

CHRISTMAS AT CHESTNUT COTTAGE

written by
JERRY ROBBINS

FADE IN:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Snow flurries fall from a winter sky.

INT. KENDRA JACKSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Painted on the open door: KENDRA JACKSON - ASSOCIATE.

KENDRA JACKSON (30), polished and poised in a tailored suit, sits behind her desk, speaking with ANITA CHAMBERS (29), a calm voice in a storm of legal frenzy.

ANITA

I thought you were spending
Christmas at your brother's?

KENDRA

I was.

ANITA

So what changed that?

KENDRA

Thanksgiving.

ANITA

That bad?

KENDRA

Even the turkey had his drumsticks
over his ears.

A KNOCK. BETH (20s), paralegal, enters.

BETH

The Chestnut Technologies
document.

She hands the folder to Kendra.

KENDRA

Thanks, Beth, hang on.

Kendra scans it.

ANITA

That's the forest clearing case?

KENDRA
Twenty-five thousand acres.
Borders a wildlife preserve.

ANITA
Where?

KENDRA
Chestnut, New Hampshire.

ANITA
Festive.

BETH
I'm heading home to Albany. First
time my parents are meeting my
fiancé.

ANITA
Let's see the ring.

Beth flashes it.

ANITA (CONT'D)
Doctor?

BETH
Plumber.

ANITA
Same paycheck.

KENDRA
Good luck with the in-laws.

Kendra signs, hands it back.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
Overnight it.

BETH
On it.

Beth exits.

ANITA
So your Christmas plan is... walls
and a movie?

KENDRA
It's peaceful.

ANITA
Until Christmas Eve hits.

CARL HARRIS (38), appears in the doorway -- crisp suit, confident stride.

CARL
Kendra. Chestnut Tech?

KENDRA
Signed, sealed, and on its way
from Harris, Whalen, and Coville
to New Hampshire.

CARL
Big case. Big client. Big win.

He nods, exits.

ANITA
(low)
Still think he's not handsome?

KENDRA
I think he's the boss.

ANITA
Also single.

KENDRA
Still the boss.

ANITA
You're no fun.

Kendra smirks.

ANITA (CONT'D)
So go to the country.

KENDRA
What?

ANITA
Snow, air, reset button.

KENDRA
I don't "do" snow things.

ANITA
That's why you should.

KENDRA
You just don't want me alone on
Christmas.

ANITA

Exactly.

Kendra types on her computer. A photo of a sleek building pops up -- "CHESTNUT SPA AND HOTEL."

KENDRA

This looks nice.

Anita glances at the screen.

ANITA

Recharge in the town where you're suing? The idea is to get away from work.

KENDRA

It has snow.

ANITA

Better hope it has room service.

She exits.

Kendra hovers her mouse over: CONFIRM RESERVATION.

She clicks.

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Under a bright blue sky and ground covered with snow, a car approaches and passes a sign: WELCOME TO CHESTNUT, NEW HAMPSHIRE!

INT. THE CAR - DAY

Kendra stares out the window and enjoys the majestic snow-covered scenery. The gum-chewing DRIVER (40s), keeps his eyes on the road with an occasional glance into the rearview mirror.

Kendra sees a faded sign next to a side road: CHESTNUT COTTAGE B AND B.

KENDRA

How many people live in Chestnut?

DRIVER

I don't know. Never been there.

KENDRA

I thought you Share-a-Ride drivers
were all locals?

DRIVER

We've gone eighty miles since the
airport. I'm local to everything
eighty miles back.

Kendra smiles with a little laugh.

KENDRA

Of course.

DRIVER

Most of my passengers go from the
airport to the city. Hardly ever
out here into the boondocks.

She continues to watch the passing fields and trees.

EXT. CHESTNUT SPA - DAY

Trees and shrubs wrap around the simple, plain,
rectangular shapes and geometric forms of the spa.

Glass front doors face an empty parking lot.

The car pulls up in front of the building and parks. The
driver pops the trunk and climbs out of the car. Kendra
does the same as he places her bags on the ground.

DRIVER

Want me to wait till you check in?

KENDRA

No need. They're expecting me.

The driver looks at the parking lot.

DRIVER

They don't look like they're
expecting anyone.

KENDRA

My confirmation email said I was
the only guest booked. I'm sure
I'll be fine.

She hands him a tip.

DRIVER

Thank you! I appreciate it. Merry Christmas.

KENDRA

Merry Christmas.

As the driver gets into the car, Kendra takes her bags and makes her way to the building.

THE FRONT DOORS

Kendra puts her bags down. As she pulls the door handle, her eyes are level with a sign taped onto the glass:
CLOSED BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH.

KENDRA

You're kidding me.

She takes her phone from her pocket.

The screen reads: NO SERVICE.

She looks around and evaluates her situation. With a deep breath, she picks up her bags... and heads for the road.

EXT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE DRIVEWAY ENTRANCE - DAY

A weary Kendra approaches the sign CHESTNUT COTTAGE BED AND BREAKFAST and drops her bags. She looks at the long road that leads to the unseen cottage.

She tries her phone again. No luck. Lifting her bags, she plods down the driveway.

EXT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - DAY

The cottage is a picture of Christmas. A pine bough drapes around the front door where a wreath, adorned with small, shiny ornaments, hangs.

Candles glow in the windows and a ribbon of smoke escapes from the stone chimney.

The two-story cottage is inviting and cozy.

Kendra arrives at the front door, and KNOCKS.

It opens and she is greeted by JAY (75), an elderly man with thinning hair, a pleasant smile, and piercing, bright eyes.

JAY

Hello!

KENDRA

Hi, I was wondering if you might
have a room available?

JAY

A room? Yes! Yes, come in, please.

Kendra enters the house.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Old furniture in good condition, hardwood floors, large
fireplace, everything tastefully decorated for Christmas.

JAY

Millie!? We have company!

MILLIE (70), enters from the hallway. Millie is good-
natured and dressed in an ugly Christmas sweater. Youth
still sparkles through the years of her timeworn face
under winter-white hair.

MILLIE

Why, hello, dear. You're freezing!
Come and stand by the fire and get
warm.

Millie guides Kendra to the fireplace.

JAY

She was asking about a room,
Millie.

KENDRA

I had a booking at the Chestnut
Spa, but they're closed.

MILLIE

We haven't rented any rooms out
this season.

Kendra tours the room and admires the knickknacks and
holiday decorations.

KENDRA

Lovely... just lovely.

JAY

We like to decorate the place for
all the holidays.

MILLIE

But Christmas is our favorite.

KENDRA

This place is beautiful! You should be booked solid all season.

Millie shows a warm smile.

MILLIE

Oh, we were waiting just for you.

KENDRA

Wonderful!

MILLIE

How long will you be staying?

KENDRA

Through New Year's.

MILLIE

A week then.

KENDRA

That's right.

MILLIE

Very well! I must tell you, though... that we should only have one "b" in bed and breakfast.

Kendra is puzzled.

MILLIE (CONT'D)

You're on your own with breakfast.

JAY

In fact, you'll be on your own all week. We're going to be heading out for Christmas.

KENDRA

What? Oh no, I've interrupted your plans...

JAY

Don't be silly! It's a relief knowing someone will be here.

KENDRA

But you don't even know me! You shouldn't be that trusting with strangers.

JAY
Are you going to rob the place?

KENDRA
No, of course not.

JAY
Then it's settled. You can stay
for the week.

Jay exits the room.

KENDRA
What are the rates?

JAY (O.S.)
Reasonable. More than fair. We can
settle when we get back.

MILLIE
We're running a little late. We
were just about to leave when you
arrived.

Millie ushers Kendra from the living room.

INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY

Clean, large, and decorated for Christmas.

MILLIE
This is the kitchen.

She opens the refrigerator to reveal sparse shelves.

MILLIE (CONT'D)
I'm afraid you'll need to do some
shopping.

Jay enters wearing his coat. He carries Millie's.

JAY
You can find everything you need
in town at the General Store. Here
you are, dear.

He helps her on with her coat.

JAY (CONT'D)
Yes sir, it's a good thing you
arrived when you did, or you would
have missed us!

They head towards the foyer.

MILLIE
I wish we could stay and help you
get settled.

KENDRA
Well... me too, I mean...

Millie passes a framed corkboard filled with notes and a
set of keys.

MILLIE
The keys are right there!

INT. THE FOYER - DAY

They approach the front door.

KENDRA
Is there a number where I can
reach you?

JAY
We don't have a mobile phone,
so...

MILLIE
You'll be fine, dear.

Jay opens the door, steps aside and gestures to Millie.

JAY
No time to dilly, Millie!

MILLIE
On my way, Jay!

Millie kisses him on the cheek.

JAY
Why, thank you.

Millie flashes one last smile to Kendra.

MILLIE
Enjoy the cottage, dear. I wish we
could stay.

Jay ushers her out the door.

JAY
But we can't! Goodbye, dear!

KENDRA

Goodbye!

And they're gone. Kendra watches as they head towards an old Suburban.

She closes the door, and with a slight shake of her head, tries to make sense of what just happened.

Her phone HUMS. She takes it from her pocket and listens to a message.

VOICE ON PHONE (V.O.)

This is the Chestnut Spa and resort. Unfortunately, we have closed for the unforeseeable future. Your reservation has -

She ends the call. A sudden thought hits her as she turns and opens the door.

The Suburban is gone. She crams her neck to see down the driveway. Nothing is there.

EXT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - NIGHT

The home glows with the lights of Christmas... window candles, white lights in the pine bough over the door.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kendra sits alone by the fire, glass of wine untouched. Her eyes drift to the phone.

A gentle piano plays a Christmas tune.

The spell is broken as she hears a loud car approach. She hurries off the sofa and shuts off the CD player.

Headlights shine through the window.

Concerned and worried, she bolts from the living room.

INT. THE FOYER - NIGHT

Kendra rushes to the door, and turns the lock. She hears footsteps approach.

She takes backward steps out of the foyer, her eyes glued to the door.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kendra makes her stand next to the fireplace - her hand touches the iron poker to make sure it's within reach.

A KEY CLICKS in the lock as muffled voices speak from the other side.

NICK (O.S.)

Did we leave the lights on last time?

WILL (O.S.)

No. I'm sure we turned them off.

Kendra is terrified as the door opens and FOOTSTEPS echo in the foyer.

NICK REED (35), stands in the entrance to the living room. He's an affable guy with a killer smile. Dressed for the outdoors with a flannel jacket and work boots, his arms are filled with two bags of groceries.

Behind him is his son, WILL REED (12), a good-looking kid with an aura that makes him older than his years.

NICK

Who are you!?

KENDRA

Who are you!?

They wait for an answer.

NICK (CONT'D)

I asked you first!

KENDRA (CONT'D)

I asked you first!

NICK (CONT'D)

My name is Nick Reed.

KENDRA

And?

NICK

And what? My name is Nick Reed.

KENDRA

You said that.

NICK

Yeah - and now you can tell me yours.

KENDRA

My name... is Rachel. Rachel Smith.

Nick and Will make their way towards the kitchen.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
Where are you going!?

NICK
The kitchen.

She hurries after them.

KENDRA
Why!?

NICK
Because these bags are getting heavy.

INT. THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nick makes his way to the counter and puts the bags down.

KENDRA
No, why are you here!?

NICK
That's odd. I was just about to ask you the same question.

KENDRA
I've rented a room till New Years.

NICK
Rented?

KENDRA
That's what one does at a B&B.

Nick has locked eyes with Kendra. She raises an eyebrow, and he remembers his manners.

NICK
This is Will. My son.

KENDRA
Will.

WILL
Nice to meet you.

NICK
We always spend Christmas here.

KENDRA

Oh?

WILL

Since I can remember.

She sits at the table as Nick opens the fridge.

NICK

I'll just be a minute.

KENDRA

Be my guest.

NICK

If you're here till New Years,
you'll need to do some shopping.

KENDRA

The General Store, I know.

NICK

There's a nice motel in town.

KENDRA

I'm happy here.

Nick turns to Will, who shrugs.

NICK

All right. I guess you can stay.

KENDRA

Why, thank you, though it's not
entirely in your hands, now, is
it?

NICK

I'm the caretaker here.

KENDRA

And I'm a guest.

He continues putting groceries into the fridge.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

So, being caretaker to this place
keeps you busy?

NICK

Somewhat. I'm also a hunting and
fishing guide.

KENDRA
Ah.

NICK
You fish?

KENDRA
No.

NICK
I won't bother asking if you hunt.

Kendra smiles.

NICK (CONT'D)
Have you picked a room upstairs?

KENDRA
Yes.

NICK
Not the second one on the right...

KENDRA
No.

WILL
Not the third one on the right...

KENDRA
First one on the left.

NICK
Oh. The large one.

Kendra nods her agreement.

NICK (CONT'D)
Well... we'll be moving in
tomorrow. Just came to drop the
groceries off.

Nick continues to stock the fridge. Will looks at him -
both make a "puzzled" expression to each other.

EXT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - NIGHT

As Kendra watches from a window, Nick and Will walk to
their older, mint condition JEEP.

The men give a feeble wave to her before they jump in.

INT. JEEP - NIGHT

Nick starts the Jeep as Will watches the cottage window.

WILL
What was all that about!?

NICK
I have no idea.

WILL
Who is she!?

NICK
I have no idea.

Nick turns the Jeep around.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kendra turns away from the window, and plunks into a chair, confused.

EXT. FOREST TREETOPS - DAY

Snow on the treetops glisten from the early morning sun.

EXT. A CLEARING IN THE FOREST - DAY

A pickup truck is parked in the middle of the clearing.

The sign on the truck door reads: CHESTNUT TECHNOLOGIES
AND LUMBER DISTRIBUTION.

A bulldozer is idle next to a stack of tree trunks. It's
an early morning lull in an active area.

The tailgate on the truck is down as Nick and his FOREMAN
(50s), lean over a large surveyor's map of the forest.

Another truck pulls in next to them.

NICK
We're still well within our
allowable cut, so you're good
doing all of sector five today.

FOREMAN
You got it.

WORKER 1 (20s), exits the truck with an overnight envelope in his hand.

WORKER 1
Mail, Mr. Reed. Madeline said this
looked important.

Nick glances at the return address and reads.

NICK
Harris, Whalen, and Coville.

His jaw tightens.

He rips it open. Skims it.

NICK (CONT'D)
Lawsuit. The Green Knights...

FOREMAN
You're kidding.

NICK
They filed a complaint. It's a
court order -- stop work until the
case is settled.

FOREMAN
You're not even profiting! You're
donating all the wood!

Nick reads in disbelief.

NICK
Doesn't matter. They don't care.

FOREMAN
It's your land! You own it!

Nick throws the envelope in the truck bed, disgusted.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - THE KITCHEN - DAY

Kendra is at the table, on her phone.

ANITA (V.O.)
So, you're not at the spa and you
found some Snow White cottage in
the woods?

KENDRA
Pretty much.

ANITA (V.O.)

If the animals help you clean house and do the dishes, get out of there as fast as you can.

KENDRA

And there's a Prince Charming, too.

ANITA (V.O.)

What!? Okay, details and talk slow!

KENDRA

Some good-looking guy came in here last night. He's the caretaker, and a fish and hunter guide or something like that.

ANITA (V.O.)

Age?

KENDRA

I didn't ask.

ANITA (V.O.)

Guess.

KENDRA

Thirties.

ANITA (V.O.)

Perfect! A nice little holiday romance.

KENDRA

He has a son, about twelve.

ANITA (V.O.)

Uh-oh. The romance bubble just popped.

KENDRA

There's no romance, Anita.

ANITA (V.O.)

You can't fool around with married men, even if they're tempting.

KENDRA

I'm not planning on fooling around with him.

ANITA (V.O.)
Yeah, but you thought about it.

KENDRA
Anita!

ANITA (V.O.)
Eh. Forget about him. He probably
lives in a double-wide with no
electricity in the woods.

KENDRA
But he's cute. Very cute.

EXT. A CLEARING IN THE FOREST - DAY

Work is at a standstill as Nick speaks on the phone at
the pickup truck.

In the distance, the Foreman is at the bulldozer as he
talks with Worker 1.

NICK
What kind of a chance do I have,
Al?

AL (V.O.)
I can't tell you what kind of a
chance you have until I see the
document.

NICK
What's there to see!? It says I
have to stop working. Isn't that
enough!? I own this land!

INT. AL SELDON'S OFFICE - DAY

A cramped and stuffy office frozen in time. Everything
old and musty.

Seated at the desk and speaking on a rotary phone, is AL
SELDON (84). Al seems as musty as the rest of his office.
From his nineteen fifties suit, to his bow tie, he's a
relic of a bygone era.

AL
I know you do, Nicky... but there
are loopholes.

NICK (V.O.)
Name one.

AL

I have to see your boundaries and surveyor markers before I can say, but if you're cutting in the long run, it could become dangerous to the land it borders.

NICK (V.)

Dangerous? How can it be dangerous!?

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION WITH NICK/AL.

AL

I can't tell you because I haven't seen anything yet! But there might be some good news.

NICK

What?

AL

They might be willing to settle out of court.

NICK

I don't want to settle. I want to win!

AL

I didn't go into law to lose, Nicky. Toss some credit my way.

NICK

How many times have you settled out of court?

AL

Dozens of times. Standard procedure. What's the law firm?

NICK

Harris, Whalen, and Coville.

AL

Oh, no. Them!?

NICK

You know them?

AL

Only by reputation.

NICK
What's their reputation?

AL
They're also known as the
Manhattan Blood Suckers. They
don't leave you with much.

NICK
No settlement. We're going to take
on these city lawyers.

AL
Yeah, I thought you would say
that.

NICK
Al, you were practicing law before
any of them were even born. You
can take them down.

AL
I can?

NICK
No question about it.

AL
I'll draw up a countersuit.

NICK
I'm in the right, aren't I? I
mean, this is my land.

AL
Of course it's yours. No dispute.
But in the eyes of the law, there
are variables.

NICK
I'll trust you to get past them.

AL
When can you get the document to
me?

NICK
I'll drive it in to you now.

Nick hangs up and turns and SHOUTS to his Foreman.

NICK (CONT'D)
Okay! Turn 'em over and get to
work! For today, anyway.

FOREMAN

You got it, boss!

EXT. ROAD TO CHESTNUT - DAY

Kendra treks along a narrow two-lane road and arrives at a sign: CHESTNUT - 5 MILES.

KENDRA

Oh, no.

A deep sigh, a stretch of the neck, and she continues on her way.

INT. JEEP - DAY

Nick, behind the wheel, spots Kendra up ahead.

NICK

Oh, no.

He reaches for the document on the passenger seat, and shoves it into the glove compartment.

EXT. ROAD TO CHESTNUT - DAY

The Jeep approaches, pulls in front of her, and comes to a stop. Nick opens the door and hops out.

Nick slows down, She keeps moving. He drives ahead, pulls over, and climbs out.

NICK

Hello, again.

KENDRA

Hi.

NICK

Want a lift?

He smiles.

INT. THE JEEP - DAY

Kendra leans back on the headrest.

KENDRA

Thanks for stopping. I thought I was in better shape.

NICK

You walked a mile.

KENDRA

Only a mile? In the city I do that in heels.

NICK

Not all at once. That was a country mile.

KENDRA

I'll take that excuse.

NICK

You heading somewhere, or just enjoying the view?

KENDRA

Trying to find a rental. Closest one online was eighty miles out.

NICK

There's a guy in town.... A lot closer. Bit of a character, but he's got cars. I'll take you there.

KENDRA

Thank you.

A beat.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

So, besides fishing and rescuing stranded women, what do you do?

NICK

Well... I'm an Alderman.

KENDRA

That's interesting.

NICK

Not so much in a town like Chestnut. I usually deal with snow plows knocking down mailboxes... kids breaking fences in the summer... and giving strangers from the city rides into town.

This brings a smile to her face and no response.

KENDRA
I've been thinking...

NICK
About?

KENDRA
You and your son spending
Christmas there for years... will
your wife be there, too?

NICK
No. She died many years ago.

KENDRA
Oh... oh, I'm so sorry. I had no
idea.

NICK
It's all right. Anyway... I can't
really stay at the cottage with
you. Small town, heavy gossip.

KENDRA
And you an Alderman.

NICK
True. Doesn't help.

KENDRA
We can swap places.

NICK
What are you talking about?

KENDRA
You take the cottage, and I'll
take the double wide in the woods!

NICK
The what?

KENDRA
Nothing.

Nick is silent, his eyes on the road.

EXT. LUCKY LARRY'S USED CARS - DAY

A tiny shack with chipped paint. Over the door: LUCKY
LARRY'S USED CARS. Five decent cars on the lot.

Nick pulls in. The shack door swings open -- LUCKY LARRY (50s), slicked hair, wrinkled suit, smiles wide.

LARRY

Nick Reed! The very man I wanted to see!

NICK

Larry.

Kendra is drawn to the cars.

LARRY

Talk to the Mayor about my variance?

NICK

I did. Still has to go through the zoning board.

LARRY

But Ed Collins runs that board! I owe him money!

NICK

That's your only route.

Larry frowns -- then spots Kendra.

LARRY

Excuse me, I've got a customer.

Instant smile.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Hello, little lady! You're lookin' at the finest used cars in New Hampshire!

NICK

She's with me, Larry. Cool it.

KENDRA

I like this one.

LARRY

Ah! A gem! Yours for eight grand!

KENDRA

I want to rent it.

Smile vanishes.

LARRY
Ah. A rental.

NICK
Larry, this is Rachel Smith.

LARRY
Pleasure. Rentals are this way.

He leads the way.

EXT. BEHIND THE USED CAR SHACK - DAY

Two rust buckets sit like props from a horror film. One bumper is roped on.

KENDRA
Is there another town with rentals?

LARRY
Eighty miles.
(points)
That way.

She sighs, defeated.

KENDRA
I'll take the one without rope.

LARRY
Excellent choice! Comes with Lucky Larry Free Towing -- day or night.

KENDRA
Good to know.

LARRY
Except Christmas Eve or Day -- that's a hundred bucks.

Kendra nods in disbelief.

NICK
I'll leave you to it. Got some errands.

He heads for his Jeep.

KENDRA
Nick?

He stops. She smiles.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
Thanks for the ride.

He tips an invisible hat, drives off.

LARRY
Cash only. No credit.

EXT. THE CHESTNUT CAFÉ, MAIN STREET - DAY

Kendra's wreck of a car pulls into a parking space in front of THE CHESTNUT CAFÉ - a small dinerette nestled between other stores.

With a struggle, she opens her door and steps out. A WOMAN passing by sees her, and smiles.

WOMAN
Hi!

The woman continues on her way.

Kendra is amazed.

KENDRA
I don't believe it. They really do.

She enters the café.

INT. CHESTNUT CAFÉ - DAY

There are cloth-covered tables, several booths, and a take out counter. Several customers eat lunch.

Kendra arrives at the counter.

A WAITRESS is at the register.

KENDRA
Um, just a coffee, please. Black, no sugar.

WAITRESS
To go?

KENDRA
For here, please.

WAITRESS

Sure. Just sit anywhere. I'll bring it to you.

KENDRA

Thank you!

Kendra sits at a table in the middle of the room. A stone-faced FEMALE CUSTOMER looks at her.

Kendra smiles.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

Hi!

The stone-faced woman doesn't react. She turns back to her lunch.

Kendra gets the embarrassed expression off her face as the Waitress arrives with her coffee.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

Thank you.

The Waitress smiles and returns to the counter.

Kendra notices a man who has entered and orders at the counter. As he waits, his eyes meet Kendra's.

She turns away immediately!

The man approaches her table, his coffee-to-go in his hand. Dashing in his long, winter trench coat, he is ERIC ANDERSON (29), tall, dark hair, the face of a movie star.

ERIC

May I join you, seeing as how the place is full?

KENDRA

It's not very full, and yes, you can join me.

ERIC

I've seen just about everyone in town... but, you're a vision.

KENDRA

And you need to work harder on your pick-up lines.

She notices the dirty glares from the other customers.

He takes a seat.

ERIC

Yeah. I'm not their favorite person.

KENDRA

I'm sitting with the local "bad boy?"

ERIC

I don't think of myself as bad.

KENDRA

So the icy, evil eyes you're getting are just Chestnut's way of saying "hey, there!?"

ERIC

I'm with an organization they don't approve of.

He offers his hand.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I'm Eric Anderson.

She shakes his hand, and with a slight hesitation -

KENDRA

Rachel Smith.

ERIC

Nice to meet you.

KENDRA

So, what organization is it that they don't approve of?

ERIC

It's called "The Green Knights."

Kendra almost spits up her coffee!

ERIC (CONT'D)

Are you all right?

KENDRA

Yes, yes... just went down the wrong pipe.

She coughs and composes herself, and plays dumb.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

I'm fine... just fine... what is it you do in the... Green Knights, was it?

ERIC

It's an environmental protection organization. I'm the head of the New England chapter.

KENDRA

You don't say?

ERIC

We fight dangers to our environment all over New England.

KENDRA

Interesting.

ERIC

Other chapters all over the world take care of the rest.

KENDRA

I see. You've got the planet covered.

ERIC

For the most part.

KENDRA

So, you're not from Chestnut?

ERIC

Jersey. Hoboken.

KENDRA

What brings you here?

An OLD MAN (80s), frail but with fight in his soul, takes a seat at the table next to them.

ERIC

Some idiot is clearing twenty-five thousand acres of trees.

KENDRA

What?

ERIC

Perfectly healthy pines and white pines, northern hardwood... just clearing the land.

KENDRA

Oh?

ERIC

The Green Knights are suing his company.

KENDRA

Think you'll win?

ERIC

That lawyer won't leave him with a single toothpick.

Kendra leans forward and whispers.

KENDRA

So why the dirty looks from the townspeople?

ERIC

Some think that because he owns the land he can do what he wants with it.

The Old Man speaks up.

OLD MAN

Darn right! That's why Ethan Allen captured Fort Ticonderoga!

Eric smiles politely.

EXT. CHESTNUT CAFÉ - DAY

Kendra and Eric exit onto the sidewalk.

ERIC

The town was gifted 6,000 acres as a wildlife preserve - the Jeremiah N. Mildred Preserve.

KENDRA

Who is Jeremiah N. Mildred?

ERIC

The guy who gave them the land! Kept the other twenty-five thousand acres for himself. Now he's destroying them.

KENDRA

The lawsuit will stop it.

ERIC

They should get served notice any time now. Are you free for dinner tonight?

She's caught off-guard.

KENDRA

Dinner!? Oh. No, no, I can't.

ERIC

I'm not used to taking "no" for an answer.

KENDRA

Well, in this case, you'll have to.

The Old Man exits the café.

OLD MAN

Look, you, why don't you just mind your own business?

ERIC

I'm only trying to help you.

OLD MAN

You can't tell us what to do with our land. It's ours!

ERIC

Right.

Eric checks his watch and turns to Kendra.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Look, um... I'm late for an appointment at City Hall. May I have your number!?

OLD MAN

Area code six zero three -

ERIC

Not you!

KENDRA

I'll see you around town. I'm staying till after New Year's.

ERIC

You're sure about dinner tonight?

KENDRA

I have plans.

ERIC

Well... Nice meeting you.

OLD MAN

Should just mind your own business.

ERIC

Listen, people are only the custodians of the land. We don't actually "own" it. The land will be here long after people, when -

He gestures to the buildings.

ERIC (CONT'D)

- all this has crumbled and turned to dust. My aim is to keep it green and safe for future generations.

OLD MAN

Hogwash! Your aim is to make a quick buck.

Eric smiles at Kendra, turns, and hurries off.

The Old Man leers at her.

KENDRA

Don't look at me! I just came in for a coffee!

OLD MAN

A likely story.

The Old Man turns, and scuffs on his way.

Kendra gives a lopsided grin and walks to her car.

Just as she is about to unlock her door, she spots Will, on the sidewalk with his school backpack.

KENDRA

Hello, Will!

WILL

Hey. I see you've been to Lucky Larry's.

KENDRA

Yes. Your dad gave me a lift this morning. Isn't this a school day?

WILL

Half day.

KENDRA

Ah. Have fun!

Will smiles and continues walking. Kendra notices a table set up on the sidewalk across the street.

A large, cardboard sign is on an easel next to the table: SUPPORT THE TREE REMOVAL.

Kendra crosses the street.

EXT. SIDEWALK PROTEST TABLE - DAY

On the table are folded brochures and a sign-up sheet, watched over by PENNY DORN (22), pretty, glasses, ponytail, no makeup, focused.

Kendra gives her a smile as she arrives at the table.

KENDRA

Merry Christmas.

She picks up a brochure.

PENNY

It's not going to be a Merry Christmas if the Green Knights get their way.

KENDRA

No?

PENNY

How would you feel if you were cutting down twenty-five thousand acres of trees and someone tried to stop you - when it's your land to begin with!

KENDRA

Well... I think most people would be against cutting them.

PENNY

Sure. Clueless people.

Penny's spirit seems to fall.

PENNY (CONT'D)
Are you clueless?

KENDRA
Well, I'm new in town. But, the
fact is, most people want to
protect the environment.

Penny's hopes rise.

PENNY
Right.

KENDRA
And that would include trees.

PENNY
Right.

KENDRA
Protect them. Trees.

PENNY
Right.

KENDRA
By not cutting them down.

PENNY
That's where you're wrong.

KENDRA
That makes no sense.

PENNY
It makes perfect sense. Unless
you're clueless.

Kendra raises her brow and grins.

KENDRA
Hm. Well... nice chatting.

She turns to go -

PENNY
Wait!

Kendra turns as Penny hands her a brochure.

PENNY (CONT'D)
Reading material. Merry Christmas!

Kendra nods a confused "thank you," puts the brochure in her coat pocket, and crosses the street.

INT. KENDRA'S CAR - DAY

She turns the radio on. Nothing but static. Changes the tuner - gets nothing.

KENDRA
Shouldn't have expected it to work
in the first place.

She sees Will Reed ahead, walking into a large, Victorian mansion that screams "money." Puzzled, she continues on her way.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kendra enters the living room with a coffee in hand. Her phone rings, and she answers.

KENDRA
Anita!? Hi.

There is paper CRINKLE and RUSTLE on Anita's line.

ANITA (V.O.)
I envy you taking these few days
before Christmas off. I'm doing
that next year.

KENDRA
Busy?

Kendra makes herself comfortable on the sofa.

ANITA (V.O.)
Busier than ever! I'm up to my
lower lip in depositions.

KENDRA
Sounds more like you're up to your
lower lip in wrapping paper and
tape.

INT. ANITA'S OFFICE - DAY

Anita has Kendra on speaker phone as she wraps Christmas presents on her desk filled with ribbon, boxes, and wrapping paper.

ANITA (V.O.)
Yeah, yeah. So tell me what's
happening in Hicksville?

KENDRA (V.O.)
It's a bit on the odd side.

ANITA
Odd?

KENDRA (V.O.)
The townspeople seem to support
the trees being cut!

ANITA
Seriously?

KENDRA (V.O.)
That's what I'm finding. Some are
pretty passionate about it.

ANITA
That doesn't make sense. I would
think the town would be furious.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION - ANITA/KENDRA

KENDRA
The Green Knight representative
appears to be the bad guy in town -
at least at the local diner.

ANITA
Are you going to let them know who
you are?

KENDRA
Not yet. I think I'll learn more
as Rachel Smith.

ANITA
Rachel Smith?

KENDRA
My spy name.

ANITA
Anyone mention the lawsuit?

KENDRA
No, but I'm sure it's arrived.

ANITA

We got confirmation of delivery.
So, what's your plan?

KENDRA

I want to know why people support
the destruction of twenty-five
thousand acres of tree life.

ANITA

What does your secret admirer
think?

KENDRA

Secret - you mean Nick?

ANITA

The double-wide who lives in the
woods.

KENDRA

Nick.

ANITA

Did you ask him?

KENDRA

No, but I said he could stay here
for Christmas.

ANITA

What!? Kendra, he's married!

KENDRA

He's a widower.

ANITA

Oh. Oh, that's sad. For how long?

KENDRA

Many years.

ANITA

Then he might be ready for a new
romance.

KENDRA

Anita.

A car approaches.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

Someone's here, hold on.

She rises and goes to the window.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
It's Nick.

ANITA
That's the second time we've been
on the phone and he shows up.
That's a sign!

KENDRA
Goodbye, Anita.

ANITA
It's a sign! Merry Christmas!

BACK TO SCENE

Kendra exits the living room.

INT. THE FOYER - DAY

She opens the door to see Nick approach as he glances at
her car.

NICK
I see it got you home.

KENDRA
So far, so good.

She steps aside.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
Come in.

NICK
Thank you.

He enters, she closes the door.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick and Kendra enter.

KENDRA
I just made a pot of coffee.

NICK
Yeah... that would be great.

She heads for the kitchen as Nick lifts a snow globe from the window sill.

He shakes it.

INSERT - SNOW GLOBE

A small plastic man, woman, and child with a snowman in front of several pine trees. Snow swirls around them.

BACK TO SCENE

Nick watches the glass encased blizzard with an emotionless stare.

The snow winds down.

A smile tugs at his lips.

INT. AL SELDON'S OFFICE - DAY

Al is at his desk with the lawsuit. He picks up his phone, and holds the document close to his eyes.

He sings/mutters as he dials the rotary.

AL
Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells, Jingle
all the day....

He hears the phone RING in his ear.

KENDRA (V.O.)
Hello, this is Kendra Jackson of
Harris, Whalen, and Coville.

AL
Listen, Missy, this is Al Seldon
in -

KENDRA (V.O.)
I'm sorry I'm not here to take
your call.

AL
I'll bet.

KENDRA
I will be out of the office until
January second.

(MORE)

KENDRA (CONT'D)
If this is an emergency regarding
a current case, you can reach me
on my cell at -

Al grabs a pencil and writes on an envelope.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
Five-five-five - eight - one -

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM -DAY

Kendra enters as Nick returns the snow globe to its place
on the mantel.

KENDRA (O.S.)
Here we go...

Kendra notices the globe as she hands him the coffee.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
It's beautiful isn't it?

NICK
Yeah. You know, I've been thinking
about what you said today... Will
and I staying here for Christmas.

KENDRA
I understand. Small town talk.

NICK
Well, that's what I've been
thinking about. I mean... the
place is big... and it's a B&B...
four bedrooms... if you're sure
you won't mind...

KENDRA
Of course I won't mind. What about
the owners?

NICK
Hm?

KENDRA
Maybe I should try and call - to
let them know.

Nick starts to speak.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
On second thought, if you've been
here for all the other
Christmases, then I guess they'll
expect it.

She notices the fire going out and puts her coffee cup on
the end table.

NICK
Let me.

Nick puts wood in the fire.

Kendra's phone rings.

KENDRA
Excuse me.

NICK
Sure.

She answers.

KENDRA
Hello, this is...

She shoots a quick glance to Nick as he stokes the fire.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
Rachel Smith.

AL (V.O.)
Rachel Smith? Who's Rachel Smith?

KENDRA
I am.

Nick looks over his shoulder. Kendra smiles back at him.

AL (V.O.)
I'm looking for Kendra Jackson.

KENDRA
Oh!

INT. AL SELDON'S OFFICE - DAY

Al looks over the document.

AL
Do you know her?

KENDRA (V.O.)
Yes! Yes, I do.

AL
May I speak with her?

KENDRA (V.O.)
Not at the moment. Is it important?

AL
She is suing my client, and I need to speak to her.

INTERCUT - KENDRA/ AL'S OFFICE

KENDRA
Which one is that?

AL
Are you her secretary?

KENDRA
Yes! Yes, that's right. Which one?

AL
Chestnut Technologies and Lumber Distribution.

KENDRA
Oh! Them!

AL
Listen, I want to speak to Kendra Jackson!

KENDRA
Well, you can't!

AL
Why not!?

KENDRA
You got the wrong number!

She ends the call.

Al hangs up and redials.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM

Nick returns to his seat.

NICK
What was that all about?

KENDRA
Oh - prank call.

Kendra's phone HUMS. She grabs and mutes it.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
These robo calls are really
annoying.

NICK
So, why are you alone for
Christmas?

KENDRA
All I have left in my family is a
brother whom I haven't seen in
years. And don't get me started on
his wife.

NICK
Why?

KENDRA
All they do is fight, from sun-up
until sundown. Non-stop.

NICK
That's not good.

KENDRA
Chestnut, New Hampshire, seemed
like a nice, quiet alternative.

NICK
Where's home for you?

KENDRA
Manhattan.

NICK
How did you find Chestnut Cottage?
It's not listed online.

KENDRA
It's not?

Nick nods slightly, "no."

KENDRA (CONT'D)
It would be booked up if it were.

NICK
But, how did you find it?

KENDRA
I passed the sign on the way to
the Spa.

NICK
The Spa that's closed.

KENDRA
I didn't find that out until I got
there.

NICK
So, in Manhattan... you've got an
apartment?

KENDRA
Of course I've. Why the questions?

NICK
Just curious.

KENDRA
Well, you know what curiosity did
to the cat?

NICK
The cat that allowed the Alderman
to take her out to dinner?

KENDRA
Dinner?

NICK
Yeah.

KENDRA
Oh.

NICK
Pick you up at seven?

KENDRA
Tonight?

NICK
Is tonight all right?

KENDRA
Tonight? Yes. Yes, it's a good
night... for tonight.

He smiles.

NICK
Is everything okay?

KENDRA
Fine. Everything is fine!

NICK
Seven?

KENDRA
Seven. I'll drive in myself.

NICK
Are you sure?

KENDRA
Yes. Independent. I'm independent.

NICK
Sounds good. I'll see you at
seven.

He stands and heads to the Foyer. Kendra follows.

INT. THE FOYER - DAY

Nick arrives at the door and opens it.

KENDRA
Oh! Where tonight?

NICK
The Chestnut Café. It's the only
place in town.

She smiles best she can.

KENDRA
Ah! Of course. Seven.

He heads for his car as Kendra closes the door.

She winces.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
The Chestnut Café. The only place
in town.

INT. CHESTNUT CAFÉ - NIGHT

The café is half-filled with evening diners. Kendra waits at a table with Will, and a vacant place setting.

WILL
He's usually on time.

KENDRA
Right now, he's a half hour late.

WILL
When he knew he was running late,
he sent me here to tell you. Gotta
give him credit for that!

KENDRA
I think you're right.
(beat)
I saw you this afternoon.

WILL
I know. We talked.

KENDRA
After that... when I was driving.
You were going into a big house?

WILL
Yeah.

KENDRA
Nice place.

WILL
It's okay.

KENDRA
You're from Chestnut, right?

WILL
Born here.

KENDRA
Ever been to New York?

WILL
No. That's where the Yankees are.

KENDRA
Let me guess -- you're Red Sox
Nation?

WILL
Through and through.

KENDRA
I don't follow baseball much.

WILL
(shrugs)
Not everyone has to.

Kendra smiles. A beat.

KENDRA
The house... is it yours?

WILL
Whose else would it be?

Across the room, she notices Eric Anderson eating alone.
She quickly looks away.

Will perks up -- Nick enters.

WILL (CONT'D)
Here he is!

Will stands as Nick joins them.

NICK
Sorry I'm late.

KENDRA
Will and I had a great talk.

WILL
I can still make the seven-thirty
movie!
(to Kendra)
Good night, Miss Smith!
(to Nick)
See ya, Dad!

Will hurries out.

KENDRA
A movie theater in Chestnut? Does
it show movies with sound?

NICK
Occasionally we get one in color,
too.

Kendra laughs. Nick doesn't. He's distracted -- distant.

KENDRA
Everything okay?

NICK
Yeah. Just some legal things
popping up.

Kendra pauses... starts to speak... stops... then --

KENDRA
Anything serious?

NICK
When it involves lawyers, it
usually is.

A young WAITER (16), arrives.

RICHARD
Good evening. I'm Richard. I'll be
your waiter.

NICK
How's it going, Richard?

RICHARD
Great, Mister Reed! Just got named
team captain.

NICK
Congratulations!
(to Kendra)
Chestnut Chargers. Hockey.

Kendra smiles.

RICHARD
Can I start you off with something
to drink?

KENDRA
Do you have a wine list?

RICHARD
Kinda. House red or house white.

KENDRA
Red, please.

NICK
Same.

RICHARD

Another waiter will bring them
right over... I'm not old enough
to serve drinks.

He scurries off.

NICK

Small town charm.

KENDRA

Speaking of small towns, I was out
driving today and saw Will going
into a big Victorian.

NICK

That's my house.

(a beat)

It is.

KENDRA

Yes! I know! I believe you!

NICK

Where did you think I lived? A
little cabin in the woods?

KENDRA

No, I --

NICK

Just because I'm a hunting and
fishing guide doesn't mean I live
like Daniel Boone.

KENDRA

(chuckles)

I'm sorry. It's a beautiful house.

NICK

I was thinking --

Richard returns with an OLDER WAITER (30s), who serves
the wine and departs.

RICHARD

Are you ready to order?

KENDRA

I haven't even looked yet.

NICK

Couple more minutes.

RICHARD

Yes, sir.

Richard exits.

KENDRA

You were thinking...

NICK

Every year, Chestnut has a
Christmas Eve Lantern Walk.

KENDRA

What's that?

NICK

A lot of people in town have a
special lantern they've made.

KENDRA

Aren't lanterns just... lanterns?

NICK

Colonial square glass – but the
metal sides are cut with different
designs. Snowmen, Santas, elves.
No two alike.

KENDRA

How did it start?

NICK

Eighteen fifty-two. Christmas Eve
blizzard. They went to midnight
service anyway... followed
lanterns in the storm.

KENDRA

Did everyone make it?

NICK

They did. After that, lanterns
became a tradition. Passed down
for generations.

KENDRA

That's a remarkable story.

NICK

I told you the history... because
I was hoping you'd join Will and
me this year.

KENDRA
I'd be honored.

Eric approaches.

ERIC
Ah. This must be your "other
plans."

Nick's eyes dart between them.

KENDRA
Hello, Eric.

ERIC
Surprised at your choice of
company.

KENDRA
People said the same when I was
with you this afternoon.

NICK
You were with him?

ERIC
What's it to you?

Nick stands.

NICK
How about I show you?

ERIC
Brute force? Sure. You win that
one. I'll win the other way.

Eric walks off. Nick sits.

NICK
Take my advice and stay away from
that snake.

Kendra manages a polite smile.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

A light snow falls on Manhattan.

INT. ANITA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Anita quickly packs up her briefcase beside a bag of wrapped gifts.

CARL (O.S.)
Thought you'd be gone by now.

She looks up to see Carl in the doorway.

ANITA
Wanted to finish the Bishop
buyout.

CARL
Any word from Kendra?

ANITA
She's at a cozy little B&B. Said
the town is very... quaint.

CARL
A B&B?

ANITA
Like something off a Christmas
card. Fireplaces. Snow.

CARL
Did she mention the lawsuit?

ANITA
Only that she's laying low, trying
to get a feel for the town.

CARL
That makes sense.

He notices Anita's awkward smile.

CARL (CONT'D)
She met someone, didn't she?

ANITA
Maybe.

CARL
This guy... local?

ANITA
He lives nearby. Hunter-fishing
type.

CARL

Great. Some bearded lumberjack
pulling her off track.

ANITA

She's not off track. She's good at
this.

CARL

She's vulnerable. That town's got
her playing house instead of
prepping depositions.

ANITA

It's a simple date, not an
elopement. She's also on
vacation... well, a working
vacation.

CARL

I want a flight out there.

ANITA

Tomorrow's Christmas Eve. No cars,
no rentals. She barely found a
room.

CARL

Then get me a Share-A-Ride. I
don't care if it's a sleigh with
reindeer.

ANITA

She'll think you don't trust her.

CARL

I trust her with a judge. Not some
local yokel.

ANITA

Not everyone in New Hampshire is a
yokel.

CARL

Book the flight.

EXT. CHESTNUT CAFÉ - NIGHT

A light snow falls as Nick walks Kendra to her car.

KENDRA

Why does everyone in town dislike
Eric?

NICK

He's meddling into something he has nothing to do with. Ever hear of the Green Knights?

KENDRA

The famous environmental group. Yes.

NICK

He's the head of the New England chapter. He's against the clearing of twenty-five thousand acres of trees.

KENDRA

And the town isn't?

NICK

The town is for it.

KENDRA

Are you?

NICK

Of course I am.

KENDRA

That's a lot of trees, don't you think?

NICK

It's a lot, but the town still has six thousand acres of pines and northern hardwood...

KENDRA

Six thousand acres versus twenty-five thousand. Seems a little disproportionate, don't you think?

NICK

Not to me.

KENDRA

Math wasn't your favorite subject?

NICK

I did all right with it. So - tomorrow night?

KENDRA

Will I look out of place without a lantern?

NICK
I'll bring one for you.

KENDRA
Thank you!

They arrive at her car.

NICK
I have another idea.

KENDRA
What would that be?

NICK
How about a Christmas Eve dinner?

KENDRA
I'm not the world's best cook. In fact, I can't cook at all.

NICK
Not you. Me. I can cook.

KENDRA
Oh! Well, in that case, yes! I make amazing cranberry spice cocktails.

NICK
That sounds great.

There is strong eye contact as they move closer together. With a tender motion, Nick takes her hands in his.

Their lips part, her shoulders tense. She closes her eyes. His gentle arms pull her close until the intended kiss is mere inches away.

As their lips are about to touch, FOOTSTEPS approach. Their eyes open. They listen.

The FOOTSTEPS are closer.

As if in a slow dream, they turn to see an ELDERLY COUPLE walk by with smiles on their faces as they see the "almost kiss."

ELDERLY MAN
Evening, Nick.

Nick returns the greeting with a listless nod.

The spell is broken as he turns back to Kendra.

NICK
I should go pick up Will at the
movie theater.

KENDRA
Mm-hm. I should be on my way.

He takes a few hesitant steps backwards.

NICK
Have a nice night.

KENDRA
Absolutely.

A smile builds on his face as he turns and strolls into
the night.

As if in a hypnotic dream, she opens her car door, and
climbs inside.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
What-did-I-almost-do?

EXT. ROAD FROM CHESTNUT - NIGHT

Kendra's car cuts through the black of night.

ANITA (V.O.)
He kissed you!?

KENDRA (V.O.)
Almost. We came close.

INT. KENDRA'S CAR - NIGHT

She has Anita on Speaker.

ANITA (V.O.)
Oh, Kendra, that is so romantic!

KENDRA
But he thinks I'm Rachel.

ANITA (V.O.)
Tell him the truth.

KENDRA
But I'll have to tell him why I
did it, and he thinks they should
be able to cut the trees down,
too!

ANITA (V.O.)
I've got some other bad news for
you.

KENDRA
What!?

ANITA (V.O.)
You not going to like it.
Tomorrow, guess who's -

The phone goes dead.

KENDRA
Hello!?

She looks at her phone.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
Dead battery!? Oh, come on!

BOOM! THUD!

The car swerves! She drops the phone and grabs the wheel
with both hands.

EXT. ROAD FROM CHESTNUT - NIGHT

The car comes to a limping halt as small metal parts
CLINK CLANK and tumble from the undercarriage and bounce
onto the pavement.

Kendra shuts the engine off, opens the door, steps onto
the road.

She sees the parts on the ground.

KENDRA
Terrific.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Nick's Jeep turns onto a side street.

INT. JEEP - CONTINUOUS

Nick sees Lucky Larry's Used Cars ahead, and spots
Kendra's car with a tow truck in front of it.

Concerned, he pulls in, hops out, and meets Larry as he
exits the office.

LARRY

Nick. How are you?

NICK

Isn't that Rachel's car?

LARRY

Yep. Broke down last night on Chestnut Road. She walked four miles back to town.

NICK

Is she all right?

LARRY

Yes, but she ain't too happy. I gave her the other one to use. Hope it holds out.

He lowers his voice to a whisper.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Hey... is it true what I hear about you and her?

NICK

What did you hear?

LARRY

You know...

NICK

No, I don't know.

LARRY

Public display of affection. In public.

NICK

We almost kissed. And if there's a next time we'll be out of view of the Chestnut Café!

Nick gets into the Jeep, and takes off.

EXT. A CLEARING IN THE FOREST - DAY

Nick, map in hand, is at the edge of the clearing with his Foreman.

NICK

I'd like to get another lot
started today, at least as much as
we can before three.

He folds the map.

NICK (CONT'D)

Christmas Eve, so we'll let
everyone go early.

FOREMAN

What about the lawsuit? We're
supposed to stop until -

NICK

As far as I'm concerned, the suit
hasn't arrived.

FOREMAN

Gotcha.

NICK

Maybe we can get a few more days
in while Al drafts up the
countersuit.

Nick is interrupted by loud RATTLES and SQUEAKS.

He and the Foreman turn to see Kendra approach in the
OTHER JUNKY CAR, as it rocks and bounces on the rutted
dirt road.

Nick turns to the Foreman.

NICK (CONT'D)

Let's get to it.

FOREMAN

Right, boss.

The Foreman walks into the forest area as Nick turns and
heads for the car.

The squeaky door opens and Kendra steps out.

She and Nick are shocked to see each other.

NICK

Rachel?

KENDRA

Nick?

NICK (CONT'D)

You lost?

KENDRA
I thought I'd find someone else
here.

NICK
Like who?

KENDRA
Whoever is running this operation.

NICK
You found him.
(beat)
I own Chestnut Technologies.

KENDRA
(stunned)
Of course... you do.

NICK
(a beat of
realization)
And you're not Rachel Smith.

KENDRA
No.
(quietly)
Kendra Jackson. Harris, Whalen,
and Coville.

Nick steps back like he's been punched.

NICK
You're the lawyer?

Kendra nods, guilt all over her face.

NICK (CONT'D)
You've been lying to me this
entire time?

KENDRA
I didn't know who you were. Not at
first. And then... I didn't know
how to tell you.

NICK
You had plenty of chances.

KENDRA
I didn't expect to --
(she pulls back)
I didn't come here looking for
this. Any of it.

NICK

But you came here with an agenda.
You were gathering intel.
Pretending.

KENDRA

No. It started that way, but --
things changed.

NICK

You're suing me.

KENDRA

It's my firm suing you. I didn't
even know it was you until today.

NICK

And that makes it okay?

KENDRA

I was going to tell you.

NICK

When? After the ruling? It's my
land and I'll see you in court.

KENDRA

So be it.

She storms into the car and tries to turn the engine over
as it strains, churns, and gives out.

Nick folds his arms and watches as she turns the ignition
several more times.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

Don't stare at me!

VRROOM - the engine turns over!

GRINDING GEARS cut into the air as she drives away.

EXT. CHESTNUT MOTEL - DAY

Typical L-shaped, one story motel with cars parked in
front of several rooms.

It's seen better days.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE - DAY

Carl Harris is at the desk as an OLD LADY (80s), dressed for cleaning the rooms, watches him sign the registry.

CARL

Is there a place in town where I
can rent a car?

The Old Lady looks at him, and smiles.

EXT. ROAD TO CHESTNUT - DAY

Nick's Jeep heads towards town.

INT. JEEP - DAY

Nick mutters to himself as he mocks Kendra.

NICK

"You mean, someone who respects
nature and the environment?"

His attention is captured by the sight of Kendra's car on the side of the road with the hood open.

A geyser of steam pours into the air.

Nick pulls over.

EXT. ROAD TO CHESTNUT - DAY

Kendra fans the steam away as Nick approaches.

She looks at him and turns back to the escaping steam.

NICK

I'm offering you a lift.

KENDRA

I'll wait for the next car!

NICK

That could be some time in this
neck of the woods.

KENDRA

I phoned Larry.

NICK

All right.

He puts the Jeep in gear.

KENDRA

No! Wait.

He turns to her.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

I got Larry's answering machine.
Who knows when he'll pick up.

Nick leans over and opens the passenger door.

INT. JEEP - DAY

Kendra's eyes are focused ahead.

She's in no mood to talk.

NICK

I'd like to explain something.

KENDRA

Maybe we should keep whatever is
left to be said for the judge.

NICK

This won't go to court.

Kendra gives him a slow burn.

KENDRA

Tell me why not?

NICK

Because I think I know you, and
you're better than that.

KENDRA

Attorney's Monthly said that I am
lethal in court.

NICK

I don't doubt it. When it's
something you believe in.

KENDRA

Stopping the destruction of twenty-
five thousand acres of trees is
something I believe in?

NICK

If you knew the facts.

KENDRA

What "facts?"

NICK

The "lethal lawyer" doesn't know the facts? I'm disappointed in you, Rachel. Kendra.

KENDRA

I read the full complaint from the Green Knights, and also how you refused to listen. That's all I need to proceed.

NICK

All due respect, you don't know diddly-squat.

EXT. ROAD TO CHESTNUT - DAY

With Kendra in the passenger seat, Nick makes a hard turn onto a dirt road that disappears into the forest.

INT. JEEP - DAY

The bumpy ride jostles Nick and Kendra.

KENDRA

Where are we going!?

NICK

To fact-finding school.

EXT. THE DIRT ROAD - DAY

The Jeep rides deeper into the forest.

EXT. JEREMIAH N. MILDRED SCENIC OVERLOOK - DAY

Nick leads the way as they arrive at a stone ledge to see thousands of forest acres and snow-covered treetops.

The sight is breathtaking.

NICK

I told you about my wife and how she had passed away.

KENDRA

Yes.

NICK

She was killed by a drunk driver
who ran a red light.

KENDRA

Oh, Nick...

NICK

I won a thirty million dollar
settlement. This land was owned by
two different farms. The owners
died within a year of each other.
This land went up for sale. And I
bought it.

Kendra shakes her head slow, in disbelief.

KENDRA

All of this!?

NICK

This is some of it. This is the
six thousand acres I gave to the
town. The Jeremiah N. Mildred
Preserve. The rest, I'm keeping.

KENDRA

And tearing down.

NICK

Ever wonder why the town is called
Chestnut?

KENDRA

After the tree, I would imagine.

NICK

But you're hard pressed to find a
chestnut tree anywhere in the
town.

Kendra is puzzled.

NICK (CONT'D)

In nineteen hundred, we got hit
with a blight. We lost about four
billion trees. They never grew
back.

KENDRA

Four billion chestnut trees?

NICK

Chestnuts were the most important forest trees. The nuts were a major food source for animals. Native Americans used chestnuts as a natural medicine for heart trouble and whooping cough.

He gestures.

NICK (CONT'D)

The trees that are on the twenty-five thousand acres will grow anywhere - and grow fast.

They take slow steps back to the Jeep.

NICK (CONT'D)

I'm clearcutting them and will introduce blight resistant chestnut trees back into the ecosystem.

She turns to him.

KENDRA

What?

NICK

Years down the road we'll have twenty-five thousand acres of chestnut trees.

Kendra stops, as does Nick.

KENDRA

Why didn't you tell me all this before?

NICK

If I knew you were the lawyer, I would have. My attorney is writing it all up in my countersuit.

KENDRA

Countersuit against the Green Knights?

NICK

They know my plans for the chestnuts. They just don't care. Their brains are in the "now," not the future.

INT. JEEP - DAY

Kendra is in deep thought as they drive back to town.

KENDRA

Clearcutting is when you chop everything right down to the dirt, correct?

NICK

Yeah. The sun will get at the new chestnut seeds and give them a great head start.

KENDRA

And you couldn't plant them in and among the other trees?

NICK

No sun, no growth.

KENDRA

This is costing you a fortune.

NICK

By the time I'm done I won't be a millionaire anymore, but the town of Chestnut will have the best forest in New England.

Her eyes open wide as she looks ahead.

NICK (CONT'D)

Who's that, I wonder?

Kendra sees her previous "Lucky Larry" car, broken down on the side of the road with the hood open.

KENDRA

That's the car I brought back to Lucky Larry's this morning! He rented it out again!?

NICK

Looks like.

Nick slows the Jeep down. Kendra sees Carl look up from under the hood.

She GASPS and sinks low in the seat.

NICK (CONT'D)

What's the matter?

KENDRA
Keep going, keep going, keep
going!

NICK
We should give him a hand.

KENDRA
Don't you dare! Step on it!

Nick increases speed back to normal.

Kendra looks over her shoulder out the back window.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
It can't be!

Nick speaks quietly and softly.

NICK
Is it someone we know?

KENDRA
I hope not.

EXT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - DAY

Nick pulls up in front of the cottage.

He turns the engine off and they are silent for a moment.

NICK
About tonight...

KENDRA
Nick, I can't.

They turn to each other.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
I can't represent my client and
spend Christmas Eve with the
defendant.

A slight nod from Nick in agreement.

NICK
I know.

KENDRA
I'll move into the motel tonight
so you and Will can spend
Christmas Eve here.

NICK

No... no, we'll be fine at home.

Kendra gives him a long stare.

NICK (CONT'D)

Good-night.

She exits the Jeep.

Nick watches as she enters the cottage and closes the door behind her.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - FOYER

Kendra listens to the Jeep fade away. She takes out her phone and dials.

VOICE ON MESSAGE

You have reached the office of the
Green Knights - Warriors for the
Environment. The office will be
closed Christmas Eve, through
January Second. We will return all
calls at that time...

Kendra ends the call.

She dials again - listens - then hits a series of buttons. She looks at the phone screen.

KENDRA

Come on... log in...

She hits more numbers, and looks at the screen.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

No!

INT. ANITA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Anita is taking a tray of Christmas cookies out of the oven. Plates are filled with decorative batches.

Her phone rings. She hits a button.

ANITA

Hi, this is Anita and you're on
speaker phone so don't say
anything you don't want the whole
world to know! Merry Christmas!

KENDRA (V.O.)

Anita.

ANITA

Kendra! What happened last night!?
You just disappeared!

KENDRA

My battery died.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kendra removes her coat with one hand and plunks down on the sofa.

KENDRA

This is the first chance I've had
to call you back.

ANITA (V.O.)

Listen! I've got something
important to tell you! Carl Harris
is -

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION - ANITA/KENDRA

KENDRA

In Chestnut.

ANITA

How did you know?

KENDRA

It's either that or his twin is
outside of town with a steaming
radiator.

ANITA

It's him.

KENDRA

What's he doing here!?

ANITA

He says he was worried that the
town seemed to support the tree
removal. But to be honest, I think
he's jealous of the hunter fishing
guy.

KENDRA

Jealous?

ANITA

He decided to fly out as soon as I mentioned him.

KENDRA

Jealous!? Carl!?

ANITA

Kendra, please don't tell me you haven't noticed that Carl has eyes for you.

KENDRA

That's ridiculous.

ANITA

No it's not. He's rich!

KENDRA

Listen, Anita. I've got a problem. I'm having second thoughts on this lawsuit against Nick.

ANITA

Nick? Your Nick!?

KENDRA

Chestnut Technologies Nick!

ANITA

You went to dinner with -- oh, no! Nick is... Oh, baby! Sweetheart, what were you thinking!?

KENDRA

I didn't know he was the guy we were suing!

ANITA

I think you should skip Christmas and jump right into the New Year and hope things get better!

KENDRA

I need you to get me the number of Eric Anderson. He's the leader for the New England Chapter of the Green Knights.

ANITA

Don't you have it?

KENDRA

I need a personal number.

ANITA

Did you call Four-one-one?

KENDRA

You need to know the town they live in and I don't know what town, and can you just do it, please!?

ANITA

I'll have to log into the work computer. Why can't you do that?

KENDRA

I just tried and it won't connect for me!

ANITA

I'll get the info, but I want you to know I'm up to my neck in Christmas cookies!

KENDRA

Thanks, Anita. Text me!

They end the call.

She hears the familiar sounds of her rental car.

Kendra rushes to the window and sees Lucky Larry behind the wheel of the newly repaired car.

EXT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - DAY

Larry turns the engine off as Kendra joins him.

LARRY

It's as good as new!

KENDRA

Larry, this car hasn't been as good as new since I was ten.

LARRY

Does that mean you don't want it?

KENDRA

Of course I want it, it's the only game in town.

He exits the car and hands her the keys.

LARRY

Here you go! Got my tow truck at the end of the driveway. Got to go pick up the other car. Broke down on Chestnut Road.

She grins.

KENDRA

I know.

Lucky Larry turns and heads towards the driveway.

LARRY

Merry Christmas!

KENDRA

Merry Christmas.

Kendra's phone HUMS. She looks at the screen.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

Thank you, Anita.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kendra hits a couple of numbers on her phone, and lifts it to her ear.

ERIC (V.O.)

Hello?

KENDRA

Eric Anderson?

ERIC (V.O.)

Yes.

KENDRA

Kendra Jackson, representing your case against Chestnut Technologies.

ERIC (V.O.)

Right! Hi.

KENDRA

I want you to read about the blight of New England chestnut trees in nineteen-hundred, and then meet me.

ERIC (V.O.)

Meet where?

EXT. JEREMIAH N. MILDRED SCENIC OVERLOOK - DAY

Kendra and Eric stand on the precipice of the overlook.

KENDRA

You read about the blight?

ERIC

I didn't have to. I know my eco-history.

KENDRA

Then you must know why Nick Reed is clearcutting?

ERIC

Of course. Food for wildlife in five years.

KENDRA

So, you understand what he is attempting to do?

ERIC

Yes.

KENDRA

Then you'll understand that as your legal representative, I am recommending that you drop the suit and walk away.

ERIC

Wait - what?

KENDRA

I am recommending that you drop the suit and walk away.

ERIC

Which side are you on?

KENDRA

Yours.

ERIC

Are you sure? Because to me, it looks like one dinner with Nick and you're ready to sell your client down the river.

KENDRA

I had no idea who he was when we were out last night. That has nothing to do with my recommendation.

ERIC

I'm supposed to believe that?

KENDRA

If you care about the environment as much as you say you do, then this is a no-brainer.

He points to the forest.

ERIC

I care about that!

KENDRA

You need to care about more than just that! You need to care about the future and what thousands of chestnut trees will do for the ecosystem.

ERIC

I don't need to be lectured to by you! I'm head of the Green Knights and -

KENDRA

And not a very good one. I wonder what the members would think if they had all the facts?

ERIC

So... you're with Nick.

Her posture grows stronger.

KENDRA

I guess I am.

Eric gives her a flat look, and walks away.

Kendra shoves her hands into her coat pockets and a surprised look comes over her.

She withdraws her hand to find the folded brochure Penny had given to her.

Kendra opens it up to see a photo of trees, with an inserted photo of Nick. Printed at the top is: "ALL ABOUT BLIGHT RESISTANT STRAINS."

KENDRA (CONT'D)
(mutters)
I could have known all along.

EXT. NICK'S VICTORIAN HOME -- DAY

Light snow falls on the one house that is not decorated.

INT. NICK'S VICTORIAN HOME -- DAY

Nick and Will are getting their lanterns ready. Nick's is a snowman, and Will has a present cut into his, which he is polishing the brass on.

WILL
Are you going to pick up Kendra?

NICK
No.

WILL
Are we going there later?

NICK
No. I don't think so.

WILL
We don't even have a Christmas tree.

NICK
There's more to Christmas than just having a tree, Will.

WILL
I know, but it's a good start.

NICK
There's not much I can do about it.

WILL
You blew it, didn't you?

NICK
Huh?

WILL
You like her.

NICK
Hey -

WILL
It's obvious. And she likes you.

NICK
We just turned out to be...
different people from who we
thought we were.

WILL
That's a dumb answer.

NICK
It's the truth.

The doorbell RINGS! Will springs up from his seat and
races from room.

WILL
Maybe that's her!

THE FRONT DOOR - DAY

Will runs and slides to the door and pulls it open.

Carl Harris stands before him. He looks like he has had a
very, rough day.

CARL
Is this the home of Nick Reed?

WILL
Yes, sir.

Nick arrives.

NICK
Can I help you?

CARL
Nick Reed?

NICK
Yes.

CARL
I'm Carl Harris, of Harris,
Whalen, and Coville.

NICK

Ah. One of the big guns with his name on the wall.

CARL

Not one of the big guns. The big gun.

NICK

And?

CARL

I'd like to have a word.

NICK

You had your word. It arrived by overnight delivery.

CARL

The lawsuit speaks for itself. I was wondering if you knew where I might find Kendra Jackson?

NICK

Have you tried the motel?

CARL

She is not registered at the motel.

NICK

Maybe she's under an assumed name. Like Rachel.

CARL

At the moment, the only one registered at the motel, is me. Is there anything else around the area?

NICK

Oh, there might be some mom and pop places, but I don't know if they're open this time of the year.

CARL

I was thinking of a B&B. A cottage. Ring a bell?

NICK

Ever hear of the internet?

CARL
Yes. Nothing showed up.

NICK
Little mom and pop businesses...
they don't understand the
internet. Don't even use it.

Carl locks stern eyes on Nick.

CARL
Oh, I'm going to enjoy grinding
you into sawdust in court.

NICK
Clever. If I were a cattle rancher
would you say "grinding me into
hamburger?"

CARL
Make your little jokes. Laugh
while you can.

Nick is not intimidated.

NICK
You're starting to scare me, Carl
Harris. Why don't you call her? Do
you have her number?

CARL
She's not answering. I'm concerned
for her safety.

NICK
You don't look concerned. You look
angry. And maybe she doesn't want
to talk to the Grinch on Christmas
Eve.

CARL
Mister Reed. Thank you for your
time.

Carl heads down the steps.

NICK
If you need to rent a car, I might
suggest Lucky Larry's! He has free
towing service!

Carl ignores the advice and keeps walking.

Nick closes the door and faces Will.

WILL
Why didn't you tell him about
Chestnut Cottage?

NICK
Slipped my mind.

Will and Nick share a smile, and head down the hall.

EXT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - DAY

Kendra pulls up in front of the cottage. As she exits the car, her phone HUMS.

She takes the call.

KENDRA
Hi, Anita.

ANITA (V.O.)
Just checking in to see if you
have bumped into the boss yet.

KENDRA
No. I haven't.

INT. ANITA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Several plates of Christmas cookies are off to the side, as Anita fills a pie crust.

ANITA
How can you miss him? It's a tiny town!

KENDRA (V.O.)
Wide open spaces out here.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION - ANITA/KENDRA

ANITA
The longer it takes for him to find you, the angrier he's going to be.

KENDRA
I'll run into him eventually, I'm sure of it. Hey, I just pulled up to the house. Can I call you later?

ANITA
Sure. Merry Christmas!

KENDRA
Merry Christmas.

Kendra takes her key from a coat pocket, and unlocks the cottage door.

INT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kendra is out of her coat and enters the room.

She puts some wood into the fireplace, and notices the Christmas tree.

Under the tree, is a lantern... with a Christmas tree cut from the brass sides.

She approaches it with hesitant steps... and kneels.

Her hands touch the lantern... she glides her fingers to the tree stencil.

Kendra lifts it and moves to the sofa where she places the lantern on her lap.

She sees the melted wax from decades before.

KENDRA
Where did you come from?

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

A light snow falls as clusters of townspeople make their way along the sidewalks on both sides of the street.

They carry lanterns of various Christmas designs - a manger, round ornaments, sleighs, reindeer, wreaths.

Distant voices in the dark call out over the steady conversations of happy townspeople.

BOY
There's Aunt Helen's lantern!

GIRL
Look! I see Grandma! Grandma!?

MOTHER
The Santa hat! That's Mister Myers!

Nick and Will end their way along the sidewalk, holiday lanterns in hand.

Neither seems happy.

Will glances down a dark side street and abruptly stops!

He sees a lantern - a Christmas tree lantern.

NICK

What?

Nick stops to see what has his son's attention. He sees the lantern approach from the darkness.

Will looks to his father, confused.

WILL

Dad?

They watch as Kendra, lantern in hand, steps into the light of Main Street.

KENDRA

I had to park behind the buildings.

NICK

You could have parked on Main.

Will can't keep his eyes off of the lantern.

KENDRA

True, but there's someone I'm hoping to avoid. I don't want to ruin Christmas Eve.

NICK

I think we've both contributed to that being somewhat impossible.

KENDRA

There's something I need to tell you.

NICK

All right.

A voice YELLS from across the street.

CARL

Kendra! Kendra Jackson! Hold it right there!

NICK
The interrogation lawyer.

KENDRA
Ah. You've met then.

NICK
Yeah. He has a lot to learn about
the fine art of the shakedown.

Carl hurries across the street and joins them.

CARL
I don't believe it! A town with
six people in it, and you get
lost!

KENDRA
I wasn't lost. I was working.

Carl turns to Nick.

CARL
This guy here! You small town
hick, I'm going to destroy you!
You won't have one chicken left to
pluck!

NICK
I don't have any chickens.

Carl turns on Kendra.

CARL
What's the status on the lawsuit?

NICK
Do you think anyone who lives in a
town without skyscrapers raises
chickens?

CARL
I'm not talking to you! You'll
hear from me in court!

NICK
You said that before.

KENDRA
Carl, I think this suit is a
mistake.

This shuts Carl down.

He gives Kendra his undivided attention.

CARL

Say again?

KENDRA

The Green Knights are wrong. Nick isn't clearing the land for buildings or a mini-mall. He's bringing back chestnut trees that were destroyed over a century ago.

CARL

Chestnut trees?

KENDRA

Yes. There are hardly any left in this area of New England. That's why the land is being cleared.

CARL

Kendra, we represent our client. Their best interest.

KENDRA

Right. And the Green Knights don't care about anything long term. They don't see how wonderful this actually is. They're wrong, Carl.

CARL

What about the trees being senselessly chopped down!? What about them!?

NICK

They're being donated to charities who can use them. Millions of dollars in free lumber.

Carl steps in close to Kendra.

CARL

Are you going to defend the Green Knights in court?

KENDRA

I'm sorry. I can't.

CARL

Then you're fired.

KENDRA

You can't.

CARL
My name is on the wall. I can do
whatever I want.

KENDRA
Check your email. I sent you my
resignation an hour ago.

Will looks at her with a beaming smile.

Nick WHISTLES a downward slide and looks at Carl.

NICK
Your turn, Junior.

AL (O.S.)
Nick! Nick!

They turn to see Al Seldon cross the street as he hurries
towards them with arms flailing.

AL (CONT'D)
Nick!

He arrives, out of breath.

AL (CONT'D)
I spotted the Christmas tree
lantern! That's how I found...

He gasps.

NICK
Careful of your heart, Al. You're
not twenty anymore.

KENDRA
Carl, this is attorney Al Seldon.
He is defending Chestnut
Technologies and Lumber
Distribution.

CARL
Him? It will be like shooting
ducks in a barrel.

KENDRA
And I'm going to assist him.

Carl's jaw drops.

AL
Actually, I'm going to let her
take the reins.

(MORE)

AL (CONT'D)

I hear she never leaves 'em
standing when she's done with
them.

Carl responds in a raspy voice.

CARL

I know.

KENDRA

Facts and science are on my side,
Carl. Once I explain to the press
how an "environmental
organization" is actually hurting
the repopulation of the spreading
chestnut tree throughout New
England... I think public opinion
will be hard on you.

Carl is speechless.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

But take your best shot. Just
remember how I fire back.

CARL

What's come over you?

KENDRA

I think I just saw the world... at
least a little part of it, as the
way it should be.

Carl turns and storms off.

Kendra's eyes meet Nick's gaze.

NICK

Are you sure about this?

KENDRA

Absolutely.

The church bell RINGS.

Nick and Kendra lead the way as Will and Al follow.

EXT. CHESTNUT COTTAGE - DAY

Snow covers the ground as Will and Nick are off to the
side of the cottage building a snowman.

Nick puts the head on.

Will takes care of the carrot nose and coal eyes.

Nick makes his way to the cottage door.

INT. THE FOYER - DAY

Nick enters, stomps the snow off his boots, and calls up the stairs.

NICK

Kendra!? Are you coming down?
Christmas morning is almost over!

KENDRA (O.S.)

I'm on my way!

Nick exits into the hallway.

INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY

He goes to the coffee pot, takes a cup, and pours.

FOOTSTEPS descend the stairs.

Nick grabs an extra mug, and pours the coffee.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kendra stands by the roaring fire. Nick enters and hands her the coffee.

KENDRA

Oh, thank you!

She takes a sip.

NICK

How did you sleep?

KENDRA

Better than I have since I arrived
in this town. You?

NICK

Well, to be honest, I have a
"crick" in my neck from the sofa.

KENDRA

Why did you sleep on the sofa?

NICK

I was staring at the lantern
watching the candle die. Fell
asleep.

Kendra notices the Christmas tree lantern is on one of
the sofa end tables.

NICK (CONT'D)

Next thing I knew, Will was waking
me up to attack the presents.

She smiles and takes another sip.

NICK (CONT'D)

I meant to ask you last night.
Where did you find it?

KENDRA

What?

NICK

The lantern.

KENDRA

Under the tree.

NICK

No. For real. Where?

KENDRA

I'm not kidding you, Nick. It was
under the tree. Not sure how it
got there.

NICK

Not the attic?

KENDRA

No.

NICK

It's been in the attic for a long,
long time.

KENDRA

I'm confused. Is there something
wrong with the lantern?

NICK

It was my mother's. She carried on
Christmas Eve since I can
remember.

KENDRA

I've never been in the attic. To be honest, I thought you put it under the tree.

Nick gives a slow nod "no."

NICK

Doesn't make sense.

KENDRA

Where's Will?

NICK

Outside. We just finished our Christmas morning snowman.

KENDRA

Really?

NICK

It's a tradition. Every Christmas morning. Open presents, bundle up, make a snowman!

Kendra laughs.

NICK (CONT'D)

Are you staying for a while? For the case?

KENDRA

I think so. Have to find a place. Maybe the people who rented me the room here will let me stay a while.

NICK

You keep saying that. No one rented you a room.

KENDRA

I beg your pardon, they most certainly did! You think I'm some kind of "squatter!?" Wait here!

She marches out of the living room.

INT. THE HALLWAY - DAY

She takes a photo from the wall.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kendra returns with a framed photo in her hand.

KENDRA

These are the people who rented me
the room.

Nick's face grows ashen.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

Their names are Jay and Millie.

NICK

These are my parents. Jeremiah and
Mildred. Everyone knew them as Jay
and Millie. My mother died, and my
dad followed a few months later. A
broken heart, really. Ten years
ago.

Kendra fumbles into a chair.

KENDRA

But, that's impossible. I spoke to
them. They were here.

NICK

I don't see how, Kendra.

KENDRA

Jeremiah? Mildred? The Preserve?
Jeremiah N. Mildred. I thought
that was a single name!

NICK

No. Jeremiah, my dad. The "N" is
for me, Nick, and Mildred was mom.

KENDRA

Nick -

NICK

You couldn't have seen them,
Kendra.

WILL (O.S.)

Dad! Come see!

Nick gives a wave to his son. Will waves back.

He takes one last glance at the photo.

A warm smile tugs at his lips.

His eyes never leave the picture as he hands it back to Kendra as he remembers fondly...

NICK

No time to dilly, Millie.

Kendra answers quietly.

KENDRA

On my way, Jay.

Nick turns to leave but stops dead in his tracks. A bewildered expression on his face.

NICK

How did you know...?

KENDRA

That's what they said to each other when they left me here.

WILL (O.S.)

Dad!

NICK

Will's waiting.

Kendra's mouth curves into a smile.

She gently places the photo on the end table near the window. Lost in a distant memory, Nick can't take his eyes from it.

She whispers in his ear.

KENDRA

I'll be outside.

Kendra exits.

Nick stares at the photo for a few moments.

He smiles, and exits.

Behind the photo of Jay and Millie, the snow globe rests on the window sill.

SEEN THROUGH THE WINDOW

Will puts the scarf on his snowman. He sticks wooden branch arms into the sides.

Nick and Kendra trudge through snow to join him.

Will carefully puts the top hat on the snowy head.

As snow begins to fall, Nick draws Kendra into his arms.

They kiss -- gentle, certain.

Will joins them, beaming. The three stand together, admiring their finished snowman.

ON THE WINDOW SILL

Inside the snow globe, a tiny man, woman, and child stand beside a snowman -- mirroring the scene outside.

A soft glow blooms within the globe.

Silver snow swirls to life, dancing through the water, cascading over the miniature family in a sparkling storm of light.

FADE OUT.