

I WANT YOU FOR CHRISTMAS

Written by
Steven Clark

Steamroller138@gmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. QUAIN T SMALL TOWN - DAY

Close to Christmas -- snow-dusted streets, rosy skies above. White lights in the birches. Street lamps wrapped like candy canes and the storefronts are deliciously festive.

A SONG plays over this, and...

INT. AUDITORIUM, STAGE - DAY

JULIA HILL, 30, guitar slung round a glittery sequined shoulder. Her eyes closed, face set in a smile. She holds for a final beat, then --

JULIA
(sings)
*I want you for Christmas and that's
just how it goes!*

BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Julia strides into the wings, waves back to the crowd as applause is heard.

She exhales, catches her breath, then opens a --

GUITAR CASE

Taped to the inside is a black and white publicity photo of BRENDA HILL, the COUNTRY SUPERSTAR from the 50s and 60s we all know and love.

BACK TO

An entourage of FAMILY greets Julia -- her mother, HELEN, 56, dad, BEN, 57 and Julia's eight-year-old daughter, KATY.

Katy runs ahead of the group, jumps into her mother's arms.

KATY
Mom! You were great!

JULIA
Thanks, peanut. Did you see the whole show?

KATY
No. I was hanging out on the tour bus with the road crew!

JULIA
You what?

KATY
Just teasing!

JULIA
You're so silly.

Julia smothers her with kisses.

HELEN
She saw the show. That is, when she wasn't eating all the sweets they have backstage. They really went all out for you. You should see it.

JULIA
Well, we better check that out then.

Ben steps up, kisses Julia's cheek.

BEN
You were great, sweetheart.

JULIA
Thanks, Dad.

They head deeper backstage, past ROAD CREW and PRESS. An eager AUTOGRAPH SEEKER hands Julia a photo. She signs it gladly.

HELEN
So, Julia, I scheduled you a bit of a break for Christmas.

JULIA
Not too long, I hope. We gotta strike while the irons hot, Mom. What's my song at now?

HELEN
Number three and holding. You got yourself a bona fide Christmas hit, Julia. You're right up there with Dean Martin, Johnny Mathis and, dare I say..?

JULIA
Don't say it, Mom. Don't you dare say it!

HELEN
Bing Crosby.

JULIA
Oh, she said it.

They enter the --

GREEN ROOM

Elaborate centerpieces and delicious, buffet-style food everywhere. PEOPLE lined-up with plates, excited chatter.

KATY
(points)
There they are, Mom. The Christmas cookies. Look.

JULIA
Go ahead, sweetie. Get some healthy food, too. And make it to go. We have a long drive ahead of us tomorrow. Dad, you have the keys?

Ben hands over a set of keys.

HELEN
You're not riding with us?

JULIA
Not this time, Mom. Katy and I need some mother/daughter time. We booked this cute little bed and breakfast here in town, and we're leaving first thing in the morning.

Helen shows some disappointment.

HELEN
Oh. Okay. Well, you girls have fun then.

Julia takes a plate and heads to the buffet. Turns back --

JULIA
We will. And we'll talk about those tour dates. Okay? We gotta book those.

HELEN
Of course.

BEN
 (to Helen)
 Always on the go, huh?

HELEN
 She always rides with us.

Ben puts his arm around her, gives her a squeeze.

BEN
 I know. Don't be too upset, honey.
 Besides, it gives us a little
 husband/wife time.

Julia waits in line for the buffet. A roadie named CARL, 40s,
 turns and offers Julia his place.

CARL
 Take my spot, Miss Hill. After all,
 you are the star of the show.

Julia smiles, ever so humble.

JULIA
 I wait in line like everyone else,
 Carl. As far as I'm concerned,
 we're all stars.

Helen and Ben watch on proudly. That's their girl.

EXT. CREST HOLLOW - DAY

An affluent development. Pristine, modern homes on spacious
 lots with long driveways.

INT. BILLY'S HOUSE, BEDROOM CLOSET - DAY

BILLY OWENS, 30, small town guy, California good looks and
 dressed to impress, speaks on the phone as he selects a tie.

BILLY
 (into phone)
 Yes, Mom. Of course I'll be at
 Trish's for Christmas. What makes
 you think I wouldn't be?

INT. EMMY'S HOUSE - DAY

EMMY OWENS, 57, comes inside, holding a cord of firewood. She
 places it in its holder by the fireplace and the Christmas
 tree.

Phone tucked between her shoulder and chin.

BEGIN INTERCUT:

EMMY

I don't know. I keep thinking you'll run off to the west coast again. It's Christmas. You know? Something comes up and...

BILLY

Mom, I promise you. I'm home to stay this time. Can't run my business from two thousand miles away.

Billy fingers through some flannel shirts and blue jeans.

BILLY

Though I gotta admit, I miss not getting up and wearing whatever I want to. I was never the suit and tie type.

EMMY

Well, that may be true. But I am glad you're back. And I know your sister is, too.

BILLY

Thanks for saying that, Mom. Look, let me run. I gotta get in.

EMMY

Okay, Billy. Love you.

END INTERCUT

BILLY

Love you too, Mom.

Billy clicks off the call, pockets his phone and exits the closet to reveal --

A lonely looking ACOUSTIC GUITAR in the corner.

EXT. STATE AND MAIN - MORNING

It's a cornucopia of old and new. Small town charm meets trendy modern. And at Christmas time, they mesh perfectly.

INT. BILLY'S CAR - DAY

Billy at the wheel. Radio spinning Christmas tunes. Julia's song "I Want You For Christmas" comes on.

Billy flashes a warm smile. He sings along.

A horn honks from behind. He checks his mirror, turns into --

EXT. OWENS CARES AUTO - DAY

A clean building with red and green holiday trim and seven car bays.

Out front, Billy stands next to a ladder, stringing up Christmas lights.

CASEY, 20, mechanic, gray overalls, strides over.

CASEY

Mr. Owens?

BILLY

Just Billy, please.

CASEY

Need some help?

Billy claps dust off his hands, goes to wipe them -- looks at his pressed slacks -- thinks -- hesitates -- wipes them on the slacks anyway.

BILLY

Maybe just someone to hold the ladder.

CASEY

Sure.

Billy checks Casey's name tag, reaches into a box and pulls out a long stretch of garland with frosted lights.

BILLY

So, you been with Owens Cares long, Casey?

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

An SUV zips past. Postcard worthy views of snow-peaked mountains and forest from every spectacular angle.

INT. JULIA'S SUV - DAY

Katy's head is buried in her iPad as Julia drives.

JULIA
This is a nice car grandpa got us.
Yes... No? Maybe so.

KATY
Sure, Mom.

JULIA
Honey, come on. Get off that.
You're missing all this beautiful
scenery. It's not every day we get
to see sights like these.

Katy complies.

KATY
I see sights like these all the
time.

JULIA
Oh yeah? Where?

KATY
On my iPad.

Julia smirks.

JULIA
Yeah, but... It's not the same as
seeing it in person.

KATY
I watch you on the iPad.

JULIA
You do?

KATY
Yeah, but it's not the same as
seeing you in person.

PING!

JULIA
What was that?

KATY
What was what?

JULIA
That. You didn't just hear that?

KATY
Uh uh.

The engine sputters. The car lurches.

JULIA
That! Oh, my goodness. What is this? Honey, check the iPad. See if there's a mechanic nearby.

KATY
You just told me to get off my iPad.

Katy scans the screen.

KATY
Um... Fourteen miles away. Owens Cares in Holly Falls.

Julia turns like she just caught a ghost out the corner of her eye.

JULIA
Owens Cares in Holly Falls? You're kidding?

KATY
No. Why? What's wrong with Holly Falls?

INT. JULIA'S SUV - LATER

Stopped at a light, Julia points to a Christma-tized sign on the side of the road --

Welcome To Holly Falls - Hometown of Country Star Julia Hill!

JULIA
And this is what's wrong with Holly Falls.

KATY
Isn't this where you grew up?

JULIA
Up until I was eighteen. That's when Grandpa started his rental business and we moved to Bedford.

Katy glances around the town.

KATY
It's pretty.

Julia's edges soften.

JULIA
Yeah, actually, it is kind of nice.
You know what they say - you can
choose your friends but you can't
choose your hometown.

Katy shrugs.

JULIA
(to car Bluetooth)
Call Dad...

INT. BEN & HELEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Beautifully trimmed for Christmas. It's like Mr. Elf came to
life and ran amok.

STUDY

Ben sits at his desk, reading glasses on, papers spread out.
He picks up his phone.

BEN
Hey, honey.

INT. JULIA'S SUV - DAY

BEGIN INTERCUT:

JULIA
Hey, Dad.

BEN
How's my favorite daughter?

JULIA
Dad, I'm your only daughter.

BEN
And I'll never let you forget it.
How's the car?

JULIA

Well, that's why I'm calling, Dad.
It made this weird... I don't know.
Belching noise.

BEN

Belching noise, huh? That's not
good. Where are you?

JULIA

We're in Holly Falls, believe it or
not.

BEN

Oh, really? Just take it to Owens
Cares. That's where I get my fleet
serviced.

JULIA

Owens Cares? Owens Cares? Isn't
there somewhere else I can take it?
You know...

BEN

Honey, Billy's in California.
Besides, wasn't that like ten years
ago?

Julia SIGHS.

JULIA

All right, all right. I'll take it
in.

BEN

Okay, good. Just tell them it's for
me. They'll put in on account.

JULIA

Okay, Dad. Thanks.

KATY

Bye, Grandpa!

BEN

Bye, sweetie!

Ben clicks off, pauses, slides his glasses back on and SIGHS
as he looks over the stack of papers on his desk. There's
some concern showing.

END INTERCUT

INT. JULIA'S SUV - DAY

Julia drives, corners, then spots Owens Cares just ahead, directly across from Holly Falls' TOWN SQUARE.

A brilliant CHRISTMAS TREE stands at its center.

EXT. OWENS CARES AUTO - DAY

Julia and Katy pull up, exit the vehicle. Immediately, Julia spots Billy, back turned, having a devil of a time with the lights and garland.

She and Katy approach.

JULIA

Excuse me, do you work here?

Billy, two rungs up on the ladder, stretches. He looks quickly at her, does a double-take.

BILLY

Oh yes. I'm--

His eyes go wide.

Julia sees it's Billy, suddenly reverses course, grabs Katy's hand.

JULIA

Oh-- We're gonna be late. Let's--

Billy loses his footing, tumbles off the ladder and into Julia's car, putting a small dent in the hood.

Katy breaks free.

KATY

Mister, are you okay?

He's frazzled, but only a moment.

BILLY

I'm fine. Julia Hill?

Julia SIGHS, shuffles back.

JULIA

Hi, Billy.

Her mouth stays open like she's got more to say.

BILLY
Oh, my god. Julia! How are you?
Boy, it's been...

JULIA
A long time.

BILLY
Yeah. Yeah... So, this must be
Katy? Right?

JULIA
Right.

Katy extends her hand.

KATY
Are you a fan of my Mom's?

Billy glances at Julia, laughs.

BILLY
Uh... Well, yeah. I guess you can
say that. Sure. It's a pleasure to
meet you, Katy.

Julia looks all sorts of uncomfortable.

BILLY
So, what brings you here?

JULIA
My car. Actually, it's one of my
Dad's.

BILLY
Oh. We service his fleet, you know.

JULIA
I know. That's why we're here.

Billy turns to the car, sees the dent he made.

BILLY
Oh, boy. We're gonna have to fix
that dent, too. I'm sorry.

JULIA
It's okay. So, what are you doing
here? I heard you moved to
California.

BILLY
I did. For a while.

JULIA
But, you're back.

BILLY
Well, my business is here. Not to mention my family and friends. California's great, but... It's not Holly Falls.

The look on Julia's face is like an old joke told by a friend. She forces a big old smile and nods along.

INT. OWENS CARES AUTO - LATER

Clean and Christmassy. Dark wood tones and retro metal signs. It's the Cracker Barrel of auto shops.

Billy pulls away from the counter, turns to Julia and Katy.

BILLY
It's the fuel injection. We need to clean everything out. Sparks. Stuff like that.

JULIA
How long will that take?

BILLY
Couple hours, tops. But that dent will take a little longer. We don't do that here. We'll have to send it out. Could be a couple days.

JULIA
A couple days? I don't have that kind of time, Billy.

BILLY
(playful)
What? You've got something better to do?

JULIA
You mean other than being stuck in your shop as opposed to, you know, getting home for Christmas?

BILLY
I'm only teasing. Don't worry. I'll get you a loaner car.
(changes course)
You know, my sister has a restaurant in town.
(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

Just a few minutes from here. Come have lunch with me. We can catch up. It's the least I can do.

JULIA

Oh, I don't know...

BILLY

Come on. You know Trish would love to see you.

KATY

Yeah, Mom. Come on.

Julia shoots Katy a look. Silence as she mulls it over.

BILLY

(shrugs)

Looks like you're outnumbered.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Billy and Julia, side-by-side. Katy's up ahead, perusing the store front windows.

BILLY

You know, I hear you on the radio all the time, Julia. That new Christmas song of yours. I love it.

JULIA

Thanks. Are You still playing?

Billy, a touch embarrassed.

BILLY

Nah. When I went away I joined a couple bands, but school took up most of my time. Actually, all of my time. And then Dad passed, so... Music kind of fell by the wayside. But my mind was always on it, though.

JULIA

Sorry about your Dad, by the way. I'd heard about that.

BILLY

Thanks. Yeah, it was tough, but... So, what about you? I see you're living the dream.

Julia laughs.

JULIA

Oh, I don't know about that. I was virtually a nobody until this song came along. Took us all by surprise.

BILLY

Why'd you write a Christmas song?

JULIA

I don't know. Christmas was always so special to me growing up. The decorations. The tree. The smell of fresh baked pies. Family dinners with crazy relatives. When I got into music, I was so consumed with trying to be successful that I kind of lost sight of all that. I guess I thought a Christmas song might be a nice way to try and bring that back. Maybe.

BILLY

Has it?

Julia looks on ahead to Katy, who throws a coin into a SIDEWALK SANTA'S pot. Santa pats her head.

SANTA

Thank you. Merry Christmas.

KATY

Merry Christmas!

BACK TO --

JULIA

(nods)
A little bit.

Julia and Billy pass the SIDEWALK SANTA when...

ROGER

Julia Hill?

ROGER FENNIMORE, 59, boyish exuberance and dressed exactly how you think a school teacher might.

Julia whirls.

JULIA

Yes? Mr. Fennimore..?

ROGER
Julia, it's you! It is you!

JULIA
Mr. Fennimore! Oh, my gosh. I
didn't recognize you at first. How
are you?

ROGER
Great. Just great.

He stares Billy down.

ROGER
Billy, where's your hall pass?

Billy pats his pockets, plays along.

BILLY
Um...

ROGER
So... are you... are you two
together?

Billy and Julia look awkwardly at each other.

JULIA
No!

BILLY
Um... No, no...

ROGER
Oh, right then. So, what brings you
back to Holly Falls, Julia?

JULIA
Oh, just passing through really. I
wasn't planning on staying too
long.

ROGER
Oh, that's too bad. We do have the
annual Christmas dance coming up,
you know.

He hands her a --

INSERT: FLYER

*HOLLY FALLS HIGH SCHOOL PRESENTS... THE 44TH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS
DANCE. BE READY FOR LOVE, LAUGHTER AND CHRISTMAS CHEER UNDER
THE MISTLETOE!*

BACK

Julia hands the flyer back, stares Samurai Swords at Billy.

JULIA

Oh, yeah. The Christmas dance. Of course. How could I possibly forget that?

Billy diverts his gaze to... just about anywhere else other than directly at Julia.

ROGER

You know we're doing your song for the dance this year?

JULIA

You are?

ROGER

Oh yes. Lovely song. It was actually Billy's idea.

JULIA

Really now?

ROGER

Why, yes. And I couldn't agree more. Such a wonderful song. Congratulations. You're right up there with Bing Crosby, if you ask me.

Julia's thrown.

JULIA

Ha! Yeah, I guess I am.

BILLY

Well, we better be getting along.

ROGER

Of course. So nice to see you again, Julia. And please stop by the school if you can. We'd all love to see you. Holly Falls favorite country singer is back home.

JULIA

Thanks, Mr. Fennimore. I'll do my best to make it.

They continue walking.

JULIA

What did Mr. Fennimore mean when he said it was your idea?

BILLY

Well, I'm on the planning committee for the Christmas dance.

JULIA

(stunned)

You are on the Christmas dance planning committee?

BILLY

Well, actually...

JULIA

Actually what?

BILLY

(barely audible)

I'm the president of the committee.

Julia stops.

JULIA

The what?

KATY

He said he's the president of the committee, Mom.

Julia presses her lips together, nods sarcastically.

Billy claps his hands, smiles.

BILLY

So, who's hungry?

EXT. TRISH'S CAFE - DAY

Hand painted Christmas scenes on the windows, framed with frosted multi-colored bulbs.

A smiling faux REINDEER stands out front holding the day's BLACKBOARD SPECIALS.

INT. TRISH'S CAFE - DAY

Trendy art and local paintings, antique furnishings and Christmas touches everywhere. Perfect blend of old and new.

The bell on the door TINGS. Billy, Julia and Katy step in.

Perched behind the host stand is TRISH, 31, pretty and fashionable. She's on the phone, but when she glances up her face lights up.

She hangs up the phone, inadvertently knocks it over as she scuttles around the podium.

TRISH
Julia!

JULIA
Trish!

They embrace.

TRISH
Oh, my goodness. What are you doing here? Who, what, why?
(then)
Katy! How are you? I haven't seen you since...

Trish lowers her palm.

Katy blushes.

JULIA
I was in town. Little car trouble and...

TRISH
Oh no. Don't tell me you took it to this guy's shop.

Billy rolls his eyes.

BILLY
Thanks, sis.

TRISH
Well, let's get you a table. I'm sure you're all starving.

JULIA
Nah, actually, maybe, just something light.

TABLE - LATER

The small table overflows with food. A smiling WAITER fills a glass of water.

Trish lowers her napkin.

TRISH

So, how's the tour? You know I hear you all over the radio.

JULIA

Tour's over, thankfully. For now. We're gonna book some more dates for the new year.

TRISH

Mom and Dad are well?

JULIA

They're great.

TRISH

How does that work out with Katy? All the touring?

JULIA

She travels with me when I'm on road. We do the home schooling thing.

TRISH

Wow. Busy girl. How do you like all that travelling, Katy?

Katy waffles slightly, and Julia takes notice.

KATY

It's okay.

JULIA

I'm not exactly my grandmother, let's just put it that way. She lived out on the road.

TRISH

Oh, your grandmother... The Brenda Hill. God, I loved her music. I still find it hard to believe she's actually your grandmother.

JULIA

Sometimes I find it hard to believe myself.

BILLY

We all loved her music.

JULIA

Thank you. She was one of a kind,
that's for sure.

TRISH

So, are you in a hurry to leave?
You should stay a couple days.

JULIA

Oh no, I couldn't. Billy's getting
me a loaner car and we should
really be getting back home.

Trish shakes her head.

TRISH

No, no, no. Look, we've got plenty
of extra space. You could see the
new house, stay a few days. We'd
love to have you. It'd be just like
old times. Whaddya say?

JULIA

I...

She hesitates, looks to Katy.

KATY

Yes!

JULIA

Only if it wouldn't be a problem.
We don't want to inconvenience you
in any way.

Trish leans in close.

TRISH

Remember that time you made me
sneak out of my house so we could
see that concert? That new boy band
you loved so much. And then my Dad
caught us as we were climbing down
the trellis, and you fell and got
tangled in the Christmas lights?

Julia GULPS.

Katy looks on in amazement.

KATY

Mom, you rebel!

JULIA
How could I forget?

TRISH
Now, that was an inconvenience.

JULIA
Yeah, I guess it was.

Trish flashes a wide grin.

TRISH
But it was so much fun!

ACT 2

EXT. TRISH'S HOME - NIGHT

Early evening, touch of daylight remains. A rustic colonial, Christmas lights shine bright. A snow man stands watch out front and a warm, inviting glow beckons from inside.

INT. TRISH'S HOME - NIGHT

Like a snow globe exploded --

Every corner a holiday wonderland of poinsettia's and pine needles. Stockings hung on the mantle and a Christmas Tree that could grace the cover of *Country Living*.

LIVING ROOM

Julia, Katy by her side, scans the house, impressed.

JULIA
I feel like I'm at the North Pole.

Trish enters from the KITCHEN with three cups of hot cocoa, passes them out.

TRISH
I gave you extra marshmallows,
Katy. I hope you don't mind.

KATY
I love marshmallows. How'd you
know?

TRISH

Just a lucky guess. Hey... Over by the fireplace are some of my son's books if you'd like to look.

KATY

Sure! Thanks.

Julia sips her cocoa.

TRISH

(to Julia, re: decoration)
You don't think I overdid it?

Julia thinks.

JULIA

(playfully)
Absolutely not.

They laugh.

TRISH

So, what's going on with you and my brother?

Julia snaps her head quickly to Trish.

JULIA

Why? Does it look like there's something going on?

TRISH

I don't know. You tell me.

JULIA

Nothing. My father recommended I stop at his shop to have the car looked at is all.

TRISH

When was the last time you saw Billy?

JULIA

Long before he became Mr. Holly Falls, apparently.

Trish chuckles.

TRISH

Yeah. Ever since he got back he's had this renewed interest in getting involved.

(MORE)

TRISH (CONT'D)

Giving back to the community. He's the president of the Christmas dance committee, you know.

JULIA

So, I've heard.

Trish looks at Julia, senses something in her tone.

JULIA

What?

TRISH

You know what. The Christmas Dance of 2009...

JULIA

Oh, you mean the time Billy left me to go hang out with his friends? That Christmas Dance? I'd forgotten all about it.

TRISH

Hmm... Apparently not.

JULIA

Seriously, Trish. It's not a big deal.

TRISH

Look me in the eye.

JULIA

What?

Trish puts her cocoa down.

TRISH

Look me in the eye right now and tell me you'd forgotten all about that.

JULIA

No.

TRISH

You know you can't lie to me. I'm a truth machine. Remember?

JULIA

Oh yeah... Like the time you caught Dave Schneider copying your answers in algebra.

TRISH
Mm hmm... He twitched.

JULIA
A big twitch or a little twitch?

TRISH
Don't change the subject.

JULIA
I'm not.

TRISH
You are.

Silence.

TRISH
Look at me then.

JULIA
No.

TRISH
Just look at me!

JULIA
Okay!

They stare each other down hard. It's on!

Katy comes up to them.

KATY
Your son reads Garry The Goat?

Julia's left eye slams shut, her face contorts.

Trish GASPS.

Julia GASPS.

Katy's confused.

The front door opens.

In steps Trish's husband, SPENCE, 33, neatly-trimmed scruff and rugged with Christmas wreaths wrapped around his outstretched arms.

Their son, MICHAEL, 6, by his side, Santa cap on his head.

SPENCE
Hey, where do you want these?

The three girls turn to the door.

SPENCE

What's the matter? Did I get the wrong size or something?

The room's filled with all sorts of bewilderment.

Katy crosses to Michael, and holds up the book.

KATY

You still read Garry The Goat?

Michael looks up to Katy, love in his eyes.

MICHAEL

Uh huh. Don't you?

KATY

No. I'm too old for that.

Billy steps in from outside, guitar case in hand. In a down vest and flannel shirt, he looks far more comfortable than the pressed suit we saw him in earlier.

BILLY

Hi, all.

Julia locks eyes with him, swiftly composes herself. It's clear she was not expecting him to show.

Or to look this good.

EXT. TRISH'S HOME - NIGHT

Night has fallen. Crystal clear, starlit sky. Smoke rises from the chimney.

INT. TRISH'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Katy and Michael sit near the Christmas tree, a stack of books nearby.

MICHAEL

I have the whole Garry The Goat collection. This is Garry The Goat in The Rainbow Zone, Garry The Goat's Christmas Wish. Oh, and this one here...

Katy yawns, while --

On the couch is Julia, Billy, Trish and Spence. After dinner, light conversation time.

BILLY

So, I had the opportunity to acquire more stores. I changed the name to Owens Cares and...

SPENCE

The rest is history.

Billy laughs.

BILLY

So to speak. There's still a lot of work to be done.

JULIA

Like what?

BILLY

Well, more stores. Growth. We're one of the few stores around that offers all our employees benefits. Bonuses. And not just a Christmas bonus, I mean year round bonuses. I want to make sure our employees thrive instead of strive.

TRISH

Ooh! I like that. That could be your new slogan. Thrive not strive.

BILLY

That is good. Anyone got a pen?

JULIA

What about music? I see you brought your guitar.

BILLY

Oh, I don't know...

TRISH

Oh, come on. We haven't heard you sing since forever. Besides, you wouldn't have brought your guitar if you weren't going to play it.

SPENCE

(egging him on)
Billy... Billy...

Billy holds up the shiny instrument like a precious jewel. Ear positioned so he can hear the tuning, then begins a slow-tempo, finger pick intro.

Julia instantly recognizes it. It's her Christmas song, but Billy's slowed the tempo way down.

BILLY

(singing)

*The tree is up with it's pretty
bows, colored lights and mistletoe.
But there's one thing you got to
know, if it's the last thing you
ever hear... I want you for
Christmas... And that's just how it
goes...*

Spence and Trish exchange warm glances. Trish places her hand on Julia's leg and smiles.

All recognize the song, but not quite the way Julia does --

To Julia it's strikingly beautiful and heartfelt. Almost as if this is the way the song should have been sung all along.

Billy stops.

BILLY

I took a few liberties with the arrangement, but... It's nowhere near as good as the way you sing it, though.

Everyone waits for Julia to weigh in.

JULIA

It... It's beautiful. I'm really impressed.

Julia and Billy gaze at each other for a brief moment, then they both look away. And that brief moment is like kismet, and it seems to hold longer than it is.

Julia turns away, crooked grin on her face.

Billy looks down, humbled by her praise.

The conversation continues. The children laugh as the logs in the fireplace crack and pop.

Off the fireplace...

EXT. HOLLY FALLS HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A BUS pulls away from the large campus. Bare tree branches and mountains overlook the school.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, AUDITORIUM - DAY

Three people seated in the first row -- Roger Fennimore and Billy, joined by RUTH HAGEN, 38.

They intently watch the stage where --

KENZIE LEITH, 13, sings Julia's Christmas song to a recorded track from a BOOM BOX.

Julia's version is an up-tempo romp. Think Dolly Parton's *9 to 5*.

But something's wrong.

Kenzie's vocals trail off. She looks uneasy, and singing way too low.

Billy stops the track.

RUTH

Kenzie, is everything okay?

Kenzie hangs her head.

Billy rises, climbs the stairs to the stage.

BILLY

Kenzie. What's wrong?

KENZIE

It's my voice.

BILLY

Are you sick?

She shakes her head.

KENZIE

No.

BILLY

Here... Sing the chorus for me.
Ready? One, two, three--

He points at her.

KENZIE

*I want you for Christmas and that's
just how it goes...*

But she trails off again, and this time it's obvious as her voice cracks several times.

Billy turns to Ruth and Roger. He looks back at Kenzie and grins.

BILLY

Okay.

KENZIE

What is it?

BILLY

I'm not too sure, but I think your voice is changing, Kenzie.

KENZIE

Changing?

BILLY

Yeah. Totally normal, but I'm not a hundred percent sure.

KENZIE

Okay. But... What do we do?

Billy thinks it over. He looks to Ruth and Roger, who are silent, but appear to be wondering the same.

BILLY

I might just have an idea.

ACT 3

INT. TRISH'S HOME, KITCHEN - MORNING

Julia and Katy sit at the breakfast nook, school books laid out next to coffee and orange juice, and --

An elaborate GINGERBREAD HOUSE -- snow frosting, mini-jelly beans for Christmas lights -- there's even smoke coming out of the chimney.

JULIA

So we just need to finish up your vocabulary work and then we'll be done.

Katy raises her head, serious look in her eyes.

KATY

Will I be home schooled forever?

Julia's caught off guard.

JULIA

Well, no. Of course not. Why? You don't like Mommy teaching you?

KATY

No, I do, but... I was talking with Michael last night and he was saying how much he loved going to school and all the friends he has.

JULIA

Well... It won't be forever, honey. Just for when I'm on tour. And right now Mommy is off tour.

Julia touches her forehead to Katy's.

KATY

Yeah, I guess so. Until the next tour.

That gives Julia pause. Not quite sure how to respond.

Trish saunters into the kitchen, dressed and ready.

TRISH

Good morning. You guys sleep well?

JULIA

Yes, we did. The bed was comfy. It was like a sleep over. Where are you off to?

TRISH

Funny you mention that. I-- Whoa! My gingerbread house!

JULIA

What about it?

Trish closely inspects it.

TRISH

The smoke coming out of the chimney. That wasn't there last night.

JULIA

I know. I made it.

TRISH
You did that?

Julia smiles, nods.

JULIA
You like it?

TRISH
It looks like real smoke. How in
the world did you do that?

JULIA
I carved a marshmallow.

TRISH
Carved a marshmallow, huh. Omigod--
the trees are frosted.

JULIA
Confectionate sugar.

TRISH
Lights on the house, too...

JULIA
Frosting, then I diced some
jellybeans. It was pretty easy.

TRISH
I never would have thought of that.
That's fantastic, Julia.

JULIA
(laughs)
Thanks.

TRISH
So, what are you guys doing? I'm
going into town. There's a
Christmas Festival. Actually,
that's why I made the gingerbread
house. I mean, not that I don't
make several every year, of course,
but... You wanna go?

Katy nods excitedly.

JULIA
Sure.

EXT. HOLLY FALLS, TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Downtown Holly Falls, well-kept and picturesque. Christmas garland and lights strung on every street lamp -- big Christmas tree that we saw earlier.

This town knows how to celebrate.

State Street is closed off today. A BANNER proclaims:

CHRISTMAS FAIR, DEC 18-20

VENDORS galore and everything Christmas -- artisan ornaments of every shape and size, funnel cakes, hot cider and cookies.

Julia and Trish stroll the sidewalk, each carrying shopping bags. Michael and Katy are up ahead, marvelling at the holiday shop windows and gingerbread houses.

JULIA

You know, we really should be getting back.

TRISH

What's your rush, Julia?

Julia thinks about this.

JULIA

You know what? I really don't know. I guess go over the upcoming tour itinerary with my Mom. Finish getting ready for Christmas.

Trish spreads her arms wide.

TRISH

Get ready for Christmas? Have you looked around? Everything you need is right here, Julia.

JULIA

I guess you're right.

TRISH

Is something else bothering you?

JULIA

Nah...

TRISH

Come on. It's me you're talking to. Remember?

(MORE)

TRISH (CONT'D)

We used to tell each other everything. Our hopes. Our dreams. Who we had crushes on.

Julia smiles at the memory.

JULIA

I just feel like everything's going by so quickly. Deadlines, concerts... And Katy seems to be getting antsy with the home schooling.

TRISH

Must be tough being a single parent, huh? Especially with your singing.

JULIA

Especially that.

TRISH

Maybe it's time to slow down a little.

JULIA

You think so?

TRISH

Well, it's your life, Julia, but... You know, there comes a time when you gotta take a few steps back. See the bigger picture. I mean, no one twisted my arm to be Miss-decorate-the-house-like-crazy-every-Christmas, but I like it. It makes me happy. I've discovered that about myself.

JULIA

And you have the cafe, too. How do you manage to squeeze it all in?

TRISH

I used to spend so much time there at first, you know. It was my baby. As time went by I realized I needed help and hired a manager. It did wonders for me. Freed up a lot of time for the things that matter the most. You know what I mean?

KATY AND MICHAEL

Stop by a FLORIST, where a YOUNG WOMAN hands Michael a ROSE.
 Michael presents the rose to Katy, smiling ear-to-ear.
 Julia and Trish watch this.

JULIA
 Of course, I do.

TRISH
 So, I guess my question is this...
 What have you discovered about
 yourself? What truly makes you
 happy?

JULIA
 That's two questions.

Julia's phone RINGS.

JULIA
 I... For one thing, I get too many
 phone calls.
 (she answers)
 Hi, Dad. Good... Oh no, that's not
 good. Okay. No, I'm actually
 staying at Trish's for a day or
 two. Yep. Okay, Dad. All right.
 Bye.

TRISH
 What is it?

JULIA
 My father said the car he gave me
 has a recall on it, and possibly
 the whole fleet he just leased.

TRISH
 Oh no. That's not good.

Julia's phone RINGS again. She SIGHS.

JULIA
 See. I told you I get too many
 calls.
 (answers)
 Hello?

UP AHEAD

Billy, on his phone, back turned, scanning the streets.

BILLY
(into phone)
Julia. Hi. Where are you?

Julia taps Billy on the shoulder.

JULIA
Coming at ya.

Billy laughs.

BILLY
Oh hey!

Katy and Michael run up to them.

KATY
Hi, Mr. Owens.

BILLY
Hi, Katy. That's a pretty rose.

Michael, all proud of himself --

MICHAEL
I gave it to her.

TRISH
(to Billy)
So, what brings you out here?

BILLY
Oh, right. Two things...
(to Julia)
Your car has a recall on it.

JULIA
Yes, I know. My father just called.
What's the other thing?

BILLY
Well, I sort of have a favor to
ask. Trish, how would you feel
about watching Katy for a while?

TRISH
I'd be happy to.

Michael pumps his fist in the air.

MICHAEL
Yes!

JULIA

Wait. Would you care to tell me
what's going on?

INT. BEN AND HELEN'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Helen's trimming the tree. Stops. Sorts through boxes of
ornaments, selects some, then sees --

A box labelled MOM.

Helen opens the lid. All kinds of ornaments from all the
places Brenda had been in her life, all the small towns and
all the tours.

She takes a GUITAR ornament and hangs it on the tree. Then a
RECORD and one of a DOVE with MUSICAL NOTES running along it.

Ben enters the room.

BEN

Found your Mother's ornaments?

HELEN

Yeah. She used to collect them from
all the places she'd been.
(points to the tree)
The guitar was from Memphis, the
dove from Colorado...

BEN

Yeah, I know. I remember those.

She faces him.

HELEN

I heard you talking about the
recalls before.

BEN

Yeah... Guess I never should have
switched dealers, huh?

HELEN

Hey, they offered you better
service and prices. It's not like
you didn't do it for a reason.

BEN

I know. This is going to make it
tough, though. Real tough.

Ben reaches into the box, takes out an ornament and hangs it.

Helen watches him.

HELEN
What are you thinking?

BEN
(shrugs)
Might be time to walk away.

HELEN
To sell?

Ben nods.

HELEN
You built this business from the ground up, Ben. Don't forget all the hard work you put in. All the time and effort.

BEN
What are you saying?

HELEN
I'm saying don't make a move like this unless you're sure. I don't know about you, but I'm not quite ready for sandy beaches and dinners at four.

BEN
(laughing)
Me neither.

She leans in close with him.

HELEN
That's not to say it wouldn't be nice... eventually.

BEN
Eventually.

They step back and look at their Christmas tree, then --
On the box of ORNAMENTS labelled MOM...

INT. HOLLY FALLS HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Julia and Billy stride through the hall. Festive Christmas decorations line the walls -- Holiday scenes painted by the students.

Julia can't help but be overwhelmed by all the memories. And that's a good thing. She breathes in.

JULIA

I really miss the smell of school.
Makes me feel like a kid again.

BILLY

Nothing wrong with a little trip
down memory lane.

JULIA

Nope. Nothing wrong at all.

BILLY

Is it like you remembered?

JULIA

(laughs)
It feels like I should be heading
to history class with Mr. Grimley.

BILLY

Yeah, me too.

JULIA

No, it feels like you should be
cutting history class. And science.
And math...

BILLY

All right, all right. Come on. I
wasn't that bad.

OUTSIDE THE AUDITORIUM

STUDENTS come and go -- rushing to class, book bags in tow.

Two GIRLS smile as Julia approaches. She's been recognized.

JULIA

(to the girls)
Hi.

The GIRLS cover their mouths and giggle.

INT. AUDITORIUM

Kenzie sits in the front row with Ruth and Roger.

Julia and Billy approach.

BILLY
Kenzie, I'd like you to meet Julia Hill.

Julia extends her hand.

JULIA
Hi, Kenzie. It's a pleasure to meet you.

Kenzie does a double-take. Her jaw drops, sparkling blue eyes open wide. She's completely awestruck.

KENZIE
Are you Julia Hill? I mean, you're Julia Hill...

JULIA
(laughs)
Yes, I am.

Roger and Ruth, pleasantly surprised, watch on.

Julia puts her bag down, straightens, hands on hips.

JULIA
So, where shall we begin?

AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Julia strums a guitar, Kenzie next to her.

The rhythm is cheery and up-tempo.

KENZIE
(singing)
And through the years as we grow old, still there's lights and pretty bows. I say it twice so you can hear, just so you'll always know... I want you for Christmas--

Kenzie voice breaks. She stops.

KENZIE
See? It's always right there. I can't hit the high notes anymore.

JULIA
Have you had this problem before?

KENZIE
No. Last week it was fine.

JULIA
How old are you, Kenzie?

KENZIE
Thirteen.

Julia puts her guitar down, goes to Kenzie.

JULIA
You're voice is changing, honey.
(turns to the adults)
You know her voice is changing?

The three of them nod in unison. Billy rises and approaches the stage.

KENZIE
Does this mean I can't sing your song?

JULIA
No, honey, no. All it means is we have to work a little harder, that's all.

BILLY
You will sing this song, Kenzie. Julia and I are going to make sure of it.

Julia looks in Billy's direction. *Julia and I?*

Billy smiles.

JULIA
Maybe we can do the song in a lower key?

BILLY
That's a tall order. Learning a new key is hard.

JULIA
When is the dance?

BILLY
This Friday. Three days.

JULIA
Then we don't have time to waste. Kenzie, what do you say? You up for this?

KENZIE

Are you going to be my teacher?

Julia pauses. Billy stops. Ruth and Roger watch closely in anticipation. Finally --

JULIA

You bet I am.

ACT 4

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

December perfect afternoon. Flurries fall. STUDENTS begin to head home.

Billy hits the key fob to his car. *BEEP BEEP.*

JULIA

You know, you could have asked me first.

Billy stops, leans over his car.

BILLY

Asked you what?

JULIA

To be a music instructor. I mean, I'm happy to do it, but you could have asked me first.

BILLY

I'm sorry. Do you not want to do this?

JULIA

No, I just said I wanted to do it. It's just, you know, courtesy. You could have asked me.

BILLY

My apologies. You're right. I should have checked first.

(then)

Would you like to do this?

JULIA

Too late now. I already agreed. Better luck next time.

BILLY

I know. I was just trying to be cute.

JULIA

You're not cute.

BILLY

I'm a little cute.

JULIA

No one's cute when they're trying to be cute.

BILLY

Said no one ever.

Julia steps towards him.

JULIA

I'm saying it. Are you saying I'm no one?

BILLY

Absolutely not.

JULIA

Oh, but I was no one at the dance, right?

There it is.

BILLY

The dance?

JULIA

When you left me to go hang out with your friends.

Billy steps forward to meet her.

KIDS walking past, starting to take notice.

BILLY

Oh, that dance. As I recall, it was you who left me.

JULIA

What? Let me refresh your memory. Most embarrassing moment of my life. I leave for five minutes. Five minutes. When I come back you're nowhere to be found! How does that work? I'm curious.

BILLY

Five minutes..? Five minutes? You were gone for over half an hour. I looked everywhere before I left. Left no stone un-turned.

JULIA

Hah! Must've been a pretty small stone.

Billy spreads his arms wide.

BILLY

It was huge.

A group of STUDENTS have stopped to watch. CELL PHONES are out and they're RECORDING.

JULIA

For your information, I broke a heel. That's why I left. I told Michelle McKenna to tell you. Then I came right back.

BILLY

Well, I never got the memo.

JULIA

Really?

BILLY

Really.

STUDENTS RECORDING

We're seeing the image of Billy and Julia arguing from a CELL PHONE SCREEN.

BACK

STUDENT #1

Hey, isn't that Julia Hill?

STUDENT #2

Yup.

STUDENT #1

Who's she arguing with?

STUDENT #2

Don't know. Some guy.

STUDENT #1

She looks really upset.

BILLY AND JULIA

BILLY
You broke a heel?

JULIA
Yes, and you left first.

BILLY
After you left.

Julia stops. Thinks.

JULIA
Yes, but when you left you had no
idea that I'd left, so as things
stand, you left first.

Billy face palms.

BILLY
That doesn't even make sense.

Julia goes to say something. Holds it. Building, building...

JULIA
You left first!

BILLY
Ugh...

He turns, spots the kids recording him.

BILLY
Oh, hey, guys. Nothing going on.
Nothing to see here--

He gets pegged with a SNOWBALL.

Wipes the snow off his face, back to the KIDS...

BILLY
You guys get that?

INT. TRISH'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Trish is on the floor, playing a game with Michael and Katy
next to the Christmas tree.

On a nearby table is the GINGERBREAD HOUSE, sporting a BLUE
RIBBON that says: *1ST PLACE*.

Julia and Billy come in from outside, neither looking very pleased.

KATY

Hey, Mom.

JULIA

Hey, honey. What are you guys up to?

KATY

Playing a game. Wanna play?

Julia SIGHS.

JULIA

Oh, maybe later.

TRISH

Hey, guess what? Our gingerbread house got first place!

JULIA

First place?

Trish points to the Gingerbread House.

TRISH

There were close to a hundred entries. The judges said they never saw anything so... Christmassy.

Julia's pleasantly surprised.

JULIA

Oh. Wow. How 'bout that. Who knew?

BILLY

So, Julia agreed to help tutor a student.

TRISH

(to Julia)

That's wonderful. Does that mean you'll be staying longer?

JULIA

A couple days. I should probably see about getting home, though. I don't live too far from here.

TRISH

Easy enough ride. I could drive--

BILLY
I'll do it.

Silence. Everyone looks at him.

BILLY
I mean, I'm kinda going that way
later anyway. No big deal.

He clears his throat.

KATY (O.S.)
Mom?

JULIA
Okay. That is, if you can bear to
be in the car with me that long.

Billy smiles.

KATY
Mom!

JULIA
What?

KATY
You're trending.

JULIA
What's trending? You mean my
Christmas song?

KATY
No. Something else. Hashtag
Christmas Fight Club?

Katy comes over with her phone. Everyone gathers around.

Julia takes the phone, taps the screen and --

INSERT: PHONE SCREEN VIDEO

The school parking lot. Billy and Julia arguing, animated,
waving their arms.

BILLY
Oh, oh! How was I supposed to know
you broke a heel?

JULIA
Well, if you'd have asked you
would've found out. There was only,
like, a thousand people there.

BILLY
Oh, same old Julia. Passing the buck.

JULIA
What's that supposed to mean?

Billy mutters something, goes around to Julia on the passenger side of the car.

JULIA
What are you doing?

BILLY
Opening your door for you.

JULIA
I can open my own door.

BILLY
You sure about that?

JULIA
Yes, I'm very sure.

BILLY
Good, because I don't want to get back in the car and find out you disappeared again.

Billy tries to open her door, but Julia makes a grab for the handle first. Comic struggling ensues.

BACK TO SCENE

Julia GASPS.

JULIA
Omigod! There goes my career.

Trish is in shock.

Katy smiles.

Billy shrugs as Julia stares daggers at him.

Katy takes her phone back.

KATY
Oh, and I almost forgot. Grandma called. Your song went to number one.

JULIA

It what?

EXT. TRISH'S HOME, DINING ROOM - LATER

Everyone's seated around the table, enjoying an elaborate spread. Christmas carols play softly in the background.

Julia's parents and Billy's Mom are present.

Wine is poured, a toast is made --

TRISH

This is a night that deserves a celebration. In honor of Julia's first number one song.

All reply: *Here, here and cheers.*

Julia appears sheepish and humble, clearly uncomfortable with the adulation.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Julia's at a table with Katy and Michael, making another gingerbread house.

Trish comes over, phone in hand.

TRISH

Number one song, number one in gingerbread house making. Is there anything you can't do?

Julia laughs.

JULIA

Hey, it was your gingerbread house. I just added some silly little touches.

TRISH

Wait till next year. We're gonna work on it together. Maybe go for the state finals.

JULIA

They even have state finals for that?

TRISH

I don't know. But if they do, we're a lock.

JULIA

Sounds good, partner.

TRISH

You know your video and your song are trending back-to-back?

JULIA

That's nice. Except for that video.

Julia's Mom comes over.

HELEN

And my phone is blowing up. Is that how you say it, honey? My phone is blowing up.

Eye roll, old person moment.

JULIA

Yes, Mom. You got it right.

HELEN

Word.

Julia covers her face.

JULIA

Oh, my god.

Billy, Santa cap on his head, adjusts a wreath over the fireplace. He turns back to try and catch the conversation.

HELEN

Not even your grandmother had a number one song. Are you aware of that?

JULIA

I am.

TRISH

And to think, all it took was you and Billy to --
 (clears her throat)
 -- clear the air at the high school to push that song to number one.

Billy comes over immediately, wreath in hand. A piece of tape is stuck to his chin.

BILLY

Now, hold on a minute. That song went to number one because it's a great song, not because of some silly little argument.

Julia looks up. They all look up. All a bit taken aback by Billy's polite outburst. Even Billy.

BILLY

I'll just get back to... whatever it was I was doing over there.

He glances around, nods his head, pulls the tape off his chin and goes back to the fireplace.

TRISH

I'm sorry, Julia. He's right. I didn't mean to suggest...

JULIA

No, it's okay. Actually, I think it might have had a little something to do with it.

The party goes on like before, but a crooked little smile remains frozen on Julia's face. *He defended me...*

FOYER - LATER

Billy slipping on his coat, readying to leave.

JULIA

Hey...

(Billy turns)

Thanks for standing up for me back there.

BILLY

(smiles)

Hey, I wouldn't have said it if it weren't true.

JULIA

Well, thank you, just the same.

BILLY

You're welcome. So, I guess we can call a truce?

JULIA

Sure. I mean, if we're going to be partners and all...

BILLY

Partners?

JULIA

With the school dance. My song?

BILLY

Of course. Actually, I'll pick you up tomorrow afternoon for the rehearsal. Sound good?

JULIA

Looking forward to it.

BILLY

You staying here longer?

JULIA

Tonight, at least.

BILLY

Good. Hey, you know, I was thinking. I kinda needed to do a few things in town tomorrow. Maybe you and Katy would like to take a drive?

JULIA

Sure.

BILLY

Great. I'll call you.

They exchange goodbye's. A little awkward. Does he kiss her cheek, shake her hand or what?

He settles for a hand shake, steps out the front door. As he exits he calls out --

BILLY (O.S.)

Mr. Hill.

Julia crosses to the window where she sees her Mom, Dad and Billy in conversation.

Billy shakes both their hands as they speak.

KATY (O.S.)

Mom?

Julia spins around in an impromptu pirouette and heads over to her daughter, who's adding glitter to a STOCKING.

Julia guides Katy's hand, then looks up.

Trish, who's been watching Julia the whole times, catches her eye and they exchange grins.

ACT 5

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT - DAY

Snow falls lazily. Christmas music plays in the background. A fire pit crackles, rows of green trees.

Billy, juggling three hot chocolates, approaches Julia and Katy and hands them out.

BILLY
Here you go, Katy.

KATY
Thank you.

Billy smiles, Katy runs on up ahead of them.

JULIA
So, why are we here again?

BILLY
Well, if you haven't noticed, we are at a Christmas tree lot.

JULIA
Yes, I have noticed that.

BILLY
I need a tree. It's the only thing I haven't gotten yet. I've been so busy with the stores and everything.

JULIA
Katy really likes you, you know. You really seem to have a way with kids.

BILLY
Just one of my many undiscovered talents.

JULIA
Like music?

BILLY
You could say that.

JULIA
You should have stuck with it.

BILLY
Yeah, but it was never my passion.
At least, not the way it was your
passion.

JULIA
So, what is Billy Owens' passion
these days?

He shrugs, pauses. Stops.

BILLY
Look around you.

JULIA
What am I looking at exactly?

BILLY
All of it. It's right here, right
now. It's tomorrow and the next
day. It's this town. It's
Christmas. You don't see it?

JULIA
I do. I think.

BILLY
Look again, Julia.

She does...

A GUY strolls by with a Christmas Tree across his shoulder --
two PARENTS swing their CHILD in the air -- the STATEHOUSE
CLOCK chimes in the distance against a rosy sky as snowflakes
continue to fall.

BILLY
You see it now?

JULIA
Yeah, I think I do.

BILLY
It's something you feel deep
inside. For me, it's being able to
enjoy the things I never did when I
was younger. I find myself living
in the moment for the first time in
my life. It feels good.

JULIA

The Billy I used to know was always living for tomorrow. A bit of a dreamer, they said.

BILLY

I know another guy they used to say that about.

JULIA

(smiles)

I heard he wasn't the only one.

(then)

You really have changed, huh?

BILLY

I'm trying. But, coming home was a good move. And not just for business, but... This is where I grew up. This little town will always be in my heart. That's probably why I get involved in a lot of things here. Like I'm making up for lost time.

Julia laughs.

BILLY

What?

JULIA

I only wish I had time to make up for lost time.

She slips. Billy takes her arm and gently rights her.

BILLY

You mean with your singing?

JULIA

Yeah. Trish said when things got too heavy for her she hired a manager. Said it helped out a lot.

BILLY

An easy fix for my sister. Your situation's a little different.

JULIA

Exactly. You understand.

BILLY

Of course. I guess the question:
How far do you want to go with
this?

JULIA

Meaning?

BILLY

You have a number one song, Julia.
You can ride that wave if you want.
Because it won't be long before
everyone is going to know who Julia
Hill is. You're gonna get a lot of
knocks on your door. Real soon.

JULIA

You know what's funny? I never
thought this would happen. I just
started singing... because I loved
to sing. It made me happy.

BILLY

That's impressive. You're touching
millions of people by doing what
you love to do.

Julia thinks on that.

JULIA

(laughs nervously)
It sounds so daunting when you put
it like that.

BILLY

No, it's not. It's beautiful.

Katy stands in between two massive Christmas trees.

KATY

Mr. Hill! Do you like this one, or
this one?

Julia and Billy look at each other.

BILLY

Yes.

JULIA

Yes.

INT. BILLY'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

The tree, a majestic ten-footer, stands proudly near the
fireplace.

Billy enters with a box marked ORNAMENTS.

BILLY

This is the last of them, I think.

He puts them down among several other boxes.

MONTAGE: TRIMMING THE TREE

A) Julia gives Billy directions regarding ornament placement.

B) Katy, ANTLERS on her head, gives Billy and Julia directions regarding ornament placement.

C) All of them laughing as Billy shows off the mother of all ugly Christmas sweaters.

D) Katy, on a stool, places the star atop the tree and...

JULIA

It's beautiful. Just what your house needed.

Billy looks into Julia's eyes. It's a playfully awkward moment between them, as if they can both tell what the other is thinking.

BILLY

There might be one more thing this house needs...

JULIA

Oh? What might that be?

Billy's watch BEEPS. He checks it.

BILLY

Rehearsal time.

KATY

Can I go, too?

Billy shrugs.

JULIA

Sure.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, AUDITORIUM - LATER

Julia sits on a stool on stage, guitar in hand.

Kenzie next to her.

JULIA

On my cue. One, two, three, four--

Julia strums her guitar -- bright, up-tempo.

KENZIE

(singing)

*The tree is up with it's pretty
bows, colored lights and mistletoe.
But, there's one thing you gotta
know if it's the last thing you
ever hear... I want you for
Christmas, and that's just how it
goes...*

Billy sits next to Katy in the front row, leaning in.

Kenzie's voice breaks on the last word.

Julia stops.

JULIA

Much better. Much better. You're
not breaking near as much as
before.

KENZIE

But, my voice is still breaking.

JULIA

And that's okay. We just need to
work through it. Shall we try it
again?

KENZIE

Okay.

And they do.

INT. TRISH'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The lights down low. Trish and Spence sit across from Billy
and Julia.

Michael and Katy are both passed out on another sofa.

TRISH

(to Spence)

They look so cute together.

Julia and Billy quickly look at each other.

JULIA

Excuse me?

Trish laughs.

TRISH

I meant Michael and Katy. You...
You didn't think I was talking
about you and Billy, did you?

JULIA

Oh, no. No...

BILLY

Absolutely not.

SPENCE

So, are you staying another night,
Julia?

JULIA

Oh, I really shouldn't. I've
imposed on you long enough.

Trish points to Michael and Katy, sleeping.

TRISH

Are you gonna be the one to wake
her up?

Julia opens her mouth as if to speak, then...

JULIA

I guess one more night wouldn't
hurt.

A DING from the kitchen. Trish rises.

TRISH

That must be the cookies.

SPENCE

I'll help you.

Billy and Julia together. Silent. One waiting for the other
to say something. Finally --

BILLY

Let's do something?

JULIA

What? We're gonna miss your
sister's cookies.

BILLY

I got something better.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Julia and Billy casually stroll the peaceful sidewalk. Most businesses are closed or closing, but everything is still lit like a Christmas Wonderland.

Julia takes a bite of a cookie.

JULIA
These are delicious.

BILLY
I thought you'd like it. Gebardt's
is the best bakery in town.

JULIA
You sure know the way to a girl's
heart.

He laughs.

BILLY
Just never the right girl.

JULIA
No?

BILLY
Oh, I dodged a few bullets, but no.
Never saw any point in settling
down. My mother's been trying to
marry me off for years.

JULIA
Has she?

BILLY
Yeah. She's a good woman.

JULIA
I know that. She's got your best
interests in mind.

BILLY
That, she does... What happened
with you? I remembered you had
always wanted to teach music,
but...

JULIA
You got a good memory. I wanted to
get into teaching, but then I had
Katy, and, well, teaching kind of
took a back seat.

(MORE)

JULIA (CONT'D)

Couldn't do school at that point.
Spent a lot of time at home.
Thinking things over. That's when
the song writing bug bit me.

BILLY

I'll say. It bit you with a
vengeance.

JULIA

And I discovered I could sing.
Like, really sing. And, you know,
the rest is...

BILLY

Well, I have to admit, the first
time I heard you on the radio it
was like... hearing the voice of an
angel.

JULIA

Oh stop.

BILLY

I'm serious. I literally had to
pull the car over to find out who
it was. Turned out it was you.

JULIA

Thank you. It's a good thing you
pulled the car over, though. I
wouldn't want you blaming me for
getting into an accident.

Billy laughs.

BILLY

Oh, come on now. Hey, can we call a
truce on that thing with the dance?
Seeing as, you know, we both
realize it was kind of a
miscommunication. And we were both
so young.

She stops walking, holds out her hand and they shake.

JULIA

Truce.

BILLY

Good.

But, they're not letting go of each other's hand.

BILLY

Umm, are you going to let go of my hand?

JULIA

Are you?

A beat. He gazes at her, crooked grin on his face.

BILLY

I wasn't planning on it.

Billy edges closer. Leans in slightly.

Julia does the same.

So quiet. Their lips just inches apart, when--

CAROLERS

*Deck the halls with boughs of
holly! Fa la la la lahhh, la la la
lahhh... 'Tis the season to be
jolly...*

Billy and Julia recoil as a trio of CAROLERS appear seemingly out of nowhere.

Moment officially broken. But Julia and Billy laugh in spite of it. They shrug, and join in singing with the carolers.

INT. TRISH'S HOME, FOYER - NIGHT

The door opens. Julia inconspicuously slides in, takes off her coat and hat and --

TRISH

And where were you, young lady?

Julia jumps.

JULIA

Oh, my god. You scared me.

TRISH

Me, too. I was starting to get worried about you.

JULIA

Thanks, Mom.

They cross into the...

LIVING ROOM

TRISH
So?

JULIA
So what?

TRISH
Did you kiss him?

JULIA
Oh, stop! You're just as bad as...
bad is.

Trish GASPS, puts her hand on her heart.

TRISH
Scouts honor.

JULIA
All, all right. Yes. And no. I
mean, we leaned in and then we were
interrupted by carolers.

TRISH
Don't you just hate when that
happens?

JULIA
I know, but what's funny - I would
have. You could say I got caught up
in the moment.

TRISH
Well, that's a good thing. Right?

Julia thinks it over. Nods.

JULIA
Yeah. I think so. I mean, I feel
like I'm leading with my heart on
this one. Haven't done that in a
long time.

Trish takes a glass of wine from the table, grabs an empty
glass, pours some in and hands it to Julia.

They raise glasses.

TRISH
The heart's a good guide, Julia.
Always. Even when it's wrong, the
journey is always worth it.

Glasses CLINK. They sip.

ACT 6

EXT. TRISH'S HOME - MORNING

A fresh blanket of snow coats the ground.

INT. TRISH'S HOME, KITCHEN - MORNING

DING! Trish removes fresh cookies from the stove and places them on a cooling rack.

Julia helps Michael and Katy squeeze frosting from piping tubes onto another set of cookies on the counter.

TRISH

(to Julia)

So glad you decided to stay another day. Wish you could stay longer.

JULIA

Yeah, me too. It was nice catching up, though. Really brought back a lot of memories.

TRISH

And you made some new ones.

JULIA

That, I did.

TRISH

It's not over yet, though.

JULIA

What do you mean?

Billy and Spence enter the kitchen.

SPENCE

Hey, guys.

BILLY

Hey, all.

JULIA

What's going on?

BILLY

So, in honor of yours and Katy's
last day at my sister's, we planned
a little something special.

Trish takes off her apron, looks at Julia in anticipation.

JULIA

Oh, really. What?

EXT. TOWN SQUARE, SKATING RINK - DAY

Just off Main Street, near the big Christmas Tree.

Julia and Katy, skated up, stand by the rink wall. Trish and
her family *shush* by, wave.

Billy calls out as he ties his skates:

BILLY

(to Trish)

You didn't tell me we were going
skating.

(to Julia)

They didn't tell me.

Julia shrugs.

JULIA

So?

BILLY

I can't skate.

JULIA

You've never been skating?

BILLY

Not successfully, no.

KATY

Don't worry, Mr. Owens. I'll teach
you.

BILLY

Thank you, Katy.

SKATING RINK

Billy flounders, arms flailing like a one-winged turkey.
Reaches out, grabs Julia.

JULIA
Hey, don't take me down with you!

BILLY
(laughing)
I'm sorry.

Katy stops him.

KATY
Okay. Stop. Close your eyes.
(he does)
Put your arms behind your back.
(he does)
Now, don't let your feet leave the
ice, and just push off.

BILLY
But, I can't see anything, Katy. I
have no balance, and I'm gonna
break my neck.

KATY
Trust the process, Mr. Owens.

Julia, amused, watches on.

Billy pushes off, right foot. Left foot. Katy skating
backwards in front of him.

KATY
That's it. Slow. Slow. Don't open
your eyes, just listen to my voice.

BILLY
I'm doing it, aren't I?

JULIA
Yes, you are, Billy.

Julia skates close to Billy.

BILLY
Who taught you how to skate, Katy?

KATY
My mom, of course.

And Julia slows so she can watch them. Billy learning, Katy
teaching. She smiles. Something beautiful about this.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - LATER

The whole gang stands behind a BOX TRUCK. Gifts, fruit baskets and grocery bags are unloaded.

Spencer and Billy unload the truck, Trish and Julia organize the items. Katy and Michael help.

Other PEOPLE load their cars with food and gifts.

Billy and Trish load his car.

BILLY
 (to Julia and Katy)
 You guys ready?

Trish, Spence and Michael go their separate ways.

INT. BILLY'S CAR - LATER

The back seat is jammed with packages. Katy has a fruit basket in her lap.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Snow on the ground, smoke from the chimney. The slick driveway reflects the colorful Christmas lights.

Julia, Billy and Katy on the front porch. Numerous gifts and boxes piled near them.

BILLY
 You guys ever play ring and run
 when you were younger? Same
 concept.

Katy leans in, rings the bell and they take off.

BILLY
 (running)
 I like to have a little fun with--

Billy face plants in the snow.

Julia stops. They're all laughing. She helps him up.

A WOMAN and a YOUNG CHILD open the door to the house and catch them just before they pull away.

They wave.

WOMAN
Merry Christmas!

EXT. HOUSE - LATER

Same deal. They ring the door bell and make a break for the car as an ELDERLY GENTLEMAN answers the door. He looks down at the packages, grins, waves as they pull away.

Julia waves back.

JULIA
Merry Christmas!

EXT. JULIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Billy's car pulls up to a beautiful home, decked out with lights and wreaths and bows.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Billy marvels at how festive the interior is.

BILLY
This is beautiful, Julia. I didn't know you were such a good decorator.

JULIA
Well, my mom helped me. I could never get it looking this good myself.

KATY
Mom, I'm gonna go upstairs.

JULIA
Okay. Put on your pajamas, too. It's getting late.

KATY
Okay.

Katy runs upstairs.

JULIA
You want something to drink?

BILLY
Sure. You got any orange juice?

JULIA

Sure do.

She heads to the kitchen.

Billy crosses to the mantle above the fireplace. Framed pictures of Julia at various ages. One in particular of --

Julia and Trish when they were teenagers.

Billy carefully lifts the picture.

BILLY

Is this when you were in high school?

JULIA (O.S.)

Huh? Oh yeah, the one of me and Trish?

BILLY

Yeah.

JULIA (O.S.)

That was taken at Marion's party.

He puts the picture down.

BILLY

Marion Ravenwood?

JULIA (O.S.)

Yup.

Billy takes a few steps, then stops when he sees a guitar resting on the sofa.

Julia re-enters, orange juice in hand.

JULIA

I haven't seen Marion in quite a while...

She sees him gazing at the guitar.

BILLY

That's a beautiful guitar. Reminds me of one I had when I was younger.

JULIA

That's because it is the one you had when you were younger.

BILLY

What?

He gently picks up the guitar, turns it over. Carved on the back are his initials.

BILLY

This is amazing! What are you doing with it?

JULIA

You gave it to me. Don't you remember?

Billy shrugs.

BILLY

If you say so. I can't believe you kept it after all these years.

JULIA

I wrote my Christmas song on that guitar. You should play it?

BILLY

Oh, no. I...

Julia pulls the orange juice out of his reach.

JULIA

Go ahead. I want to hear you.

BILLY

All right. If you insist.

Billy sits. Strums the guitar. It's like an old shoe.

Julia sits across from him. Katy comes down the stairs and joins her mother.

Billy exhales. Picks a slow arpeggio on the strings.

Julia recognizes the chords immediately. Her song again.

BILLY

(singing)

*Bluebird on the wing flies high,
like our love, let's out a sigh.
It's Christmas morn, joy in our
kid's eyes. Deep in their hearts,
one thing they'll always know... I
want you for Christmas...*

And as he sings, he looks into her eyes. Like he's singing only to her.

Katy glances at Julia, and can see the moment Billy and her mom are sharing. She smiles. This feels right.

Suddenly, Julia's eyes go wide. She picks up the glass of orange juice and downs it in one shot.

Something just hit.

Billy stops playing.

BILLY

Julia? Are you all right?

She's almost out of breath.

JULIA

Yeah.

BILLY

You sure? You just drank all my orange juice.

Julia shakes her head. Puts the glass down.

JULIA

That's it!

BILLY

That's what?

But Julia doesn't answer. A smile the size of Florida crosses her lips.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, AUDITORIUM

On stage, Julia, on one knee. Anticipation. Listening intently as --

Kenzie sings the song. Not her version, but Billy's slowed down version.

Billy, off to the side, plays guitar. He watches just as intently. Hangs on every word.

And Kenzie sings it perfectly.

Billy strikes the last chord.

Kenzie holds the last note.

Julia springs up and embraces her.

JULIA
You did it! I'm so proud of you!

KENZIE
Thanks, Miss Hill.

JULIA
No, thank you.

Billy walks over.

BILLY
We have a winner.

He hi-fives Kenzie, hugs Julia.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Crisp and cold, light snow.

Billy and Julia head to the car.

BILLY
Congratulations, Julia. You really brought out the best in her.

JULIA
(humbled)
Well, I guess. I mean, if I did, that's great. It was your version that did it, though. See, maybe you should have stuck with music.

Billy laughs.

BILLY
Ha! Think of what I would've missed. I guess I'm just as happy being behind the scenes.

JULIA
Well, whatever. It's your arrangement that got us here.

BILLY
And your instruction.

Silent for a moment, basking in the moment.

BILLY
So, hey, you want to do something
tonight?

JULIA
Okay. Like what?

BILLY
Haven't given it much thought yet.
Let's just celebrate.

Walking. She turns, squints.

JULIA
Are you asking me on a date, Billy
Owens?

BILLY
Um, well, I guess...

JULIA
Because I've been asked out on
dates before and that's pretty much
how it sounds.

Billy stops.

BILLY
Yes. I am.

Julia stops.

JULIA
Well then, I accept.

BILLY
Great.

ACT 7

EXT. MIDDLEBURY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Looks more like a landmark Country Inn than a restaurant.
Festively decorated. Music plays inside.

INT. MIDDLEBURY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Fine wood accompaniments, roaring fireplace. Trendy and
nostalgic all at once. At a --

TABLE

-- are Julia and Billy.

Julia marvels at her surroundings. She's breathless.

JULIA

I've always wanted to come here.

BILLY

You finally made it.

JULIA

It's wonderful. Nice choice.

BILLY

You know, legend has it the tree lighting tradition started right here in Holly Falls.

JULIA

Really?

BILLY

The settlers have a huge feast every Christmas. While waiting for the men to come back with dinner, the women and children would find the biggest tree they could. They'd hang lanterns and shiny ornaments on it in hopes the men would see the glow and it would guide them home if they got lost.

JULIA

Sort of like a beacon.

BILLY

Exactly like a beacon. Eventually, it became tradition. That's why every year they light the tree.

JULIA

Can I ask you a question?

BILLY

Sure. But if you want to know how the Mr. Elf tradition got started, I'm at a loss.

JULIA

No, nothing like that. But, I'm just curious... You say you've dodged a few bullets. Does that mean you just never met the right girl?

Billy chuckles, looks down.

JULIA

I'm sorry. That was out of line.

BILLY

No, no. It's not. It's okay... I dated a girl for four years when I was away. It was going exactly the way it was supposed to. We were talking about our future, looking at houses together. I really thought that this was the one, you know.

Julia nods. Rapt.

BILLY

And then, suddenly something changed...

JULIA

What?

BILLY

Around that time my businesses began started to take off. It was in its infancy, but the groundwork was laid. It was looking really good, and I felt great about it. It was like, you know, I can do this. I'm good at this. And, I guess, I started putting more effort into that than my relationship. I thought I was doing the right thing. That I was paving the way for our future.

JULIA

And she left you because of that?

BILLY

Not just because of that, but that was the beginning, so...

JULIA

Is that why you're so involved in charity work?

BILLY

It started out like that too, I guess. I was good at it, but it's so much more than just being good at something.

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

It's how you feel when you make others feel special. At least, that's my corny version.

JULIA

I don't think there's anything corny about it at all.

With each layer she peels back, the more drawn to him she feels.

BILLY

Seriously, though. I find you don't get back much if you don't give a little. Sometimes you just need something more, like...

(taps his chest)

In here. Where it counts.

JULIA

Where it counts.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Helen and Katy, Santa caps on, sit near the fireplace. Two mugs of hot cocoa nearby.

Helen strings popcorn onto a thread.

HELEN

I used to do this with your mother when she was little.

KATY

How little?

HELEN

Real little. One year we actually had a Christmas tree with all homemade ornaments. Paper snowflakes, popcorn, popsicle sticks.

KATY

I'd like to do that.

HELEN

You will. You--

Helen's phone RINGS. She picks it up.

HELEN
 (into phone)
 Hello? Yes? Okay, yeah... Sure,
 I'll hold...

KATY
 Who is it?

Helen shrugs.

INSERT: PHONE SCREEN

FACE TIME pops up, then an image of a rugged dude in a COWBOY HAT appears. Big smile, scruff on his face.

This is country star DEL TRAVIS, 34.

BACK TO SCENE

Helen covers her mouth and GASPS.

HELEN
 Del Travis?!

Katy slides over to see, excited.

He tips his hat.

DEL
 Ma'am. Hi there, little lady. How
 you both doing tonight?

HELEN
 (flustered)
 Oh, I'm great. We're great. I mean,
 I'm fine, you're great, I'm great,
 I...

Del laughs.

DEL
 Thank you!

HELEN
 This is a surprise, Mr. Travis--

DEL
 Just Del, please.

Helen. Red-faced and enamored --

HELEN
 Del. So, what can we help you
 with... Del?

DEL

Well, I'm kinda wanting to speak to the young lady with the number one song in the country.

Off Helen...

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Billy thanks a VENDOR, takes two Christmas lanterns. Hands one to Julia.

BILLY

One for you.

JULIA

Thank you.

They head to the Christmas Tree.

BILLY

So, have you decided what you want to do with touring? I remember you said you wanted to spend a little more time with Katy.

JULIA

I have no upcoming shows, but people have been calling. Maybe in the Spring. I think it might be time to attend to other things. Bringing Katy out on the road all the time was... maybe a little unfair.

BILLY

Spending time with those you love is important. Especially at Katy's age.

JULIA

You're right.

They're in front of the TREE. Julia goes to hang her lantern.

JULIA

So, what do we do? Just hang these on the tree?

Billy stops her.

BILLY

Wait! You need to make a wish first. You didn't think you could just hang this on the tree without making a wish, did you?

JULIA

Of course not. How silly of me.

Julia closes her eyes.

BILLY

Are you going to make a wish?

JULIA

I'm thinking!
(opens her eyes)
Okay. I think I have one. What about you?

Billy gazes at her.

BILLY

I made mine a long time ago.

In unison, they hang their lanterns on the tree. It brings them closer. Into each others' bubble kind of close. They lean in, faces inches apart. This time it's gonna happen. This time --

CAROLERS

*Rockin' around the Christmas tree
at the Christmas party hop!
Mistletoe Hung where you can see,
every couple tries to stop...*

Billy and Julia bust out laughing. This can't be happening again!

The CAROLERS sway back and forth, gleefully harmonizing.

Julia holds out her hand. Billy takes it. They lean into each other under the stars.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helen sits on the couch, crocheting a stocking. The front door opens and in comes Julia.

JULIA

Hi, Mom.

HELEN

Hey. How was your date?

JULIA

Mom, it wasn't a... I mean, it was...

HELEN

I guess it went well then.

Julia smiles, takes off her coat and hat.

JULIA

Yes, it did.

Helen sports a funny grin.

JULIA

What?

HELEN

Does the name Del Travis ring a bell?

JULIA

(matter-of-factly)

Uh, yeah... Hottest country star ever. Artist of the year two years running. Why?

HELEN

He just face-timed me.

JULIA

He what?!

Helen points upstairs.

HELEN

Shhh... I just put Katy to bed.

JULIA

(whispers)

Are you kidding?

Helen shakes her head.

HELEN

I'm not. He's working on new music in Nashville. He wants you to fly down and sing a duet with him. Said he's a huge fan of your music. And not just your Christmas song. He knows all your stuff.

JULIA
 (shocked)
 Really?

HELEN
 His own words. He even mentioned
 the possibility of you opening some
 shows for him.

Helen hands her a set of printed-out tickets to Julia, who
 stares at them in awe.

HELEN
 He sent these right over. He asked
 if you could be there by Friday.

JULIA
 Whoa... Wait a minute. Friday's in
 two days, Mom. That's... That's
 the...

HELEN
 The night of the dance.

JULIA
 Yeah.

Julia's takes a deep breath. Her jubilation downgrades to
 uncertainty. Apprehension.

JULIA
 I don't know what to say to that,
 Mom. This is huge. Do you know what
 this could do for my career?

HELEN
 It could send you right up into the
 stratosphere. It could...

INSERT: PICTURE

On the mantle, a framed photo of Brenda Hill -- her HUSBAND
 beside her. A young Helen on her lap.

BACK TO SCENE

JULIA
 Don't say it, Mom.

Helen smiles.

HELEN
 I don't think I need to this time.

JULIA
 Mom, I may not get an opportunity
 like this again. Ever.

HELEN
 I know.

JULIA
 I mean, this is a once in a
 lifetime shot here.

HELEN
 I know, but...

JULIA
 But?

Helen puts her hand on her daughter's shoulder.

HELEN
 Julia, I'm not the one you need to
 convince.

EXT. HOLLY FALLS - DAY

MONTAGE --

The sidewalks are filled with holiday SHOPPERS -- winter
 coats and scarves and bags...

The TOWN SQUARE CHRISTMAS TREE, and...

EXT. OWENS CARES AUTO - DAY

As Billy pulls up in his car, he spies Julia standing there.

He gets out.

BILLY
 Hey.

JULIA
 Hey yourself.

BILLY
 What's going on?

JULIA
 Can we talk?

INT. TRISH'S CAFE - DAY

Trish at the front of the store, head turned, stealing a glance at a --

TABLE

Billy and Julia.

BILLY

Julia, we worked so hard on this.
Now you're just gonna take off and
go to Nashville?

JULIA

Billy, please understand. This is a
chance to sing a duet with Del
Travis. He's the biggest country
star in America right now--.

BILLY

I know who he is.
(shakes his head, exhales)
So, this is what it must have felt
like.

JULIA

How what felt like?

BILLY

Getting left at the dance.

She grabs his hand.

JULIA

Billy, please. It's so not like
that.

BILLY

No, it's exactly like that, Julia.
I guess all that talk about how you
want to step back, take it slow.
That's all out the window now.

JULIA

Billy, this is an opportunity that
may never come around for me again.

BILLY

It may never come around for
Kenzie, either. Did you think about
that? She's expecting you to be up
on that stage with her.

This stuns Julia into silence.

Billy hangs a beat, waits on her response.

He gets up from the table.

BILLY

Well, it's your decision. I should have known this was too good to be true.

JULIA

Billy...

He laughs to himself, shakes his head.

BILLY

And here I thought all this time we might have had something...

JULIA

We do, Billy. That's still there...

With that, he walks out.

Trish, on the phone, watches him exit. She turns back to see Julia sitting by herself. Clearly torn and conflicted.

Julia turns her head. They lock eyes.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Trish and Julia shuffle down the sidewalk. They pass a storefront with a miniature Christmas Town displayed prominently in its window.

A bell RINGS. Julia drops a dollar in a SIDEWALK SANTA'S pot.

TRISH

Holy smokes. Del Travis, huh?

JULIA

I know. We'll be back by Christmas Eve, so...

TRISH

You'll miss the dance. You can't record your vocals here?

JULIA

Del likes to capture the essence, he says.

TRISH

What about Katy?

JULIA

She's going, too. Del has a daughter around her age, so it should be fun.

TRISH

I see. Well, that's great, Julia.

JULIA

(sighs)

Billy didn't seem to think so.

TRISH

He'll get over that, Julia. He's very understanding.

JULIA

He didn't seem too understanding at the cafe.

TRISH

That's a knee-jerk reaction. I don't think he's had time to really process it. That being said, you need to do what's best for you, Julia. Like you said, it's a once in a lifetime chance.

JULIA

You know, I've always made it a point of saying I'm not my grandmother. That it'd be okay if I never reached her level of success. Yet, here I am.

TRISH

There's nothing wrong with that, honey.

Julia thinks on this.

JULIA

My grandmother was a lot younger than me when her fame exploded. She had all the time in the world to follow her dreams.

TRISH

Things were different back then, Julia.

JULIA
Yeah. Much different.

They continue down the picturesque, tree-lined street.

ACT 8

INT. OWENS CARES AUTO, OFFICE - DAY

Billy sits at his desk, lost in thought. He shuffles through some papers until --

He comes across a random photo.

INSERT: PHOTO

Few years back. Billy standing on a sun drenched beach, holding a surfboard.

BACK

He stares at it a good long while, puts it aside.

Casey, the mechanic we met earlier, knocks on the open door.

CASEY
Mr. Owens?

BILLY
Hey.

Casey approaches, hands Billy a card.

CASEY
This is for you. I just wanted to say thanks for everything. I'm not used to getting a Christmas bonus.

BILLY
Your welcome, Casey. And get used to it. We pride ourselves on doing things a little differently around here.

CASEY
Well, thanks again.

BILLY
You got plans for Christmas?

CASEY
Me and my wife are heading upstate to see my mother.
(MORE)

CASEY (CONT'D)

It'll be her first time seeing her granddaughter.

BILLY

Oh, that's awesome.

CASEY

It is. I don't get to see my mother as much as I'd like anymore, so it's always good to go back home. Even for a little while.

Billy nods. This resonates.

BILLY

Yes, it is. Well, Merry Christmas. And tell your mom I said hi.

CASEY

I will. Merry Christmas.

Casey leaves.

Billy regards the card Casey gave him, then opens it. Something falls out.

He picks it up. It's the Christmas Bonus Check with a NOTE paper-clipped to it.

INSERT: NOTE

*Please give this to someone who needs it more than I do.
Merry Christmas!*

BACK

Billy opens his mouth as if to call for Casey, then stops. He smiles, shakes his head.

INT. BEN AND HELEN'S HOME - DAY

Helen, Ben and Katy decorate the tree.

Julia comes in from outside.

KATY

Mommy!

JULIA

Hey, baby. What are you guys up to?

HELEN

Just putting the finishing touches
on the tree. Come here.

Helen shows Julia the box of ornaments from her mother.

HELEN

These are your grandmother's
Christmas ornaments.

Julia goes through the box.

JULIA

Oh, wow. I haven't seen these in a
long time.

HELEN

Yeah. Some of these I haven't put
up since you were young. Must've
got buried behind the others.

Julia gently reaches in and lifts one out.

INSERT: ORNAMENT

The kind you put a photo in. Julia as a BABY, wearing a
cowboy hat. Brenda Hill proudly holds her.

Above the photo -- *Granddaughter's First Christmas.*

BACK

Behind them, Ben and Katy tend to the tree.

Julia's clearly touched.

JULIA

I haven't seen this in years, Mom.

HELEN

Flip it over.

Julia reads, then reads aloud:

JULIA

*If we couldn't be together, I'd
forget all the rest. Without you in
my life, I'd lay me down to rest.
Understand, when you joined my
life, I rose from off the street...
My darling, my angel... You make my
life complete.*

(to Helen)

Mom, that's beautiful.

HELEN

Its from a song she wrote for you
years before you were even born.

JULIA

Years?

HELEN

Somehow she just knew.

Julia dabs at her eyes, holds the ornament close.

JULIA

Can I have this?

HELEN

I think your grandmother would have
wanted that.

Julia exhales, looks away.

HELEN

Something else weighing on you?

Julia composes herself, tries on a smile.

JULIA

No... I'm fine, Mom.

Helen grins that knowing, motherly grin.

HELEN

You know, even your grandmother
took time for herself once in a
while. Growing up, I always found
that whenever I needed her the
most, she was always there.
Somehow. Even today.

JULIA

Grandma was so special, wasn't she?

HELEN

She was. She always made it look so
easy.

JULIA

Funny. I guess I'm really not like
her.

HELEN

Why do you say that?

JULIA
Because I always find it so hard.

HELEN
You're more like her than you know,
Julia.

Julia hugs her mom.

JULIA
Katy, you ready?

KATY
Sure, Mom.

BEN
By the way, when you see Billy,
thank him again for me.

JULIA
Thank him? For what?

BEN
Those recalls I had. My whole
fleet. Billy put me in touch with a
friend of his who owns a
dealership. They're going to
provide me loaner cars until mine
are ready. Really fair price, too.
I couldn't have done it without
him.

This revelation gives Julia pause. Total mood shift.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Setting sun through the snow covered tree branches.

Billy and his mom stride leisurely along the sidewalk.

BILLY
It's just that we worked so hard
with Kenzie on her singing, and now
it seems she's...

EMMY
What?

BILLY
Leaving us behind. Look, I know it
sounds dramatic, but...

EMMY

When you left for school, your father and I were a little upset.

BILLY

You were?

EMMY

Well, you took off to the other side of the country, Bill. Parents worry. But we accepted it because we knew that's what you wanted to do. We weren't going to stand in the way of that.

BILLY

So, you're saying I need to accept this.

EMMY

I'm saying sometimes you just need to get out of the way.

BILLY

Yeah, but this is different.

Emmy smiles. She knows.

EMMY

Things are always different when love is involved.

Billy kisses her forehead, locks arms with her.

BILLY

You wanna grab some dinner?

EMMY

Some dinner would be nice.

Billy points up ahead to the town Christmas Tree.

BILLY

Did I ever tell you how the Christmas Tree lighting came to be?

EMMY

Why? Has it changed since the last time you told me?

EXT. JULIA'S HOUSE - DAY

December perfect. Crisp and cool.

INT. JULIA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia places a shirt into a suitcase, zips it.

Katy comes down the stairs lugging a heavy duffle bag.

JULIA
Sweetie, you got everything you
need?

KATY
Yes, Mom.

JULIA
Great. If we leave right now we'll
be at the airport just in time.

KATY
Do we hafta go?

Julia turns, surprised.

JULIA
What do you mean? You said you
wanted to go. Remember? Nashville,
the country music capital of the
world. Del's got this great big
house with a studio. You can meet
his daughter.

KATY
Yeah, I guess so.

Julia kneels in front of her, fixes her hair.

JULIA
We'll be back on Christmas Eve,
sweetie. I promise.

KATY
Okay, Mommy.

She beeps Katy on the nose.

JULIA
That's my girl.

EXT. JULIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Julia and Katy exit to see Billy heading up the driveway.

KATY
Mr. Owens!

BILLY

Hi, Katy.

JULIA

Sweetheart, can you go put this in the car for mommy.

Julia hands Katy a bag.

JULIA

Hi.

BILLY

Hey. Heading out?

JULIA

Yeah...

BILLY

Look, I just wanted to--

JULIA

Can I ask you a question?

BILLY

Sure.

JULIA

Did you help out my father with his business?

BILLY

Yeah. Why?

JULIA

Why didn't you tell me?

BILLY

I don't know. It just... never came up really.

JULIA

So, you hid it from me?

BILLY

No, I wasn't hiding it from you. I was going to tell you, I just... With everything going on, it just kinda slipped my mind.

JULIA

I can't be bought, Billy. If that's what you were thinking.

BILLY

Bought? W- What are you talking about?

JULIA

How many shops do you have?

BILLY

Three. I'm in talks to buy a fourth. I don't understand, Julia. What does that have to do with anything.

JULIA

I'm not just another acquisition, Billy.

BILLY

Acquisition? Is that what you think I was doing? Trying to buy your love?

JULIA

That's sure what it feels like.

Billy shakes his head. Incredulous.

BILLY

Wow. And to think, I was coming here to apologize for being selfish.

JULIA

Maybe that's something you should have done at the restaurant.

BILLY

Yeah. Maybe...

She brushes past him.

JULIA

Merry Christmas, Billy.

BILLY

Merry Christmas to you.

He stands alone for a moment on the house steps. Stunned. Too surprised and too hurt to utter another word.

INT. HOLLY FALLS HIGH SCHOOL, GYM - DAY

STAFF puts the finishing touches on the gym. Streamers are hung, garland is strung. Punch bowls, chafing dishes, mistletoe and bows.

INT. AUDITORIUM

Billy does a final run through with Kenzie. They stop.

BILLY

You got it, kiddo. You nervous.

She puts her thumb and forefinger together.

KENZIE

Just a little bit.

BILLY

That's good that you're nervous. It means you're gonna do great.

KENZIE

I still wish Miss Hill was going to be here.

BILLY

I know you do. But I'll be right there beside you. I'm not going anywhere. Okay?

She nods.

KENZIE

Okay.

BILLY

Now, go get ready. I'll meet you over in the gym.

INT. JULIA'S CAR - DAY

Julia behind the wheel, an unsettled look on her face. Deep in thought. The days events gnawing at her.

Katy, from the back seat, takes notice.

KATY

Mom? Mom..?

JULIA

Yes, honey?

KATY
Is everything okay?

JULIA
Yeah. Everything's fine.

Katy doesn't look too convinced. Neither does Julia.

Finally, Julia eases the car to the side of the road. Stops, sits a moment in silence.

Julia SIGHS.

KATY
Why are we stopping?

Julia doesn't answer. She raises her head and --

MONTAGE: JULIA'S THOUGHTS --

She and Billy hang lanterns on the Christmas Tree.

Billy face-plants in the snow after they dropped off gifts.

Julia listening to Billy play her song for the first time.

In the school parking lot, Julia winds up and throws a snowball at Billy, hiding a little smile that we didn't noticed then.

BACK

KATY
Mom?! I'm sorry, sweetie. What?

KATY
Why are we stopping?

JULIA
I'm not sure.

KATY
Did the car make another *pinging* noise?

JULIA
No, that was just me thinking this time.

Beat.

KATY
Maybe you need a mechanic.

Julia smiles, almost laughs. Funny, but not so far from the truth she now realizes.

JULIA

You know what? You may be right.

Julia shifts the car into drive, cuts the wheel and turns the car around.

EXT. HOLLY FALLS HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Sun hangs low. Last light of day. PEOPLE file in.

INT. HOLLY FALLS HIGH SCHOOL, GYM - DAY

A winter wonderland. School colors gold and blue mesh perfectly with the Christmas blandishment. Show time.

Billy with his guitar case. Looks around the room. He spots...

Kenzie, across the way, in a pretty blue dress and her hair done just right. She sees Billy, smiles wide and waves for him to come over.

BILLY

You. Look. Awesome.

KENZIE

Thank you.

Roger Fennimore comes over.

ROGER

Billy, glad you could make it. Are we all set?

BILLY

Ready as we'll ever be. What do you think, Kenzie - ready to crush this?

But she doesn't answer. Just keeps grinning.

Billy looks confused.

BILLY

W- What's the matter? I got food stuck in my teeth?

Just then, Roger steps aside.

And there's Julia.

Billy's stunned.

ROGER
(to Kenzie)
Come on, let's get ready.

They leave Billy and Julia alone. Silence a moment, then --

BILLY
You came back.

JULIA
I came back.

BILLY
What made you change your mind?

JULIA
Remember how everyone told me that
going to Nashville was a once in a
lifetime chance?

BILLY
Uh huh.

JULIA
Well, you were right. This...
(points to the stage)
...is a once in a lifetime chance.
And I'm not going to let it slip
away.

Billy nods. Gets it, but --

BILLY
What about us?

JULIA
Us... I thought about that, too. I
think not being here for the dance
just didn't sit right with me from
the beginning. I knew I needed to
be here. But I took that guilt and
projected it onto you. You and a...
a simple act of kindness you showed
my father.

BILLY
So you believe me?

JULIA

(nods)

Yes. It's like our dance all those years ago.

BILLY

A misunderstanding?

JULIA

A misunderstanding. I'm sorry, Billy. Can you ever forgive me?

A smile finds it's way onto Billy's face. The rough edges smooth out and --

STAGE

ROGER

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our annual Christmas Dance. It's wonderful to see you all here tonight. So without further ado, I'd like to introduce Kenzie Snell. She's going to be singing her rendition of I Want You For Christmas, written by Holly Falls' own Julia Hill. I'm sure you all know who she is.

The CROWD applauds.

Kenzie steps aside to reveal an empty stool and a shiny guitar resting beside it.

ROGER

And, to accompany Kenzie, on guitar, our own Billy Owens. Billy?

All eyes shift to Billy and Julia.

BILLY

You go.

JULIA

No. I couldn't. This is your show.

Billy shakes his head.

BILLY

No. Kenzie needs you up there, Julia. Besides, you know me... I'm happy just standing in the wings, watching others shine.

Billy pulls away, smiling ear-to-ear.

BILLY

Now go. You got a good crowd here.

Julia watches him a moment longer, then heads to the stage.

The crowd GASPS.

ROGER

Well, this is a surprise. Ladies
and gentlemen, Julia Hill!

Julia takes the stage. Hugs Roger. Goes to Kenzie, adjusts her microphone stand. Kenzie beams.

Julia whispers in her ear. Kenzie nods.

Julia drags over another stool, sets it next to hers.

KENZIE

Mr. Owens, Miss Hill says she wants
you up here right now. Says she
won't take no for an answer.

Billy's protests playfully. He's been joined by Trish, Spence and Michael. His sister gives him a gentle push.

Katy, Ben and Helen join them.

The CROWD applauds as Billy takes his seat next to Julia. He slides the strap of his guitar across his shoulder.

Julia nods to Billy.

JULIA

One, two, three and...

Lights go low. The opening chords are heard. Slow and sweet, biding their time until...

KENZIE

(singing)

*The tree is up with it's pretty
bows, colored lights and mistletoe.
But there's one thing you got to
know if it's the last thing you
ever hear -- I want you for
Christmas, and that's just how it
goes...*

Kenzie continues singing. And she's perfect.

The lights are down low. Silver snowflakes dangling from the ceiling reflect the lights from the stage.

Billy keeps his eyes on his picking, looks up briefly to see Julia gazing at him.

He smiles back.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - LATER

All is peaceful and still. Julia and Billy hold hands as they walk. The town Christmas Tree stands before them.

Spence and Trish are up ahead with Julia's parents. Michael and Katy throw snowballs.

BILLY

What a night, huh? Kenzie was perfect.

JULIA

Yes, she was. Except you missed a note on the second chorus.

BILLY

(laughs)

That was only because you made the change too early. It threw me off completely.

JULIA

Oh, is that what happened?

BILLY

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

JULIA

(laughs)

Okay.

BILLY

So, hey, you never mentioned what happened with Del Travis.

JULIA

I told him I had something important going on. He understood.

BILLY

Are you still doing the duet?

She nods.

JULIA

I'm gonna record my vocals in my home studio and send them over.

BILLY

That's good. I'm glad it all worked out.

Silence for a moment as they come up on the Tree. A snowflake gently falls. Julia takes notice.

JULIA

Looks like we're going to have a white Christmas.

BILLY

It sure does.

They stop. She points at their lanterns on the Tree.

JULIA

Hey, look. Our lanterns are still there.

BILLY

Are you ever going to tell me what you wished for?

JULIA

I don't know. Are you gonna tell me what you wished for?

They face each other. They lock hands.

BILLY

Come on, you know I'm not supposed to tell.

JULIA

Well, I won't tell either.

BILLY

Okay. Did it come true, though?

They lean in close. Their faces inches apart...

JULIA

I think it's about to.

From out of nowhere--

CAROLERS

Through the years we all will be together, if the fates allow.

(MORE)

CAROLERS (CONT'D)

*Have a shining star upon the
highest bow...*

Billy and Julia laugh, though they don't look away this time.
Just into each others' eyes.

And they kiss.

CAROLERS

*... And have yourself a merry
little Christmas now.*

... They embrace.

As the flurries fall, the Christmas Tree as their backdrop,
Julia and Billy slow dance to the song of the carolers.

He twirls her, they sway to the tempo as we...

FADE OUT.