

CHRISTMAS IN ROBIN HILLS

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INT. LA PROVENCE - EVENING

A bustling, upmarket French restaurant in the heart of New York. Snappily-dressed waiters and waitresses wine and dine tables of happy dinners.

Everyone's in a group or a couple apart from GEORGE (30s, shaggy hair, dressed smart casual). He sits alone at a table for two.

A half-full glass of red sits in front of him. With a sigh, he takes a sip and checks his watch. A friendly young WAITRESS sidles up to his table.

WAITRESS

Can I get you some more wine?

George smiles and looks up at a grand-looking clock on the restaurant's wall - it's nearly 10 pm.

GEORGE

There's only one thing I want more... and I'm hoping she'll be here any minute.

WAITRESS

(Sheepish)
Was that a yes or a no?

GEORGE

That was a yes.

WAITRESS

Are you ready to order your entree?

GEORGE

I'm waiting for someone. She'll be here any minute. I think.

WAITRESS

Okay, sir. Just so you know, last orders are at 10 PM.

George looks back up at the clock and offers a smile.

GEORGE

Hmmm... well, I guess that gives us fourteen minutes to choose what we'd like...

He laughs half-heartedly - she offers a sympathetic smile before she scoots off.

CUT TO:

INT. TAXI - EVENING

A New York cab zips through the late-night traffic. Snow falls and the radio blares out festive music as the CAB DRIVER hums along.

HENRIETTA (30s, curly blonde hair, striking but serious) is in the back seat - phone clamped to her ear as if her life depends on it.

HENRIETTA

(Into phone)

...yes! My assistant? Mary? Oh! She resigned last week. Yes, Mr. Myers, I'm really sorry about that - any emails you sent would have bounced.

CAB DRIVER

Hey, what's your favourite Christmas song? I got this Bluetooth thing set up so it can play anything you can think of.

Henrietta looks at him incredulously.

HENRIETTA

(To the driver)

I'm on the phone!

(To the phone)

No, Mr. Myers, not you! I'm in a taxi. Okay, first thing tomorrow morning I'm going to send you a proposal that'll blow your mind. We'll make it rain. Give me until tomorrow, you won't regret it. Great! Thank you!

She hangs up and breathes a sigh of relief. She takes out a little mirror from her bag and checks her makeup.

CAB DRIVER

You know I could have been a singer myself, did I ever tell you that?

HENRIETTA

I don't think so - I only met you ten minutes ago...

CAB DRIVER

Yeah! Aw, man, the voice I used to have when I was younger. You'd never believe it.

HENRIETTA

I'm sure I wouldn't. How close to the restaurant are we?

CAB DRIVER

Ten minutes. Maybe eight if we're lucky. Do you know who was a hell of a singer if ever I heard one? Frank Sinatra. Ol' blue eyes. What's your favourite Sinatra tune?

Henrietta rolls her eyes and takes out her phone. She's about to dial 'GEORGE' when a call from 'MR. SYED' comes in.

HENRIETTA

(Answering the phone)

Mr. Syed! I was about to call you. My performance managers have found a way to double your Google results - they've been working on the plan all day.

(Pause)

I'm sorry, we're on New York time here. They'll send it to you first thing tomorrow morning. In fact, I'll send it over myself...

CUT TO:

INT. LA PROVENCE - MOMENTS LATER

George takes a slug of wine and looks up at the clock. It's nearly 10.

The Waitress comes over with a pen and a pad.

WAITRESS

Sorry to trouble you again, sir. We need to get your order in before the kitchen closes.

George sighs.

GEORGE

I guess I should eat something before I go home.

Just as he picks up the menu the double doors swing open and a windswept Henrietta appears - accompanied by a barrage of snow.

As she talks into her phone she scans the restaurant until she catches sight of George.

She waves and scurries over.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Ohhh actually, can we have another five minutes?

The Waitress reluctantly nods and trots back to the kitchen.

Henrietta sits down opposite George and mouths 'one second' to him as she yaps into her phone.

HENRIETTA

(Into phone)

Yes, Mrs Zimmermann, my designers have been finishing the artwork today. They'll send it to you first thing tomorrow morning. In fact, I'll send it myself... we'll make it rain. Okay, Mrs Zimmermann, we appreciate your patience. Yes, happy holidays to you too.

Henrietta hangs up and takes a deep breath. She looks up at George, who says nothing. An awkward moment passes.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Hey! How are you?

She reaches over to kiss him. It ends up being more of a peck on the lips as he isn't into it.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry. Work really got away with me today.

GEORGE

Henrietta, come on! It's one thing if you're a little late because of a meeting. But you're three hours late! I booked the table for 7. You knew that...

HENRIETTA

I'm sorry! I was in pitches all day, then I had clients calling me from as soon as I got. Also, the traffic was ridiculous...

GEORGE

You're here now I guess.

HENRIETTA

You've waited here three hours? That's... impressive.

(MORE)

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

(Somewhat irreverently)
What were you even doing?

GEORGE

I've become very familiar with the
wallpaper patterns.
(Points)
Would you say that's teal or aqua?

HENRIETTA

Aqua.

GEORGE

Really? I think it's teal.

HENRIETTA

It's definitely aqua.
(Beat)
George, I have to be honest. I've
got an absolute day from hell
tomorrow. I've got to be in the
office for 7, maybe even half 6...

GEORGE

And?

HENRIETTA

Well... we've spoken about this.
And I know dates are important to
you...
(quickly)
Oh, and important to me too, of
course! I want us to really enjoy
tonight, but it can't be a late
one...

GEORGE

Right?

HENRIETTA

(Triumphantly)
So I've come up with a structure.

GEORGE

A what?

HENRIETTA

Okay. Hear me out.
(Clears throat)
So, assuming this is a three-course
meal, I've come up with
conversation points to cover during
each course. That way we can fully
catch up.

(MORE)

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

(beat)

Then, after dessert, we can summarise and discuss further actions... err... I mean plan future dates...

By now George's eyebrows are raised so high they're ready to invade the New York skyline.

GEORGE

Henrietta, that's ridiculous. Even for you. I know your career is important, but we can't run our time together like it's some meeting.

The Waitress pops up with a pen and pad.

WAITRESS

Hey, are you two ready to order?

Henrietta grabs a menu and looks inside.

HENRIETTA

Yes! Let me see...

GEORGE

No, we're not. Would you mind asking the kitchen if we could get 5 more minutes?

WAITRESS

I can try...

GEORGE

Also...
(Points)
Is that aqua or teal?

WAITRESS

Looks like teal to me.

GEORGE

I knew it!

She hurries off to the kitchen.

HENRIETTA

Hey! What was that all about? The quicker we order, the quicker we can...

GEORGE

The quicker we can what? Cover off your structured agenda? Email each other the minutes of the meeting? Henrietta. What's happened to you? You were so much fun when we met...

HENRIETTA

Come on, things weren't as intense at work then. I've got my Vice President role now.

GEORGE

Yeah, you have. In fact, that's all you've got...

HENRIETTA

What do you mean?

GEORGE

I'm sorry, Henrietta, I've been taking a back seat way too long. I know your career's important and I'm proud of you - but I think I need more.

HENRIETTA

So you're... you're... breaking up with me?

GEORGE

I don't want to. But...

Henrietta's phone starts ringing. She's about to answer it when she looks up at George and catches his eye.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Whatever. Answer it. Maybe they'll give you what I can't.

(Beat)

Also that's definitely teal. Not aqua.

He turns and makes his way out of the restaurant. Henrietta looks dumbfounded. The phone keeps ringing.

For a second it seems as if she's going to ignore it and go after George. She doesn't. She answers after a sigh of resignation.

HENRIETTA

(Into phone)

Hello? Mr Myers? You tried calling Mary? Ah, didn't I say?

(MORE)

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

She resigned last week. I'm about to start hiring a new assistant.

CUT TO:

EXT. LA PROVENCE - EVENING

George stands outside in the snow. Waiting in the hope that Henrietta might come out. He takes something out of his pocket and looks at it. It's a box for an engagement ring.

He looks through the window, but she's not coming. She's still in the middle of an animated phone conversation.

He sighs, throws the box into the nearest trash can and flags down a cab.

GEORGE

TAXI!

George takes one last look at Henrietta. She's definitely not coming. He slams the cab door shut behind him and it peels off into the night

CUT TO:

EXT. HENRIETTA'S APARTMENT BLOCK - NIGHT

A cab pulls up outside a block of plush looking apartments. A dejected looking Henrietta gets out.

HENRIETTA

(To the driver)

Thank you, have a good evening.

She stands on the pavement for a second and looks up at the sky. She's about to enter the block when something catches her eye.

Next to her block is a small garden area with a couple of benches and a water feature.

A huge Christmas tree stands proudly next to the water feature. It's covered in decorations and a shiny star sits on top.

She walks over to it. When she reaches it she notices a sign.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

(Reading)
The Magic Christmas Tree of 58th
Street. Make your Christmas wish
today.

She laughs cynically and looks back up at the tree. The star seems to be shining brighter now.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

I wish... I wish... things were
easier. No. I wish... things would
hurry up and work out. I wish...
(Sighs)
Why's it matter anyway.

She turns and stalks off towards her block.

As she's tapping in the entrance code there's a loud PUFF and MAGGIE (50s, kindly, red-cheeked) appears out of nowhere. She stands next to the tree in a fluffy hat and a long overcoat.

She watches Henrietta as she disappears into the building.

MAGGIE

(Thoughtfully)
Oh, Henrietta McCloud, what are we
going to do with you?

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. MALKOVICH MARKETING - MORNING

It's 7 am and the city is waking up to a snowy morning. Malkovich Marketing is a high-rise skyscraper with a classical ad agency vibe.

Even though it's early a steady stream of workers make their way through the revolving doors and into the foyer.

A taxi pulls up and Henrietta jumps out.

HENRIETTA

(Into her phone)
... yes, Mrs Jimenez. You'll have
it right away - I'm at the office
now, thank you.

She hangs up. The phone immediately rings again.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Henrietta McCloud.

(beat)

Mum? Hi. Home for Christmas? Oh no, not this year... I haven't got time to get my hair cut, let alone fly back to Seattle for a few days. I'm sorry, mum - I'll have more time next year, promise...

Maggie appears out of nowhere and watches Henrietta head into the building.

Once she's out of sight Maggie lifts up a hand and clicks her fingers - making a mysterious twinkling sound.

The snow around her glows for a couple of seconds.

She smiles and makes her own way into the building - her casual clothing making a stark contrast to everyone else around her.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRIETTA'S OFFICE - MORNING

Henrietta's office is tidy and well-kept. Pop psychology and marketing titles line the bookcases.

A photo of her and George in happier times sits on a filing cabinet by the door.

She's at her desk, frantically tapping away at her laptop.

The door opens and SADIE (30s, red-haired, bespectacled) comes in with a couple of coffees.

SADIE

You're in early!

HENRIETTA

(Not looking up)

Yeah, so many pitches. Agency land never sleeps at Christmas.

Sadie trots over and sets down one of the coffees. She looks concerned.

SADIE

You look tired. I'm guessing you were also working late?

Henrietta forces herself to stop and looks up at Sadie, trying to be as polite as she can.

HENRIETTA

Well, you know how it is, it's hard to switch off when there's so much to do...

SADIE

No, no I don't know how it is.
(Laughs)
I was tucked up with Netflix and mint choc chip by 8 last night.
(Laughs again)
I guess that's why I'm not Vice President!

HENRIETTA

(Smiles)
Thanks for the coffee, Sadie.

SADIE

Are you sure you're okay? You look really worn out. In a glamorous way of course...

HENRIETTA

It's... oh... it's nothing.

SADIE

You're sure?

Henrietta sighs and looks up from her laptop again.

HENRIETTA

It's George. He... err... we... we broke up last night.

SADIE

(Shocked)
No way! That guy worshipped the ground you walked on.

HENRIETTA

It's complicated. Sorry, Sadie, I've got so much on I can't think straight to talk. Can we do lunch? I should have twenty minutes at 2:15, I can tell you about it then.

SADIE

Sure.

She walks back to the door.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Oh, by the way, Mr. Malkovich wants to see you in his office. He said it was urgent.

HENRIETTA

Urgent? God, everything and everyone is urgent I swear. Why can't he just call me like everyone else?

SADIE

You know what he's like. Old school. Better not keep him waiting.

Sadie leaves.

After a beat, Henrietta closes her laptop and makes her way to the door.

She stops by the filing cabinet and looks at the picture of her and George. She opens one of the drawers and drops it inside.

CUT TO:

INT. MR. MALKOVICH'S OFFICE - MORNING

Big, spacious and full of accolades to celebrate a long advertising career.

MR. MALKOVICH (60, booming voice, snappily-dressed) stands by the window and looks out onto the snowy cityscape. Generic Christmas music plays from an old-fashioned radio on his desk.

There's a knock at the door.

MALKOVICH

Come in!

Henrietta enters coffee in hand.

MALKOVICH (CONT'D)

Henrietta! Just the person I was waiting for.

HENRIETTA

Good morning, Mr. Malkovich.

MALKOVICH

You're in early.

HENRIETTA
Well, you know how it is...

MALKOVICH/HENRIETTA
(At the same time)
Agency land never sleeps at
Christmas!

Malkovich laughs a booming laugh and Henrietta laughs half-heartedly.

HENRIETTA
How can I help, sir?

MALKOVICH
I've got two pieces of news. Would
you rather have the good news
first, or the really good news
first?

HENRIETTA
Either, Mr. Malkovich.

MALKOVICH
Okay, let me introduce you to your
new assistant.

As if on cue, the door opens and Maggie enters. She's now dressed in office attire.

MALKOVICH (CONT'D)
I'd like you to meet...

For a second Malkovich looks confused. Maggie subtly clicks her fingers and we hear a faint twinkling sound.

MALKOVICH (CONT'D)
... Maggie. Your new assistant -
Mary's replacement.

Henrietta is confused.

HENRIETTA
But... I... I haven't even asked
the talent team to put a job ad
live.

MALKOVICH
Yes, well...

He looks puzzled - Maggie clicks her fingers again and, after a quick twinkle, Malkovich snaps himself out of confusion and back into the room.

MALKOVICH (CONT'D)

... Maggie sort of came out of nowhere. She's highly qualified and I think she'll be great.

Maggie leans in and shakes Henrietta's hand.

MAGGIE

Pleased to meet you!

HENRIETTA

Likewise.

MAGGIE

I had a look at your LinkedIn earlier. You've had quite a career already!

HENRIETTA

Thank you. Where have you worked before?

MAGGIE

All over the place. Places you can't even imagine. I've most recently been on assignment in Lapland.

Henrietta tries to square this in her head but Malkovich cuts in.

MALKOVICH

Maggie is only one part of the good news double bill. Have I ever told you about Operation Malkovich in the Community?

HENRIETTA

I don't believe you have, Mr. Malkovich.

MALKOVICH

It's a new initiative. New as of last night. Born thanks to the dream combo of whiskey soda and a hot tub. I want everyone at senior executive level to be involved.

HENRIETTA

Okay, what is it?

MALKOVICH

It's Christmas and, as you know, many of our clients are still operating brick & mortar stores. Which, in this digital age, need all the help they can get.

HENRIETTA

Right...

MALKOVICH

So it got me thinking. We have a lot of talented middleweight staff who can run our accounts. So why not send our greatest minds out into the field to improve our clients' retail numbers in real time?

HENRIETTA

I'm not sure I'm following, Mr. Malkovich?

MALKOVICH

I'm sending out my top staff to help our retail clients in person. Like consultants to help their businesses make the most profit in the busy time of the year.

HENRIETTA

What?

MALKOVICH

I've a perfect place for you. Our client, Bird Family Wines, is based in a beautiful little town called Robin Hills. It's a holiday home for the rich so it'll be easy to get some extra sales. Especially with that business brain of yours.

HENRIETTA

Robin Hills? A wine shop? What!?

MALKOVICH

It's in Colorado. It's beautiful. You're going to love it.

HENRIETTA

I've never even heard of it.

MALKOVICH

When I opened Malkovich Marketing they were one of our first digital clients - so I've got a soft spot.

HENRIETTA

Can't I do it via Zoom? I have reports to do and pitches to win. I can't just fly out to Colorado.

MALKOVICH

The whole exercise is about you helping and being there in person. Surely you can trust your team to cover while you're away?

HENRIETTA

Well... yeah, of course.

MALKOVICH

Great. How quickly can you pack a bag? Your flight leaves JFK at 1 - Maggie has already sorted it. Isn't she great?

(beat)

You're going to love it, Henrietta, and your team can reach you on your cell if there are any issues.

(Notices that Henrietta isn't impressed)

Needless to say, when I come to name my successor I'll want someone who has experience in the field as well as the boardroom.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Henrietta and Maggie are in the elevator. Henrietta is ready to explode.

HENRIETTA

A flight at 1!

(To Maggie)

Where do you live? Do you even have time to pack a bag?

MAGGIE

Don't worry about me. I won't be on your flight. I have my own way of getting places - I'll be there when you get there.

HENRIETTA

This is ridiculous. I'm not going.
I can't...

MAGGIE

(Wisely)
Henrietta. I think this will be
great for you.

HENRIETTA

I don't. I'm not going, I'm gonna
go back up and tell Mr.
Malkovich...

Henrietta goes to press another button on the lift. Maggie
lightly clicks her fingers and, as ever, there's a faint
twinkle.

MAGGIE

I really think you should give it a
try, Henrietta. Who knows, you
might even get some time to
yourself.

A submissive, dazed look sweeps across Henrietta's face.

HENRIETTA

I... maybe you're right. If Mr.
Malkovich thinks it's a good idea,
I should give it a try.

Henrietta shakes her head as if to clear it and, with a sigh,
commits to her fate.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SMALL AIRFIELD - AFTERNOON

It's mid-afternoon and we're in the heart of the country.
Snow trickles across an abundance of winding roads and steep
hills.

The airfield is a striking contrast to JFK airport.

Henrietta stands in a parking lot by the front of the main
building. There isn't a soul in sight. Surprise, surprise,
she's on her phone.

HENRIETTA

Hello?

MAGGIE (V.O.)

(Phone)

Henrietta! How was your flight?

HENRIETTA

As good as economy-class can be.
I'm at the Robin County airport.
Uber doesn't work here and I can't
see any cabs...

MAGGIE (V.O.)

(Phone)

Welcome to small-town America.

HENRIETTA

(Unimpressed)

Thank you. Now, how do I get there?

MAGGIE (V.O.)

(Phone)

Don't worry. Your ride should be
there any minute now.

A bus trundles into view and hooks a right into the parking lot. It stops a few yards away from Henrietta.

A paper sign tacked to the windshield reads: "Robin Hills".

HENRIETTA

Ah. I can see it.

MAGGIE (V.O.)

(Phone)

Great! I'll see you in an hour or
so.

CUT TO:

I/E. COACH - MONTAGE

A quick-fire montage as the bus travels through the countryside. It's a far cry from the cityscapes and shapes Henrietta's used to.

The old man sitting next to her drifts off with his head on her shoulder. She scowls.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS - AFTERNOON

An establishing shot of the picture postcard township of Robin Hills.

It's all decked up for Christmas. A happy mix of tourists and locals go about their daily business in the streets.

A sign reads: *'Welcome to Robin Hills - Home of the famous Robin Hills Christmas Market'*

The bus arrives and stops by the sign. Henrietta and the other passengers exit and wait for the driver to wrestle their luggage out from under the bus.

Maggie scoots over to her.

MAGGIE

Welcome to Robin Hills! Isn't it beautiful? It was voted America's second-best festive destination just last year.

Henrietta, who was about to check her phone, stops and looks around.

HENRIETTA

It's pretty but cell reception is poor. Hang on... how did you get here before me?

MAGGIE

(With a smile)
I teleported.

This catches Henrietta off guard and she laughs. It's the first time we've heard her genuinely laugh. It leaves us wanting more.

Maggie doesn't laugh. Maybe she's not joking.

HENRIETTA

Take me with you next time!

The driver holds out Henrietta's bag - as she grabs it she loses her footing on the icy sidewalk.

The driver reaches a hand out to steady her but it's too late - she's already slipping and sliding across the road.

She fights to keep upright. She's about to CRASH to the ground when someone catches her.

Alarmed but secure, she looks up at:

LIONEL (mid-thirties, handsome in an everyman kinda way, dressed in a check shirt and jeans).

LIONEL
Careful. They don't salt these streets like they do in the city.

PULL BACK TO:

INT. ROBIN HILLS - CONTINUOUS

Henrietta frees herself from Lionel's grip and proudly stands upright. Her bag falls on its side and skids over to where he's standing.

He picks it up with ease.

HENRIETTA
How do you know I'm from the city?

LIONEL
I just know. I'm clever like that.

She snatches her bag off him.

LIONEL (CONT'D)
Also, city people never have any manners. A country guy or gal would have thanked me for saving their neck.

HENRIETTA
You didn't save my neck! I did gymnastics as a girl. I was about to steady myself.

LIONEL
Did you do acting classes as well?
'Cos you sure convinced me otherwise.

Lionel and Maggie laugh.

HENRIETTA
Hilarious.

LIONEL
Do you need a hand with your bag?

HENRIETTA
No, I'm fine thanks. I can carry my own bag.

LIONEL

Well, in that case, have a nice
day...
(As he walks off)
City folk!

Henrietta scowls at his retreating form.

HENRIETTA

What a pig!

Before she can say anything more her phone rings.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

(To phone)
Mr. Syed. Busy? No, not at all!
Yes, we sent the deck over this
morning... oh, you didn't get it?
Have you checked your email? Yes...
the app with the envelope on it.

CUT TO:

EXT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - MOMENTS LATER

A quaint, traditional wine store on one of Robin Hills' main
high streets.

Like everything else in town, it's decorated for the festive
season. A sign reads: *'Run by the Bird family before, during
and after prohibition!'*

Lionel enters, carrying a bag of food.

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - CONTINUOUS

It's cosy but cluttered. The walls are lined with old
newspaper clippings and photos of the bird family.

Lionel's father, DOUG (70s, smiley, walks with a stick) leans
against the counter with a calculator and some paper.

LIONEL

Lunch is served.

DOUG

A late lunch!

LIONEL

There were queues everywhere. It's
busy season.

DOUG
It's not looking good, Lionel.

LIONEL
What isn't?

DOUG
The numbers. We're down again.

LIONEL
It's Christmas. The market's
opening soon. Things will pick up.

DOUG
You say that every year.

LIONEL
Come on, dad, you've got to
believe.

DOUG
One day this will all be yours, and
I won't be around to help. I need
you to take some interest in the
books.

Before he can answer the door opens and a CUSTOMER enters.

Lionel sets the food down and heads over to the customer.

We see a different side of him now. All business and very
passionate about wine.

LIONEL
Hey! Welcome to Bird's Wines - how
can I help?

CUSTOMER
I'm making some meatloaf so I need
something that'll go with that. But
it can't be too heavy. Heavy reds
give my girlfriend a headache.

LIONEL
Okay. No problem. We've got some
Merlot that should do the trick...

As Lionel shows a bottle to the customer we notice a more
modern-looking photo that stands out amongst some of the
older ones.

It shows Lionel, a 2-year old girl and a pretty red-haired lady.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS - AFTERNOON

Maggie and Henrietta walk through the streets.

HENRIETTA

Wow. They might as well call it Christmas Hills. I've never seen so many decorations.

MAGGIE

Not even when you were a kid?

Henrietta falters for a second.

HENRIETTA

Maybe when I was really young. My grandma lived in a little town like this. There was Christmas stuff everywhere.

MAGGIE

New York is always lit up for Christmas.

HENRIETTA

That's a different kind of decoration. That's big and bright. This is heartfelt.

They cross the road and end up on the same street as the Bird Family Wine store.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

(Sees the store)

This is it? It's small...

MAGGIE

But what a location! With your sales and marketing know-how, they'll clean up this Christmas.

HENRIETTA

This is ridiculous. We have so many big clients. This must be our smallest.

MAGGIE

As Mr. Malkovich said this was one of his first accounts so he's very loyal.

CUT TO:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - AFTERNOON

Lionel wraps the customer's chosen bottle in some foil.

LIONEL

You're going to love it. And, because it's organic, your girlfriend won't get a headache.

CUSTOMER

Does that mean it's sulphite free?

Lionel can't quite stop himself from rolling his eyes.

LIONEL

No. No, it doesn't.
(Catches himself)
Sorry, it's nearly impossible to cut sulphites out of wine. There are more sulphites in a side of fries than a bottle of wine - and I'm sure your girlfriend has had plenty of those before.
(Off Customer's look)
Err... I didn't mean anything by that. Just that most people like fries.

CUSTOMER

Thanks, have a nice day.

The Customer scoops up the bottle and exits.

DOUG

It's nearly three o'clock, Lionel.

LIONEL

And?

Something clicks.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

Oh, Katie! Can you watch the shop while I pick her up?

DOUG

Of course. But when you're back we need to talk about these accounts, I might have a solution...

LIONEL

Okay.

He grabs his coat and hurries out the door. Doug shakes his head and takes another look at his papers.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS ELEMENTARY - DAY

Parents wait outside to collect their little terrors.

The school sits on the edge of town and, like every other building we've seen, it's decked from top to tail in Christmas decorations.

The bell rings. A horde of children pour out of the main building and converge upon their expectant parents.

Among them is KATIE (10, red-haired, freckles, full of beans) - she spots Lionel and gives him a hug.

KATIE

Dad!

LIONEL

How was your day, honeybug?

KATIE

I've got the best news.

LIONEL

The best news EVER?

KATIE

Yes!

LIONEL

That's quite a claim, let's hear it...

Before Katie can say anything MRS. GRIFFIN (60s, hair pulled back into a tight bun, prim & proper) glides over to them.

MRS. GRIFFIN

Mr. Bird. How are you this afternoon?

LIONEL

(Mock formal)

Mrs. Griffin. I'm jolly good this afternoon, how are you?

MRS. GRIFFIN

(Doesn't appreciate the humour)
I'm well, thank you. I wanted to tell you how proud I am of Katie.

LIONEL

Oh, well thank you, I'm always proud of Katie. What's got you singing her praises today?

MRS. GRIFFIN

As you know, every year a pupil gets to perform a solo at the Robin Hills Christmas concert and this year...

KATIE

(Can't contain herself)
It's me, dad! This year it's me!

Lionel beams with pride.

LIONEL

That's amazing, honeybug! What's the song?

MRS. GRIFFIN

It's a popular music track, not exactly my taste. But many people like it.

KATIE

Jingle Bell Rock.
(Beat)
Wasn't that mum's favourite?

LIONEL

(Smiles)

It was. This is great, honeybug, I'm so proud of you! We'll dine on banoffee pie tonight to celebrate.

MRS. GRIFFIN

Need I say, Mr. Bird, this is a real honour and, on the day, I hope Katie will give her best performance.

LIONEL

I have no doubt she will.

Lionel puts his arm around Katie and leads her away.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

Mrs. Griffin is a bit of a sourpuss
isn't she?

MRS. GRIFFIN

(Closer than expected)
What was that, Mr. Bird?

Lionel and Katie both laugh.

LIONEL

Nothing, Mrs. Griffin, have a great
day!

KATIE

Was she really your teacher as
well?

LIONEL

She was. I'm so proud of you,
honeybug. Only the best singer in
the whole school gets to do the
Christmas solo - it's been the same
since I was your age!

KATIE

I know, dad. Can I tell you a
secret?

LIONEL

Of course. Your secret is my
secret. Where's the dead body...?

KATIE

Dead body?

LIONEL

Adult joke, honeybug, what is it?

KATIE

I'm nervous, dad. There's gonna be
a lot of people there.

LIONEL

I know. But I've heard you sing.
You're even good when you sing in
the shower! You got this.

KATIE
Will you help me get better?
Please!

LIONEL
I'll try me best.

KATIE
Will you sing too, dad?

LIONEL
Definitely not.

KATIE
Please?

LIONEL
You'll soon know that song like the
back of your hand and you won't
need me to sing.

KATIE
(Looks at the back of her hand
quizzically)
I hope so, dad.

CUT TO:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - DAY

As Doug scratches down some notes on a pad the door swings
open.

He looks up to see Henrietta and Maggie.

HENRIETTA
(Quietly to Maggie)
It's quaint but cluttered.

DOUG
You'll have to speak up, my dear.
My hearing ain't so good. Welcome
to Bird Family Wines, what's your
tippie today?

MAGGIE
We're from Malkovich Marketing.

DOUG

I'll be damned. You guys were quick! You've arrived at the right time. Lionel's out. He's my boy.

(Beat)

He doesn't take too kindly to outside help at times. I'm glad I caught you before you met him. He may take a bit of convincing.

HENRIETTA

That's fine. I can negotiate with the best of them.

(Offers hand)

I'm Henrietta McCloud. VP of Marketing.

DOUG

(Shakes)

How do ya do, Henrietta? I'm Doug Bird.

MAGGIE

(Shakes his hand too)

And I'm Maggie.

(He's expecting a last name)

Err... Mistletoe. Maggie Mistletoe.

DOUG

Charmed. Well now, I guess our little shop is a far cry from some of your usual clients?

HENRIETTA

(Looking around)

You can say that again.

(Catches herself)

But it's lovely! I'm sure I can help.

DOUG

Say, how is Mr. Malkovich doing? My brother worked with him many moons ago. So when we wanted to get on... what is it you call it? Google? Mr. Malkovich cut us a deal, helped us set it up, and keep it running.

HENRIETTA

He's good. He was singing Robin Hills' praises.

Henrietta takes another look around the shop - mind whirring already.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

How are sales looking?

Doug takes a deep breath.

DOUG

We're lucky because we own the building - but it still ain't cheap to run. Especially the cost of keeping the wines at the right temperature. Considering the number of potential customers in Robin Hills, we're not making the sales we should.

(Trying to sound chipper)

Still. It's Christmas. Robin Hills comes alive at Christmas. Or so my son keeps telling me. Did you see the signs for the Christmas Market?

HENRIETTA

We did.

DOUG

We're proud to support it. We always have a stall there and I'm convinced this will be the year it picks up. We could do more with our marketing but my son, well, he's pretty protective of the way we do things. It's almost like he's the old-timer around here...

As if on cue Lionel enters with Katie.

DOUG (CONT'D)

And, as if by magic, here he is.

Katie is in the middle of singing to herself.

KATIE

(Slightly off-tune)

... having a happy holiday...

She suddenly notices everyone else and blushes.

LIONEL

Welcome to Bird Family Wines.

(Nods to Doug)

Has my glamorous assistant been able to help?

Lionel clocks Henrietta.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

Ah! We've met.

HENRIETTA

(Grimaces)

I think we have.

LIONEL

I bet I know exactly why you're here.

HENRIETTA

I'll be impressed if you do.

LIONEL

You're after some sour grapes, right?

Lionel laughs.

KATIE

Be nice, dad!

DOUG

Lionel. Let me explain.

DISSOLVE OUT:

DISSOLVE IN:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - MOMENTS LATER

Doug, Henrietta and Maggie have just explained the situation to a shocked Lionel. Katie sits in the corner sipping on a juice box.

LIONEL

You've flown all the way from New York City to tell us how to run our business?

HENRIETTA

That's one way to describe it.

LIONEL

How else would you describe it?

HENRIETTA

I'd be a little more positive.
(beat)

So how about: our boss has kindly sent us here. For free. To give you some extra help over the holidays.

LIONEL

Extra help! Our wine sells itself.
We don't need some Marketing VP to
help with that.

HENRIETTA

From what I've heard, your wine
hasn't been selling itself...

LIONEL

What!

(To Doug)

Dad, I leave you for ten minutes
and you tell some stranger off the
street about our business - what
gives?

DOUG

Lionel! Could you cool off for a
second? Mr. Malkovich is her boss.
Do you remember him from when you
were a nipper? He helped me set up
our website and get us advertising
on the Google. If he's sent
Henrietta to help us I think we
should be open to it.

LIONEL

I get it. Robin Hills is a pretty
place to spend Christmas. No doubt
you talked your boss into this to
get a free Christmas holiday. There
are plenty of shops here you could
help...

HENRIETTA

I can assure you this isn't my idea
of Christmas bliss...

By this point, Doug and Katie have their heads in their
hands. Maggie rolls her eyes and subtly clicks her fingers -
as ever we hear that mysterious twinkle.

LIONEL

(Dazed for a second)

Well as you're here I suppose you
can help.

HENRIETTA

(Dazed for a second)

I'd be happy to help.

The two hold eye contact for just a second longer than
normal.

LIONEL

Right. Okay.

HENRIETTA

Okay then.

KATIE

Grandad! Grandad! Now that dad and the pretty lady have stopped squabbling, can I tell you something important?

DOUG

Of course, sweetheart.
(Shoots Lionel a look)
It'd be nice to hear a mature member of the Bird family speak!

KATIE

It's good news but it's scary news. Guess who Mrs. Griffin has chosen to sing the final song at the Christmas Market concert?

DOUG

(Playfully)
Hmmm... let me think. Nat King Cole?

KATIE

No, silly. Me! Katherine Frances Bird! But it's scary! I have to know all the words like the back of my hand - by next week Friday.

DOUG

I best get you home so you can cosy up with some cocoa and practice.

An awkward beat passes.

LIONEL

We're not far off closing time. Why don't you go get some beauty sleep and come and start consulting tomorrow?

HENRIETTA

Fine by me.

LIONEL

Does 10:30 work for you?

HENRIETTA

What kind of store opens at 10:30?

LIONEL

I don't know. We open at 9, but we'll have deliveries to put away and I don't want any passengers around.

HENRIETTA

Fine. 10:30 it is.

MAGGIE

Let me show you your Air B n B.

Henrietta is about to go - but stops herself.

HENRIETTA

Sorry the curiosity is killing me.
(Turns to Katie)
What are you going to sing?

KATIE

Jingle Bell Rock!

HENRIETTA

What a classic. There aren't too many big words in the lyrics, so maybe your dad can help you learn it!

Katie laughs. Lionel rolls his eyes. Maggie and Henrietta turn to leave.

MAGGIE

Couldn't resist, could you?

HENRIETTA

When inspiration strikes.

CUT TO:

EXT. HENRIETTA'S DIGS - EVENING

Evening falls on Robin Hills as a flutter of snow dusts a cosy house in the heart of the town.

INT. HENRIETTA'S DIG - EVENING

The open-plan living room and kitchen space are tastefully decorated for Christmas. The TV plays a cheesy Christmas flick in the background.

An activewear-clad Henrietta pours herself a glass of red from a bottle on the breakfast bar. Next to the bottle is a book - *'All you need to know about wine'* - a bookmark shows she's already a quarter of the way in.

She opens the back door and steps out into the garden.

EXT. GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

The garden has a lush view of the town. It's like a living, breathing seasonal greetings card.

Henrietta drinks in the wine and the scenery. For once she looks relaxed.

She fishes her phone out of her pocket and opens up her contacts. Scrolls through until she finds 'GEORGE'.

After some hesitation, she bites the bullet and calls him. Within a few rings 'CALL REJECTED' flashes up. Her breath mists the air as she sighs.

HENRIETTA

I knew structured dating wasn't a good suggestion.

Her phone rings. She nearly drops it in her excitement to see who it is. It's Mrs. Zimmermann.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

(Answering after another sigh)
Hello Mrs. Zimmermann. No one's sent you the analysis yet? Oh, let me see...

She turns her back on the moonlit night and retreats into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. LIONEL'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Lionel sits on the sofa and watches as Katie practices Jingle Bell Rock.

A piano stands in the corner of the room with a sheet over it - it clearly hasn't been used in a while. A wedding picture of Lionel and SALLY (Katie's mum) sits on top.

KATIE
(Singing; slightly nervous)
Later we'll have some figgy pie and
do some yodelling...

Lionel holds up a hand to stop her.

LIONEL
Great, honeybug, great. BUT it's
pumpkin pie and caroling.

Katie stamps her foot.

KATIE
Ohhhh! Just as I thought I'd got
it.

LIONEL
Don't worry, we've got a week to
nail this. But you need your beauty
sleep right now - it's way past
your bedtime.

KATIE
One more time, dad? Please!

LIONEL
One more time. On the count of 3.
1...2...3. Go!

Katie dramatically clears her throat and begins again.

KATIE
Rockin' around the Christmas tree.
With a Christmas party hat...

LIONEL
Honeybug! It's Christmas party hop.

KATIE
No, it isn't!

LIONEL
It is.

KATIE
But that doesn't even make sense.

LIONEL

You find me a Christmas song that makes sense and I'll give you five dollars.

KATIE

Oh, dad. Do you know what would help?

LIONEL

Practice. Lots of practice. Practice makes perfect.

KATIE

No! Sing it with me! If you sing it with me it would really, really, really help!

Lionel hesitates.

LIONEL

You know I don't like to sing, honeybug.

KATIE

You used to! Granddad says you used to sing really well.

LIONEL

Granddad is being kind.

KATIE

Please sing it with me!

LIONEL

Maybe tomorrow. Right now you need to go brush your teeth - you've got school tomorrow.

Katie huffs and hurries out of the room. Lionel looks at the piano and bites his bottom lip.

Doug walks in and regards him sternly.

DOUG

It wouldn't hurt you to sing with her, Lionel. You're at home. It's not the same as singing to a crowd.

LIONEL

I know, dad. I just can't. It's too much.

Doug walks to the mantelpiece and picks up a framed photo. It shows Lionel and Sally on stage in front of a small crowd.

DOUG

Sally would want you to. It was always your favourite thing, just because she isn't here to sing with you anymore doesn't mean you can't.

LIONEL

It's not as simple as that. It brings me the opposite of joy after what happened.

Doug walks over and puts his arm around Lionel's shoulder.

DOUG

It's up to you, son, but hearing and seeing you sing used to be one of my favourite things in this life. It was one of your mother's too.

LIONEL

Thanks, dad. I don't think my singing along will help, anyway. Practice is what'll get her through.

DOUG

I'm sorry, by the way.

LIONEL

For what?

DOUG

The Malkovich Marketing people coming by. I should have told you, but I knew how you'd react.

LIONEL

It's okay, dad, you had the best intentions. I just think we've got this. We don't need some city-type coming in and telling us what to do.

DOUG

This business might be Katie's livelihood one day. Not just ours. We need to get it to a good place. I hope you'll keep that in mind tomorrow when Henrietta starts helping.

LIONEL

This Christmas is our Christmas.
You'll see.

DOUG

I wish I had your confidence.

With that he heads out, leaving Lionel all alone. He looks at the photo of him and Sally singing, before gazing wistfully at the piano.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HENRIETTA'S AIRBNB - MORNING

Henrietta is wrapped up as snug as a bug in a rug. A digital clock on the bedside table changes from 5:59 to 6:00 - a shrill alarm blares and she wakes up with a start.

The wine book sits next to the clock, the bookmark shows us she's now halfway through.

HENRIETTA

(Groggily)
I had a dream I was...
(Notices surroundings)
... ah, not a dream...
(Thoughtfully)
Hmmm... dream or nightmare?

She pulls herself out of bed and opens the curtains - the snowy town looks beautiful outside.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Maybe not a nightmare, after all.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS - MORNING

Henrietta, clad in a fashionable tracksuit, runs through the snowy streets. Music blasting in her ears.

She takes a right and ends up on the same street as the Bird Wine Store. With its lights off it's hard to notice it.

She stops outside and looks at it thoughtfully.

HENRIETTA

(To self)
Unless I was really looking for you
I'd never see you.

She jogs a little further down the road and stops outside a Liquor Store. Even though it's not open yet there's a big sign outside and posters line the windows.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Well, that's the easiest competitor research I've ever had to do.

She runs a little further and nearly bumps into MR. FORSHAW (50s, steely hair, moustache).

MR. FORSHAW

Good morning!

HENRIETTA

(Pulling headphones out)
Morning!

MR. FORSHAW

Nice to see another early riser about! The folks in this town sure do like their sleep. I like to get to work as soon as possible so I can get my odd jobs done before the rest of the world wakes up.

HENRIETTA

I'm with you on that. Early bird and the worm, right?

MR. FORSHAW

Exactly.

HENRIETTA

Which store is yours?

Mr. Forshaw proudly points to 'FORSHAW'S PRINTERS'. A sign in the window tells us they do everything from posters to sandwich boards to full-length manuscripts.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

A printers? Interesting.

MR. FORSHAW

Yes, ma'am. The only one in town. Truth be told, the only one for about seventy miles.

HENRIETTA

When will you be open and ready for an order?

MR. FORSHAW

If you give me thirty minutes I'll be ready to go.

HENRIETTA

Okay. I have an idea. Let me finish my run and I'll be back. I'll need some A2 posters, some A4 flyers and some A5 cards.

MR. FORSHAW

You won't be disappointed.

Henrietta nods, pops her headphones back in, and continues her run. From her expression, we can tell she's in the process of hatching a cunning plan.

CUT TO:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - MORNING

An hour or so has passed. Doug stacks the shelves from some freshly delivered crates.

Henrietta opens the door and peers in.

HENRIETTA

Morning, Mr. Bird.

DOUG

Henrietta! What a ray of sunshine you are this morning.
(Checks the clock)
It ain't even nine. You're a little early?

HENRIETTA

The early bird gets the worm.
(Looks around slyly)
Is Lionel in?

DOUG

He's walking Katie to school.

HENRIETTA

I've had an brainwave. I think you'll like it, but I'm not sure he will.

DOUG

(Smiles mischievously)
You can count me in, then!

(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)

We've got about twenty minutes
before he's back. What needs to
happen?

HENRIETTA

Okay, so...

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS ELEMENTARY - MORNING

A throng of parents and children, decked out in woolly winter warmers, make their way towards the school. Lionel and Katie walk among them.

Lionel kisses Katie goodbye before watching her scurry into the school building with the other kids.

He's about to head off when Mrs. Griffin comes trotting over.

MRS. GRIFFIN

Mr. Bird, how are you this morning?

LIONEL

I'm good, Mrs. Griffin, how about you?

MRS. GRIFFIN

Very well, thank you. I'm looking forward to your famous mulled wine at this year's market.

LIONEL

Glad to hear it.

Lionel turns to go.

MRS. GRIFFIN

Mr. Bird. Just before you go - there was something I want to run by you.

LIONEL

You finally worked out I used to copy from Harry Gregman in fourth grade?

MRS. GRIFFIN

No.
(Scowls)
Did you?

LIONEL

Well as you'll see from my marks it was the blind leading the blind.

MRS. GRIFFIN

How's Katie getting on with her practice?

LIONEL

Good, but we've only had an evening of it.

MRS. GRIFFIN

When she performs we've asked Mr. Cook, the music teacher, to play piano...

LIONEL

(Sees where this is going)
Right...

MRS. GRIFFIN

You're a fantastic pianist, Mr. Bird. But, I'm aware that you don't play these days...

LIONEL

I haven't since Sally...

MRS. GRIFFIN

(Warmer than usual)
I know, I know. I just wanted to say that, should you wish, you'd be more than welcome to take Mr. Cook's place. Katie would be most appreciative of it, I'm sure.

LIONEL

Thank you for letting me know. But I think Mr. Cook has this covered.

Mrs. Griffin nods and Lionel turns to go. She looks as if she might say something else for a second, but catches herself and heads back into the school.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS - MORNING

Lionel walks through the main high street - carrying a couple of coffees and a bag of breakfast.

The town is wide awake and busy. In the middle of the street a young guy and girl, dressed as elves, hand out flyers.

The ELF GIRL offers Lionel a flyer.

ELF GIRL
Morning, sir. Will you be drinking wine this Christmas?

LIONEL
(Laughs)
I've been known to dabble.

ELF GIRL
Well! You should head down to Bird Family Wines on Bridge Street. If you tell them what you're cooking they'll give you the perfect pairing for it.

LIONEL
Okay...
(Dawns on him)
Hang on! Bird Family Wines? What? That's my store!

ELF GIRL
You own a wine store? That's like my dream!

LIONEL
Who gave you these?

ELF GIRL
A pretty blonde lady asked my brother and I if we fancied a bit of work. We're back from college for the holidays.

Lionel shakes his head.

LIONEL
Thank you.

He storms off.

ELF GIRL
Scrooge is alive and well and living in Robin Hills.

LIONEL
I heard that!

CUT TO:

EXT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - MOMENTS LATER

Lionel rounds the corner by the store and stops in his tracks.

A group of excited customers wait in line outside.

Doug, dressed in a loud Christmas jumper, hands out chocolates and chats to customers.

LIONEL

Dad! Have you finally gone senile?
What's all this?

DOUG

(To customers)
And here he is! For those of you
new to Bird Family Wines, here is
my son, our resident wine guru -
Lionel Bird.

Customers start waving and saying hello to Lionel.

LIONEL

(Embarrassed)
Morning, everyone.

A SMILEY LADY holds up one of the flyers.

SMILEY LADY

So, even if we're having something
a little different for Christmas
dinner you'll find the right wine
for it?

An ELDERLY CUSTOMER pipes up.

ELDERLY CUSTOMER

What about our New Year's Day
dinner? My wife and I are partial
to a nice side of salmon.

Henrietta comes outside and startles Lionel by also piping up. She's enjoying his embarrassment.

HENRIETTA

He can most definitely help with
both! He'll even find you a wine to
go with your cold turkey sandwiches
on Boxing Day.

Like Doug she's wearing a loud Christmas top. She has another one in her hands.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

But, before he can, we need to get him in the Bird Family Wine festive uniform.

She hands him the jumper.

LIONEL

Well... I... err... I didn't know there was a Christmas uniform.

HENRIETTA

(To the customers)

You'd prefer your recommendations coming from someone who looks the part, right?

The customers agree. Lionel accepts his fate and, after handing the coffees to Henrietta, slips his jumper on. The customers clap.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

It suits you.

CUT TO:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - DAY

Maggie helps a customer in the background. While an astonished Lionel addresses Doug and Henrietta.

LIONEL

What's going on now? I take 40 minutes out to get Katie to school and I come back to flyers being handed out in the streets.

HENRIETTA

When was the last time you had that many customers at 10 am?

DOUG

When was the last time we had that many customers ever?

LIONEL

That's not the point. We're not in some city rat race. This isn't how we do things in Robin Hills. People come here to relax they don't want to be bombarded with flyers. We're a traditional wine store - it cheapens us.

DOUG

Lionel! I swear I'm supposed to be the grumpy 72-year-old around here, not you. None of those customers are complaining about the flyers - if anything, they're happy.

HENRIETTA

Is his middle name Ebenezer by any chance?

LIONEL

Hilarious.

Henrietta picks up some cards from the counter.

HENRIETTA

I've had these printed up for us. I used my company card too - so no extra cost to you.

LIONEL

Fancy recommendation cards? We're a traditional wine store...

HENRIETTA

And what could be more traditional than handwriting a customer's recommended pairings down for them? I swear you're being difficult for the sake of it.

LIONEL

I swear you're only here to make things difficult.

Maggie looks up from wrapping a bottle and clicks her fingers with a twinkle.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

(Glazes over slightly)
Okay. Okay. Fine. We've got customers out there. How's your wine knowledge? Dad and I are gonna be stretched...

HENRIETTA

I've been reading up. I could sell snow to Eskimos, so wine to people who want it should be easy.

LIONEL

Okay.

(To Doug)

Let's get that queue moving! We can discuss this later.

CUT TO:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - LATER

Everyone works their socks off to help a steady stream of customers.

Doug is at the till processing orders, Maggie wraps bottles next to him while Henrietta and Lionel write out their recommendations.

LIONEL

(To some customers)

Lamb and Pinot Noir were made for each other. You're going to love it.

The customers thank Lionel and move over to the till.

Henrietta turns to Lionel and smiles.

HENRIETTA

Surely you must be happy?

LIONEL

Well...

HENRIETTA

Come on! We're helping people AND getting the sales you need to keep the business going.

LIONEL

Okay, okay. I admit it. Today hasn't been too bad.

HENRIETTA

'Hasn't been too bad'. That feels like high praise.

LIONEL

I didn't mean to make you blush.

The two laugh and, for a second, things feel a little warmer between them.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

I do have one question though. And, brace yourself, because this could also be thought of as praise.

Henrietta jokingly leans against one of the shelves for support.

HENRIETTA

Got any shampoo for this compliment shower?

LIONEL

Your wine knowledge is... better.. than I expected. You've made some good recommendations. Is that thanks to choosing the wine at corporate lunches?

HENRIETTA

Something like that. My dad used to travel a lot for work and would often bring my mum a bottle back. I used to love reading the labels as a kid.

LIONEL

You were a kid once? I assumed you popped out fully dressed and ready for the boardroom.

HENRIETTA

You'd be wrong. I've been reading up too. Fail to prepare, prepare to fail.

A customer enters - as Lionel heads over to greet them, Henrietta looks at him thoughtfully.

Doug sidles over to her.

DOUG

I can't thank you enough. I'm sure Lionel is grateful too.

HENRIETTA

Do you know what? He very nearly thanked me. It was very close!

DOUG

The Christmas Market kicks off on Monday. As I said before, we've got a stall there.

(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)

If you've got any bright ideas as to how we improve that I'm all ears.

HENRIETTA

I'll get my thinking cap on.

DOUG

Say, what are you doing tomorrow night?

HENRIETTA

Tomorrow night is... Friday, right?

DOUG

Yep.

HENRIETTA

Well, I'll probably have an awful lot of emails and work to catch up on.

DOUG

And, once you've done that?

HENRIETTA

It could take all night...

DOUG

Could is the key word, there. Every Christmas, at around this time, we have a gathering at ours. Just a few faces from town, a bit of wine, and a roaring fire. We'd love to have you there.

(Proud)

She's only 10 but Katie makes some mean Christmas cupcakes. She'd be devastated if you left Robin Hills without trying them.

HENRIETTA

I honestly think I'll be a bit too busy to swing by...

A twinkle as Maggie clicks her fingers.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

... But I could probably make time. As long as the cupcakes are as good as you say.

DOUG

Scout's honour! Maggie, you'll come along too, won't you?

MAGGIE

Well, like Henrietta said, if those cupcakes are as good as you say I won't be able to resist.

DOUG

Let's hope Katie can handle the pressure.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HENRIETTA'S DIGS - EVENING

Henrietta sits at the breakfast bar and taps away at her laptop. Her wine book sits a few inches away, the bookmark tells us she's now three-quarters of the way through.

HENRIETTA

(Phone)

... yes, Mr. Myers. No Mary doesn't work here anymore, my new assistant is Maggie. I think I forwarded you her email? Yes, yep, anyway I'm now about to send you those files. Just hitting send as I speak. There we go. Did you get it? Great. Yes... Merry Christmas to you too.

Henrietta hangs up and exhales in relief.

For a second she's about to consider doing some more work, instead she stops and looks out of the kitchen window at the snowy evening outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - EVENING

Henrietta studies the sleepy landscape. Enjoying a moment of tranquillity.

Her phone buzzes. She fishes it out of her pocket, it's a message from George.

"Hey H. Hope all is well. When are you back in town? I have some of your clothes at my apartment. I want to get them back to you".

HENRIETTA

(To self)
Not even a kiss. Structured dating
really wasn't my best idea.

Her phone begins to ring. It's Mr. Myers.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Just as a girl was starting to feel
lonely...
(Answers)
Hello again, Mr. Myers...

CUT TO:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - MORNING

Henrietta works on a display at the front of the store, Doug
and Lionel chat with customers in the background.

Maggie appears with a coffee and brings it over to Henrietta.

MAGGIE

You look tired.

HENRIETTA

Thanks, Maggie, you look lovely
too.

MAGGIE

Late night?

HENRIETTA

I needed to get some documents over
to the Myers Group and one of the
team made a mistake, so I had to
redo it.

MAGGIE

Nothing good comes from burning the
candle at both ends.

HENRIETTA

I wouldn't be if Mr. Malkovich
hadn't sent me down here.

MAGGIE

This is an opportunity, Henrietta,
you need to realise that.

Maggie glides away, leaving Henrietta to contemplate.

Lionel comes over to join her.

LIONEL

What's this display all about? Or is it just a chance to express yourself with that garish tinsel?

Henrietta laughs.

HENRIETTA

This is our 'bestsellers' display. It's right at the front of the store - so whenever anyone walks in they'll see our best wines right away.

LIONEL

Every wine in the shop should be a bestseller, if not we're picking the wrong wines.

HENRIETTA

Trust me. We'll give advice to the customers who want it, and those who just want to grab something quickly will easily know what's good.

LIONEL

That... almost makes sense.

HENRIETTA

Every day's a school day.

CUT TO:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - LATER

Just like yesterday, it's a busy afternoon in the wine store. Henrietta's bestsellers display is now finished and beautifully decorated.

Doug and Maggie work behind the counter, while Henrietta and Lionel chat with customers. At exactly the same time both sets of customers ask:

CUSTOMERS

What's your favourite wine?

And, in unison, Henrietta and Lionel both say:

HENRIETTA/LIONEL

Californian Zinfandel every time.

They stop sharply and turn to face each other.

LIONEL

You heard me say that before didn't you?

HENRIETTA

I did not!

A beat passes. The Customer Lionel was serving smiles.

CUSTOMER

That's cute. Did you two serve it on your wedding day?

LIONEL

Wedding day? Oh no, no. We're not married. Henrietta works for me.

HENRIETTA

I don't work for him. I'm helping him out.

CUSTOMER

(Looking from one to the other)
When the big day comes that's one thing you'll agree on, at least.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HENRIETTA'S DIGS - EVENING

Henrietta brushes her hair in front of a mirror.

Maggie waits patiently at the kitchen counter.

HENRIETTA

Honestly, Doug is such a sweetheart. If it wasn't for him I think the wine store would have closed a long time ago.
(As he untangles a knot)
But... Lionel? He's so stuck in his ways. He tried to move the bestsellers display twice today.

MAGGIE

We should start making a move.

HENRIETTA

Hang on, I just need some hairspray.

MAGGIE

This is the third time you've done your hair in the last half an hour.

HENRIETTA

I'm having a bad hair day. It happens!

MAGGIE

If I didn't know better I'd think you were trying to impress someone.

Henrietta looks puzzled for a second, then realises.

HENRIETTA

Well, if you thought that you'd be wrong. Unless you mean Katie? She's so sweet.

CUT TO:

INT. LIONEL'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

A festive party is in full swing. Seasonal jingles ring out as the guests mingle.

The familiar faces of Mr. Forshaw and Mrs. Griffin are among the guests.

Katie is walking around with a tray of snacks. Mr. Forshaw takes one.

MR. FORSHAW

I hope your dad is paying you for being such a great waitress?

KATIE

I wish!

MRS. GRIFFIN

How are you getting on with Jingle Bell Rock?

KATIE

(Blushes)
Dad says practice makes perfectt.
So I'm practising.

Lionel appears.

LIONEL
My ears are burning.

Katie uses this as her excuse to leave and heads off to offer snacks to the other guests.

MRS. GRIFFIN
I was just checking in on Katie's practice.

LIONEL
She's doing well.

MRS. GRIFFIN
Have you thought any more about accompanying her on the piano?

Lionel hesitates. Just as he's about to answer the doorbell rings.

LIONEL
I better go get that.

He hurries off.

MR. FORSHAW
Saved by the bell.

INT. LIONEL'S HALL - CONTINUOUS

Lionel opens the door to Henrietta and Maggie.

LIONEL
Welcome to Mi Casa.

His eyes rest on Henrietta for a little longer than they should. Maggie notices and smiles.

HENRIETTA
And there I was thinking you'd live in a cave.

LIONEL
Us country dwellers can have nice pads too. Can I take your coat?

She takes off her winter coat and hands it to him, he can't help but stare - she looks lovely in her dress.

Before he can say anything more Katie appears with a tray of snacks.

KATIE

Hey!

HENRIETTA

Hey, good to see you. How's Jingle Bell Rock going?

KATIE

Ohhh... everyone's asking me that.

LIONEL

It's going. You're just having a few difficulties with getting it to your high standards aren't you, honeybug?

Henrietta looks at Katie thoughtfully.

HENRIETTA

Come and find me before bedtime. I might be able to help.

KATIE

Okay!

Katie hurries off.

LIONEL

How would you help her? Christmas performances and business presentations aren't the same.

HENRIETTA

There's a lot about me you don't know. Now, can a girl get a drink around here or are those bottles just there to look pretty?

LIONEL

Actually, on that note, I might have something you'll like. Find me later...

Lionel heads off.

MAGGIE

He's not so terrible, is he?

HENRIETTA

Not as terrible as I thought. But, then again, I thought he was very, very terrible when I first met him.

Henrietta heads into the house and waves 'hello' to Mr. Forshaw and Doug. Maggie smiles knowingly before following her in.

CUT TO:

INT. LIONEL'S HOUSE - EVENING

A quickfire montage of the party. As snow falls outside it's the kind of seasonal shindig most people would love.

Henrietta lets her hair down and shows her fun side. A couple of times we notice her and Lionel catch eyes. They're not pictured together until:

CUT TO:

INT. LIONEL'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Lionel leads Henrietta into the kitchen. Both a little merry, both a little looser than usual.

HENRIETTA

So, you had something to show me?

LIONEL

I did. Hang on, let me find it...

Lionel opens a pantry cupboard and roots around.

HENRIETTA

Credit where credit's due, you throw a good party.

LIONEL

Us country folk know how to have a good time.

HENRIETTA

What have you got against city people?

LIONEL

Is this the part where you tell me you're actually from the country?

HENRIETTA

Nope. Seattle girl born and bread.

LIONEL

The home of Frasier and... coffee, right?

HENRIETTA

Among many other things, yeah.

LIONEL

I've got nothing against city people, really. We're a tourist town - if it wasn't for them coming here for their holidays we'd be struggling even more. I've just met more than a few know-it-alls in my time and I've had people tell me how to run my business before. I'm not keen on unsolicited advice.

HENRIETTA

I hear you. Just so you know I never intended to be here. It was one of my boss's crazy ideas to send a few of his Execs out to our clients.

Lionel finally pulls a fancy-looking bottle of wine from the cupboard.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

What do we have here?

LIONEL

Here's one thing I think we'll both appreciate.

HENRIETTA

It's a Zinfandel?

LIONEL

You got it. But not just any Zinfandel. Californian, barrel-aged and from the year 2011.

HENRIETTA

2011 is special?

LIONEL

It was one of the best years for Zinfandel, ever.

Lionel takes two glasses out of a cupboard.

HENRIETTA

It's okay I've already got a glass.

LIONEL

You'll need a fresh one. Can't be contaminating this nectar with anything else.

He hands her a glass and, with a little panache, proceeds to open the bottle with a waiter's friend.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

Okay. You know a little bit about wine. But has anyone taught you how to properly taste it?

HENRIETTA

Pour and sip?

LIONEL

There's an art to it.

He pours them a small measure each.

HENRIETTA

Stingy portions? Or are we doing shots?

LIONEL

These are tasting portions. You can have a glass after.

She takes her glass.

LIONEL/HENRIETTA

(Chinking glasses)
Cheers.

HENRIETTA

Now enlighten me, oh wise one.

LIONEL

First, take a sniff, and tell me what you get.

Henrietta sniffs the glass.

HENRIETTA

Grape isn't the right answer, is it?

LIONEL

There's no right answer. But you're better than that.

Henrietta laughs and takes another sniff.

HENRIETTA

Right... hmmm. Blackberries?
Cherries?

LIONEL

Very good. Now for the part you
mentioned, take a sip - but don't
swallow it.

Henrietta sips from her glass. As they're doing this they're
getting closer and closer to one another.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

Hold it in your mouth for a second.

She does.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

See what flavours you get. And,
just before you swallow, breathe
out through your nose. It'll help
your tastebuds get more from it.

Henrietta does as she's told and, as she takes the glass
away, both of them realise how close they are to one another.

A beat passes. There's something there.

The two are a nanosecond away from a kiss when they're
interrupted by:

KATIE

(Hurrying into the room)
Henrietta! Can you still help me
with my song?

They both jump back as if they've been caught doing something
unthinkable. Both blush.

HENRIETTA

Hey, Katie! Of course - as long as
your dad doesn't mind me keeping
you up ten minutes later?

LIONEL

No, of course not.

Henrietta offers a sympathetic smile. Lionel pours a little
more wine into her glass.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

How about that Zinfandel, hey?

HENRIETTA

Yeah. I really felt it.

Katie takes Henrietta by the hand and leads her out of the room.

Lionel sips his wine and looks up at a pair of dishcloths hanging up on a hook. One says 'HIS' and the other says 'HERS'.

He looks guilty.

DOUG (O.S)

It's been a long time, son.

A startled Lionel turns around to see Doug standing in the doorway.

LIONEL

Dad, you were spying on us?

Doug laughs.

DOUG

No. But I'd have to be as dumb as a post not to notice there's something there.

LIONEL

I don't know about that.

He looks back up at the dishcloths - Doug follows his gaze.

DOUG

It really has been a long time, son. If I know Sally she'd want you to move on. Katie's growing up fast, you need more in your life than our silly shop.

LIONEL

Yeah, but you know what tomorrow is.

Doug nods, solemnly.

DOUG

I know.

He puts an arm around Lionel.

DOUG (CONT'D)

(Holds up his glass)
 Anyway, my hearing might not be as good as it once was, but my nose still works fine. If that's a 2011 Zinfandel...

CUT TO:

INT. KATIE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Henrietta sits on the bed as Katie finishes a rendition of Jingle Bell Rock.

It's good but ever-so-slightly out of tune. Katie looks at Henrietta expectantly. She smiles encouragingly.

HENRIETTA

(Claps)
 It was... good!

KATIE

But not amazing? I want it to be amazing! I want it to be really, REALLY amazing!

HENRIETTA

I have a feeling it'll be amazing by next week.

KATIE

Do you have any advice?

HENRIETTA

Hmmmm... can I let you in on a big secret?

KATIE

Yes! Yes! Yes! You can trust me. Scout's honour!

HENRIETTA

Do you know what I wanted to be more than anything when I was your age?

KATIE

A businesswoman?

Henrietta laughs.

HENRIETTA

No! I wasn't boring back then! I wanted to be a singer. More than anything ever.

KATIE

Really?

HENRIETTA

Yes! Back then YouTube wasn't a thing, so I'd record all my favourite artists from MTV...

KATIE

MTV?

HENRIETTA

I'm sure that's still a thing. Music Television. I'd record them and I'd practice all day. I even mowed my neighbours' lawns to get money for lessons.

KATIE

What happened?

HENRIETTA

I... err... well, it's hard to explain. Things just... moved differently to how I thought they would.

KATIE

I want to be a singer more than anything else in the world. My mum was an amazing singer.

HENRIETTA

Does she still sing?

KATIE

No. Not anymore. But she once had a song that was on the radio!

HENRIETTA

Okay. So the chorus is the most important part of any song.

She stands up and begins her own rendition:

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

(Singing perfectly)
Jingle bell, jingle bell, jingle rock.

(MORE)

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Jingle bells chime in jingle bell
time. Dancin' and prancin' in
Jingle Bell Square. In the frosty
aiiiiiiiir...

Katie claps.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Did you hear at the end there?
Where I made the word 'air' sound
really long?

KATIE

Yes! That was so, so, so, so good!

HENRIETTA

I think if you added that to your
version, you'd go from really,
really good to really, really
amazing.

KATIE

I tried to. It's hard.

HENRIETTA

It's easy when you know how. It's
all about your breathing...

CUT TO:

INT. LIONEL'S LANDING - EVENING

Lionel is about to knock on Katie's door. He stops when he
hears the conversation inside.

HENRIETTA (O.S.)

... I won't expect you to spell it.
But it's called the diaphragmatic
breath.

He smiles to himself.

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

Anyway, those are the basics. You
practice and I'll come by next week
for a rendition.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS - NIGHT

It's getting late and the icy streets of Robin Hill are a spellbinding contrast to the starry night sky.

Maggie and Henrietta walk home - both a little merry.

MAGGIE

I don't know if the wine's gone to my head. But you look happy and you look relaxed. This is new.

HENRIETTA

Hey! You've not even known me a week. How can you judge?

MAGGIE

I know you better than you think.

HENRIETTA

It was a nice night. It's nice to go to a party and just enjoy it. Usually I'm running round trying to network.

MAGGIE

Glad you took the assignment?

HENRIETTA

Not sure I had much choice. It's been nice though. I'm gonna call Mr. Malkovich on Monday to see how much longer he wants me out here.

MAGGIE

You're not spending Christmas here?

HENRIETTA

Christmas? Here? No! I'll have so much work to catch up on when I fly back...

MAGGIE

Surely you're not going to work on Christmas Day?

HENRIETTA

Well I might have spent it with George.

(Beat)

He's my ex. We broke up recently. I've got... some friends I can stop by and have a drink with on the day if I get time.

They reach Henrietta's digs.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Anyway, good night! I'll probably be working most of the weekend, but let me know if you need anything.

MAGGIE

Good night, Henrietta.

Henrietta enters her house and Maggie continues down the road a by herself.

She reaches the corner of the street and looks back thoughtfully at Henrietta's digs.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Let's see how you feel in a week.

And, just like that, she disappears into thin air.

Streetlights shine down on the sidewalk, but there's no one around.

CUT TO:

EXT. HENRIETTA'S DIGS - DAY

Henrietta sits at the breakfast bar working on her laptop. She's clad in activewear. A cup of coffee in front of her.

The wine book is also on the counter - the ever-changing bookmark shows she's nearly finished it.

She triumphantly hits the enter key and stretches - back cracking as she does.

She slips on a pair of running shoes and straps up the laces.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS - DAY

Henrietta jogs through the town. As it's a Saturday it's even sleepier than usual. A handful of tourists and locals nod 'hello' as they canter past.

She hooks left and a car horn makes her JUMP out of her skin.

She turns to see a smiling Lionel pull up next to her in a pickup truck.

LIONEL

Good morning! I thought you'd be all wrapped up watching some daytime TV?

HENRIETTA

Thinking isn't your forte is it?

LIONEL

I err... I... well. I just wanted to say thank you.

HENRIETTA

That's my pleasure. I'm sure the sales figures from this week...

LIONEL

Oh no, no! Not for that. I'm talking about helping Katie.

Henrietta looks into the truck and notices a bouquet of flowers on the shotgun seat.

HENRIETTA

Oh, Lionel! You didn't have to.

LIONEL

Have to what?

He looks at the flowers and clocks on.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

Oh no! No, no, sorry those aren't for you.

HENRIETTA

Oh...

An awkward beat passes.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Well... they look lovely.

LIONEL

(More sombre now)
Sorry. I have somewhere I need to be. I'll catch you on Monday.

He drives off - leaving a downtrodden Henrietta standing by herself.

HENRIETTA

Henrietta McCloud. 35 years old and
your heart's fluttering because you
thought a boy got you flowers. Get
a grip.

She jogs on with a new determination.

CUT TO:

INT. LIONEL'S TRUCK - DAY

He drives out of Robin Hills and onto the main road.

LIONEL

Smooth, real smooth.

He looks at the flowers and grimaces.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS - LATER

Henrietta jogs through the town. She reaches a sign that
says: "*You're now leaving Robin Hills - come see us again
soon!*"

She looks at it for a second and continues on - running
alongside the grassy banks that line the road. Her trainers
cut a path through the snow.

She heads up a slope and finds herself running across a
field.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Lionel's truck is parked up on the side of a windy road.

Two ditches line either side of the road and separate it from
the steep, snowy hills that border Robin Hills.

Lionel kneels by the side of the road. He holds the flowers
as he talks to Sally.

A dead, wilted bouquet sits to his right.

LIONEL

... she's shaping up to be a great
singer. You'd be so proud.

(MORE)

LIONEL (CONT'D)

In other news, well, people keep
telling me it's time to move on...

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Henrietta runs until she reaches the edge of the field. She's
been on an incline and is now at the top of a slope.

She pulls her phone out of her pocket and changes the track
she's been listening to.

Just as she's about to pocket it she slips on the ice. For a
second it looks like she'll steady herself, but at the last
moment, she slips again and TOPPLES over the edge of the
slope.

HENRIETTA

AIEEEEE!

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

LIONEL

... I don't know what you'd think
about that. I wish you could send a
sign.

He hears a COMMOTION from above.

Looks up and sees a flailing Henrietta as she TUMBLES OVER
the edge of the bank and lands unceremoniously in the ditch.
Icy water splashes his face.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

You sure do know how to make an
entrance.

He looks back at the bouquet and sighs.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

HENRIETTA

I'm not hurt. But I think my pride
is.

LIONEL

Gymnastics didn't help you that
time either?

HENRIETTA

Hilarious.

She tries to get up but slips again. Lionel laughs.

LIONEL

Okay, let me help you.

He gets to his feet and heads over to get her.

As he does he trips and ends up in the ditch next to her. There's a loud crack as his ankle buckles.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

ARGGGGH!

HENRIETTA

Oh no! Are you okay?

LIONEL

Ahhhh. It's my ankle. It's...
err... an old Little League injury
that never properly healed.

HENRIETTA

Who gets injured playing Little
League?

LIONEL

It's a physical sport. God, that
hurts.

Henrietta adjusts herself and swats some mud and ice out of her hair.

A pained Lionel sits up and stretches out his leg - wincing in agony as he does.

HENRIETTA

Let me have a look at it. I've got
a first aid certificate.

LIONEL

Does it cover damaged ankles on icy
ditches?

HENRIETTA

No - believe it or not the course
isn't quite that granular. But I'm
sure I can improvise.

She pulls up Lionel's trouser leg - his ankle is already swelling up.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
Can you wiggle your toes?

LIONEL
Yep.

HENRIETTA
I think that means it isn't broken.
Shall we see if we can get you up?

He gingerly pulls himself up, using Henrietta as a crutch. He holds his left leg a few inches above the ground.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
(Straining to support him)
Okay. Take a deep breath.

LIONEL
Deep breath? My foot hurts, I'm not
having a panic attack.

HENRIETTA
Let's see if you can put some
weight on it.

Lionel lowers his foot to the ground. For a second it seems like it might be okay, but he pushes too hard and howls in pain.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
I think we should get you to a
doctor. Do you have any phone
signal? Mine seems to only get
reception in town.

LIONEL
I didn't bring mine with me.

HENRIETTA
You came out here on the ice
without your phone? Surely that
goes against survival 101.

LIONEL
It's only a ten-minute drive. I
didn't count on you falling down a
hill. I'm not even going to ask
what you were doing there - spying
on me?

HENRIETTA
Jogging actually. It's popular with
us city folk.

She takes her phone out of her pocket - sure enough it says 'no signal'.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

You seriously don't have your phone on you?

LIONEL

Seriously.

HENRIETTA

What if something happened to Katie?

LIONEL

She's with dad.

HENRIETTA

What if something happened to him?

LIONEL

Okay, we're wading through hypotheticals now. I get your point.

HENRIETTA

Anyway. Let's get you to a doctor.

LIONEL

I should be okay now...

He lowers his foot the ground and ends up howling in pain once again.

HENRIETTA

(Wincing at the howl)
Katie clearly doesn't get her vocals from you.

LIONEL

We're gonna have to drive.

HENRIETTA

Do you think you can drive?

LIONEL

No! You'll have to.

HENRIETTA

I... err... I'm not insured.

LIONEL

It's ten minutes down the road. I know the local cops. We'll be fine.

Henrietta blushes.

HENRIETTA

I can't drive.

LIONEL

What?

HENRIETTA

Well... I had a few lessons. But never finished. I grew up in Seattle and moved to New York right out of college so I never really needed to.

LIONEL

How many lessons did you have?

HENRIETTA

Five. Is it automatic?

LIONEL

Nope.

HENRIETTA

What!? Who drives stick these days?

LIONEL

Me! I like to feel like I'm actually driving the thing.

Henrietta rolls her eyes.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

The way I see it. We've got two options.

HENRIETTA

Go on...

LIONEL

You either use your great acting skills to become a crutch and help me back to town. OR I play driving instructor and give you your sixth lesson.

HENRIETTA

How about I run back to town and get help?

LIONEL

Do you know the way?

HENRIETTA

I think so. Maybe.

LIONEL

I've got things I need to do back at the shop. Come on. It's easy. I can do the gears for you.

HENRIETTA

How far is it?

LIONEL

Four miles. If that.

HENRIETTA

I think it's easier if you wait here.

LIONEL

Nope. Driving is a good skill to learn. You've spent the last few days telling me how to do things, now it's my turn.

HENRIETTA

You're really that petty?

LIONEL

And proud. Now c'mon. Help me into that shotgun seat.

HENRIETTA

You're sure you can't wait here while I run back?

CUT TO:

INT. LIONEL'S TRUCK - DAY

Lionel sits in the passenger's seat and massages his ankle as Henrietta tries drive.

The car kangaroos its way down the road. Lionel jolts forward every time she pushes the accelerator.

HENRIETTA

How am I doing?

LIONEL

We're getting there. Very slowly. In second gear. But, we're getting there.

HENRIETTA
How's the foot?

LIONEL
It's still attached. But it hurts.

The car kangaroos again and Lionel pitches forward.

LIONEL (CONT'D)
Ouch!

HENRIETTA
Sorry!

A sign by the road welcomes them to Robin Hills.

LIONEL
Thank God for that.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIONEL'S HOUSE - LATER

A washed and changed Henrietta knocks on the door with a flask in her hands.

Doug answers.

DOUG
Good afternoon!

INT. LIONEL'S HALL - CONTINUOUS

Henrietta steps inside.

HENRIETTA
How is the patient?

DOUG
He's good. Sprained ankle. Doc Jenkins has given him some painkillers so he's a little out of it.

HENRIETTA
Sorry I couldn't stay once I'd dropped him off. I had some work to chase up.

DOUG
You sure enjoy your work, don't ya?

HENRIETTA

I'm not sure that 'enjoy' is the word I'd use...

DOUG

Oh. You spend all that time doing something you don't really enjoy. Funny old world, ain't it?

HENRIETTA

Can I pop up and check in? Or is he asleep?

DOUG

He's been snoozing on and off. I'm sure he'll want to say thanks himself. I'll take you up.

The two climb the stairs together.

DOUG (CONT'D)

That ankle has been giving him problems for years. Always a weak spot. He hurt it at dance class when he was a teen.

HENRIETTA

Dance class? He said Little League.

DOUG

(Laughs)
Baseball? No, not Lionel. He was a showman, not a sportsman.

HENRIETTA

Where's Katie?

DOUG

She's gone to the swimming club. She's mighty happy with the singing tips you gave her. Thank you for that.

HENRIETTA

My pleasure.

DOUG

You're doing some great things in Robin Hills and it's only been a few days. Shame it's only temporary, ain't it?

Henrietta doesn't know what to say, so opts for a smile.

INT. LIONEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

A groggy Lionel lies in bed. Ice wrapped around his elevated foot.

The door opens and Henrietta enters.

LIONEL
Visiting hours are over.

HENRIETTA
If that's an attempt to get me to pretend I'm a nurse it's not working.

Lionel smiles.

LIONEL
Sorry, I'm all dosed up so my wit isn't as sharp as usual.

HENRIETTA
No difference there.

He laughs. Henrietta sets the flask down on the bedside table next to him.

LIONEL
What's this?

HENRIETTA
Golden vegetable soup. My mum's special recipe. Whenever I was ill or hurt she'd make it for me. So I thought I'd bring you some.

LIONEL
Thank you. Hang on a minute...

HENRIETTA
What?

LIONEL
When you dropped me at the doctor's you said you had to rush back for some calls. But you were actually making soup for me?

HENRIETTA
(Blushes)
My calls finished a little earlier than I thought. And, anyway, I had to leave it to simmer while I answered some emails.

LIONEL
I'm very grateful.

HENRIETTA
How long are you gonna be laid up
for?

LIONEL
A couple of days. I should be
fighting fit by Wednesday.

HENRIETTA
So, we'll have to send customers
here to get the wine pairing
recommendations?

LIONEL
You're here for another few days,
right?

HENRIETTA
Yep.

LIONEL
Dad knows what he's doing. But, as
you'll have noticed, he's not
getting any younger. Can you help?

HENRIETTA
That's what I'm here for.

LIONEL
The Christmas market opens on
Tuesday. Dad will know what to do
with our stall but, as I say, he'll
need help.

HENRIETTA
All under control.

Lionel yawns.

LIONEL
Sorry. These tablets make me
sleepy.

Henrietta's phone rings.

HENRIETTA
Sorry. I have to take this. I'll
leave you to it, Sleeping Beauty.

LIONEL
Is that a client calling you?

HENRIETTA

Yep. Mrs. Jimenez. Works for Global Snacks, one of our biggest clients.

LIONEL

Henrietta. It's 4 pm on a Saturday. It's nearly Christmas. What could be that important?

HENRIETTA

Agency land never sleeps at Christmas!

LIONEL

Maybe it should.

Henrietta is about to answer.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

Look. I know I'm not in the same corporate world as you. But one thing I do know is you've gotta set boundaries with people or you'll live your life forever on call.

HENRIETTA

Sorry I have to get this.

LIONEL

I need some sleep anyway.

He rolls onto his side as Henrietta answers.

HENRIETTA

(Phone)
Hello, Mrs Jimenez. Busy? No, not at all...

LIONEL

(Quietly)
Liar!

Henrietta gently throws a cushion at him and she slips out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. LIONEL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Doug sits on a recliner with his feet up, lost in a Western novel.

Henrietta sticks her head around the door.

HENRIETTA
I'm heading off, Mr. Bird.

DOUG
How was he?

HENRIETTA
His usual self.

DOUG
Ha. I know he can be a little grouchy at times, he's not had much luck in the last few years.

HENRIETTA
What do you mean?

DOUG
Take a seat.

Henrietta perches on the end of the sofa.

DOUG (CONT'D)
You were probably wondering what he was doing when you saw him earlier.

HENRIETTA
I forgot to ask in all the excitement.

DOUG
(Points to photo)
That's Sally. Katie's mum. Her and Lionel were inseparable. High school sweethearts. They danced and sang together. I swear if they'd pushed it they could have gone pro.

HENRIETTA
That explains the dance class. What happened?

DOUG
They had Katie and settled down. Lionel became more and more interested in helping me with the shop and Sally started helping too. But they still liked to go and sing together. Festivals, open mic nights, you name it.
(Beat)
Just for fun.

(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)

One day, when Katie was small I said I'd look after her so they could go to a show a couple of towns away. Not far out of Robin Hills there was a tricky patch of black ice. They lost control of the car and Sally. Well. She didn't make it.

HENRIETTA

Oh god. I had no idea.

DOUG

Lionel was distraught, of course. We all were. He hasn't sung since. Since then he's thrown his all into raising Katie and running the shop - hence why he's so resistant to any kind of change with it. I think he likes it how it was when Sally worked there too.

HENRIETTA

Of course, that makes sense.

DOUG

It was six years ago today. Every year, on the day, he lays some flowers at the site of the crash.

HENRIETTA

So that's why he was there...

DOUG

I'm not telling you all this just to give you a sob story.

(Beat)

I'm not as dumb as a post, I can see how you two look at each other at times. I know you've got your life and he's got his. Both in different places. But that ain't to say things couldn't work. I think it'd do him good to move on.

Henrietta doesn't know what to say.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Anyway, that's just the two cents of an old man with a little bit of life experience. It's up to you two to work it out... if you want to. All I'll say is, be patient with him.

HENRIETTA

Thank you, Mr. Bird.

DOUG

Go enjoy the rest of your day.
Katie and I'll take care of him and
we'll see you bright and early
Monday morning.

CUT TO:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - DAY

A busy Monday plays out as a dream team of Henrietta, Doug
and Maggie help thirsty customers.

The shop's phone rings. Doug answers.

DOUG

(Phone)
Hello?
(Grins)
Lionel! You should be resting up
instead of worrying about us!
Everything is ticking over nicely.
(Looks over at Henrietta)
She's doing a great job.

CUT TO:

INT. KATIE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Henrietta sits on the bed as Katie delivers another rendition
of Jingle Bell Rock.

She's more confident than before. Henrietta is delighted.

KATIE

(Singing)
Giddy-up jingle horse, pick up your
feet. Jingle around the clock.
Mix and a-mingle in the jinglin'
feet.
That's the jingle bell...
That's the jingle bell...
That's the jingle bell rockkkkkkk!

HENRIETTA

Wow! A star is born! I think I'm
looking at the new Taylor Swift.
(Beat)
She's still cool, right?

KATIE
She's definitely cool!

HENRIETTA
How are you feeling? Only a couple
of days to go.

KATIE
There's gonna be a lot of people
there...

HENRIETTA
But they'll be rooting for you and
wanting you to do well.

KATIE
Dad says if I get scared I need to
pretend they're all naked.

HENRIETTA
Hmmm... what if some of them are
big and old? That might scare you
even more!

Katie laughs.

KATIE
Have you ever performed for a big
crowd?

HENRIETTA
I have. I haven't sung to a crowd
since I was a girl, but I give a
lot of presentations at my job.

KATIE
What are you presenting?

HENRIETTA
Usually something really boring. I
wish it was Jingle Bell Rock.
You're gonna be great!

KATIE
Will you be there to watch me?

HENRIETTA
(Hesitates slightly)
I should be...

KATIE
Will you sing with me if I get
stuck?

HENRIETTA

You won't get stuck. I believe in you!

CUT TO:

INT. LIONEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lionel reclines on the sofa with his foot on a stool. He looks a little fresher than the last time we saw him.

A decanter of red wine sits on the coffee table near him.

Henrietta peeks her head in.

LIONEL

How's she sounding?

HENRIETTA

Really good.

LIONEL

Thank you for helping her out. I try and teach her but I'm not patient enough.

HENRIETTA

Oh you surprise me.

LIONEL

Okay. Do you want the good news or the bad news first?

HENRIETTA

Good news.

Lionel points to the decanter.

LIONEL

That's the rest of the Zinfandel we had last night. I've stored it at just the right temperature. It should taste even better today.

HENRIETTA

I best get a couple of glasses, then.

LIONEL

Well, as it's such a special wine I need to ask a favour first.

HENRIETTA

Shoot.

LIONEL

As we just covered, I'm the world's worst teacher. I also happen to be the world's worst present wrapper. Are you any good?

HENRIETTA

I'm not bad.

LIONEL

In exchange for a glass of this ruby elixir, could you help me wrap Katie's presents? Usually, I ask dad, but his arthritis has been playing up lately.

HENRIETTA

This is the second favour you've asked me in the last few days. It's almost like you're starting to rely on me.

LIONEL

Can you help?

HENRIETTA

Of course.

DISSOLVE OUT:

DISSOLVE IN:

INT. LIONEL'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Christmas music plays in the background as Henrietta wraps gifts. Wine glass by her side.

Lionel looks at her and catches himself smiling.

HENRIETTA

(Proudly holding up a present)
Not bad, hey?

LIONEL

So much better than what I'd do.

HENRIETTA

That's the last one. I better go,
it's an early start tomorrow and
I've got a bit of work to do when I
get in.

LIONEL

Still haven't set those boundaries,
ey?

HENRIETTA

Don't worry yourself about my
boundaries. I'll make sure the
market stall looks amazing
tomorrow, that's all you need to
think about.

LIONEL

I might try and head down in the
afternoon to take a peek...

HENRIETTA

No, you won't! Remember what the
doctor said? Another day's rest for
that leg, then you can get up and
about.

Lionel mock salutes.

LIONEL

Okay, ma'am.

Henrietta laughs.

HENRIETTA

That's better.

A beat passes.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

I'll.. err... I'll see you
tomorrow.

LIONEL

I thought I was banned from turning
up?

HENRIETTA

Yeah, but I promised Katie I'd stop
by for one more run-through.

LIONEL

Just to see Katie? Or were you
gonna check in on me too? Two birds
with one stone.

HENRIETTA

(Laughs)
Definitely not. Katie only.

The two share a smile as Henrietta pulls herself to her feet.

DISSOLVE TO:

DISSOLVE IN:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS XMAS MARKET - MORNING

Robin Hills' famous Christmas market is in full swing.

As a choir sings from a grand stage a swarm of tourists and
locals work their way through the maze of stalls, rides and
attractions.

The Bird Family Wines' stall is busy. The Elf Boy and Girl
from earlier sell Mulled Wine to customers while Maggie and
Henrietta help with pairings.

TOURIST

We like to make fried chicken for
Christmas dinner.

HENRIETTA

Fried chicken?

TOURIST

It's a bit of a thing in Japan,
actually. I used to work out there
and we kinda got into it.

HENRIETTA

Now I'm wondering if Kentucky Fried
Turkey is the Christmas treat I'm
missing out on?

TOURIST

Could you recommend a wine pairing?

Henrietta thinks for a second.

HENRIETTA

This is a classic question. But, do
you prefer red or white?

TOURIST

Either.

HENRIETTA

In that case, you can't look past a Sauvignon Blanc. However, if you wake up on Christmas Day and want red, you could go for a Beaujolais or a Pinot Noir.

(Beat)

Let me write that down for you. If you take this card into our store on Bridge Street you can get a 5% discount.

Henrietta jots down her advice on one of the pairing cards and hands it to the Tourist.

TOURIST

Thank you. Have a Merry Christmas!

HENRIETTA

Merry Christmas.

He heads off. Henrietta takes a deep breath.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Wow. What a day.

MAGGIE

Lovely though, isn't it? Everyone's so happy and relaxed. Enjoying the country air.

HENRIETTA

It's really something.

MAGGIE

Are you going to stay here for Christmas?

HENRIETTA

No! I need to get back. I've tried to keep up, but there's still so much to do. I'll stay long enough for Katie's show and then I'll fly back the day after.

MAGGIE

There's nothing that could make you stay?

HENRIETTA

(Confused)

No. My life is in New York. What's with the inquisition?

Lionel and Katie appear. He's hobbling along with the aid of a stick.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Hey! I thought you were resting up today?

LIONEL

I was. I rested all morning. But I've heard that a hot cup of mulled wine can be the cure for many ailments - so I wanted to check that out for myself.

HENRIETTA

You could have made one at home.

LIONEL

I could have. But I heard the best in town was here...

Henrietta rolls her eyes.

HENRIETTA

Katie! You need to keep your dad in check.

KATIE

He won't listen to me.

HENRIETTA

Or anyone else! How's your practice going?

KATIE

So, so good! I think I'm ready. I just need to make sure I don't get shy.

HENRIETTA

Being shy is natural. It's all about how you manage it.

Henrietta moves over to the Mulled Wine station and spoons some into a paper cup for Lionel.

LIONEL

How's it going? It looks busy.

HENRIETTA

Everyone's going mad for the pairing cards. Whoever suggested those must be a genius.

LIONEL

(Looking round)
Where's dad?

HENRIETTA

He's minding the store.

LIONEL

We usually close it during the market time, we can do the orders from here.

HENRIETTA

You could be missing out on extra sales.

LIONEL

Hmmm... true. Anyway, there's a reason why we came here...

HENRIETTA

Not just to check up on us?

LIONEL

(Awkwardly)
Katie has something she'd like to ask you. An invitation.

HENRIETTA

Oh really? I'm all ears.

KATIE

(Reciting it)
To thank you for all your help with everything we'd like you and Maggie to come over tonight for dinner. Dad's cooking his famous meatloaf.

HENRIETTA

Hmmm.. I have some work that I should really be doing tonight, but how can I turn such an offer down?
(Looks at Lionel)
How good is the meatloaf?

LIONEL

Better than my gift wrapping.

HENRIETTA
Count me in. What time?

LIONEL
7 o'clock sharp.

HENRIETTA
Shall we sneak in another practice session while your dad cooks?

KATIE
Yes!

LIONEL
Okay. 7 it is. We better head back - I've got some prep to do!

Katie and Lionel head off.

MAGGIE
Do you think that invite was really from her?

HENRIETTA
Yeah... who gets their 10-year-old daughter to ask someone to dinner with them? Anyway, you got an invite too.

Henrietta watches Lionel as he limps off into the distance.

MAGGIE
You're sure there's nothing that could convince you to stay here a little longer?

HENRIETTA
(Thoughtfully)
Positive...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIONEL'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dinner is in full swing as Henrietta, Katie, Maggie, Doug and Lionel sit at the table.

Everything is laid out beautifully. Candles burn on either side of an impressive-looking meatloaf.

Lionel carves while Doug fills each of the adult's glasses with red from a crystal decanter.

If you didn't know better you'd think they were all family.

HENRIETTA

(To Katie)

So. Be honest with me. Is your dad's meatloaf really as good as he says?

Katie leans in conspiratorially.

KATIE

(Whispering)

Grandad's is better! But ssssh... don't tell anyone.

HENRIETTA

Your secret's safe with me.

LIONEL

What're you two whispering about?

KATIE

Nothing!

HENRIETTA

Katie was just telling me how amazing your meatloaf is.

Henrietta and Katie laugh.

LIONEL

(To Katie)

You're more than welcome to have a double serving of veg and nothing else?

HENRIETTA

(Laughing)

How could you be so cruel to your dear, sweet daughter?

LIONEL

I was talking to both of you!

Lionel splashes a drop of gravy Henrietta's way.

HENRIETTA

Hey!

She retaliates - hitting him between the eyes with a pea.

Doug looks at Katie and rolls his eyes.

DOUG

Katie. I used to think you were growing up too fast. But now I see that's only in comparison to those around you.

LIONEL

(To Henrietta)
You can see where I get my exemplary wit from.

Lionel finishes carving and serves everyone a slice of the meatloaf. Katie dishes up vegetables and mash.

DOUG

Before we dig in, I'd like to propose a toast.
(Holding his glass up)
To a successful and healthy Christmas for Bird Family Wines and the Bird family. And, also, to new...
(Looks at Lionel then Henrietta)
... friends.

MAGGIE

Here, here!

Everyone clinks glasses.

LIONEL

Now dig in!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIONEL'S KITCHEN - LATER

The food has been devoured. Everyone's leaning back in their chairs. Full. Satisfied. Cosy.

LIONEL

Was it the best meatloaf you've ever had?

HENRIETTA

It's up there. My Aunt Sheila used to do a very, very good one, though. You've got competition.

MAGGIE

It's the best I've ever had. On Earth, anyway.

A beat passes - everyone looks a little confused. With a groan, Doug pulls himself to his feet.

DOUG

Well, I'm about ready to turn in for the night. When you get to my age a big meal with a few glasses of red is a surefire way to get you to the land of nod.

MAGGIE

I best head off too. Red wine makes me sleepy. Thank you for everything.

Everyone says their goodbyes and Maggie stops to give Katie a hug before she heads out.

Doug turns to Katie.

DOUG

Bedtime for you too, young lady. You need your sleep for the performance tomorrow.

KATIE

I'm too excited to sleep!

HENRIETTA

Even Taylor Swift needs her sleep.

KATIE

Okay. Okay.

She runs over and gives Doug a hug.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Good night, dad.

LIONEL

Good night, honeybug.

She turns to Henrietta. Falters for a second. Then runs over to hug her. Henrietta is visibly touched.

KATIE

Goodnight, Henrietta.

HENRIETTA

Goodnight.

Doug and Kate exit.

LIONEL
She really likes you.

HENRIETTA
Most people do. Apart from you.

LIONEL
Hey! I never said that.

HENRIETTA
You were a tough crowd at first.

LIONEL
I'm sorry for that. I put so much into running the shop. Since Sally... went... all I was left with was Katie and the shop. It just took me by surprise, was all.

HENRIETTA
I understand.

LIONEL
That's where I was when you saw me. Visiting Sally. It's a little ritual I have.

HENRIETTA
I know, your dad told me.

LIONEL
Anyway, you don't want to hear about that. When you're so wrapped up in running something your way, it can be hard to accept help. But I'm glad you came.

A beat passes. Lionel looks emotional, Henrietta moves her chair a little closer and puts one of her hands around his.

HENRIETTA
Are you okay?

LIONEL
Yeah, of course. I'm fine. This time of year makes me a little... soft... that's all.

HENRIETTA
I can imagine. You've done so well bringing Katie up... and what a voice she's got!

LIONEL

How long are you staying for?

HENRIETTA

I'm going to go back the day after tomorrow. I'll stay for the show.

LIONEL

Nothing could tempt you to stay for Christmas?

HENRIETTA

I'm sorry. I can't even find time to spend it with my family, let alone another.

LIONEL

Even if I go out and buy the best turkey in all of Robin Hills? With a gallon of Zinfandel? We have WiFi in Robin Hills, you can still work from here.

Henrietta hesitates.

HENRIETTA

It's... well. I know you won't like this...

LIONEL

Go on.

HENRIETTA

It's a really critical time for my career. Mr. Malkovich is set to retire any day now and if I keep pushing I could be next in line to replace him. At 35! All the hours I've put in over the years will be worth it.

LIONEL

And then what?

HENRIETTA

What do you mean?

LIONEL

So, you get this dream job and then what? I don't know much about running a big business, but isn't that just inviting longer hours and more stress into your life?

HENRIETTA
That's what drives me.

LIONEL
Is it?

HENRIETTA
Yeah.

LIONEL
There's been plenty of times I've seen you here relaxing, enjoying things and even having time to help a little girl sing Jingle Bell Rock.

HENRIETTA
I have. I've enjoyed it. But my life isn't here... your life is.

LIONEL
You're right. I'm judging you by my own standards. Can I ask one question though?

HENRIETTA
Sure.

LIONEL
Is there anyone back home?

HENRIETTA
Anyone?

LIONEL
As in... a partner.

HENRIETTA
There was. Until recently. George.

LIONEL
What happened?

HENRIETTA
Honestly, I thought we were gonna go the distance. I thought I was gonna marry him. But things went the wrong way.

LIONEL
I'm sorry to hear.

HENRIETTA

As you probably guessed I put work first and there was only so much of it he could take.

Lionel places his other hand on top of Henrietta's.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

How about you? Anyone since Sally?

LIONEL

No. Well...

Lionel looks into her eyes.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

I probably shouldn't do this.

He leans over and the two kiss. Deeply. They pull away after a few seconds.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

You're sure you can't stay any longer?

HENRIETTA

Lionel I...

LIONEL

At least tell me you'll think about it?

HENRIETTA

Okay, I'll think about it. Our lives are in different places though - we need to remember that. I better head to bed anyway, another early start tomorrow.

Henrietta gets up. Pauses for a second. Then leans over and kisses Lionel on the lips.

She's halfway to the door when he says:

LIONEL

You feel it though, don't you?

HENRIETTA

Feel what?

LIONEL

It. Something. Between us.

HENRIETTA
 Maybe. Good night, Lionel Bird.

She smiles and heads out into the hallway.

HENRIETTA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 I'll think about staying for
 Christmas. But only for that gallon
 of Zinfandel.

The front door clicks shut and Lionel is left alone in the kitchen. He takes a sip of wine and looks up at the 'HIS' and 'HERS' dishcloths thoughtfully.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRIETTA'S DIGS - MORNING

Henrietta's phone RINGS as the bedside clock reads 05:59.

She jolts awake and looks around in a daze. She wipes the sleep from her eyes and grabs her phone.

Mr. Malkovich is calling.

HENRIETTA
 (Groggy)
 G... good morning.

She pulls herself out of bed and stretches.

MALKOVICH (V.O.)
 (Phone)
 Good morning, Henrietta. I know
 you're an early bird, so I'm hoping
 I didn't wake you?

HENRIETTA
 Nope... I'm wide awake. How are
 you, Mr. Malkovich?

MALKOVICH (V.O.)
 (Phone)
 Good, thank you. More importantly -
 how are you? How's Robin Hills? I'm
 jealous - the last time I visited
 was in '99. It was gorgeous. I hope
 it hasn't changed?

Henrietta opens the curtains to reveal another beautiful, snowy morning.

HENRIETTA

It's lovely.

MALKOVICH (V.O.)

(Phone)

Good! I'll cut to the chase, Henrietta, I understand that you're planning on coming back tomorrow?

HENRIETTA

Yes, I've asked Maggie to book a flight - I'll be home by tomorrow afternoon.

MALKOVICH (V.O.)

Ask her to cancel it. My assistant has booked you a flight for today, she'll email you the details shortly.

HENRIETTA

(Wide awake now)

Today? But I...

MALKOVICH (V.O.)

(Phone)

Don't tell me you're enjoying standing on a shop floor too much? This exercise was nice but I'm starting to think it wasn't one of my better ideas. We're having some problems with a few of our big accounts and I need my best people here.

HENRIETTA

Today?

MALKOVICH (V.O.)

(Phone)

Sandra Jimenez is flying in for a meeting this evening. She's not happy with some of the creative the teams have put together. She wants the adverts to go live on Boxing Day. I know you trust your Lieutenants but I need you in the room.

HENRIETTA

Okay. Right. It's just that I...

MALKOVICH (V.O.)

(Phone)

I'm looking forward to playing golf when I retire. I can't wait. But before I do I need to be sure I've got the right replacement. Your flight is at 3 o'clock.

HENRIETTA

Okay, Mr. Malkovich.

MALKOVICH (V.O.)

(Phone)

Have a safe flight.

He disconnects the call. Henrietta scowls and throws her phone onto the bed.

She walks over to the dressing table mirror. Looks hard at herself.

HENRIETTA

Maybe it'll all be worth it when that first Presidential paycheck arrives.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRIETTA'S DIGS - LATER

Henrietta, dressed and caffeinated, packs her luggage. The radio plays in the background.

RADIO PRESENTER (V.O)

And that was Nat King Cole. What a classic. Now, for another classic - it's Jingle Bell Rock.

Henrietta stops sharp. She hurries over and turns the radio off.

Before she can think anymore there's a knock at the door. She answers it and Maggie steps in from the cold.

MAGGIE

Morning.

HENRIETTA

Hey, did you get my message?

MAGGIE

Yes, I can cancel the flight, but I want to make sure that's what you want?

HENRIETTA

Why is everyone so intent on working out what I want all the time? Mr. Malkovich's assistant has booked me a flight for 3 this afternoon.

MAGGIE

Okay. Your wish is my command...

HENRIETTA

Thank you.

MAGGIE

What did Lionel say?

HENRIETTA

About what?

MAGGIE

When you told him you couldn't make Katie's performance and you were leaving earlier than he expected?

Henrietta blushes.

HENRIETTA

I haven't had a chance to speak to him yet.

MAGGIE

If the flight isn't until 3 there's plenty of time to go and tell him.

HENRIETTA

I don't know why that's any concern of yours - but I'll call him.

MAGGIE

Wouldn't it be nicer to say goodbye in person?

HENRIETTA

I'm... It's just that...

MAGGIE

You might change your mind if you were to see him?

HENRIETTA
What? I don't know. Maybe.

MAGGIE
Is that a bad thing?

HENRIETTA
I'm trying to go with my head over
my heart, here. Hearts are fickle.
I've got to where I have through
using my head.

A beat.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)
Okay. Okay. I'll go and say bye.

CUT TO:

INT. BIRD FAMILY WINES - MORNING

Doug is straightening up some of the bottles on the shelves.
The door chimes as Henrietta enters.

DOUG
Good morning, Henrietta!

HENRIETTA
Hey Doug.

DOUG
Is everything okay?

HENRIETTA
Is Lionel here?

DOUG
He's at the market already. In
fact, I thought you'd be there by
now to help set up? We switched it
around today. He's there and I'm
here.

Henrietta nods.

HENRIETTA
I've got some bad news.

DOUG
Better shared than kept to
yourself.

HENRIETTA

Something's come up with work and I need to fly back to New York this afternoon.

DOUG

Something that can't be avoided?

HENRIETTA

It's important. Mr. Malkovich called me himself.

A beat passes.

DOUG

Katie will be disappointed.

HENRIETTA

I know.

DOUG

And... so will someone else.

HENRIETTA

I know. This is such an important time for my career and everything I've worked for. I need to make sure I get it right.

DOUG

You gotta do what you gotta do. Have you spoken to Lionel?

HENRIETTA

I... err...

DOUG

I'll let him know.

HENRIETTA

Thank you. It's... well... I'd love to stay. But maybe it's for the best. The more... attached... we all get the harder it'll be.

DOUG

It's been a pleasure, Henrietta. Thank you for everything. If you change your mind, you know where we'll be. Katie's song is at 5 on the dot.

Henrietta and Doug hug goodbye.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS XMAS MARKET - MORNING

A horde of guests descend on the Christmas Market stalls.

The Elf Boy and Girl work the crowds while Lionel mixes a batch of mulled wine.

His phone rings.

LIONEL

(Phone)

Hello dad.

(Beat)

Sorry... what was that? Signal's
breaking up - who's gone? She's
what?!

Lionel looks gutted. He crushes a paper cup in his hand.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

(Phone)

... but it's Katie's show tonight.
I... I've just ordered some more of
that 2011 Zinfandel...

CUT TO:

INT. TAXI CAB - DAY

Henrietta sits in the back of a cab as it wheels her away from the snowy streets of Auburn Hills.

Her phone starts to ring. It's Lionel. For a second her hand hovers over it - unsure whether to answer.

After a wince and a sigh, she flicks her phone to silent mode and turns it over.

The Driver turns on the radio and, predictably enough, Jingle Bell Rock blares out. Henrietta looks like she's going to cry.

DISSOLVE OUT:

DISSOLVE IN:

EXT. SMALL AIRFIELD - DAY

The airfield is deserted asides from a few employees and a refuelling plane.

Henrietta sits outside on a bench. She's on the phone.

HENRIETTA

(Phone)

... of course, Mr. Syed. We'll turn
the campaigns on for Boxing Day.
You have my word. Thank you.

As she hangs up an AIRPORT ATTENDANT scurries past.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Hey! Is the 3 o'clock to New York
still on time?

AIRPORT ATTENDANT

Should be good to go. We're just
filling it up with some fuel.

Henrietta nods and the Airport Attendant heads off.

She's about to pick her phone up again when Maggie appears
out of nowhere.

HENRIETTA

Where did you come from?

MAGGIE

I just arrived.

HENRIETTA

But... how did you even get here? I
thought you were making your own
way back?

MAGGIE

I teleported.

HENRIETTA

Riiiiight.

MAGGIE

Henrietta. I've tried not to
interfere too much. But I have to
ask - are you sure you need to head
back?

HENRIETTA

Mr. Malkovich was pretty certain.

MAGGIE

Is that what you want?

HENRIETTA

What's with all the questions? My old assistant never used to grill me like this.

MAGGIE

I'm a different kind of assistant.

HENRIETTA

It's an important time for my career. I keep saying. I can suss out what I want once I've got there.

MAGGIE

But if for whatever reason, you couldn't make it - they could get by, couldn't they? Katie's show is tonight!

HENRIETTA

Of course.

MAGGIE

Do you wish that would happen?

HENRIETTA

Well... if it did I wouldn't complain, but...

Henrietta looks up and realises she's all alone. Maggie's nowhere to be seen. A faint twinkling sound hangs in the air for a couple of seconds.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Maggie?

MAGGIE (O.S.)

It's been a pleasure, Henrietta. But I have others to help - take care of yourself.

HENRIETTA

Hey! Don't you have to give 2 weeks notice?

She stands up and has another look around - but she's not there.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

She's so weird. If this was a movie
I'd think she was some kinda Fairy
Godmother...

AIRPORT ATTENDANT (O.S.)

Hey, miss!

Henrietta turns around to see the Airport Attendant scurrying
towards her.

AIRPORT ATTENDANT (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad
news but one of our mechanics just
discovered a serious fault with the
New York plane...

Henrietta's mouth opens wide.

DISSOLVE OUT:

DISSOLVE IN:

EXT. ROBIN HILLS XMAS MARKET - EVENING

The Christmas market is the busiest we've seen it. While some
of the stalls still trade the majority of visitors make their
way to a seating area in front of a main stage.

A choir sings Christmas carols under the almost militant
direction of the school music teacher, MR. COOK (40, glasses,
lanky).

Doug sits next to Mr. Forshaw and some other familiar faces
from the party.

MR. FORSHAW

Your granddaughter is up next,
right?

DOUG

Yep.

MR. FORSHAW

How's she feeling?

Doug looks up and sees Lionel walking over.

DOUG

I think we're about to find out.

Lionel takes a seat next to Doug.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Well, how is she?

LIONEL
She's nervous.

DOUG
Too nervous to sing?

LIONEL
I told her there was no pressure
and she can pull out any time but
she wants to go ahead.

DOUG
That's the Bird spirit.

MR. FORSHAW
If she's anything like her mum and
dad I'm sure she's got one heck of
a voice.

DOUG
Maybe it would give her an extra
confidence boost if her dad was
playing piano alongside her.

LIONEL
Thanks for that, dad. I'm going to
grab a mulled wine before it
starts, can I get anyone else a
drink?

MR. FORSHAW
Mulled cider for me.

Lionel hurries off.

MR. FORSHAW (CONT'D)
What's gotten into him?

DOUG
He's had his heart broken.

MR. FORSHAW
The pretty lady from the city?

DOUG
Yeah.

MR. FORSHAW
She was only here a week or so, he
gets attached fast.

DOUG

Sometimes you find the kinda connection that just speeds things up.

MR. FORSHAW

How'd she break his heart?

DOUG

She went back to the city quicker than he expected. I think he'd got it into his head that she'd be around a bit longer and he might be able to woo her some more.

MR. FORSHAW

It's a damned shame. If there's anyone that deserves happiness it's Lionel, especially after what happened with Sally.

The Christmas carols come to an end. As the choir take their leave, Mrs. Griffin steps onto the stage with a mic.

MRS. GRIFFIN

(To crowd)

Can I please get a round of applause for the fantastic Robin Hills Church Choir?

The audience complies with aplomb.

MRS. GRIFFIN (CONT'D)

I'd just like to say thank you to everyone for coming out here this evening. We appreciate it very much and we're really proud to announce we've seen record numbers at this year's Christmas market.

More cheers and applause. Lionel reappears with the drinks and hands a cup to Doug and Mr. Forshaw.

MRS. GRIFFIN (CONT'D)

And now for a very special performance. We have Robin Hills Elementary's very own Katie Bird singing Jingle Bell Rock!

Another round of applause as Mrs. Griffin heads back to her seat. A couple of STAGE HANDS bring on a piano and set it on the left-hand side of the stage.

Lionel winces at the sight of it. Doug gives him a look.

MR. FORSHAW

God, I'm nervous for her. There are
a lot of people here tonight.

Katie appears on stage, dressed in a sparkly festive dress.
She holds a mic. She's very nervous.

Lionel starts clapping.

DOUG

Come on, Katie!

MR. COOK

(Into a mic)
Let's get this show on the road! If
anyone wants to dance feel free.

The spotlight shines onto Katie as Mr. Cook plays the opening
bars.

She holds the mic up to her mouth and tries to sing. The
words won't come.

Mr. Cook smiles encouragingly and plays the opening bars over
again.

LIONEL

Come on, Katie. Come on, honeybug.
You got this.

KATIE

(Singing; into mic)
In the frosty air....
(Beat)
No! No! Sorry, wrong lyric.

MR. COOK

That's okay, Katie. Let's start
again.

Mr. Cook plays the opening bars another time. Katie holds the
mic tight in her clammy hands.

It's tense.

She holds the mic up, and tries to find the words. They don't
come. She looks like she's about to cry.

Mrs. Griffin gets up from her seat at the edge of stage.
She's about to rescue her pupil when a voice cuts through the
air:

HENRIETTA (O.S)

(Singing)
Jingle bell, jingle bell, jingle
bell rock! Jingle bells swing and
jingle bells ring!

Katie's eyes light up.

The crowd turns to see Henrietta standing at the back.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Come on! You've got this!
(Singing again)
Jingle bell, jingle bell, jingle
bell rock! Jingle bells swing and
jingle bells ring!

Katie smiles and starts to sing along.

Lionel gets to his feet.

DOUG

Go on, son. Stop being as dumb as a
post and get on that damned stage.

INT. MAIN STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Lionel hurries onto the stage and heads over to Mr. Cook.

LIONEL

Do you mind if I take over?

MR. COOK

No, of course not.

KATIE

Dad!

Mr. Cook departs and Lionel slides onto the seat. The crowd
clap.

LIONEL

Hey, honeybug.
(Into mic)
Is this thing on? Oh yeah it
definitely is. Hi, all! There's
been a change to the scheduled
pianist. But, as the say, The show
must go on...

Henrietta appears on stage. Lionel gives her a look.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

It looks like we've also got a backing singer. Give it up for the sensational...
 (frowns)
 ... and elusive... Ms Henrietta McCloud.

A confused Mrs. Griffin hands Henrietta a microphone.

HENRIETTA

(Quietly to Lionel)
 I can't believe I'm doing this.

LIONEL

I can't believe you went off without saying goodbye.
 (To crowd; mic)
 Okay, you lovely people. From the top. This is the amazing Katie Bird. Or honeybug as I like to call her...

KATIE

Dad!

LIONEL

... with Jingle Bell Rock.

This time Katie goes for it and delivers the performance we all wanted to see, with some backing vocals from Lionel.

Henrietta helps for the first few lines before moving away and allowing Katie to take centre stage.

KATIE

(Singing)
 Jingle bell, jingle bell, jingle bell rock
 Jingle bells swing and jingle bells ring.
 Snowin' and blowin' up bushels of fun.
 Now the jingle hop has begun.

As the crowd applauds and cheers Katie brings the song through to its conclusion.

KATIE (CONT'D)

(Singing)
 That's the jingle bell...
 That's the jingle bell...
 That's the jingle bell rockkkkkk!

As she bows to the audience Lionel and Henrietta catch each other's eye. She offers a smile. He can't help but smile back.

DISSOLVE OUT:

DISSOLVE IN:

INT. LA PROVENCE - EVENING

SUPER: A few months later...

The same upmarket French restaurant we saw at the start. Waiters and waitress frantically zip around to deliver a stellar dinner service.

Henrietta sits at a table by herself. A glass of red next to her. The same Waitress from the opening scene comes by.

WAITRESS

Can I get you another glass of wine?

HENRIETTA

Not for the minute. My guests should be here soon.

WAITRESS

No problem.

The doors open and Henrietta looks up to see Lionel and Katie enter.

She smilee.

Katie spots her and rushes over. They embrace.

HENRIETTA

Hey there!

KATIE

New York is amazing! I want to go to college here one day.

Lionel arrives at the table.

LIONEL

Luckily there's a few more years before we have to worry about that.

He looks at Henrietta. They both smile.

HENRIETTA

Hey.

LIONEL

Hey.

They embrace and kiss. Katie looks embarrassed.

HENRIETTA

(As they take a seat)

So you're enjoying being tourists?

LIONEL

Yeah. Long time since I've been to the Big Apple. I think I've navigated my way pretty well for a country bumpkin.

HENRIETTA

I've got something exciting to show you.

LIONEL

Here? In public? I didn't know you were into that...

Henrietta gives him a look and covers Katie's ears.

She takes a card out and hands it to him.

HENRIETTA

Mr. Forshaw sent over the final design at lunch time. I think they're ready to print.

LIONEL

(Reading)

Henrietta McCloud. Freelance Marketing Consultant. I love it.

HENRIETTA

Me too.

LIONEL

I guess the only question now is... what address are you gonna put on it? Robin Hills or NY?

HENRIETTA

I guess we'll see. I've got a few more months to cover Mr. Malkovich's role before the full-time replacement starts.

LIONEL

I can't believe he suddenly retired and didn't give you the role full-time. After all that work.

HENRIETTA

(Shrugs)

He decided on someone with more experience. I think he just wanted to keep me motivated.

(Beat)

Anyway, I can't wait to work for myself and on my own schedule.

Whether that's in NY or...

(Looks at Lionel)

... Robin Hills.

She hands them both a menu.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Now, let me feed you hungry tourists. I can recommend the Coq Au Vin and they've got a gorgeous Red Sancerre.

As they study the menu Henrietta's phone rings.

Lionel gives her a look.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Do you mind if I take this?

She shows her phone. Her mum's calling.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

It's important.

Lionel smiles and nods.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

Hang on. One question before I go.

(Points to wallpaper)

Is that aqua or teal?

LIONEL

Aqua.

HENRIETTA

I knew it! I'll be right back.

She hurries out of the restaurant to take the call.

KATIE

It's definitely teal, dad.

EXT. LA PROVENCE - CONTINUOUS

Henrietta steps outside and answers.

HENRIETTA

(Phone)

Hi mum! No... no, of course I have
a few minutes to talk. How are you?
How's dad's foot now?

Someone walks past her on the sidewalk. She looks up and does a double-take.

It's Maggie.

They look at each other for a couple of seconds. Maggie peers into the restaurant and sees Lionel and Katie sitting together.

She winks at Henrietta and waves.

Before Henrietta can react Maggie has disappeared - leaving that familiar twinkling sound behind.

Henrietta shakes her head in exasperation.

HENRIETTA (CONT'D)

(Phone)

... visit you for Easter? Yes! That
sounds a great idea. I'd love to.

(Beat)

You know the old bar & grill on
Prince Street? Can you find out if
they still do open mic nights
there?

(Beat)

Oh and one final thing. Will the
other guest room be free?

(Look inside at Lionel & Katie)

I might have a couple of extra
guests with me.

FADE OUT:

THE END