorrow?"

A second later, Josh's phone DINGS again with a response from Jerry: "Baby spinach, greens, dill, tarter, onions. Balsamic Vinaigrette ON THE SIDE."

DING. Another text from Jerry: "Sorry, wrong text. Talk tmrw."

ELLIE

Hello? Earth to Josh. You getting
bombarded with investment questions
from his soon-to-be clients?

Josh tucks away his phone.

JOSH

Not exactly. It's just some work
stuff. It can wait.

The two step up to a vendor's booth to order some food.

END OF ACT 5

ACT 6

EXT. MAIN ST. SIDEWLAK - NIGHT

Ellie and Josh share a popcorn on the bench in front of Turnkey Real Estate. We see the plaque between them that says: "THIS BENCH GENEROUSLY DONATED BY JANNIE TURNKEY AND HER CONTRACTOR HUSBAND TUCKER. VALUABLE AND RESPECTED MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY."

Josh wants to tell Taylor about the promotion text from Jerry, but gets interrupted.

JOSH

So, the messages were actually about my job--

ELLIE

Oh! I'm sorry but you just reminded me of something. There's this company in Ohio looking for a freelance graphic designer. It sounds pretty cool. I'm kind of excited about it.

JOSH

I'm surprised you would leave here for a job.

ELLIE

It's remote. Ohio? You think I would leave here for Ohio? Get real. I'm sorry, you were saying something?

JOSH

Right. I wanted to tell you--

Ellie notices a group of carolers across the street and taps Josh's arm excitedly.

ELLIE

I swear I'm not doing this on purpose, but look! Carolers!

Ellie stands up.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

We gotta go. We can check-off caroling, Josh.

Ellie grabs Josh's hand and tugs him across the street to join the carolers.

FADE OUT.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Establishing shot of Town Hall.

INT. TOWN HALL - MEETING ROOM - DAY

Inside a small meeting room, the Christmas Planning Committee has gathered. There's a table near the entrance that's covered in snacks and a large conference table in the middle of the room.

Seated around the table with name cards in front of them, we see Ellie, Mayor Mayer, Todd, MELVIN (60's, grumpy), and CLARISSA (40's, bubbly). The Mayor's Assistant and Photographer are standing near him. Everyone around the table is wearing the same Christmas tree pin on their shirt.

At one end of the room, there's easel with a list of ridiculous ideas to discuss. The Mayor gavels the meeting into session.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Alright everyone, thanks for coming. We're here to discuss ideas for making our downtown Christmas celebration even better. As you can see...

The Mayor motions to the ease. We see the text: "Christmas Planning Committee Meeting Topics" followed by these items listed: "live reindeer, manger scene with real baby, real life snowman (science not there yet?)."

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)

...We have the start of some ideas. Some consider these good. Others consider these not so good.

The Mayor, Todd, and Clarissa simultaneously look over at Melvin. He is sitting with his arms crossed and looks disinterested.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)

Anywho...does anyone have anything else to add to the discussion?

ELLIE

I have something that maybe we could discuss. What about paper ornaments made by kids in the community? The stores could hang them in their windows and--

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Nah. Too basic. We need bigger, flashier ideas. Aren't you a designer? Shouldn't your ideas be, what do they say in Silicon Valley? "Out-of-the-box" and "revolutionary"?

Todd does a rocket gesture up into the air.

TODD

To the moon!

Ellie gets quiet and decides against sharing any more ideas.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Didn't you have the real tree idea? Now that's a big idea.

TODD

The big city has their biggest real tree ever this year.

The Mayor immediately becomes irate and slams his fist on the table.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Enough! I don't want to hear about that big city and their gimmicky downtown Christmas tree. I'm tired of being outshined,
 (consults quietly with
 Todd)
 Outshone?

TODD

Outshoned, I think?

The Mayor addresses the full audience again and beings gathering papers and packing up.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

I'm not going to be outdone by that city! Ohh no. No they don't. Not again.

Mayor Mayer stands up. Todd follows suit.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
Todd, cut down that tree Ellie
showed us and put it up downtown.

The Mayor storms out of the meeting room, followed by his Assistant and Photographer. His Photographer grabs a handful of snacks on his way out the door.

INT. TOWN HALL - HALLWAY - DAY

Todd catches up to the Mayor and stops him in the hallway.

TODD
Mr. Mayor Mayer--

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Just pick one, Todd--

TODD
Um, sir, the downtown is still
zoned for a tree and gathering
space--

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Well, good. Make it happen--

TODD
But, sir, unfortunately--

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Don't do it, Todd. Don't bring me
bad news. Not on my special day--

TODD
Oh, happy birthday, sir. I had no
idea--

Todd catches a glimpse of the Mayor's Assistant who is shaking her head "no."

TODD (CONT'D)
It's just that, downtown is zoned
for a tree and gathering space, but
there's now a formal process in
place and we must hold an emergency
hearing to vote on having a real
tree again.

The Mayor dramatically looks around at others in the hallway and starts a slow clap.

MAYOR MATT MAYER
He did it, folks. He brought me bad news.

TODD
It's one of the protections enacted under the BRIGHT LIGHTS act.

The Mayor nods and they both begin to rattle off the acronym but mumble towards the end because neither can remember it.

MAYOR MATT MAYER
Right right right...

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)	TODD
Beautifying Right In	Beautifying Right In
Greenville...	Greenville...
Homecooking Tastes...	Help To
Like...it...Gree...Great..	Liquidity..Levitate...

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)
Schedule the emergency hearing, Todd. I have to start working the phones. This is personal. No more bad news, Todd.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Establishing shot of Ruth's house with her tree in the yard.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Josh is on the phone with his boss Jerry. He is in an area of the house that has windows with a view of the front yard.

JERRY (O.S.)
I mean, it's everything you could want in a promotion. And it's all yours.

JOSH
Wow. Yeah, it sounds great. It's just--

JERRY (O.S.)
Great. Now that all the business stuff is out of the way. How you doing up there, man? You hanging in there? Remembering your Aunt Nancy and everything--

JOSH

It's my Aunt Ruth. Her name was Ruth.

JERRY (O.S.)

Right, of course. So you've been enjoying some time off around there?

JOSH

A bit. I actually did get to talk investments the other day--

JERRY (O.S.)

You pushing the Goliath funds? My man! Greif, shmeif, am I right? Get some, Josh!

JOSH

(annoyed)

No, it wasn't like that. At all. It was more of an impromptu conversation, just a small group of locals in a coffee shop talking about the market and asking questions.

JERRY (O.S.)

Uh huh. The coffee shop where your ex-girlfriend works?

JOSH

Yeah, but, I mean, it's not like that...

JERRY (O.S.)

No, of course. Small town, sheer convenience. Just happened upon an investment meeting. It's not like the one who doesn't want you to sell your house and leave is the one who called to tell you about this impromptu meeting or anything, right?

Josh is quiet for a beat.

JOSH

Right.

JERRY (O.S.)

Well, hey, I gotta run. Great talk.
Real excited to get you back here
and get settled into your new role,
Mr. Director of Private Equity
Asset Allocation.

JOSH

It has a nice ring to it.

Jerry hangs up and we hear the BEEPS of an ended call.

Josh notices a commotion outside and looks through a window
to see Ellie outside hammering a stake into the ground with
a sign on it: ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS CHRISTMAS TREE
SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING TONIGHT.

Todd, the Mayor, the Mayor's Assistant, his Photographer,
Melvin, and Clarissa are standing by Aunt Ruth's tree
evaluating it. They are all wearing their Christmas Tree
pins.

JOSH (CONT'D)

What is going on out there...

Josh rushes out to see what it's all about.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Josh approaches Ellie, who is holding a hammer and yard signs
promoting the Zoning Board meeting, to ask what is going on.

JOSH

Hey, Ellie. What's this all about?

ELLIE

Oh, hey Josh. So, the Mayor OK'd a
vote to put up a real tree
downtown. But we have to have a
vote first to--

JOSH

I'm sorry, what? Is that why
they're over there looking at Aunt
Ruth's tree? Do they think they can
just take a vote and then cut it
down?

ELLIE

Well, I don't think it happens over
night like that but...I thought you
were cool with seeing how this
plays out?

JOSH

It feels like things are happening kind of fast. And there's more to think about. I got a call from my boss. He wants to promote me.

ELLIE

Well I'm not surprised, you're great at your job--

JOSH

He would need me back in the office as soon as possible. So I would need to button up all this,
(gestures towards the house)
as soon as possible.

ELLIE

Right. But, we still have one of Aunt Ruth's traditions left to--

JOSH

Oh, come on, Ellie. Grow up. This is real life. We can't pretend this is some fantasy and we're living in a snow globe.

ELLIE

It is real life, Josh. This is real life. Aunt Ruth really wanted you to do these things. I know it seems silly to you and like a huge waste of time because it's not time working up a corporate ladder, but this is real. Ruth spent her whole life climbing the corporate ladder. She lived alone her whole life and worked so hard her whole life. And she was happy. But you said it yourself, you've been working so hard to achieve success in your career, and you've done that, and you still aren't fully satisfied by it. I think Aunt Ruth knew that about you. I think she knew you needed more. And I'm sure she knew this would be hard for you to do. But the least you can do, the very least, Josh, is see it through. Honor her last wishes and do her silly traditions. And come to an agreement with me about this tree.

(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)

After that, you can still choose to do whatever you want. But this is real life, Josh.

(deflated)

But you do whatever you want, Josh. It just seems so immature to leave-

JOSH

Immature?? I'm not being immature! You're immature!

Ellie gasps.

ELLIE

What??

ELLIE (CONT'D)

You're immature!
Jinx!

JOSH

You're immature!
Jinx!

They stand in silence for an angry moment, staring at each other. They both storm off in opposite directions without another word to each other.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY - LATER

Josh packs his car for the road trip back to the office. He pulls a small, weathered, square box out of a bag and walks over to the tree in Aunt Ruth's yard. The tree has a number of ornaments on it, as Ellie has been decorating it. Josh takes a handmade ornament out of the small box and hangs it on the tree. We see that the ornament says: "Merry Christmas 2015."

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY [FLASHBACK]

CHIRON: 8 years ago...

We're in Aunt Ruth's yard with ADULT ELLIE (19), AUNT RUTH (62), and ADULT JOSH (20). Ellie is saying goodbye to Aunt Ruth before heading back to college after winter break. Josh is carving something into the tree, trying to ignore Ellie.

AUNT RUTH

Josh, why don't you come over and say goodbye to Ellie?

Josh continues what he is doing and responds without looking.

ADULT JOSH

without looking
See ya.

Ellie brushes it off but Aunt Ruth can see that Ellie is wanting more.

AUNT RUTH

It might be hard to appreciate this right now, but some things just have to run their course. Some beautiful and important plants have the sharpest of thorns. To protect themselves. You see?

(looks at Josh)

They don't want to be hurt, so they insolate and protect themselves from others getting too close. They keep things that could hurt them at a distance.

Ellie addresses Josh again.

ADULT ELLIE

I hate your guts and hope I never see you again!

Josh still has his back turned to Ellie and Ruth. His eyes well up, but her comment makes him laugh, and then cry a little.

Josh WAVES with his back still turned.

Aunt Ruth hugs Ellie.

We see that Josh has carved something into the tree bark: "JH + EH" surrounded by a heart.

[END FLASHBACK]

CUT TO:

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

CHIRON: Present day...

We see the 2015 ornament Josh has placed on the tree.

As the shot PULLS BACK from the "Merry Christmas 2015" ornament, we catch a glimpse of the "JH + EH" carving in the tree bark.

As the shot continues to pull back, we have a full view of Josh at the tree and see Ellie walking up behind him.

Ellie tosses a snowball at Josh's back. He chuckles.

JOSH

Do you hate my guts and never want to see me again?

ELLIE

I know that you have a lot on your mind, but I want you to consider something. When you think about a decision, are you making that decision because it's what you want or because it's what you think you should do? Because it seems like you've been spending so much of your life following a path that you've planned out that maybe you've lost sight of what's in your heart. If logic is failing you, then follow your heart. At least then you can't second guess and over analyze. You just accept that you're following where your heart leads you.

JOSH

I need to go talk to my boss about this job. But then I'll come back and I'd like it if we could finish the last tradition together? The gift wrapping race?

ELLIE

I'm like the Tom Petty of gift wrapping, so watch out.

JOSH

I think you mean Richard Petty.

ELLIE

Maybe...

JOSH

Ok, I'll see you soon.

After Josh leaves, Ellie finds her and Josh's initials carved into the tree and traces the heart with her finger.

END OF ACT 6

ACT 7

EXT. GOLIATH INVESTMENTS - DANVERS, PA - DAY

Establishing shot of Goliath Investments.

INT. GOLIATH INVESTMENTS OFFICE - DAY

Josh is back at the Goliath Investments office to meet with Jerry and talk about the promotion. Through the floor-to-ceiling glass of Jerry's office, we see Josh and Jerry in the middle of an animated discussion.

JOSH

This fantastic opportunity you've sold me on is not as autonomous, independent, nor perfect as you made it sound. It's the same job I have now, just more money, a corner office, direct reports, quarterly revenue goals, and hardly any interaction with clients. The exact opposite of what I am looking for.

As he hears the words come out of his mouth, he realizes what is he saying. He doesn't want this. He doesn't want to be here.

JERRY

You can't live in this fantasy space where profits don't matter. You're on the track to success, stay on track, Josh. Bountiful rewards await.

JOSH

Money costs too much.

JERRY

What's that?

JOSH

A good friend once told me that money costs too much. And I didn't really get it until now.

JERRY

Well I don't get that at all. And you could get yourself into real trouble saying stuff like that to clients.

Jerry pops a handful of almonds in his mouth and points at Josh while he chews.

JERRY (CONT'D)
Quick way to get the SEC breathing
down your neck with comments like
that, Josh.

CUT TO:

INT. GOLIATH INVESTMENTS - LATER

Josh packs his personal items at his desk into a cardboard box. His desk phone rings.

JOSH
Hello, Joshua Hanson speaking.

Josh smiles at the familiar voice on the phone.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Ahh, Mrs. Lewis. So nice to hear
from you. Actually, I am glad you
called, there is something I wanted
to tell you.

Josh looks around the office before sitting down for more privacy.

JOSH (CONT'D)
I'll be leaving Goliath
Investments, Mrs. Lewis. This will
be my last day here. But not to
worry, you're in great hands. I'm
sure your new account manager will
reach out soon--
No, I think I'll be going off on my
own, starting my own investment
firm--
Oh, wow. Really? Mrs. Lewis, as
your longtime account manager I
can't advise moving your
investments over to my new firm--
No, I won't have an online portal
that you'll need to login to--
OK, I won't argue with you.
(proudly)
It would be an honor to have you
investment with my new firm.
I'll talk to you soon.

Josh hangs up the phone and fist pumps. He is psyched about his very first client.

EXT. GOLIATH INVESTMENTS - DAY

Outside the office building, Josh looks up at the GOLIATH INVESTMENTS sign. He places his box of belongings on the ground, makes a snowball, and then chucks it at the GOLIATH sign. He nods in satisfaction.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

When Josh returns to Greenville, he finds Ellie at Ruth's tree. He throws a snowball at her back. She returns fire. They exchange snowballs. They start rounding the tree chasing each other with snowballs. They collide and end up on the ground together. They kiss.

JOSH

I'm not taking the job promotion. I actually quit.

ELLIE

You what??

JOSH

It just felt right in that moment. Something came over me and I just, I don't know, I did not want to be there. I wanted to be back here.

ELLIE

Well, I am...I was gonna say that I'm shocked but maybe I'm not. I'm excited. I'm excited for you!

JOSH

Yeah me too. And they held that virtual tree vote meeting while I was gone, right? How'd that go?

ELLIE

Oh that was a disaster.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. EVELYN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As Ellie sits down in front of her laptop to join the virtual tree vote meeting, the shot ZOOMS in on the computer screen until it fills the view.

We see a number of individuals on the virtual meeting, including: Ellie, Mayor Mayer, Todd, Melvin, Clarissa, Taylor, and a few others with just their name displayed.

Ellie describes the meeting to Josh as we see clips from the virtual meeting.

ELLIE (V.O.)

The meeting started out bad and kept getting worse. First, someone on the call was ordering a peppermint milkshake and didn't mute themselves.

MEETING PARTICIPANT

Yeah, can I get that with no whipped cream and no cherry?

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Who gets their peppermint shake with no whipped and no cherry??

ELLIE (V.O.)

Then, Todd kept interrupting Mayor Mayer, and you can imagine how that went.

TODD

Maybe we should begin with the pledge of fir-llegiance.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Not now, Todd.

ELLIE (V.O.)

Then the Mayor opened it up to public comments.

In the virtual meeting we see someone with a hand raised in their square.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Yes, in the back, I see that hand.

ELLIE (V.O.)

But he had everyone muted because of the peppermint shake thing, so when no one spoke up, he moved on.

In the virtual meeting we see the Mayor holding up a piece of paper that's he's reading.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

OK, we've got a letter submission from Ellie.

ELLIE (V.O.)

But he must've been getting impatient because he pretty much just glossed over the whole thing.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

There's some real sentimental stuff about Ruth Matthews in here...blah blah blah...and then finishes it off with a Christmassy quote. Nailed it, El. Anyone else?

ELLIE (V.O.)

Finally, you'll love this, the Mayor pressed a button and turned himself into a hamburger.

In the virtual meeting, the Mayor has enabled the hamburger filter and can't turn it off. SO now he looks like a hamburger.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Ok, I must've hit a button somewhere here, and I can't turn it off. Rest assured, I am not a hamburger.

In the virtual meeting, the screen glitches and goes black.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ellie and Josh are still on the ground in the snow.

ELLIE

And that was it. They ended without any resolution. They're going to hold another tree vote meeting in person.

JOSH

Wow, sorry I missed all that.

ELLIE

Well, you have a good excuse. Which I feel like we should be celebrating. Maybe you should take me to dinner.

A gust of wind knocks some snow off the tree and onto Josh's head. They laugh.

JOSH

Yes, dinner sounds nice. But first,
gift wrapping?

JOSH (CONT'D)

ELLIE

It's a-

It's a-

They both start and then stop before completing the statement together. Instead they break into laughter.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER - NIGHT

Establishing shot of the Greenville Community Center. A nondescript building with a people filing into it.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER FUNCTION SPACE - NIGHT

Inside the community center space, there's a visible sign that says "COMMUNITY GIFT WRAPPING EVENT TONIGHT." It's a room that can accommodate about a hundred people, but there are about 25 people there wrapping presents at stations around the room. It's a very festive and jovial environment.

Ellie and Josh stand at a table together, with Josh measuring out tape and Ellie wrapping boxes with festive wrapping paper.

SANDY (70's) from a nearby table comes up to them and greets Ellie.

ELLIE

Oh, Josh, this is Sandy.

JOSH

Yes, of course, I know Sandy. She was at the investment roundtable thing.

SANDY

Hi, Josh. Nice to see you again. I wanted to let you know that I took your advice and I spoke to my advisor about rebalancing my portfolio. Thank you for the suggestion, dear.

Before Sandy walks away, she winks at Ellie.

Josh notices the wink. He doesn't say anything at first but it kinda eats away at him.

JOSH

What was that? It looked like a little wink, huh?

ELLIE

Oh, I don't know. She likes to wink I guess.

Josh isn't buying it. As he looks around the room, it seems like all of the gift wrappers are watching them and even admiring them in a weird way.

JOSH

Huh. You know, it feels little weird in here, right? Like everyone is kind of watching us?

ELLIE

I don't know, does it?

JOSH

You know, one of the reasons I think I was having a hard time trusting my feelings was that my it was all so coincidental. All of a sudden, people who needed investment advice were popping up and you were--

ELLIE

I was what?

JOSH

I don't know what you were doing, or if you were doing anything at all. Maybe everything here is just as perfect as it feels. I mean, I am sort of betting on that being the case. But if you had been manipu- I mean, coordinating things, then it would just make me feel uneasy about the whole thing.

ELLIE

Josh, everything we've--

JOSH

Did you? Did you coordinate anything that has happened?

ELLIE

Josh, all the stuff we've done together has been real.

(after a beat)

(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)

I may have...maybe the investment group wasn't as ad-hoc as I made it seem...But all I did was throw a label on it. All the people, the conversations you had, it was all you.

Josh quietly nods to himself and then shakes his head. He hands Ellie a piece of tape.

JOSH

I think we've met our gift wrapping obligation.

Josh stands up and takes one step before turning back to Ellie.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I mean, I quit my job, Ellie. Now I'm afraid I've made a huge mistake. This is why I stick to logic. Clear, logical, steps.

Josh walks away. Ellie looks distraught and is questioning what she's done.

EXT. MAIN ST. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

After leaving the gift wrapping event, Josh walks around downtown. It's a beautiful nighttime Christmas scene.

He sits down on a bench in front of Turnkey Real Estate. - a bench sponsored by the Turnkey family. He talks quietly to himself.

JOSH

Oh, Aunt Ruth. I wish you were here. I could really use your advice.

Josh pulls out his phone to watch some of Ruth's will video.

Josh taps the Fast Forward button. When he stops, we hear a ridiculous out-of-context commentary by Ruth.

AUNT RUTH

"...a green thumb! So I said, you can put that green thumb in your b-"
"

Josh chuckles and then taps Fast Forward again.

AUNT RUTH (CONT'D)
"...who says 'analogous to'?? Who
talks like that??"

Josh taps Fast Forward again to a part in the video where the Aunt Ruth's doorbell rings. In the video, Ruth gets up to get the door. When she walks back into view, a teenage Josh is with her; he just happened to arrive at her house while she was recording.

Grown up Josh tears up when he sees this in the video.

In the video, Josh sits down next to Aunt Ruth. She is getting teary eyed because she knows what this means, but teenage Josh has no clue. She pulls Josh close.

AUNT RUTH (CONT'D)
I'm just making a video for some
time in the future. I'll stop in a
minute. You know, Josh, it's
important to take good care of the
people in your life and do things
for others. We come into this life
alone and most of us leave this
life alone. It's all about the
connections we make while we're
here. That's what makes a full
life.

Aunt Ruth discretely wipes away a tear. An oblivious teenage Josh speaks on the video.

TEENAGE JOSH
Can we go sledding or watch Wild
Wild West or something?

AUNT RUTH
Absolutely. Let's go.

Aunt Ruth stops recording and Josh's phone screen goes black.

JOSH
You're right. Thank you.

END OF ACT 7

ACT 8

EXT. MAIN ST. DOWNTOWN - STREET - DAY

As the shot ZOOMS in to a town worker in the middle of the road, we hear the narration from an audiobook that Todd is listening to.

AUDIOBOOK NARRATOR (V.O.)

"He grabs Penelope in his massive, farm-strong arms, and pulls her body close to his... Their hearts are both beating over one hundred beats per minute. Penelope longs for the touch of his lips--"

The shot lands on Todd, wearing headphones and placing work cones around a pothole in the street. He's got a wheelbarrow filled with asphalt, a shovel, and he's wearing a reflective vest.

Josh walks down the sidewalk nearby and notices Todd working in the street. He begins to wave and call out to Todd, which we can't hear over the audiobook narration.

Todd jumps when Josh taps him on the shoulder.

JOSH

Hey, I've been calling to you.

TODD

Oh, hey, Josh. Sorry about that. Was all wrapped up in this book I'm listening to.

JOSH

Business book?

TODD

Farm hand romance.

Josh chuckles and then nods when he realizes Todd wasn't joking.

JOSH

Oh. Cool. So what are you doing out there on a Saturday?

TODD

Just having a little fun. Care to join?

Josh takes in the scene.

JOSH

Nah.

TODD

What's wrong, man? I can sense the sadness on you.

JOSH

It's a long story. I'm just worried that I'm making some big changes in my life without really thinking them through properly. Ellie has been really supportive, but also sort of primed the pump, so to speak.

TODD

Niiiiice use of farm hand lingo!

JOSH

She set up an investment conversation and made it seem like a regular thing, but in reality it was just for me to get to talk to people and answer their questions.

Todd sticks his shovel into the pile of asphalt and leans on the shovel.

TODD

You know what your problem is? You're too precious with everything. So what if she made up the meeting? It actually sounds really nice. And you really met with people. You really helped some people.

JOSH

Yeah, I guess I did.

TODD

Everything is what you make of it. Ellie is out there just making things happen. It's important to put your mark on things, to have a hand in making a place what you want it to be, to be part of the solution. You can sit in meetings all day, have conversations all day. You know how many calls I get about the potholes in the roads? They're endless. We have meetings every week about it.

(MORE)

TODD (CONT'D)

You know who's not in those meetings? The people who actually shovel the asphalt into the ground. We just sit around and talk about the budget, and the overtime, and all the details around it. At some point, someone needs to pick up a shovel and fill in the hole. I know you wonder why I've stayed here my whole life. It's because I can do this.

(pointing to the road)

I can have an impact. I can pull over on the side of the road and fill a hole to make this place a little better.

JOSH

I get it. You're making a bigger impact today than you know. Thanks, Todd.

Josh rushes out of the street and into the Turnkey Real Estate office.

INT. EVELYN'S HOUSE - DAY

Ellie is working on her tablet, designing an animated graphic to promote the Christmas Committee real tree vote (maybe a tree that lifts a branch and sniffs an armpit and then sighs with pleasure at their own scent). It's clear that she is enjoying being creative again.

Ellie posts the completed animated graphic to her photo-sharing-based social media page.

Ellie's phone then DINGS with a text from Tay: "Are you coming into work?"

ELLIE

Shoot! I lost track of time!

She rushes to leave.

INT. TAY'S HOT CHOFFEE SHOP - DAY

Behind the counter at Tay's coffee shop, Ellie pulls a handful of "Tree Vote" fliers from the printer and talks to Taylor.

ELLIE

It just felt really good to design something again, even something as simple as a little Christmas tree.

TAYLOR

I saw it. I loved it. You're so good at coming up with ideas like that.

Ellie looks at her phone and sees that there are a handful of hearts on her post. She's not a viral sensation, but she is satisfied. She likes this feeling.

While still looking at her phone, a notification pops up: "Josh Hanson liked your post and left a comment."

Ellie taps the notification to read Josh's comment: "everyone loves a real Christmas tree."

Ellie smiles. And then she has an idea.

END OF ACT 8

ACT 9

INT. TOWN HALL MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

It's the night of the tree vote and nearly the whole town has gathered in a town hall meeting room - Ellie, Josh, Evelyn, Jannie, Tucker, Taylor are all in attendance.

All of the voting members sit at the front of the room except for the Mayor, who is nervously talking to his assistant.

The Mayor steps up to the podium and gavel the meeting into session. He gets right to the vote.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

We all know why we're here.
Everyone's had a chance to review
the minutes from the previous
meeting, I trust. So let's skip
right to the public comments
portion.

Ellie steps up to the podium to speak.

ELLIE

As many of you know, Ruth Matthews,
a beloved member of this community,
passed away recently. I wanted to
share with you a quote from her
last Will and Testament. She said,
"Of course, my favorite tradition
is decorating the Christmas tree
for everyone to see. That brings
everyone holiday cheer."

Many members of the audience nod in agreement.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Voting for a real tree is a way for
me to honor Ruth's memory, honor
the wonder of the season, and would
be a symbol of the strong feelings
I have,

(looking at Josh)

For the special people in my life.
Thank you.

The audience claps. Todd attempts to start a "TREE! TREE! TREE!" chant, but Mayor Mayer squashes that immediately.

The Mayor steps up to the podium again. He is about to call the vote, but the curmudgeonly committee member MELVIN interjects from the audience.

MELVIN

Not so fast, Mr. Mayor. I am not a fan of ad-hoc rules changes nor biased in the arguments. The Mayor is clearly pro-tree. We already know how he's going to vote. I think that everyone should put aside their preferences and vote based on the issues presented. As a result, I am abstaining from voting, and request that both myself and the Mayor be replaced with neutral voting members.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

Well, just as I suspected, Melvin's out. And a tent pole of my election campaign was that I would never abstain from a vote, so no can do, Melvin.

Todd scurries up to the podium to point out something to the Mayor that is written in the bylaws.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)

Unfortunately, I am getting word that the Christmas Planning Committee has a rule that every member must participate otherwise no member will participate. This basically tables the issue for the year.

We hear disappointed crowd noises.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)

There won't be enough time to get a new vote, cut down the tree, put it up, and decorate it in time for Christmas.

As Mayor Mayer lifts his arm to gavel the session to a close, he freezes mid air when we start to hear a beeping noise coming from outside and see a yellow light flashing through the window. It's the sound of a backhoe backing up.

Shelbie rushes into the meeting room and Josh notices her at the door. She excitedly nods her head and gives him two thumbs up.

Josh grabs Ellie's hand.

JOSH

Come with me!

They stand up in front of the crowd in the meeting room.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Excuse me. Everyone. I have a very
special surprise.

The audience goes quiet.

JOSH (CONT'D)
We may not be able to chop down a
tree and put it up downtown, but
thanks to the SHADE AND GATHER
provision in our downtown zoning
bylaws...

We see the Mayor and Todd start mouthing the acronym.

JOSH (CONT'D)
...we are able to add greenery to
our downtown.

Josh turns to face Ellie.

JOSH (CONT'D)
And there's an addition to our
downtown that I'd like you to see.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CHRISTMAS MARKET - NIGHT

Inspirational holiday music swells.

A crowd gathers at the stage where the lighting display
happened earlier. There is now the shape of a tall fir tree
barely visible in the background.

Josh leads Ellie to the edge of the crowd. Ellie is putting
the pieces together and getting emotional.

ELLIE
Is that my tree??

JOSH
Hold that thought.

Josh motions to the crowd to part and a path forms in between
the people that creates a perfect view of the tree in front
of them. There is still a town worker in a bucket truck
wrapping lights around it.

Josh nods at her to repeat it.

ELLIE
That's my tree?!

Todd plugs in an electrical cord and the whole tree lights up. It's a majestic sight, brightening the whole scene.

Ellie and Josh kiss big, huge, gigantic ones in front of the tree.

Standing off to the side are the Mayor, Jannie, and her contractor husband Tucker. The Mayor's confused.

MAYOR MATT MAYER

They can't just cut through red tape and put a real Christmas tree.

TUCKER

It's my park, Matt. It's got my name on it. I can plant a tree.

Tucker nods to a dedication plaque near the tree that says: "THIS PARK GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY JANNIE AND HER CONTRACTOR HUSBAND."

TUCKER (CONT'D)

Unless you'd rather me tarp that hole I got in your roof while I dig it back up. Might be a few weeks before I can get back over there to re-shingle...

MAYOR MATT MAYER

(swiftly)

Nope.

The Mayor shrugs at the Christmas Planning Committee members.

MAYOR MATT MAYER (CONT'D)

It's his park.

EXT. JASPER L. MCGILLICUTTY ATTORNEY AT LAW OFFICE - DAY

Establishing shot of the law office.

INT. JASPER L. MCGILLICUTTY ATTORNEY AT LAW OFFICE

Ellie and Josh sit across from Jasper McGillicutty while he shows them one more thing from Ruth's video will. He presses play on a laptop. We see Ruth sitting on her couch talking to the camera.

AUNT RUTH

So, obviously you two are together now. As you should be...

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Ruth's voiceover continues as we watch Ellie and Josh put ornaments on a newly planted baby fir tree where the previous tree used to be.

AUNT RUTH (V.O.)

You have your very own holiday traditions now, too. By now, I'm sure I've seen how everything ended up. And I suspect I am happy as can be.

Ellie gives Josh a gift - a small box with a new ornament inside. He opens it and smiles.

JOSH

I love y...your...your gift.

ELLIE

I love...yours, too.

Shot zooms in to show the ornaments bending the branches on the tree: "Master Ornament Maker" "Eggnog Speed Sampling Champion" "Dueling Caroler" "Best Baker" "World's Best Gift Wrapper" as "Oh, Christmas Tree" plays.

Merry Christmas!

END OF ACT 9