

ONE STARRY NIGHT

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. BROADWAY THEATRE - NIGHT

Opening night of a big, new musical. Posters, bright lights, fans outside eagerly awaiting a post-show moment of Broadway magic.

We focus on one name on the marquee: JACK TANNER.

INT. BROADWAY THEATRE - NIGHT

A red curtain. A ROAR. The kind you feel in your teeth.

The CURTAIN parts to reveal a glittering COMPANY. Sweat, tears – and right in the middle:

JACK TANNER (mid-20s). The sort of young man who looks like he's been kissed by a spotlight his whole life.

He steps forward for his solo bow.

The audience goes feral.

Jack's smile is enormous. Disbelieving. He drinks it in like oxygen.

He bows – once, twice – and then the cast SWARMS him.

Arms around shoulders. A thousand "YOU DID IT!" mouths.

Jack glances out at the sea of people standing, clapping, screaming.

For a moment, he looks like he might cry.

Instead – he laughs. Pure exhilaration.

INT. GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

Controlled chaos. Flowers. Champagne. A wall of PLAYBILLS.

Someone has already scribbled "OPENING NIGHT BABY!!!" in lipstick on a mirror.

Jack is being passed around like a trophy – but he's good at this.

A VERY FAMOUS ACTOR (immaculately dressed, casually iconic) air-kisses him.

VERY FAMOUS ACTOR
Darling. You were – honestly –
offensively good. I hate you.

JACK

Thanks, mate. That's exactly what we were going for.

Laughter. A PHOTO is taken.

A PRODUCER presses a glass into his hand.

PRODUCER

To you, kid. The reviews are going to be obscene.

JACK

Cheers, Shelly.

He sips. His hand trembles slightly from adrenaline.

Another CELEB appears. Another hug. Another selfie.

Jack's smile never drops – but his body is flagging. The night is eating him alive.

Exhausted – and absolutely buzzing.

Someone shouts from across the room:

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

Jack! Your dressing room's a shrine. Go bask, sweet cheeks!

Jack offers a last dazzling grin, then slips away.

INT. JACK'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Quiet. Blessed, muffled quiet.

Small room. Big mirror. A lucky charm taped to the frame. A dog-eared script.

Make-up wipes, hairpins, a damp costume slung over a chair like it's passed out.

Jack closes the door. Leans against it.

He exhales, long and shaky. Like he's been holding his breath all night.

He stares at himself in the mirror.

Mascara smudged. Hair damp. Cheeks flushed.

Still... triumphant.

Jack laughs softly to himself – a "can you believe this?" laugh – then sinks into the chair, suddenly heavy.

He reaches for his phone.

The SCREEN LIGHTS UP. A notification banner: "HOLLOWTREES VILLAGE COMMUNITY PAGE – NEW POST"

Jack pauses. A flicker of something.

He taps.

ON SCREEN: A painfully cheerful, slightly tragic graphic.

CINDERELLA – CHRISTMAS EVE! Tickets on sale soon!

A photo of the village hall, dressed up with clip-art stars and a font that should be illegal.

Jack's mouth tugs into a grin.

He scrolls.

A comment thread. Someone arguing about whether the fairy godmother should arrive on a scooter "for safety." Someone else has replied: "HEALTH AND SAFETY HAS RUINED MAGIC. I BLAME TONY BLAIR."

Jack huffs a laugh. Then –

A VIDEO MESSAGE thumbnail from "MUM & DAD"

Their faces are far too close to the lens.

Jack smiles before he even presses play.

He taps.

ON SCREEN –
VIDEO MESSAGE:

INT. MEADOWS KITCHEN – DAY (ON VIDEO)

APRIL MEADOWS (late 50s), Jack's mum, warm and nosy in the best way, addresses camera like she's hosting the One Show. COLIN MEADOWS (same age), pretending he doesn't want to be in shot, hovers behind her with a mug of tea.

APRIL (ON VIDEO)

Right. We're doing this properly because your father insisted on "production values."

Colin leans in, deadpan.

COLIN (ON VIDEO)

We've got a ring light.

April shoves him.

APRIL (ON VIDEO)
Well, well, Mr. Broadway Sensation!
How does it feel being the toast of
the Big Apple?

COLIN (ON VIDEO)
He'll be insufferable.

APRIL (ON VIDEO)
Oh, stop it, Colin. (beat) Anyway,
we saw the poster for the village
panto and we thought of you. Took
us right back.

She tilts the phone to show a printed flyer on the fridge:
CINDERELLA. VILLAGE HALL. CHRISTMAS EVE.

COLIN (ON VIDEO)
'Spect you feel a long way from the
village hall, don't you, son?

April laughs, delighted.

APRIL (ON VIDEO)
Remember when you were in it? You
were... oh, what were you?

COLIN (ON VIDEO)
A tree.

APRIL (ON VIDEO)
Not just a tree. The best tree. You
took it very seriously.

COLIN (ON VIDEO)
He went full method, didn't he?
Wouldn't move for hours.

APRIL (ON VIDEO)
And then you were Aladdin, weren't
you? Or was it an ugly sister?

COLIN (ON VIDEO)
He did the ugly sister voice at
home for three months. His nan
nearly disowned him.

April leans closer, conspiratorial.

APRIL (ON VIDEO)
Anyway, love, we just wanted to say:
we're so proud of you.

Colin, unable to help himself:

COLIN (ON VIDEO)
But if you fancy coming home and
taking a custard pie in the gob for
the good people of Suffolk –

APRIL (ON VIDEO)
Just ignore him.

COLIN (ON VIDEO)
Don't ignore me. I'm your father.

April rolls her eyes.

APRIL (ON VIDEO)
Call us when you can, love. Not at
three in the morning. Love you!

Colin leans in for one last jab.

COLIN (ON VIDEO)
Don't marry an American! Didn't
work out for Harry, did it?

April swats him. The video wobbles.

APRIL (ON VIDEO)
Bye, darling!

The lens is briefly covered by April's finger.

END VIDEO.

BACK TO SCENE.

Jack sits very still.

A smile stays on his face – but his eyes go somewhere else.
Suffolk.

The village hall smell of floor polish and paint.

His mum fussing his costume. His dad pretending not to cry
when he went on.

He scrolls back to the panto graphic. "CINDERELLA – CHRISTMAS
EVE."

Jack's thumb hovers over "CALL MUM".

He doesn't press it.

Instead, he lets the phone rest in his palm – heavier than it
should be.

A KNOCK at the door.

VOICE (O.S.)
 Jack? You got a minute?

Jack blinks. Puts the feeling away. Broadway Jack slides back on like a jacket.

JACK
 Yeah – come in!

The door opens. A RUNNER sticks their head in, bright-eyed.

RUNNER
 Your agent's been calling. She says
 don't forget your audition
 tomorrow.

Jack's stomach tightens – the familiar jolt.

JACK
 Tomorrow. Yeah.

RUNNER
 Early. Like... offensively so.

Jack laughs, weary.

JACK
 Of course.

The runner disappears.

Jack looks down at his phone again.

Suffolk. Clip-art stars. The village hall.

Then he swipes to a CALENDAR ALERT:

"AUDITION – 10:00AM – FEINSTEIN-ROSS CASTING, MIDTOWN"

Jack stares at it.

Exhilarated. Exhausted.

And suddenly aware how far away the village hall really is.

ON SCREEN:

The word AUDITION on Jack's meeting invitation.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. HOLLOWTREES VILLAGE - DAY

The picturesque Suffolk village of Hollowtrees, dusted with snow. The quaint cottages and winding streets are covered in festive Christmas decorations.

The village feels like it's come straight out of a holiday postcard – peaceful and idyllic.

Locals move about bundled up in scarves and coats, some carrying shopping bags, while children run past, laughing in the snow.

We slowly move toward the village hall: the heart of the community.

A small group of VILLAGERS is gathered outside: a local FARMER is unloading hay bales for the panto set, a YOUNG MOTHER walks by, dragging a small Christmas tree, KIDS in tow

EXT. VILLAGE HALL - NOTICEBOARD - DAY

The camera stops at the village noticeboard outside the hall, where various announcements are posted. Among the usual community updates, the camera lingers on: Zumba classes, Christmas Shoppe rota, Lost chicken ("Answers to 'Kevin'") And finally, in bold, large letters: "HOLLOWTREES PLAYERS PRESENT: CINDERELLA! AUDITIONS - TODAY, 2PM"

INT. VILLAGE HALL - DAY

Fairy lights twinkle around the stage, and the room is filled with Christmas decorations and props for the panto. The vibe is festive, but there's an unmistakable nervous energy in the air.

The Panto Committee is already seated at a trestle table, ready for the auditions. We see:

REV. EMMA COPLEY (early 30s), local vicar, warm but a little frazzled. She's also the director of the panto.

MISS PRITCHARD (late 60s), village music teacher, quietly shuffling through her sheet music at the piano, her expression tired but kind.

SIR ALASTAIR FOX-GLOVER (mid-60s), local landowner and lord of the manor; dressed with consummate country elegance.

The first auditioner – a supremely confident twelve-year-old GIRL in sparkly green – strides to the front. She announces – loudly:

GIRL
I shall be performing "Denying
Gravy" from Wicked!

The panel exchanges looks – clearly unsure of what she means.

GIRL

My stupid brother broke the wi-fi,
miss, so I had to do the words from
memory. But I don't think you'll
notice.

Emma and Miss Pritchard exchange a look. Miss Pritchard plays
the intro.

GIRL

(singing, badly)

*Something has changed within me,
Something is not to blame.
I'm through the la-la-la
Of something, something in a frame.
Too late for second helpings.
Too late to go back to sheep.
It's time to trust my peelings.
Close my eyes and peep.
I don't know why I'm buying gravy.
I think I'll try denying gravy,
And why is gravy brown...*

Huge breath for the big finish. Miss Pritchard abruptly stops
playing.

MISS PRITCHARD

Thank you, Bethany. I think we've
heard all we need to hear.

GIRL

Yes, Miss Pritchard.

SIR ALASTAIR

(sotto voce)

More than enough.

She smiles proudly and exits.

EMMA

Next!

BRENDA, a middle-aged woman, steps up to the mic. A GOAT on a
lead is with her.

SIR ALASTAIR

Give me strength.

EMMA

Brenda, so glad you came.

BRENDA

(indicating the goat)

This is Leonard.

SIR ALASTAIR

Leonard?

BRENDA
My emotional support goat, Sir
Alastair.

SIR ALASTAIR
But of course.

Emma kicks him gently under the table.

EMMA
Whenever you're ready, Brenda.

BRENDA
I shall be performing "Memory" from
Cats.

SIR ALASTAIR
(quietly)
What a surprise.

EMMA
Whenever you're ready, Brenda.

BRENDA
Right, here we go.
(a little curtsy)
"Memory" - by Dame Lady Miss Elaine
Page, BBC. (beat) "Memory".

Miss Pritchard begins the piano intro and gets to Brenda's
vocal entrance, when there's - nothing.

BRENDA
Sorry, vicar. I've forgotten it.

Leonard bleats, plaintively.

A montage of other auditions follows:

FOOTBALL LAD, (17) full of confidence but not talent, starts
to rap Frozen's "Do You Want to Build a Snowman?" Sort of.

FOOTBALL LAD
(rapping badly)
*D-d-d-d-d-do you want to build a
snowman? Yo!
Ain't that cool? Ice!
I got ice, yo!
Frozen time, yeah, on the line, yo!
Ain't got a fine, I forgot the
rhyme, yo.*

He gives a clumsy thumbs-up.

FOOTBALL LAD
Peace!

He drops the mic.

Cut to horrified judges.

Three WI LADIES step forward, ready to sing "I Dreamed a Dream" as a round; each singing in a completely different key.

WI LADY #1
(off-key)
I dreamed a dream in time gone by.

WI LADY #2
(off-key)
I dreamed a team in Hay-on-Wye.

WI LADY #3
(off-key)
I dreamed a teen when I was high.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - DAY

The auditions are over. Thankfully.

Emma is rubbing her temples, trying her best to stay calm. Leonard the goat is still wandering around the hall, chewing on stray decorations.

Sir Alastair finally speaks;

SIR ALASTAIR
Perhaps it's time we considered
putting the "mime" back into
"pantomime"?

EMMA
That's not helping, Alastair.

MISS PRITCHARD
There's always Leonard?

Leonard the goat looks up at the mention of his name.

Then, ALICE, a quiet, shy local girl in her early 20s, steps forward. She's holding a music book; clearly very nervous. She doesn't speak, just hands Miss Pritchard her sheet music.

She clears her throat and takes a breath.

ALICE
(with raw emotion)
*On my own, pretending he's beside
me.
All alone, I walk with him 'til
morning.*

The previous chaos fades into nothing as Alice's voice fills the hall, soft but powerful and pure.

Her talent is undeniable, even though she doesn't show off. She finishes, standing there: shy, unsure of herself.

For a moment, Emma and Miss Pritchard exchange a quiet glance – the kind that says it all.

ALICE

Sorry, vicar, I think I messed up a little bit.

EMMA

No need to apologise, love. You're exactly what we need. Welcome to the cast. You're Alice from Dalebrook Farm, aren't you?

ALICE

Yes, vicar.

MISS PRITCHARD

We'll make a fine Cinderella of you, my dear: never fear.

INT. VICARAGE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The soft glow of a lamp beside her gives the room a warm, lived-in feel. Emma's sitting on the sofa, exhausted from a day of failed auditions; her sermon book open but forgotten as she watches TV. The screen shows a tacky American entertainment show:

ON SCREEN:

TV VOICE (V.O.)

(breezily)

Suffolk, England: rolling hills, quaint cottages – and the new home for A-list celebrities. Let's take a look at the stars at home for... "Christmas in Suffolk".

ON SCREEN:

An American heartthrob in the hit sci-fi series "Starfall". Clips of him (all shirtless and muscly, with space sword in hand) looking both intense and effortlessly cool.

TV VOICE (V.O.)(CONT'D)

There's heartthrob Tyson Finch, star of the smash-hit series "Starfall", where the battles are fierce, and the abs? Even fiercer.

We see Tyson performing a dramatic sword fight – shirtless again – followed by a slow-motion shot of him looking dramatically into the camera, a faint smile on his lips.

TV VOICE (V.O.)

He and his beautiful girlfriend -
supermodel Ilsa Karpova - have made
their forever home in the sleepy
English countryside.

ON SCREEN:

We see an ageing rock star at huge concert, guitar ablaze:
the crowd erupts into applause.

TV VOICE (V.O.)(CONT'D)

Syd Blade, living legend of rock 'n
roll. Remarkably, still alive, and
selling out arenas around the
world.

A Black pop star, lounging in front of a massive Christmas
tree in a cozy, oversized sweater. A glass of champagne in
hand, she's grinning ear to ear, giving a wink to the camera.

TV VOICE (V.O)

Kiki Watts, the pop diva whose
voice defined a generation; and
who's made the English countryside
a part of her soul.

ON SCREEN:

We see Kiki on stage, in a glittering gown, performing a
classic ballad, the crowd swaying and singing along in
adoration.

ON SCREEN:

We see Jack on stage in his slick, high-energy number on
Broadway: sexy, powerful and owning the stage.

TV VOICE (V.O.)

And who could forget Jack Tanner,
the local Suffolk boy who became
the darling of Broadway? Nominated
for his first Tony at only 25!

Jack at the Tony Awards: paparazzi snapping.

TV VOICE (V.O.)

These incredible stars are living
their best lives in the cosy heart
of Merry Olde England. So here's
wishing them a very Merry Suffolk
Christmas!

Emma's tea has gone cold, and her sermon book lies open
beside her on the coffee table. She pauses the TV. Her eyes
drift to the sermon notes.

WE SEE that only thing she's written down: "LOOK TO THE STARS"

Emma's expression shifts; the realisation dawning. She looks heavenward as if to say "thanks".

WE SEE the TV screen, paused on Jack Tanner at the Tony Awards: living his best life.

INT. THE MEADOWS' FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jack, in joggers and a beanie, slumped on the sofa in his parent's living room. The farmhouse is not grand - cosy, a bit run-down. He is scrolling his phone.

CLOSE-UP: The screen of Jack's phone. He's scrolling his own feed: him at his Broadway curtain call, with celebrity pals, out with the jet set.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Those sheep aren't going to worm themselves, Jack!

Jack sighs.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - DAY

The Panto Committee is gathered. Emma sits at the head of the table, rubbing her temples, looking both exhausted and determined. Sir Alastair and Miss Pritchard are with her.

A new addition: DEBBIE DOLAN (50s) - manager of the local Christmas Shoppe.

In the background, a YOUNG HANDYMAN (20s) - mixed-race and drop-dead gorgeous - is doing odd jobs. He's dressed in a tight-fitting T-shirt and snug blue jeans.

EMMA
Well, yesterday was a complete disaster, and we've still got almost every major role to fill - except Cinderella.

There's a long pause as the committee members exchange glances.

SIR ALASTAIR
I haven't quite recovered from "Denying Gravy."

DEBBIE
We don't have a Prince Charming. Or a Fairy Godmother, or a Buttons.

Just Frank and Bob Squires doing their Dame and Baron Hardup... again.

SIR ALASTAIR

Must they?

EMMA

They must, Alastair. (beat) Look, I've been thinking: maybe we need some help? There are some pretty big stars on our doorstep, you know?

MISS PRITCHARD

You want to bring in "celebrities", vicar? I'm not sure that will go down well in the village.

Emma takes a deep breath, more insistent now.

EMMA

People will gossip no matter what, Miss Pritchard. But this is about getting the whole community involved. Even the famous ones. You know: putting something back.

SIR ALASTAIR

And how exactly do you plan on acquiring these so-called "celebrities"? I'm not sure they'll be thrilled about playing a village hall.

DEBBIE

What do you want me to do, vicar - put up a notice that says: "A-list Needed for Panto"?

EMMA

Yes, Debbie. Actually: yes. They chose to be here. They wanted "the simple life". Kiki Watts, Tyson Whatsisname, Syd Blade for heaven's sake! They all live here now. In Hollowtrees. I's sure they'd help... even if it's only for the PR.

The others look unimpressed, though Emma seems undeterred.

EMMA

It's not about ego. It's about using what they've got - star power, charm - to make the the whole village rally behind the panto.

[REDACTED]
 Christmas is the one time of the year where everyone comes together. (beat) Or it used to be.

SIR ALASTAIR

I hardly think a "pop diva" will lend much subtlety to our Fairy Godmother. Miss Watts' vocal style is a little...

DEBBIE

"Brassy" is the word I'd use, Sir Alastair. (beat) And I'm sure that... that Tyson Thingummy won't want our manky old costumes.

SIR ALASTAIR

From what I've seen of Mr. Finch's career, Mrs. Dolan: costumes have seldom been uppermost in his mind.

MISS PRITCHARD

It may not be Hollywood-standard, Sir Alastair, but it's all we've got.

There's a long, pregnant pause. Emma looks from one face to another, sensing reluctance.

EMMA

You know what they say: God helps those who help themselves.

The silence lingers, and for a moment, it feels like everyone's looking at Emma, assessing the idea.

SIR ALASTAIR

Well, in that case, vicar: God help us.

The group exchanges unsure looks, but the resolve is there. They're going to try. But it's clear they're all still quite uncertain how this will play out.

INT. THE MEADOWS' FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is warm and rustic, with a country charm. April MEADOWS (early 50s, practical and grounded) - Jack's April - stands at the stove, a woman whose strength shows in the way she moves and her no-nonsense attitude.

She's stirring a large bowl of Christmas pudding mix; her hair unexpectedly chic for a farmer's wife.

The door opens, and Jack walks in after a run.

Without a second thought, Jack peels off his sodden T-shirt. He's not sculpted and chiselled, but broad-shouldered and solid.

He drops the T-shirt over the back of a kitchen chair. April, still focused on the stove, notices.

APRIL
 (tutting, but
 affectionate)
 Jack!

Jack heads straight for the kitchen table and sits down, grabbing his phone and starting to scroll.

The house phone rings. April picks up the receiver.

We hear only April's side of the conversation as she speaks into the phone.

APRIL
 Oh, hello, Dick. Yes. Yes, I've been keeping busy. (pause) Not too bad, just the usual. How's Debbie? (pause) Oh, I see. Good for him. (beat) I suppose. (pauses) Mm-hmm, I see. Well... I can ask...

While she talks, she looks over at Jack, who is now more de-fluffing his belly button, oblivious.

APRIL
 Well, I'll let you know if we can help. Yes, alright then. (beat) Bye-bye, Dick.

She hangs up the phone and glances over at Jack; his attention firmly on his phone as he scrolls.

APRIL
 That was Dick Dolan.

JACK
 Who?

APRIL
 You remember: married to that... formidable woman who runs the Christmas Shoppe.

JACK
 Oh God, Debbie Dolan...

APRIL
 Yes, well. They're in a bit of a pickle. Apparently, her Christmas elf has taken a job at the Greggs in Poleham Basset.

Beat.

Jack groans dramatically, lifting his head to look at his April. She has a look on her face - a look he knows.

JACK

Mum, you're not serious? I was 16!

APRIL

Well, I can't have you under my feet moping about all Christmas, can I? You're going to have to earn your keep somehow, you know.

Jack sighs, dramatically slumping in his chair, rolling his shoulders in a stretch.

JACK

You and Colin didn't sell that field to send me to drama school so I could ponce about in an itchy leotard and a pointy hat! Does Dick even know I'm a...

APRIL

(teasing)

A what, Mr. Big Shot?

Jack looks sheepish.

APRIL

Anyway, Dick Dolan wouldn't know a Broadway star from a traffic light. If it's not in "Horse & Hound", then as far as Dick's concerned, it doesn't exist.

Jack shifts uncomfortably, trying to find a way to protest, but April is already looking at him pointedly; her arms crossed.

JACK

(sounding like a teenager again)

Mum!

APRIL

Shoppe. Pointy hat. Now.

Jack, resigned, grabs his phone.

JACK

My agent is going to kill me.

EXT. THE STAR PUB - DAY

A classic English pub, festooned with Christmas lights - none of which are working. An older ELECTRICIAN is beavering away on the roof installing a large, plastic star.

INT. THE STAR PUB - DAY

The village pub is cozy, with Christmas decorations brightening up the space. Locals chat, laugh, and sip drinks as the panto committee gathers around a large wooden table, brainstorming ideas for how to approach the celebrities.

DEAN (early 20s) - jacked, fresh-faced, likes a fitted tee - tends the bar.

DEBBIE

Right. What if we dress up as plumbers? Knock on their doors and say someone's reported a leaky flange?

MISS PRITCHARD

Plumbers? Really?

SIR ALASTAIR

I don't care if it is Christmas, Mrs. Dolan; I will not use the word "flange".

DEBBIE

Well, I don't hear anyone else coming up with any bright ideas.

MISS PRITCHARD

I think we're getting a tad carried away. Let's be practical, shall we?

SIR ALASTAIR

Well said, Miss Pritchard. (beat) What if we go in SAS-style: masks, dead of night? Bit of "shock and awe".

DEBBIE

My Dick's got a lovely baklava helmet, Sir Alastair. I'm sure he'd let us have a borrow.

MISS PRITCHARD

I think you'll find it's a "balaclava" helmet, Debbie. (beat) At least, I certainly hope it is.

There's a moment of awkward silence, and everyone looks at each other. Then, Emma slumps back in her chair, the weight of their indecision hanging in the air.

EMMA

This isn't getting us anywhere. We can't even come up with a plan to get in the front door!

As the group fidgets, Dean - who has been overhearing the conversation and checking his biceps in the mirror - chimes in.

DEAN

No one would refuse to see the vicar and the lord of the manor, would they? (beat) I mean: wouldn't be right.

The committee falls silent. Emma and Sir Alastair exchange looks of realisation. It's so simple. It might just be their best shot.

SIR ALASTAIR

My dear boy. You may have the body of a shire horse and the face of an angel, but you have the mind of Moriarty himself. Dean, I salute you.

Dean looks very pleased to have been of service.

EMMA

We'll go to them straight - no nonsense. After all, they can't say no to the vicar. (beat) Can they?

DEBBIE

Where would we start? That one what never wears shirts would be my choice. (beat) Hypothetically speaking, of course.

SIR ALASTAIR

I fear Mr. Finch must wait, Mrs. Dolan. We must - alas - begin with the one celebrity who has been here the longest.

DEBBIE

But she's never even been in the Christmas Shoppe, Sir Alastair. Maureen from the post office thought she was dead!

EMMA

Alastair, you can't mean?

SIR ALASTAIR

I fear I do, vicar. (beat) The lioness must be bearded in her den.

All look deeply unhopeful

INT. DAME CECILY'S HOUSE - DAY

The house of DAME CECILY SHARPE, 80s, grande dame of the English stage and a long-running American TV drama. Emma and Sir Alastair sit nervously on a chintz sofa.

SUPER: '"THE MALTINGS" Home of Dame Cecily Sharpe DBE'

Dame Cecily enters - casually dressed but with an imperial hauteur. She is clearly seeing them on sufferance, and gives a wintry smile.

DAME CECILY

Well, this is an unexpected... I had no idea the village contained anything worth having a "meeting" about.

EMMA

Dame Cecily. Such an honour. I'll come straight to it. We're putting together the annual panto, and - gosh - well, we'd love to have you involved. And we thought - well, Sir Alastair and I thought - you might... possibly?

Dame Cecily raises an eyebrow, looking them over. Her voice is sharp.

DAME CECILY

(withering)
A... "pantomime"?

SIR ALASTAIR

Dear lady. We only thought, nay, dreamed that -

Dame Cecily holds up a bejewelled hand. She draws her shawl like a cloak.

DAME CECILY

I. Do. Not. Do. (scathing) "Panto".

She sweeps across the room until she is framed in the entrance to the next room, then turns majestically back.

DAME CECILY

Ever.

INT. TYSON FINCH'S HOUSE - DAY

Emma and Sir Alastair enter from the sleek, modern foyer. The clean lines and minimalist decor are striking but cold.

In the background, TYSON FINCH (30s, American, built like an Adonis) lounges on a sofa, pumping a dumbbell.

SUPER: '"X7-163/COSINE" (formerly The Old Mill House) Home of Tyson Finch'

Tyson's supermodel girlfriend - ILSA KARPOVA (30s) is scrolling her phone.

SIR ALASTAIR

Mr. Finch. Here in Hollowtrees we are huge fans of your... um....

He indicates a huge poster on the wall: Tyson shirtless in "Starfall".

SIR ALASTAIR

... oeuvre.

EMMA

Of course we are. And, well, we were wondering whether you would consider pitching in to help us with the village panto?

Tyson puts his phone down, studying them with a cool expression.

TYSON

You want me to do a what: a... a "play"? In the village? Look, preacher, I don't do personal appearances. And I don't do theatre - and I definitely don't work for free.

SIR ALASTAIR

But...

TYSON

Look, I appreciate you guys coming out here - but you got the wrong guy, folks. I'm Hollywood. I'm action movies. I'm sexy-but-relatable. (beat) I'm People magazine's Sexiest Man Alive. Twice. I'm not... I'm not doing it.

He glances towards Ilsa.

EMMA

Not even to help your community?

TYSON

(flatly, as he stands)
Not even then, preacher. Now, if you'll excuse me: you got the wrong guy.

He opens the door to see them out, his final gesture polite but final. As he closes the door, Ilsa gives him a disappointed look, which seems to touch a nerve.

EXT. SYD BLADE'S HOUSE - DAY

A gigantic Georgian pile that has been thoroughly neglected. Un-mown lawns. A car parked randomly in a flowerbed. Emma and Sir Alastair ring an enormous doorbell.

SUPER: '"DUNROCKIN" (formerly Billington Hall) Home of Syd Blade'

They hear some crashes and grunts. Then the door is opened by: SYD BLADE, 70s - in a dirty T-shirt and worn-out jeans; his unkempt white hair dishevelled. A noisy party is going on in the background. It is 10 a.m.

Emma and Sir Alastair stand awkwardly on the doorstep.

SYD
(swigging from a bottle)
What?

EMMA
(trying to sound upbeat)
Mr. Blade. Such a pleasure. Huge fan. I'm Reverend Copley. (beat)
The vicar at St. Matthew's? (beat)
In the village?

SYD
And?

SIR ALASTAIR
And I am Sir Alastair Fox-Glover, Mr. Blade (beat) Baronet? Your near neighbour. Our fields abut, as it were. The vicar and I were wondering if we could possibly induce you to join our merry band of players in the festive Christmas production of...

SYD
Don't do Christmas.

He slams the door in their faces.

As they stand there - befuddled - they hear Syd returning to the party.

SYD (O.S.)
Dunno. Some tart dressed as a vicar and a posh git flogging foxgloves. Here, Keith, crank it up, mate!

INT. KIKI WATTS' HOUSE - DAY

A sumptuously over-decorated room - more Vegas than Suffolk. Colour-coordinated. Pictures of Kiki on almost every wall and surface.

SUPER: '"POLEHAM LACEY" Home of Kiki Watts'

KIKI WATTS (50s, Black, American, gorgeous, heavily made-up) is in a satin robe, lounging on an extravagant chaise; champagne flute in hand. All smiles and purrs, but something behind the eyes.

Emma and Sir Alastair stand. Emma is very excited.

KIKI

(sips her champagne)

Well, this is... nice. What could you possibly want with li'l old me, reverend?

EMMA

Kiki...

A flash of thunder from Kiki's eyes.

EMMA

Um... Miss Watts. We're organising the village panto, and we'd love to have you involved. Just a cameo: something to bring the glamour.

KIKI

What the hell's a "panto"?

SIR ALASTAIR

A pantomime, dear lady. A jubilant, life-affirming celebration of British theatrical tradition.

EMMA

And honestly, Miss Watts, you would be an absolute sensation. So many hits to choose from! "Diva Fever" was the first dance at my parents' wedding.

KIKI

(not pleased)

Was it now?

EMMA

Oh yes. And the panto keeps so many other village programmes alive: the lending library, meals-on-wheels, the Christmas lunch for people who've got nowhere else to go.

Kiki leans forward.

KIKI
 Meals on what now? Listen, you seem like nice people, and what y'all are doing is... (yawn) so inspiring. I'll tell ya what I'm gonna do.

Emma and Sir Alastair look thrilled.

Without rising, she opens her handbag and extracts a business card.

KIKI
 (to Emma)
 You give my agent a call, honey, you hear?

EMMA
 (taking it)
 Oh, thank you! Thank you, Ki... Miss Watts.

SIR ALASTAIR
 Jolly decent of you, madam.

KIKI
 She's at a... well, I suppose you'd call it a "wellness facility" right now down in Cabo. But they tell me she'll be out by Easter.

EMMA
 (crushed)
 Oh. I... (beat) well, that's very kind of you, I'm sure.

KIKI
 Any time, sugar.

With a subtle move of her head, Kiki indicates that the audience is over.

Sir Alastair takes Emma gently by the arm.

SIR ALASTAIR
 Come along, vicar.

INT. THE STAR PUB - NIGHT

The Panto Committee sits at its usual table. The pub is quiet and an air of doom hangs over the group. Dean, of course, is at the bar.

A LOCAL is talking to him.

LOCAL
 (teasing)
 Christmas lights still not working,
 I see, Dean?

At the large table:

SIR ALASTAIR
 Well... that's that.

EMMA
 It can't be.

DEBBIE
 Cancelling the panto will break a
 lot of hearts; I can tell you that
 for nothing, vicar. Including mine.

A long beat of silence.

MISS PRITCHARD
 So, we're just giving up?

SIR ALASTAIR
 No, Miss Pritchard. But let us at
 least withdraw while we still have
 our dignity.

Sighs all round, but Miss Pritchard looks angry.

From the bar:

DEAN
 Jack Tanner would do it.

All eyes turn to Dean.

EMMA
 Jack Tanner? Broadway star Jack
 Tanner? We might just as well
 expect Tom Cruise to be strolling
 down the high street, Dean.

DEAN
 Wouldn't know about that, vicar.
 But I do know Jack Tanner's doing
 shifts at the Christmas Shoppe.
 He's their new elf. Started today.

All eyes turn to Debbie.

DEBBIE
 Oh... oh my goodness. I... oh, how
 could I have been so daft?

SIR ALASTAIR
 Mrs. Dolan, explain yourself.

DEBBIE

Well, my Dick told me about Gregg leaving, or someone getting a job at Greggs. Or... I dunno: the lippy one with the attitude, I expect...

EMMA

Debbie!

DEBBIE

Anyway, turns out Dick's filled the vacancy with the lad who worked for us when he were in school. But Dick don't know about stage names or nothing, so he says he's hired Jack Meadows. And silly old me didn't put two and two together.

MISS PRITCHARD

Really, Mrs. Dolan.

DEBBIE

I can't apologise enough.

SIR ALASTAIR

You could try.

EMMA

Stop all this nonsense, for goodness' sake. We've got an actual star in our midst. From Broadway, no less! If we can nab him - and one more - the panto could still go ahead.

SIR ALASTAIR

But we're no closer to getting any of them!

MISS PRITCHARD

If I've learned anything from making recalcitrant children plough through "Für Elise", vicar, it's how to make someone do what they really don't want to.

EMMA

Are you saying our celebrities are just children, Miss Pritchard?

MISS PRITCHARD

Oh, worse than that, vicar. (beat) They're big babies.

All smile in recognition.

SIR ALASTAIR

But I feel sure, Miss Pritchard,
that you are the one to bring our
famous five to heel?

MISS PRITCHARD

I will telephone you later this
evening with instructions.

She raises her port and lemon, and the others raise their
drinks too. Miss Pritchard has a steely glint in her eye.

SIR ALASTAIR

Almost makes one feel sorry for
them.

All toast.

CUT TO: a montage of telephone calls between Miss Pritchard,
Emma, Debbie and Sir Alastair. Laptops are consulted. Notes
are taken.

INT. DAME CECILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Dame Cecily's sitting room. Sir Alastair enters, his usual
composed demeanour just a touch more disarming today.

SIR ALASTAIR

Dame Cecily, I must say, I'm most
gratified you are receiving me.

Dame Cecily is seated. There's a wariness in her eyes as she
gestures for him to sit.

DAME CECILY

Sir Alastair. My mother would have
never have forgiven me for
slighting a... neighbour. Do sit.

She sips her tea delicately; her gaze steady on him. He sits.

SIR ALASTAIR

I come to speak of a cause dear to
both our hearts, madam: the
theatre.

Dame Cecily raises an eyebrow, intrigued but withholding
judgment.

DAME CECILY

And there was me thinking you were
here for that wretched pantomime.

SIR ALASTAIR

That, too, madam. But you see, Dame Cecily, it's not just the panto that's calling. (beat) It is theatre itself.

He pauses, letting his words hang in the air. Dame Cecily's eyes flicker to a framed photograph of her younger self.

SIR ALASTAIR

I saw you in the West End as a... younger man. Your acting was extraordinary, peerless. But it was your direction of the play that stayed with me.

Dame Cecily glances away, her lips pressed together in an almost imperceptible wince. The mention of her only time directing clearly strikes a chord.

DAME CECILY

You saw my Cherry Orchard?

SIR ALASTAIR

Never seen a better production before or since. (beat) Of anything.

Dame Cecily shifts slightly in her chair, a flicker of something passing through her eyes.

SIR ALASTAIR

When we lost you to Hollywood, I mourned. Many did. (beat) But that doesn't mean I wasn't glued to "Sunset Shadows" for all nine series. (beat) You really were very naughty, weren't you?

DAME CECILY

"Constance Cavendish" was very naughty, Sir Alastair, I merely tried to make her something more than a gorgon.

SIR ALASTAIR

And you did, madam. By gad you did.

Dame Cecily gazes at him for a long moment, clearly moved but still cautious.

Beat.

DAME CECILY

Even... even if I wanted to help: I'm far too old to be capering about a village hall in the dead of winter.

SIR ALASTAIR

You misunderstand, dear lady. I'm not asking you to appear.

DAME CECILY

No?

SIR ALASTAIR

No, Dame Cecily. I am asking you to direct.

There's a silence. Dame Cecily stands, walking to a nearby window, looking out for a long moment as if weighing her options, the weight of the decision clear on her face. She turns back with a nostalgic smile.

INT. TYSON FINCH'S HOUSE - DAY

The same sleek, modern foyer. Silence. Then: the CHIME of a video INTERCOM.

ON A SMALL SCREEN by the door: Debbie in her Christmas Shoppe fleece and bobble hat, squinting up at the camera; arms full of carrier bags.

DEBBIE

(on screen)

Mr. Finch? It's Debbie Dolan from the village. Don't panic, love, I'm not selling anything.

A beat. The lock BUZZES.

INT. TYSON FINCH HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Tyson, in workout gear, opens the door. Behind him, we glimpse Ilsa padding past in yoga gear; headphones on.

TYSON

You're from...?

DEBBIE

The Christmas Shoppe, love. By the post office. (beat) Your wife bought an advent calendar and a reindeer loo brush.

TYSON

She's not my... Anyway. Look, Mrs...

DEBBIE

Debbie, love. I won't stop, I know you like your privacy. Everyone in the village knows that, don't they? "Mr.



[REDACTED]

Hollywood wants to be left alone."
Fair play. Too many nosy parkers
around here anyway.

She shoulders past him before he can object, stamping snow off her boots onto his designer floor.

DEBBIE

But I'm not everyone, Mr. Finch.

Tyson closes the door, resigned, but stays between her and the rest of the house.

TYSON

Mrs... Dolan, is it? If this is about the pantomime, I already told the vicar and the swanky guy -

DEBBIE

Sir Alastair. Yes, I heard. (beat) I don't want to take up your time, Tyson. I can call you Tyson, can't I, love?

TYSON

Sure, but... uh, this isn't really a good...

DEBBIE

I'd just like to explain why our daft little panto means something to this village. May I?

He looks bemused, but can't think of a way out.

TYSON

Fine. Um... sit down. Please.

They sit.

DEBBIE

The thing is, Tyson. The panto isn't all larking about and silly pop songs.

TYSON

That's literally what pantomime is, Mrs...

DEBBIE

Debbie, dear. No. (beat) See, the panto is how we can give Christmas lunch to folks who otherwise would be at home with a ready-meal and crap telly.

Tyson is suddenly more attentive.

DEBBIE

It's being able to send round a bit of Christmas cheer to old folks who can't get about like they used to.

Tyson's expression changes.

DEBBIE

And... well, I've been on Goggle, you see, Tyson.

TYSON

"Goggle"?

DEBBIE

Oh, it's wonderful what you can find out in there, Tyson. You should get one! My Dick showed me his.

TYSON

His "Goggle"?

DEBBIE

Oh yes. And... well, I Goggled you quick sharp, didn't I? (beat, her tone softens) You didn't have it easy: coming up, did you?

Tyson's eyes moisten. There's a catch in his voice.

TYSON

Uh... no, I guess...

DEBBIE

Single mum in... where was it, love?

TYSON

Homer, Alabama.

DEBBIE

That's it. Bringing you up on her own without... well, without much, is what I'd say. (beat) Anyways, can't have been easy, I'm sure. Never is. (beat) Bet she had good people around her, didn't she?

Tyson nods. Eyes moist.

TYSON

Yes, ma'am.

DEBBIE

Church folk, weren't it?

TYSON
 (voice catching)
 Yes, ma'am. First Presbyterian.
 Over on Springfield Avenue.

DEBBIE
 Well, there you are, then. (beat)
 See, all of us need someone, don't
 we, love? Someone that don't care
 what they gets back. Cares about
 what they give.

That settles for a moment.

TYSON
 By God, you're good, Mrs. Dolan.

DEBBIE
 Well, you're a poppet, aren't you
 now? A very handsome poppet, if I
 may say so?

TYSON
 (laughing)
 You may.

DEBBIE
 Well, that's settled then.
 Rehearsals start ten tomorrow.
 (beat) Can we expect you?

TYSON
 You can. (beat) And when I'm back
 in LA, you are definitely my new
 agent.

DEBBIE
 (laughing)
 Ooh! Well, we'll see about that.

TYSON
 Oh, it's a done deal.

Debbie laughs. As she stands, Tyson pulls her into a hug. At first she laughs it off, then she realises: he needs it.

DEBBIE
 That's alright, my love.

Ilsa looks in on the moment, and smiles.

INT. KIKI WATTS' HOUSE - DAY

A maid shows in Miss Pritchard, in her best coat and sensible shoes.

On her chaise: Kiki, in an oversized cashmere sweater and leggings; bare feet tucked under her, scrolling idly on a tablet.

KIKI
You're not Amazon.

MISS PRITCHARD
No, dear. I'm Miss Pritchard. From the Pantomime Committee.

The maid retreats. A beat. Kiki remembers, vaguely.

KIKI
Listen, lady, I already said "no" to your little... whatever. Nicely, as I recall. Well, nicely for me.

MISS PRITCHARD
You did. I just thought I'd come and congratulate you.

That throws Kiki.

KIKI
On what, exactly?

MISS PRITCHARD
On your excellent judgement. You were quite right to turn it down. (beat) You wouldn't stand a chance.

Kiki sits up a little.

KIKI
Say what, now?

MISS PRITCHARD
It's hard enough getting the WI to hit the same note, Miss Watts: let alone a stage full of farmers, teenagers and half the Scouts pack. Wrangling them into a proper ensemble? Ha! You'd be eaten alive.

She sets her satchel down, calmly.

MISS PRITCHARD
I've been at it forty years and I still go home hoarse and wondering where I went wrong with my life.

Kiki narrows her eyes, stung in spite of herself.

KIKI
I've played to sixty thousand people, honey.

I think I could cope with the...
Women's Institute and some hick
kids.

MISS PRITCHARD

Oh, I don't doubt you can shout
over them. (beat) Turning them into
an ensemble is another matter. That
takes a particular sort of person.

Kiki swings her legs off the chaise, intrigued despite
herself.

KIKI

What sort of person would that be?

MISS PRITCHARD

Someone who doesn't just like the
sound of her own voice, Miss Watts.
Someone who cares about everyone
else's.

That lands.

Miss Pritchard looks around at the platinum discs on the
wall: the photos of Kiki in stadiums, gowns, spotlights.

MISS PRITCHARD

I daresay your choir was rather
good, wasn't it?

Kiki lets out a short laugh, despite herself.

KIKI

My choir?

MISS PRITCHARD

You don't get lungs like yours from
nowhere, Miss Watts. Someone stood
in a cold room with a dodgy piano
and put you through your paces,
didn't they?

That hits a nerve. Kiki looks away, suddenly miles off.

KIKI

(quiet)
Miss Jenkins.

MISS PRITCHARD

There we are.

KIKI

Prim as all get-out. Hat for
church, gloves for funerals. Played
the organ like she was scolding God
himself.

Miss Pritchard smiles; she knows this woman.

KIKI

She ran a girls' choir. I was eight. Couldn't stand still. She'd tap the stand with a pencil. "Again, Katie. Again." High descant till I thought my head would come off. Said the good Lord didn't need another little Black girl mumbling in the back row. (beat) He needed joy.

Kiki blinks back to the present, a little embarrassed she's said that much.

MISS PRITCHARD

He still does.

A beat. Miss Pritchard picks up her satchel, as if preparing to leave.

MISS PRITCHARD

Anyway. She was lucky, your Miss Jenkins. In you. (beat) None of my lot will remember me in thirty years. I shout, they squeak. We get through "Once in Royal David's City" without bloodshed. And that's that.

She turns, heading for the door.

KIKI

What's that supposed to mean?

MISS PRITCHARD

It means not everybody gets a Miss Jenkins in their life. Or a Kiki Watts, for that matter. Some of them just get... me.

That hangs in the air.

KIKI

You think I couldn't do it? This "panto" thing?

MISS PRITCHARD

I think you've spent a long time singing at people, dear. Not much time singing with them. (beat) Different muscle, you see.

Kiki studies her. The diva armour is cracking.

KIKI

And your ensemble of misfit toys –
that's the panto?

MISS PRITCHARD

Look: we have a girl from the dairy
farm who sings like her heart's
breaking, three WI ladies who think
harmony is a type of yoghurt, and a
boy who raps "Silent Night" as
though it had personally offended
him. (beat) But they're trying.
They could use... well, they could
use a Miss Jenkins.

Kiki looks over at the Christmas tree, the twinkling lights
reflected in the glass of a framed stadium shot of herself,
arms outstretched to a sea of phones.

KIKI

Miss Jenkins never asked me, you
know? She just told me to show up.
Thursday nights. No excuses.

MISS PRITCHARD

Then consider this not an
invitation, but a timetable.
Tomorrow morning. Ten a.m. Village
hall. You stand at the back, you
listen. If you hate it, you go home
and we'll say no more about it.

Kiki hesitates.

KIKI

And if I don't hate it?

MISS PRITCHARD

Then you help. From the piano or
centre stage. I don't much care.
Fairy Godmother, choirmistress;
both.

A long beat. Kiki's eyes are a little glassier than before.

KIKI

I'm not wearing anything with
tinsel on it.

MISS PRITCHARD

Heaven forbid.

Kiki lets out a genuine, surprised laugh.

KIKI

I'll look in, lady. That's all.

MISS PRITCHARD
Of course. Thank you.

Miss Pritchard turns to go, then pauses.

MISS PRITCHARD
If you do decide to stay, Miss
Watts: there's a little girl in the
village who could do with thinking
that Fairy Godmothers looks just
like her.

That lands.

Miss Pritchard lets herself out. Kiki stands in the glow of the tree, staring at a photo on the wall – a teenage Kiki in a choir robe, next to a stern, elegant BLACK WOMAN.

KIKI
Miss Jenkins, I swear to God...

She places her fingers affectionately on the frame.

INT. SYD BLADE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Mismatched tiles, an Aga, and gold records propped casually against the wall. Through a half-open door we glimpse a corridor leading to a heavily soundproofed door with foam panels stuck up everywhere.

The back door creaks as Emma steps in, shaking snow from her coat. She takes in the chaos: empty beer bottles, a bowl with one sad cornflake in it, a leather jacket thrown over a chair.

Syd Blade, in trackies and a faded tour t-shirt, stands at the counter making tea in a chipped mug. He doesn't turn.

SYD
If you're the taxman, I've been
legally dead since 2003.

EMMA
If I were the taxman, Mr. Blade, I
would hardly have brought a
casserole.

He glances back. Emma is holding a Tupperware tub, steam fogging the lid.

SYD
You lot really don't believe in
knocking, do you, vicar?

EMMA

The door was unlocked. In
Hollowtrees, that's practically an
invitation.

She sets the casserole on the table.

SYD

What is it?

EMMA

Beef and Guinness.

He snorts despite himself, finally turning fully to face her.

SYD

So, what do you want, vicar?

EMMA

The same thing I wanted last time:
your help with the pantomime.

SYD

Then you've wasted your casserole,
love. I told you: not interested.

EMMA

Of course. It's just that I'm under
rather a lot of pressure from the
district council at the moment.

He freezes: mug halfway to his mouth.

EMMA

Noise complaints. Traffic. Drones.
An escaped llama? People getting
very worked up about "unauthorised
change of use".

She nods vaguely toward the soundproofed corridor door.

EMMA

That's quite a serious conversion
you've got there for an
"agricultural outbuilding".

SYD

You've been talking to Mrs.
Pilkington.

EMMA

Mrs. Pilkington has been talking to
me, Syd. At length. About the
racket in the middle of the night.

SYD

It's a recording studio, love. Who
gives a....

EMMA

No planning permission. No change-of-use application. And I'm pretty sure your roof would fail every safety regulation known to man.

SYD

You're blackmailing me?

EMMA

I am simply making you aware of the moral, legal and structural consequences of being a bad neighbour.

SYD

So what do you want, rev?

EMMA

Syd, the panto pays for the pensioners' Christmas lunch, the food bank top-up, the youth group. If it collapses this year, people go without.

She meets his eye; steel under the softness.

EMMA

And - as a member of the Parish Council - I have a letter from the enforcement officer sitting on my desk. All it takes is one phone call saying I can't, in good conscience, ignore what I've seen up here.

Syd looks over at the corridor. The studio door. His jaw tightens.

SYD

That studio is the only thing keeping me sane, vicar.

EMMA

I know. And I'd hate for it to be inspected. By strangers. With clipboards.

A long, charged beat.

SYD

You sure you're are a vicar?

EMMA

Even Jesus overturned a few tables when people took the... mickey.

He huffs out a laugh, despite everything.

SYD

So what's the deal then, Mother-Teresa-with-Teeth?

EMMA

No publicity. No interviews. No one needs to know you're doing it, except the people in that hall. You come in, you help our band sound less like a dying moose... and maybe strum a guitar in the finale.

SYD

I'm not wearing a frock.

EMMA

I'm not asking you to, Syd. I just want our lot to sound slightly less like a bin lorry reversing.

He slumps into a chair, rubbing his face.

SYD

This is extortion: that's what this is.

EMMA

It's community, Syd. With leverage.

He looks up at her. She doesn't blink.

SYD

If I say no?

EMMA

Then I make the call. And I'll feel terribly guilty about it all through Evensong. (beat) But I'll do it.

Syd exhales, defeated.

SYD

Rehearsals are when?

EMMA

Tomorrow. Ten a.m. Village hall.

SYD

I'm not promising anything more than yelling at your drummer.

EMMA

That's... well, that's wonderful is what it is.

She picks up the casserole lid, opens it a crack.

EMMA

I'll leave this here. Consider it a
downpayment on your soul.

SYD

One squawk to the press, one
jobsworth on my drive in a hi-vis
vest, and I'm gone.

EMMA

Scout's honour.

She turns to go, then pauses at the door.

EMMA

Oh, and Syd?

He looks up.

EMMA

If you're going to play 'til two in
the morning, at least keep it
tight. Mrs. Pilkington says last
night's solo was very sloppy.

SYD

Sloppy? I'll show her sloppy, that
miserable old...

EMMA

Tomorrow at ten, Syd. Sharp.

She leaves.

Syd reaches for a fork: pries off the lid. Takes a bite:
heaven.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - DAY

The village hall is at maximum chaos. Half-painted flats; a
crooked glittery moon, plastic snow everywhere.

Miss Pritchard is at the piano, already looking like she's
lived several lives today.

The LOCAL CAST bustle about - WI ladies with song sheets,
EXCITED CHILDREN in bits of costume.

At the back: Tyson lurks in a hoodie and cap, arms folded,
pretending to be invisible.

Kiki sweeps in, an hour late, in an enormous scarf and
sunglasses: carrying a coffee. Heads turn.

KIKI

Sorry, folks. Road was full of sheep. Or old people. Couldn't tell which.

Syd, in yet another faded tour t-shirt, is on a chair plugging his guitar into a tiny amp that hums ominously.

Dame Cecily stands with a clipboard and pencil: imperial as ever. Emma hovers beside her.

EMMA

Right! Thank you all so much for coming. This is just a first stagger-through: very relaxed, very informal –

DAME CECILY

(over her, cutting)

There is nothing "informal" about rehearsal, vicar. We shall begin at Act One, Scene Three. The ball. Cinderella, Prince, Fairy Godmother and... peasantry.

(claps)

Places, please.

DEBBIE

Girls, that's us! Marion, Brenda – we're peasants, ain't we? 'Specially you, Brenda – you was born for it.

Leonard bleats.

The ladies shuffle forward.

Alice, in a rehearsal skirt, edges onto the stage, pale but determined.

ON STAGE – MOMENTS LATER

Alice. Three WI ladies. Kiki has somehow ended up dead centre; even though this clearly isn't her scene.

Miss Pritchard settles at the piano.

DAME CECILY

We shall take it from Cinderella's entrance to the ball. Miss Pritchard, if you please.

Miss Pritchard starts a simple waltz.

DAME CECILY

And... action.

Alice takes a breath to sing –

KIKI
 (belting)
I dreamed a dream in time gone by!

Miss Pritchard slams her hands onto a discordant chord.

MISS PRITCHARD
 Wrong musical, Miss Watts.

KIKI
 Lady, if I'm on stage, I sing what
 I sing.

From the floor, Syd snorts.

KIKI
 I don't remember asking for your
 set list, grandpa.

SYD
 I don't remember you finding the
 note, pet. We're all disappointed.

A gasp from the WI ladies.

DAME CECILY
 Mr. Blade: kindly save your
 heckling for the pub.

EMMA
 Okay! Let's... let's just go from
 Alice's first line. Kiki, perhaps
 you could just watch this one?

Kiki sips her coffee, unimpressed, but steps aside.

Miss Pritchard starts again.

ALICE
 (singing)
*Here in this hall, a dream may
 start -*

TYSON (O.S.)
 Too long.

Everyone turns.

Tyson stands at the back: hood still up.

TYSON
 The skirt. It's too long. She'll
 stack it on the palace staircase.

DAME CECILY
 Thank you, Mr. Finch, but this is
 not a risk assessment. This is the
 theatre.



[REDACTED]
 We do not worry about "health and safety", we worry about truth.

TYSON

Yeah, well, truth won't help when she face-plants into the front row, your... ladyship. Just saying.

EMMA

Let's carry on.

MONTAGE - REHEARSAL

Kiki insisting on key changes.

KIKI

Everything up a tone. My belt lives up there.

Miss Pritchard already altering the music, tight-lipped.

MISS PRITCHARD

Yes, well, the WI's lungs do not.

We hear the WI ladies attempting the higher key; sounding like geese caught in a wind tunnel.

Syd stopping them mid-carol.

SYD

Right, no. You're clapping on one and three.

WI LADY #1

We have always clapped on one and three, Mr. Blade.

SYD

Listen, babe. I know more about claps than I care to mention.

Tyson up on stage with a script, utterly flat.

TYSON

"My lady, I have searched the kingdom for you. Please try on this slipper and fulfil your destiny."

DAME CECILY

Mr. Finch, you sound like a man selling broadband.

TYSON

I'm finding my character, duchess.

Kiki refusing props.

PROP VOLUNTEER
Your wand, Miss Watts.

KIKI
I don't point plastic at people,
child. Kiki's brand does not
include cut-price accessories.

Dame Cecily - trying to organise a crowd scene.

DAME CECILY
When I raise my hand, you shout
"Hooray!" Once. With joy. Not like
a flock of traumatised pigeons.

She raises her hand.

Half the ensemble yells: "HOORAY!", while the other half:
"HUZZAH!" - a TODDLER screams. Somewhere a phone goes off
playing "All I Want for Christmas is You".

Dame Cecily's eye twitches ominously. Leonard bleats.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - LATER

The hall is hotter, messier. People are fractious.

Emma stands centre, visibly frayed.

EMMA
Right. Let's just take the
transformation scene: Fairy
Godmother, Cinderella, Prince
Charming.

KIKI
I have to be done by three. My
vocal coach says if I sing past my
window, my resonance collapses.

SYD
You might try collapsing it back
onto the note, love.

KIKI
At least people pay to hear me, old
timer.

SYD
Well, they won't in here, pet. It's
three quid and a raffle ticket.

DEBBIE
Can everyone stop being famous for
five minutes and help me find the
bloomin' raffle tickets? (catching
herself) Sorry, vicar!

The noise builds - overlapping complaints: Kiki about her lighting, Syd about monitors, villagers about costumes.

Emma tries to rise above it.

EMMA

If we could just - excuse me - if
everyone could just -

No one stops. Someone accidentally kicks over a box of plastic baubles. A CHILD bursts into tears. Leonard bleats.

Emma claps, hard.

EMMA

STOP!

Silence: jagged and sudden. Every face turns to Emma.

She hadn't meant to shout like that. Her eyes shine with angry tears.

EMMA

It was supposed to be...

She fights for composure and loses.

EMMA

This was meant to be... fun. For
the village. For the kids. For...
all of us. Not... this.

She gestures around helplessly at the chaos.

EMMA

If it's all beneath you... If you
all hate it so much, you don't have
to be here. None of you.

Her script slips from her hands, pages scattering over the floor.

EMMA

(choked)

I'm sorry. Just... just, carry on
without me.

She turns and hurries off towards the little vestry door at the side, shoulders shaking.

People avert their eyes. Syd looks at his feet. Kiki suddenly finds her coffee lid fascinating. Tyson watches Emma go, jaw tight.

Miss Pritchard gently closes the piano lid and follows her.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - SIDE ROOM - DAY

A cramped room full of broken chairs and a terrifying papier-mâché angel. Emma leans against a filing cabinet, wiping at her eyes; furious with herself.

The door clicks shut as Miss Pritchard slips in.

EMMA

I've made it worse, haven't I? I dragged in a bunch of egomaniacs... and everyone hates each other... and nothing works and -

MISS PRITCHARD

No one hates anyone, vicar. They're just... very loud about being themselves.

Emma sniffs.

EMMA

I thought if we had stars, it would all... I don't know. Run itself? Sell tickets, raise money?

MISS PRITCHARD

Ah. There's your problem.

She perches opposite Emma; hands folded.

MISS PRITCHARD

You're behaving as if it's their pantomime. It isn't, vicar: it's ours.

Emma looks up, eyes red.

EMMA

They're all pulling in different directions: Cecily wants Chekhov, Kiki wants the Albert Hall, Syd wants Glastonbury, Tyson wants... a ticket back to LA. I can't... wrangle them.

MISS PRITCHARD

Then perhaps: don't. Plant your feet. Decide what this is.

(beat)

It's a village show that pays for hot dinners and keeps Ivy Pilkington from despair for one more winter.

Emma manages a wobbly smile.

EMMA

I just want it to be good.

MISS PRITCHARD

And it will be, my dear. But it'll be good in the way it's always been good: Frank Squires' wig falling off in the second half. Alice forgetting she's shy and singing like her heart's on fire.

Beat.

MISS PRITCHARD

The stars can help, of course. But they're guests, Emma; not saviours. And besides: you're the vicar. This is your hall.

Emma takes that in.

EMMA

But I don't know how to handle them.

MISS PRITCHARD

Then we'll find someone who does. (beat) Someone who knows what it means to be part of an ensemble.

EMMA

But we've run out of people! We've emotionally blackmailed half the parish.

MISS PRITCHARD

We haven't tried the one person in Hollowtrees who's actually done this. Properly. Eight shows a week. Day-in, day-out. Company warm-ups. Curtain calls. On Broadway; no less. (beat) Jack Tanner.

Emma blinks.

EMMA

He's already been forced into a dodgy elf hat by Debbie Dolan.

MISS PRITCHARD

Details. He knows how to carry a scene - and a show. A big one. He knows how a company works.

(beat)

We don't need another ego, vicar. We need a professional.

Emma sits with that. The idea steadies her.

EMMA

So Jack becomes... what?

MISS PRITCHARD

The heart and soul of "Cinderella", that's what. (beat) Buttons. We don't have one, do we? (beat) And my goodness we need one.

EMMA

Right. Jack Tanner. I'll go to the Christmas Shoppe first thing in the morning.

MISS PRITCHARD

No, dear. You get some rest. Leave Jack Meadows... sorry, Jack Tanner, to me. (beat) Now, come on. Leonard will be getting fractious.

Emma smiles.

EMMA

You'll stay at the piano, won't you?

MISS PRITCHARD

Where else would I be, vicar? (beat) Someone has to drown out Syd.

They share a conspiratorial look. Miss Pritchard suddenly winces a little.

EMMA

What's the matter?

MISS PRITCHARD

Nothing at all, dear. (beat) It's been a long day, hasn't it?

The noise of the hall seeps back in - bickering, tuning, someone dropping something heavy.

INT. CHRISTMAS SHOPPE - DAY

The shop in full chaos: tinsel, fairy lights, piles of novelty tat. A steady queue of CUSTOMERS. Debbie in command.

A jingle of the doorbell as Miss Pritchard steps in; bringing a swirl of cold air and dignity in a sensible coat.

Behind the counter: Jack in his ELF COSTUME - green leotard, striped tights, pointy hat - but it's the same costume he wore at age 16. The effect on his strapping frame is... unfortunate. He's gamely wrapping a present for a SMALL CHILD, who stares up at him in awe.

SMALL CHILD

You're very big, mister. Are you a real elf?

JACK

(wink)

Only on my mum's side.

The child beams, takes the wrapped present and toddles off.

Jack smiles after him. He looks up to see:

JACK

Miss P!

MISS PRITCHARD

Jack Meadows. (beat) Or whatever's up in lights nowadays.

DEBBIE

You know our Jack, Miss Pritchard?

MISS PRITCHARD

I taught him piano between the ages of nine to fourteen, Mrs. Dolan. Or tried to. He preferred to sing. (beat) Loudly.

JACK

"Less Shawn Mendes; more breath support."

MISS PRITCHARD

I said that to everyone, Jack. You simply ignored it more enthusiastically than most.

Debbie clocks the chemistry.

DEBBIE

Well! I'll just check the mince pie pyramid before it collapses... again.

She bustles away.

Miss Pritchard steps up to the counter. Jack self-consciously adjusts his jingling hat and too-tight leotard.

JACK

I know what you're going to say, Miss P.

MISS PRITCHARD

Is that so?

JACK

Look, I'd really love to help with the panto, but I'm up for this big TV thing in America, and Andrew's thinking maybe a (faltering)... um, bringing back... in the New...

Miss Pritchard says nothing; just calmly watches him flail.

MISS PRITCHARD

Do you remember the Year Ten production of "Oliver!"?

Jack nods.

MISS PRITCHARD

You weren't Oliver. You weren't even the Dodger. You were the second workhouse boy from the left.

Jack smiles.

MISS PRITCHARD

And when the lights went out in Act II that night - and everyone panicked - you started the song, didn't you? Quietly. On the beat. And everyone followed.

JACK

Listen, Miss P., I...

MISS PRITCHARD

This is my last panto, Jack.

JACK

What?

MISS PRITCHARD

No-one knows yet. And I'd like it to stay that way. Yes?

Jack nods.

MISS PRITCHARD

So: do it for the community. For Oliver! For your April and Colin. Do it for Andrew Lloyd Webber, if you like. But I'm asking my very best second-workhouse-boy-from-the-left if he'd be... a friend.

Jack's eyes are misty. He looks over at Debbie Dolan, nodding at him vigorously.

JACK

What time do you need me?

MISS PRITCHARD

Ten a.m. sharp. And... be prepared, Jack. At present it's... well, it's like the X Factor, but with considerably less dignity.

JACK

Ten a.m.

Miss Pritchard places her hand gently on Jack's arm and smiles.

MISS PRITCHARD

Leave the leotard at home, yes?

They both chuckle. One more gentle look, and Miss Pritchard makes her dignified exit.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - DAY

The village hall is in full swing - chaos as usual, but with the familiar hum of an ongoing production. Dame Cecily is perched in the front, clipboard in hand: eyes sharp as ever.

Syd is tuning his guitar in the corner, Kiki is on her phone. Tyson stands at the back, arms folded, observing. Alice looks nervous.

The room is buzzing with half-hearted activity, and the tension is palpable. Among the group are FRANK SQUIRES and BOB SQUIRES, twin brothers in their 60s: salt-of-the-earth farmers.

At the front of the room, Emma watches the cast with a hopeful but exhausted expression.

Jack walks up to Alice.

JACK

Alice, right? Miss P. tells me you're a natural.

ALICE

(blushing)

Oh, I don't know about that.

JACK

(pointing at Tyson)

That the TV star? Hmm. Thought he'd be taller.

ALICE

Tyson Finch. (beat) I think he's lovely.

JACK
Really? (beat) Can't say I see it
myself.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - DAY

The group is gathered on stage. Everyone's a little disjoined. Kiki is on her phone, Syd is tuning his guitar with gritted teeth, and Tyson is eyeing everything with a detached, bored expression.

Jack notices BEN FEDDEN (50s) - a Black farmer from the village - building a set piece at the back of the hall.

JACK
That's coming along nicely.

Ben looks up, nods, and goes back to his work, pulling a thick wood plank into place.

JACK
Respect, man.

Ben looks nonplussed.

The chaos continues. Kiki finally puts her phone down and addresses Syd, who is still grumbling over his guitar.

KIKI
You're the one with the chops, Syd.
Why don't you go ahead and run this
whole thing while I take a nap?

SYD
You mean a performance in the key
of TikTok, love?

KIKI
Fairy Godmother sings when she
sings, old man.

Jack is trying to work out where to slot in. He moves over toward Emma, who's in the back, scribbling notes and trying to manage everything at once.

JACK
So, vicar: how's it looking?

EMMA
Like a catastrophe with glitter.
It's all over the place. I'm
running out of ways to make people
want to be here.

JACK
I don't know. From what I've seen,
it's... interesting.

██████████

[REDACTED]

You just need someone to help them find the rhythm. I'm Jack, by the way.

EMMA

I know. And you're here to save the day, I suppose?

Jack smiles.

JACK

I'd like to give it a go. (beat) If you'll let me?

EMMA

Fill your boots.

Jack takes a breath, sensing the opportunity to step in. He spots Dame Cecily making feverish notes in a leather notebook.

JACK

Dame Cecily?

She looks up - imperious.

DAME CECILY

You are?

JACK

Jack Tanner, ma'am.

Her look says: who?

JACK

Buttons?

DAME CECILY

How very disappointing. I thought you'd be American. (beat) And taller.

JACK

Sadly, no.

DAME CECILY

Out with it.

JACK

I know how busy directors are. I was wondering if you'd mind if I ran the ensemble through a few warm-ups?

DAME CECILY

The who?

JACK
The ensemble, Dame Cecily. The
supporting actors?

DAME CECILY
Oh, them. Well, it couldn't hurt.
Run along, then, Mr. Whatever-Your-
Name-Is.

Jack smiles.

JACK
Right! Over here, everyone! Come
on.

Everyone reluctantly trudges to the space in front of the
stage.

JACK
Good morning!

Tumbleweed.

JACK
Anyway, um... okay, so my name is
Jack. I'm a local boy from right
here in Hollowtrees.

FRANK SQUIRES
We know.

JACK
And I'm playing Buttons.

BOB SQUIRES
We know that too, lad.

DAME CECILY
Good God: is he still talking?

JACK
I'm sure Dame Cecily has given you
a rousing pep talk...

FRANK SQUIRES
Oh no she hasn't!

That gets a laugh from company and crew.

JACK
Ha-ha. Good one, Bob.

BOB SQUIRES
I'm Bob. He's Frank, yer daft
ha'p'oth.

More laughter.

JACK

Of course. Anyway... (casting around for help) Miss Pritchard, could you give us a little beat to get us started?

MISS PRITCHARD

With pleasure.

She starts to play a surprisingly lively beat on the piano.

MISS PRITCHARD

Although I do think a guitar might be more appropriate. Isn't that so, Mr. Blade?

Syd rolls his eyes and begrudgingly starts plucky out a much funkier beat.

JACK

How about we start with a little movement? You know, get the blood going.

Reluctantly, the cast starts to move: it is not impressive. Jack knows what he has to do?

JACK

(snapping his fingers)
Miss Watts. You look like a woman who knows how to snap.

KIKI

With these nails? Nu-uh, baby: Kiki don't snap.

From the back, another set of finger snaps. It's Tyson. Once the ensemble sees him getting involved, suddenly they are much more keen. More snaps. The energy rises.

Jack makes eye contact with Tyson and gives him a nod of thanks.

JACK

That's it. You're getting it.

Miss Pritchard catches Syd's eye and gives him a quizzical look. Syd gets the message.

SYD

(to the band)
Right, you lazy bastards. Time to earn your beer money. And a one... a two.

The band joins in, and now the room lifts. People are smiling.

JACK

C'mon. There's no right way or wrong way. Just move with the music.

He moves through the gyrating throng.

JACK

(to the ensemble)

Nice one, Maureen. That's it. Brenda - get those hips in the game. (to one of the younger cast members) Always knew you were a mover, Brandon.

Kiki - phone in hand - slinks out the side door.

Emma and Tyson stand together at the back of the hall.

Jack encouraging, laughing; doing little hip bumps. Even Syd can't quite stifle a smile as the band really gets the hall jumping.

Tyson feels something. Stand on the side looking cool or join the fun?

Emma looks at him, then gives him a playful shove. Tyson joins the makeshift dance floor. Of course: he's a fantastic mover. The WI ladies look like they might faint. Alice is beetroot-red when Tyson gracefully pulls her into a spin.

Emma looks like she might cry with joy. Could this really be happening? She looks once again at Jack - his smile, his ease, his joy. His shoulders.

EMMA

(to herself)

Oh, crikey.

The only person not dancing or playing an instrument is TOM TATE: the handsome young stagehand who was at the auditions. He watches the dance floor with a smile of genuine pleasure. He looks at Tyson; flirting with the WI ladies.

Tyson looks up, eyes bright; hair falling just so on his forehead - their eyes meet.

Tom holds his gaze. Tries to look away. Can't.

Tyson makes a small sound that's midway between a sigh and a gasp.

The music and dancing keep going as we leave a scene that just found a little bit of Christmas magic.

INT. THE STAR PUB - NIGHT

Fairy lights flicker half-heartedly along the beams. The FIREPLACE crackles. The air is thick with the hum of locals, laughter, and the clink of pint glasses. Dean, as always, is at the bar.

LOCAL

How are those Christmas lights of yours coming along, Dean?

Much laughter at the bar.

Dean looks decidedly unhappy.

In a snug corner: Emma, Jack, Miss Pritchard, Syd, Tyson and Debbie crowd around a couple of pushed-together tables.

Empty crisp packets, half-drunk drinks and scattered rehearsal scripts. Everyone's warm from the fire; flushed from the day.

EMMA

(raising her G&T)
To the first rehearsal that didn't end in total disaster.

MISS PRITCHARD

Let's not get carried away, vicar.

DEBBIE

(to Jack)
You were marvellous, love. Like stirring honey into nettle tea.

JACK

I'll take that as a compliment, Debbie.

TYSON

It was... pretty good, you guys. Not perfect, but...

SYD

Until these jokers tried to play one of my songs.

Across the pub, the PANTO BAND - four middle-aged local men with day jobs and delusions - struggle their way through a pub version of an old SYD BLADE & THE VIOLET SQUEEZE hit. It's... recognisable. Just.

SYD

That's not the rhythm. That's not the chord. I'm not sure that's even the bloody song.

MISS PRITCHARD

They've certainly made it their own, Mr. Blade.

JACK

Go on, Syd. Show 'em how it's done.

SYD

Nah. Let 'em murder it. They'll get tired eventually.

JACK

But then they'll play it again...

Syd glares. He drains his pint, stands up.

SYD

Bleedin' amateurs.

He strides across the pub. The band look up: terrified and star-struck.

BAND LEADER

Oh my God.

SYD

You - keys. You - follow me. And for the love of Hendrix, stay in F.

He launches into the intro. The pub perks up.

AT THE BAR: Tom stands at the bar, nursing a pint - effortlessly handsome is his regulation tight white T-shirt and blue jeans. He pretends not to look at Tyson, who pretends even harder not to look back.

Their eyes meet for a heartbeat.

TYSON

Anyone want another drink?

Smiles and nods all round.

EMMA

A port and lemon for Miss Pritchard, please, Tyson. Same again for me.

Jack and Debbie nod their approval too.

Tyson walks up to the bar, casual as anything, and positions himself close - but not too close - to Tom.

They both try and act chilled, without entirely succeeding. Dean is busily pulling pints for the Squires brothers.

TYSON

Nice pub, bro.

TOM
Only one in the village.

TYSON
(extending a hand)
Finch. Tyson Finch.

Tom takes a sip of his pint. He shakes Tyson's hand.

TOM
You always say it like that?

TYSON
Come again?

TOM
(in a passable American
accent)
"Finch. Tyson Finch." (beat) Like
James Bond.

Tyson looks taken aback - but the twinkle in Tom's eye lands.

TYSON
Yeah. (laughs) I don't even know
why I said that.

TOM
Just teasing you, mate.

A moment of pleasant silence. Tyson opens his mouth to continue the conversation, but then:

SIR ALASTAIR
Tom! Just the chap I've been
looking for!

Sir Alastair breezes up - all tweed, scarves and snowy shoulders.

TOM
'Evening, Sir Alastair.

Sir Alastair gives Tyson the once-over.

SIR ALASTAIR
Whisky-and-soda, if you'd be so
kind.

TYSON
(bemused)
Um... sure.

Tyson motions to Dean.

SIR ALASTAIR

Dear boy: I've been wondering if
you could come up to the house and
take a look at my back gate?
Tomorrow suit you? Eleven-o'clock?

Tom looks over at Tyson as if to say: sorry.

Tyson smiles.

TOM

Eleven it is, sir.

Sir Alastair picks up on a mood.

SIR ALASTAIR

Wasn't interrupting anything, was
I?

TYSON

Not at all... Al.

Sir Alastair bristles a little, but recovers.

SIR ALASTAIR

Jolly good. Now where's that drink,
hmm? And Dean - what on earth is
going on with your Christmas
lights?

Syd and the band have moved on to the next song. Syd - bossy
and cantankerous - is clearly loving every minute of it.

Emma and Miss Pritchard are alone at the table while Debbie
and Jack help Tyson with the drinks.

EMMA

Not bad, eh Miss Pritchard?

MISS PRITCHARD

Don't get ahead of yourself, vicar.
We're not out of the Christmas
woods yet.

EMMA

Kiki and Cecily?

MISS PRITCHARD

Indeed. The dame and the diva.
(beat) But don't you worry.

EMMA

I never do, Miss Pritchard. Not
with you around.

Beat.

MISS PRITCHARD
Vicar, I wonder if I might...

EMMA
Yes?

As Miss Pritchard is about to speak, the drinks arrive at the table in a flurry of chatter and spills.

Emma looks at Miss Pritchard as if to say: go on.

MISS PRITCHARD
No matter.

Emma pats her hand and the conversation starts up again. Miss Pritchard sips her port and lemon.

Tom looks once more at Tyson and then heads out into the cold.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - DAY

The hall is quiet, shafts of wintry sunlight angling through the high windows. A faint chill in the air. The piano sits alone centre stage – open, expectant.

The door creaks open. Kiki steps in, surprised to find the place deserted. She's in sunglasses and a hoodie; takeaway coffee in hand.

KIKI
Hello? Anyone alive in here?

MISS PRITCHARD
Just us, Miss Watts.

Kiki jumps slightly, pulling down her sunglasses. She spots Miss Pritchard sitting.

Seated beside the piano – clutching a satchel like a shield, is TAMIKA TATE – thirteen, mixed-race.

KIKI
What's going on? Where is everybody?

MISS PRITCHARD
This isn't a rehearsal, Miss Watts.

KIKI
Then what the –

Indicating the girl.

MISS PRITCHARD
This is Tamika.

TAMIKA

Hello, miss.

Kiki gives her a nod, then turns back to Miss Pritchard.

KIKI

Right... okay.

MISS PRITCHARD

Tamika wanted to audition for the panto. But when she saw the others – well, she changed her mind.

Tamika shifts awkwardly. Her eyes are wide and guarded.

MISS PRITCHARD

She sings in church. Has a fine soprano. But she's never sung a solo. Never had the chance.

Kiki stiffens, caught between sympathy and irritation.

KIKI

So why am I here?

MISS PRITCHARD

Because she's not ready for an audition. She needs something else. A first step.

Beat.

MISS PRITCHARD

I thought you might be kind enough to give her a little coaching.

KIKI

I don't coach.

MISS PRITCHARD

And yet here we are.

Kiki looks at Tamika, then at Miss Pritchard. Something in Tamika's posture – clenched hands, bitten lip, burning determination just beneath the surface – strikes a chord.

KIKI

(sighs)

Alright, kid. Let's see what you've got.

TAMIKA

I... I can't. Not with people watching.

MISS PRITCHARD

I shall repair to my knitting.

She exits.

Kiki watches Tamika a beat, then gently pats the piano bench.

KIKI

Okay. No pressure. Come here,
child.

Tamika edges forward. She sits, rigid.

KIKI

You sing in church, baby?

TAMIKA

Only in the back, miss. With
everyone.

KIKI

I get it. I was a back pew belter
too. 'Til Miss Jenkins made me sing
in front of the whole damned
congregation.

TAMIKA

Miss Jenkins, miss?

KIKI

She was my Miss Pritchard (raising
her voice to be heard) - only not
as mean!

TAMIKA

Did it go okay, miss? When you sang
by yourself?

KIKI

(grinning)

I cried. Then I sang. And then I
cried again. And.... Hey, no more
"yes miss, no miss" okay - makes me
feel like I'm (loud again) - an old
maid! It's Kiki, sweetheart, just
Kiki, okay?

Tamika giggles.

KIKI

C'mon, girl. Let's start with
breathing.

She gently places a hand by Tamika's ribs.

KIKI

In through the nose. Out through
the mouth. (beat) Again.

Tamika follows, gradually easing. Kiki hums a soft scale and
nods for her to join. It's weak, but it's there.

KIKI

Not bad, not bad, girl. Now again,
but like you mean it. Like you're
not in the back row anymore.

Tamika breathes. Opens her mouth.

And sings – a little fragile – but it's there. Real. Pure.

Kiki watches, surprised. Moved.

KIKI

There she is. Okay, here's what we
do next...

Miss Pritchard pokes her head back into the hall for a
moment, and smiles.

EXT. CHRISTMAS SHOPPE - DAY

Christmas shoppers bustle about: choosing trees, hauling bags
to waiting cars. A small mulled-wine stall is doing a roaring
trade. Debbie is running from pillar to post to keep
everything ticking along.

Dame Cecily is wandering among the goods on offer, crinkling
her nose at a particularly garish Rudolph with an illuminated
nose. She spots Miss Pritchard and tries to hide behind a
display of novelty Christmas underpants.

MISS PRITCHARD

Good afternoon, Dame Cecily.

DAME CECILY

(rumbled)

Ah, Miss Pritchard. I was just...
browsing.

Miss Pritchard gives her a look.

MISS PRITCHARD

I always enjoy this time of year,
don't you?

DAME CECILY

Not particularly, no. Too much
noise. Too many people.

MISS PRITCHARD

Hmm.

DAME CECILY

Hmm?

MISS PRITCHARD

Oh, it just strikes me as odd,
that's all. I mean...

DAME CECILY

Go on.

MISS PRITCHARD

Well, with the effect you have on people, I would've thought...

DAME CECILY

What effect is that?

MISS PRITCHARD

At the last rehearsal. I think everyone else had left but you sat with Alice for nearly an hour, didn't you?

DAME CECILY

Um... yes, I...

MISS PRITCHARD

Running lines with her. Talking about her character. I've been teaching for forty years. It isn't often you see what I saw in Alice's eyes.

Dame Cecily - for the first time - is uncertain what to say, but Miss Pritchard waits.

DAME CECILY

You know, Larry once told me that some people can change the temperature of a room just by being in it.

MISS PRITCHARD

I think Lord Olivier may have been right. (beat) Don't you?

DAME CECILY

I suppose I...

MISS PRITCHARD

It all depends on whether one wants to make it colder or warmer, don't you think?

That lands.

MISS PRITCHARD

If you'll forgive me, Dame Cecily. Such a busy time of year.

Miss Pritchard moves away. Dame Cecily is left to wonder what kind of temperature she wants to bring with her.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - LATE AFTERNOON

The atmosphere is calmer than before, but still a little chaotic. The cast are spread about: Jack helping Tamika with some lines, Kiki talking quietly with Ben near the piano, Syd fiddling with guitar strings, Tyson stretching in the corner, shooting the odd glance toward Tom - visible biceps - who's fixing a light fitting.

The door opens quietly.

Dame Cecily enters, dressed impeccably but un-showily: tailored coat, polished boots, and a look of quiet command. She carries her leather-bound notebook and a silk scarf knotted just so.

The room doesn't fall silent - not quite - but attention shifts. She takes her time crossing the space, noting each cast member like a curator assessing a curious exhibition. She stops by the piano, tapping a pencil gently on the top.

DAME CECILY

Well.

Everyone turns.

DAME CECILY

I thought I might see if the ship had righted itself - or sunk entirely.

MISS PRITCHARD

Still afloat, Dame Cecily. Some bailing required.

DAME CECILY

(to the group)

I know I wasn't at the last rehearsal. An incident involving my gardener and his retractable hose. I shan't elaborate. (beat) But now, I'm here. And if you'll allow an old woman her indulgences, I'd like to begin properly. With an apology.

Bemused looks all round.

DAME CECILY

You see, it's said that I left the West End because of a fat, American... chequebook.

Some laughter.

DEBBIE

Oh, I loved "Sunset Shadows", Dame Cecily. Still do!

More chuckles, and scattered applause.

DAME CECILY

Well, the truth is, I... I lost my nerve. Just... couldn't seem to give the audience what they deserved any more. (beat) And so, Los Angeles, with its retakes and its... yes: its big, fat chequebooks.

More laughter - and sympathy too.

DAME CECILY

Well, it was a life-saver as much as a lifeline. But I never set foot on stage again. And then, being here... with you... and this...

FRANK SQUIRES

We still love you, Dame Cecily. Don't we, Bob?

BOB SQUIRES

'Course we bloody do.

Everyone laughs. Dame Cecily looks like she might laugh and cry at the same time.

She opens her notebook.

DAME CECILY

Bless you. All of you. Now, shall we get to work?

She gestures graciously toward the stage.

TYSON

(to Miss Pritchard)

Another formidable broad, Miss Pritchard.

MISS PRITCHARD

I couldn't agree more, Mr. Finch.

They reset. As the cast moves into position - lighter now: more together.

INT. TYSON FINCH'S HOUSE - DAY

Sunlight streams through floor-to-ceiling windows. Tyson, shirtless, nervous, paces his pristine, designer home gym. He adjusts the lighting, a towel on a weight bench, checks his reflection, then grabs a spray bottle and gives his chest a subtle spritz. One last glance in the mirror.

DING-DONG.

He darts to the door, tries for casual nonchalance, then opens it to reveal: Tom Tate. Looking adorable in his regular get-up, plus a warm, winter jacket and a home-made knitted scarf.

TYSON

Tom! Thanks for coming out, bro.

TOM

No bother, mate. Pulley on the lat machine, right?

TYSON

Yeah. Keeps sticking. Thought you might have a look, man.

Tom steps inside, gives the place a once-over.

TOM

Bit of kit, this. Home gym or Bond villain lair?

TYSON

(laughs, too hard)

Well, you know. Gotta keep it tight, even in the Suffolk.

TOM

Right.

Tom slips off his jacket and scarf - revealing that killer bod - and crouches down to inspect the machine. Tyson hovers.

TYSON

Drink? Protein shake? Coconut water?

TOM

I'm good, thanks.

A beat as Tom works. Tyson fidgets. Leans against the doorframe - flexed just so.

TYSON

So... you, uh, from round these parts?

TOM

Born here. My mum's from Antigua but ended up working for Sir Alastair back in the day.

TYSON

Cool. That's so... like, real, bro.

TOM

Not sure what that means, but yeah.

Another awkward beat. Tyson watches Tom. Tom adjusts a wrench.

TYSON

Tom, dude... You got a sick physique, you know?

Tyson moves a little closer, flexes a little harder.

TOM

Thanks, man. You too.

TYSON

(standing very close now)
Do... do you ever think about modelling? Or acting? 'Cause I think you...

TOM

(pulls back, squinting at him)
You know what, mate? I'm gonna stop you there.

TYSON

What? I'm just -

TOM

I've seen this movie. (beat) I didn't like it then, and I don't like it now.

Tyson freezes. Tom stands, wiping his hands.

TOM

You want something fixed, ask me to fix it. You want company or... whatever, ask me for a pint at The Star. Or a walk. Or something... what was it you said? Something real.

TYSON

I didn't mean -

TOM

Yeah, you did, mate. And it's fine. But I'm not a project, or a punchline, or a trophy. (beat) Even for Mr. Hollywood.

He gathers his tools.

He walks to the door.

TYSON

Tom, I... (door slams) Crap.

Tyson stands alone in his silent, glossy gym, still damp from the spritz, suddenly looking very small.

We pull back to see Tom's home-made scarf still hanging on the pec deck.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - SCENERY WORKSHOP - NIGHT

The village hall has been transformed into a battlefield of DIY ambition: SAWDUST, half-painted BACKDROPS, teetering FLATS. The air smells like gloss paint and regret.

BEN is alone, methodically measuring a timber frame. Calm hands. Farmer's patience. A man who can build anything if you'd just stop changing your mind.

A CLUNK behind him.

Ben looks up, ready to tell someone off—

Jack steps gingerly over paint tins, carrying two bottles of beer and a bundle of brushes like an offering. Hoodie, beanie — dressed down.

JACK

Is this where the magic happens?

Ben blinks. A slow smile creeps in.

BEN

Well, well.

JACK

(grinning)

Well, well what?

BEN

Broadway's wandered into my shed.

JACK

It's not a shed. It's a creative laboratory.

(gestures to chaos)

Also, I brought bribes.

Jack holds up the beer. Ben's expression softens despite himself.

BEN

Other than Tom, you're the first person to set foot in here since I started building this damn set.

JACK

I'm trying to be helpful. Kiki said you were basically doing the Sistine Chapel but with MDF.

Ben snorts. Takes a beer.

BEN
Kiki Watts said that?

JACK
She said it with love. And also...
mild panic. So I thought I'd come
see the horror for myself.

Ben looks him up and down – half amused, half sceptical.

BEN
You know what you're doing with a
hammer?

Jack clocks the hammer leaning against a flat.

JACK
I once played a carpenter in a
Tennessee Williams. Does that
count?

Ben laughs, properly.

BEN
Alright then. Get in.

Jack picks up the hammer like it might bite him.

JACK
What do I hit first?

BEN
Ideally, nothing that's load-
bearing.

They share a warm chuckle. Jack shrugs off his coat and rolls up his sleeves. It's oddly grounding to see him in sawdust instead of spotlight.

Jack and Ben paint a flat side by side. Smudges of paint on their cheeks.

Jack paints with surprising focus. Ben moves around him, efficient and precise.

JACK
You always lived round here?

BEN
Since I was ten. Grew up farming in
Antigua. My sister got a job with
Sir Alastair and, well. Now I farm
here.

JACK
Your sister?

BEN
Tom's mum.

Jack pauses.

JACK
Wait – Tom's your nephew?

BEN
Mm.

JACK
That makes sense. Same energy. Like you could both build a house during a conversation.

Ben chuckles.

BEN
He's got more time for nonsense than I do.

JACK
I've noticed.

They keep painting. A beat.

Jack looks around at the half-built world: unfinished skyline, flats stacked like dominoes, ambitious scale everywhere.

JACK
This is... a lot, Ben. We gonna be ready by Christmas Eve?

Ben exhales, long-suffering.

BEN
Not at this rate. Dame Cecily's got the bit between her teeth now. Bigger this. More that. "Can the pumpkin be higher?"
(beat)
I could work all day and all night and still not be ready.

Jack absorbs that – properly. The leader in him waking up.

JACK
So what you're saying is: you need people.

BEN
I'm saying I need a miracle.

Jack nods as if hearing a cue.

JACK

Right.

Ben notices the look on Jack's face – the "I'm about to do something" look.

BEN

What?

Jack keeps painting, casual, but his eyes are already elsewhere.

JACK

Oh, it's nothing. You just let Jack Tanner do his thing.

Ben eyes him – wary now.

Jack wipes his hands on a rag, pulls out his phone, scrolls, taps.

JACK

(into phone)

Tyson. It's Jack.

Ben watches, bemused, as Jack turns charm into logistics.

JACK

Listen, I'm at the village hall with Ben.

Ben raises a hand in a tiny wave, like: hello, random celebrity.

JACK

We're building Dame Cecily's... Christmas cathedral.

(beat)

And I was wondering if you could lend me something.

Ben stops painting. That's intriguing.

Jack turns slightly away – not secretive, just polite. We don't hear the reply on the other end.

JACK

(beat, nodding)

Uh-huh.

Ben tries to read Jack's face. Jack keeps it neutral – almost too neutral.

JACK

(beat)

Just for a few hours. Saturday afternoon.

Ben's eyebrows go up.

JACK
Exactly. Two hours.
(beat)
You're a legend.

He ends the call. Pockets the phone. Picks up his brush again as if he's just ordered takeaway.

Ben stares at him.

BEN
You asked Tyson Finch to lend you
what exactly?

Jack meets his eyes – totally innocent.

JACK
A Christmas miracle, my friend.

Ben watches him paint for a beat, trying to work out if he's joking.

BEN
If a donkey arrives, I'm leaving.

JACK
Fair point.

Ben shakes his head, smiling despite himself.

EXT. VILLAGE HALL - NOTICEBOARD - DAY

C/U on the noticeboard. Pasted on top of the frayed "SET BUILDING: VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!" is a small addendum: "SATURDAY WITH SUPERMODEL ILSA ~~KRAPOVA~~ KARPOVA")

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

A perfect, crisp winter afternoon. Frost on the hedgerows, breath in the air. Emma and Jack walk side by side, both wrapped in scarves and wellies, the distant village visible behind them.

JACK
Can't believe I've been here nearly
two weeks and this is my first
proper walk.

EMMA
Well, you've had a lot on. Singing,
dancing, celebrity wrangling.

JACK
Don't forget elf duty.

EMMA
 (chuckles)
 How could I?

They walk a few more steps in companionable silence.

EMMA
 This path's my sanity, most weeks.
 Being a vicar's like juggling cats.
 Cats on fire. Someone's always ill
 or grieving or getting married or
 furious about the flowers. It's
 exhausting.

JACK
 But you love it?

EMMA
 God help me, I do. It's a
 privilege, in a strange way. To be
 there at the best and worst moments
 of people's lives.

Jack nods, thoughtful.

JACK
 I envy that. The clarity. I'm not
 sure what I'm doing next.

EMMA
 You? But you're —

JACK
 Broadway was... incredible. But
 then all these offers poured in. A
 cop show, a period film, an action
 thing with jet-skis. They all want
 an answer and I — (shrugs) I don't
 know who I'm meant to be.

EMMA
 Maybe you don't need to know yet.

JACK
 I just keep wondering if I've...
 already done the best thing I'll
 ever do.

EMMA
 (pause)
 You mean "Oliver!": Year Ten,
 second workhouse boy from the left?

Jack laughs. So does she. A flicker of chemistry passes
 between them.

JACK
 You're good for me, vicar.

EMMA

I am. And you're not half as annoying as I expected.

They continue walking. Side by side. No need to rush.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - DAY

The hall is a riot of activity. Seemingly every man and teenage boy from a five-mile radius is there: dressed in what they consider their Saturday night pulling outfits. Hair is gelled. T-shirts are tight. One could suffocate on the Lynx body spray.

In the midst of it all - serene, gentle and devastatingly beautiful - is Ilsa. She is wearing overalls that, on her, look like haute couture. She's working the room with real skill: a smile here, a touch there.

In her wake: a room of smitten, tongue-tied men doing their best to hold in their bellies, and young guys flexing anything they can.

But - the work is being done. Sets are coming together; lights are being hung. The pantomime is taking shape.

Dame Cecily - supervising - is impressed. When her eyes meet Ilsa's, she gives a small incline of her head.

INT. THE STAR PUB - DAY

The pub is practically empty. Dean is polishing glasses, as always.

Tom stands despondently at the bar, sipping his pint.

At a corner table, Jack sits with a dog-eared rehearsal script and a biro, making notes. He's half in his own world, half keeping one eye on Tom in that quiet way people do in small villages.

Dean glances over at Jack.

DEAN

Rehearsals not killing you enough, Broadway?

JACK

Just popped in for caffeine and moral support, Dean.

(beat)

Tom looks like he's swallowed a wasp.

Dean follows Jack's gaze. Tom pretends he hasn't noticed either of them noticing.

DEAN

That's just his face when he's thinking.

JACK

About what?

Dean shrugs: none of your business. Fair.

The door opens.

Tom and Dean look up.

It's Tyson, looking very sheepish. In his hands - neatly folded - is Tom's home-made scarf.

Jack clocks the scarf. Clocks Tom's posture. Clocks Tyson's face. He immediately understands: this is not a "say hello" visit. This is a "please don't hate me" visit.

Tyson looks at Tom but doesn't move.

A beat.

Jack stands, casually gathering his script and pen as if he's just remembered something.

JACK

I'm gonna go see if Emma needs me for anything.

Dean gives the smallest nod: thanks. Jack heads toward the back corridor - giving them space without making it a thing.

Tom inclines his head towards the comfy sofa near the roaring fire.

Tyson exhales - grateful for the lifeline - and they both cross the pub from different directions to get there. They sit.

Dean comes over with two pints and sets them down before going back to his glasses.

From the back corridor, we can just glimpse Jack hovering for a second, pretending to read his script, absolutely eavesdropping. Then he winces at himself and retreats properly. A human beat.

Tyson gingerly hands Tom the scarf.

TYSON

I figured you'd want that back.

Tom nods but doesn't speak.

TYSON
 Look, Tom, I... I really messed
 that up, didn't I?

TOM
 (stone-faced)
 Big time, mate.

TYSON
 I didn't... I don't... Back in
 Hollywood, okay? There's bars you
 can go and, you know, meet people.

Tom is listening.

Beat.

TOM
 (relenting a little)
 Must get lonely.

TYSON
 It can be. And, y'know, you're the
 first guy since I moved here
 that...

TOM
 You don't have to explain yourself,
 mate. (beat) But there's a right
 way and a wrong way to... y'know:
 meet people.

Tyson nods.

TYSON
 And, boy, did I pick the wrong way.

Tom laughs, resentment and hurt melting away.

TYSON
 So, by way of an apology.
 Apparently, there's a great little
 Italian joint over in Poleham. And
 I was wondering... maybe you and I
 could...

TOM
 I'd love to, mate.

TYSON
 And if you don't want to, I
 completely... wait, what?

TOM
 I would love to.

TYSON
 Really?

Tom smiles and takes a long sip of his pint. Their gazes linger.

Dean comes over, can't help himself.

DEAN
Everything alright here, gents?

TYSON
Dean, my friend. Everything here is goddam perfect.

Dean smiles, genuinely pleased.

As Dean turns back to the bar, Jack reappears briefly at the corridor entrance – only long enough to catch Tom's smile.

Jack and Dean share a tiny look: relief.

Jack gives a small, almost invisible thumbs-up to Dean – then quietly slips out, leaving Tyson and Tom in their moment.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - MAIN STAGE - DAY

A rehearsal in full, glorious swing. The cast is in sync: laughter, energy, even Dame Cecily is beaming. Jack leads a number, Tyson and Kiki in step, Syd playing guitar with unexpected warmth.

EMMA
They're actually... enjoying it.

MISS PRITCHARD
No parades just yet, vicar.

Suddenly – the double doors at the back of the hall BANG open. Everyone freezes in place.

A MAN in a hi-vis vest and clipboard steps in. Late 40s, officious and joyless.

MARTIN
Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen.
Vicar. Sorry. Could we pause for a moment?

Everything grinds to a halt.

MARTIN
Martin Drake. West Suffolk Fire and Safety. We had an unscheduled check flagged by the county system.

EMMA

(smiling, approaching)
 Oh gosh, sorry about that, Mr. Drake. But, as you see: we're just rehearsing for the...

MARTIN

About that, your reverence. I'm afraid this venue won't meet safety code standards in time for a public performance on the 24th.

Gasps. Murmurs. Dame Cecily mutters something very unladylike.

EMMA

But the paperwork is —

MARTIN

Doesn't matter. You're non-compliant, vicar. Electrical, exit signage, some issues with the back fire door. No hall, no panto.

He hands over a formal notice, then exits without a backward glance.

The silence that follows is deafening.

MISS PRITCHARD

Emma, dear. Sit me down, would you?

Emma helps her gently to a chair. Miss Pritchard looks pale, faint.

JACK

Someone get some water.

Tamika dashes for the kitchen.

MISS PRITCHARD

Just a dizzy spell. Nothing to worry —

She slumps forward.

TYSON

Call an ambulance.

TOM

On it!

Everyone scrambles. Kiki guides the younger cast members away. Dame Cecily takes Miss Pritchard's hand.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - LATER

A somber hush. The hall is half-empty now. A few cast members linger, stunned. Emma, Jack, Syd, Tyson, Debbie and Kiki gather near the stage.

DEBBIE

(hanging up)

They said she's stable. They've taken her to Ipswich.

JACK

Right. Emergency Panto Committee. Now.

EMMA

You're all very welcome at the vicarage. Might be a bit of a squeeze, mind.

SYD

I've got a better idea.

INT. THE STAR PUB - NIGHT

The group is now fully assembled and Sir Alastair has arrived. A fresh round of drinks on the table. Papers, notes, and the panto script are spread out. The air is thick with worry, but determination is building. Dean - bar.

SIR ALASTAIR

No village hall, no Miss Pritchard, and a rather pressing deadline. (beat) I've seen less fraught situations in wartime.

He pulls out a silk handkerchief.

SIR ALASTAIR

This will break Leonard's heart.

Debbie lets out a stifled sob.

DEBBIE

The poor mite.

TYSON

You guys: we can't cancel. Not now. Not after everything.

KIKI

There's gotta be somewhere we can perform. Don't you guys have a school or something?

BEN

No heating. Budget cuts.

SYD

What about a marquee?

EMMA

In December, Syd? You want the entire village to freeze to death? Besides, we'd never get one this late in the day.

JACK

There's got to be somewhere we haven't thought of. (beat, a realisation) Unless...

A pause. Then all eyes shift slowly toward Sir Alastair.
He senses it. Blinks.

SIR ALASTAIR

What?

EMMA

The barn!

SIR ALASTAIR

My barn is for summer weddings and overpriced birthday parties, vicar. It's not for... slapstick and sequins.

KIKI

It has a roof, doesn't it?

TYSON

And lights?

BEN

And parking.

SIR ALASTAIR

Yes, but —

DEBBIE

You wouldn't want to go down in history as the man who killed the panto, would you, Sir Alastair?

SYD

Think of the legacy, mate.

SIR ALASTAIR

No.

JACK

Think of Miss P.

SIR ALASTAIR

Oh, for heaven's sake.

A pause. Then:

SIR ALASTAIR

Very well. One night only. No animals. Leonard excepted. No fog machines. And absolutely, positively no custard pies.

EMMA

Oh, Alastair! Praise the Lord!

DEBBIE

Leonard's going to be over the moon!

Everyone laughs.

SIR ALASTAIR

I regret this already.

They all raise their glasses in grateful toast.

Dame Cecily leans closer to Sir Alastair.

DAME CECILY

(softly)

Thank you, Alastair. (beat) Now... about the custard pies...

INT. SIR ALASTAIR'S BARN - DAY

Rehearsal is in full swing. Jack and Emma run a scene while Dame Cecily provides notes. Debbie hovers off to the side, her clipboard clutched tightly. Tyson and Kiki are waiting for their cue.

EMMA

I've spoken to the hospital and they're going to let me know how Miss Pritchard's getting on.

Debbie looks very sheepish. Then:

DEBBIE

(grim)

Vicar. I... Oh, I don't know how to... We've sold twenty-two tickets.

EMMA

I'm sorry - what?

DEBBIE

With everything going on, I just... I took my eye off the PR ball.

EMMA
 (looking up)
 I suppose it's a bit much to ask
 for another miracle?

A flat falls over.

EMMA
 Thought not.

Tyson and Kiki overhear the exchange and share a conspiratorial look.

They walk over to Emma and Debbie.

KIKI
 We may not know much about village
 life, reverend, but publicity? Now
 you're talking our language.

TYSON
 If you can spare us for an hour or
 so, we'll get right on it.

Emma nods. It's their only hope.

EXT. SIR ALASTAIR'S BARN - DAY

A press call is in progress. Tyson and Kiki pose for cameras outside the barn, grinning with theatrical bravado. Dame Cecily condescends for a few snaps. Jack and Emma stand awkwardly by a festive backdrop. Syd sulks in the background.

A small group of JOURNALISTS mills about - a LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHER, a regional TELLY CREW, and a handful of UNIMPRESSED REPORTERS checking their phones.

REPORTER 1
 Let me guess. You're doing
 Cinderella. In a barn. With... who
 was it, again?

JACK
 With who? Tyson Finch! Kiki Watts!
 Syd bloody Blade, for God's sake!

REPORTER 2
 Yeah, but it's no Hugh Grant in
 "Aladdin", is it? (beat) He's got a
 unicorn and a hologram in
 Lowestoft.

KIKI
 We have Dame Cecily Sharpe, fellas.

REPORTER 1
 Big in the 90s, weren't she?

REPORTER 2

Yeah, the 1890s.

DAME CECILY

I shall try not to take that personally.

A few CAMERA CLICKS. Half-hearted. The reporters drift, bored.

Jack clocks it: this is dying on its feet.

He glances at Emma – mortified. Debbie – panicking. Then: Tyson, standing just off to the side, jaw tight, watching Tom as he adjusts a string of fairy lights nearby.

Jack steps in close to Tyson – sotto, like two pros at a junket.

JACK

They're not here for the panto, mate.

TYSON

No kidding.

JACK

They smell "Christmas PR" and their brains turn off. They want a story. Something real.

Tyson bristles at that word.

TYSON

Real?

Jack follows Tyson's line of sight – to Tom.

JACK

Yeah. That.

Tyson swallows. Defensive.

TYSON

Don't, man.

JACK

Listen, you don't owe them anything, right? You don't. Your life is your own. But if you did want to stop... you know. If you want a moment in your life where you don't let these idiots write the story for you...

Tyson looks at Jack, thrown by the sincerity.

JACK

...this is a room full of cameras.
And a village that needs a miracle.
(beat, gentler))
Only if it's yours. Not mine. Not
theirs. Yours. (beat, looking at
Tom) And his.

A long beat. Tyson's breathing changes. He glances again at Tom – and it's clear: the decision isn't PR. It's longing. It's fear. Tyson exhales.

TYSON

Okay, Jack.

He steps away before he can lose his nerve.

Jack watches him go – worried he's pushed too hard – then Emma looks at Jack, confused.

EMMA

What did you just do?

JACK

Told him he's better than he thinks
he is. I hope.

Tyson walks over to Tom. Tom looks up, wary.

TOM

All going to plan, Ty?

TYSON

Sort of. I was just thinking...

Tom stays guarded – but Tyson's face is different. Honest. After a pleading look from Tyson, Tom nods.

They hold hands.

Tyson turns back to the press – voice steady.

TYSON

Hey, boys. Over here.

The photographers swing to face Tyson and Tom.

Beat.

Tyson pulls Tom close. Then kisses him. A real kiss – tender, brave.

Cameras click. Someone gasps. The photographer's flash goes off like wildfire.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A pale winter light filters in through the blinds. The room is quiet, clinical, but with a vase of drooping carnations on the windowsill. Emma steps quietly inside, holding a paper bag and a thermos.

Miss Pritchard lies in bed, propped up by pillows, looking frailer than we've seen her. But her eyes are still sharp.

MISS PRITCHARD

Is that the vicar... or the Ghost
of Christmas Present?

EMMA

It's me. And I've brought tea. Real
tea.

She sets down the thermos and bag, pulls up a chair beside the bed.

MISS PRITCHARD

Oh, bless you. Hospital tea is
practically a war crime.

EMMA

They say you're stable. But...

She doesn't finish. Miss Pritchard watches her gently.

MISS PRITCHARD

But you've guessed, haven't you?
(beat) It's a little bit more
serious than that, vicar.

EMMA

I know you hate fuss, but if
there's anything -

MISS PRITCHARD

There might not be time, Emma.

A pause. Emma looks down at her hands.

MISS PRITCHARD

Don't cry, vicar. You'll stain your
dog collar.

Emma smiles through tears. Miss Pritchard reaches over and gently pats her hand.

MISS PRITCHARD

What matters now is the panto. And
the village. You've all done
something rather beautiful.

EMMA

Because of you.

MISS PRITCHARD

Oh, nonsense. But let's make sure it happens. No matter what.

EMMA

Oh, I think everything that can possibly go wrong already has!

MISS PRITCHARD

Yes, dear. (beat) Yes, I'm sure it has.

INT. CHRISTMAS SHOPPE - NIGHT

Debbie is on her laptop, processing orders and sipping a mug of cocoa. She has marshmallow topping on the tip of her nose. She doesn't notice.

Suddenly, a torrent of notifications start to ping up. She clicks through one immediately. It is MailOnline:

ON SCREEN: The photo and a glimpse of the headline.

"TV hero finds his leading man: "Starfall" hunk Tyson Finch comes out in shock kiss with Suffolk handyman"

Another set of notifications starts, all reading. "Ticket Confirmation: Cinderella".

INT. GLAMOROUS HOTEL SUITE - LONDON - NIGHT

Ilsa, hair scraped up, sheet mask half-on, scrolls her phone.

ON SCREEN: the same MailOnline headline and Tyson/Tom kiss.

Ilsa exhales, then smiles - fond, unsurprised.

ILSA

(softly)

About time, Finchy.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - DAY

The cast and crew gather round a printed notice: SOLD OUT scrawled across the bottom. Excitement bubbles. Debbie high-fives Kiki. Tyson looks stunned. Jack and Emma exchange a grin.

INT. MONTAGE - CELEBRITY MESSAGES

Kiki checks her phone from her sofa at home. A text from her agent: "Headline concert at the Albert Hall. J-Lo cancelled. NYE. Soundcheck: Dec 24. GRRRRRLL - we back!"

She stares at it. Hesitates.

Tyson, post-gym session, towel slung round his neck. Tom is still doing bench press. Tyson's phone buzzes: "Chris Nolan wants F2F. LA. Xmas Eve. Can't move it. Huge."

He exhales, heart thudding.

Syd, sprawled in a retro armchair in the pub, guitar across his lap. His iPad pings: "Oil baron's 40th - Marrakesh. 250K for 20 mins. Dec 24. What a plonker! Assume it's a Yes?"

Syd blinks, then slowly sets down the guitar.

Jack, seated by the barn's fire exit with Emma, nursing tea. His WhatsApp chimes: "Netflix series a go, baby!! Lead role. Contract on email. Shoots Memphis: Dec 24. Text for deets. Kudos, man!"

He stares at the screen, torn.

INT. BARN THEATRE - NIGHT

The festive fairy lights twinkle as the cast wraps up another rehearsal - unaware of the dilemmas now seeded.

INT. THE MEADOWS' FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

There's washing up in the sink and a plate of mince pies cooling on the counter.

April is wrestling clingfilm onto a trifle. Colin - Colin sits at the table mending a halter, mug of tea at his elbow.

The back door opens. Jack steps in, scarf around his neck, breathing steam. He stamps the cold off his boots.

APRIL

Don't traipse that across my clean floor.

He obligingly kicks his boots off onto the mat.

COLIN

You look knackered.

APRIL

Of course he looks knackered, he's running a West End show out of a cowshed.

She kisses Jack's cheek, then shoves a plate at him.

APRIL

What?

Jack drops into a chair, takes a mince pie, doesn't really eat it.

April clocks it immediately.

APRIL
That's your "I'm thinking too hard" face.

COLIN
Not the "I've crashed the car" face? (beat) Again.

Jack can't help a small laugh. Then it fades.

JACK
I got an offer.

That gets their attention.

JACK
Netflix. Proper Netflix, not bloke-in-a-shed Netflix.

COLIN
They want you to fix their wi-fi?

APRIL
Colin.

JACK
Limited series. Six parts. About a jazz band in 1950s New Orleans. Proper scripts, proper director. They sent me the pilot. It's... really good.

April softens. She sits opposite him.

APRIL
What's the part?

JACK
Band leader. Bit of singing, bit of trumpet playing, loads of acting. One of those "career defining" jobs my agent keeps banging on about.

COLIN
I'd watch it.

JACK
Yeah.

Beat.

APRIL
What's the catch?

JACK
Starts shooting Christmas Eve. In
Memphis.

That lands.

COLIN
Ah.

APRIL
And you haven't told the vicar?

JACK
Not yet.
(quickly)
I mean, it's only a date, right?
They could move it. Maybe.
Probably. Or not.

Silence for a moment. The radio carol changes. April studies
him.

APRIL
You've worked ten years for
something like this.

COLIN
And we've watched you. London, New
York... Milton bloody Keynes.

APRIL
You missed three Christmases in a
row. Slept on sofas. Did that tour
with the animatronic penguin.

JACK
Let's never mention the penguin
again, yes?

The clock ticks.

JACK
Do you think I should go?

COLIN
We didn't say that.

APRIL
It's not our job to tell you what
to do, love. Last time we tried
that you dyed your hair blue and
moved to Manchester.

JACK
It was a phase.

COLIN
You looked like a mop.

April stifles a smile. Colin goes back to his halter, also smiling.

APRIL

We're proud of you, Jack. Whatever you choose. You know that, don't you?

JACK

I know.

APRIL

But you didn't come here to be told "we're proud of you."

JACK

I came here because I don't want to be stupid. I don't want to wake up in ten years and realise I said no to something incredible.

COLIN

Might not be the best thing.

JACK

Cheers, dad.

COLIN

I mean it. You thought "Oliver!" at school was the best thing once. Then the West End. Then Broadway. You'll think this is the best till the next one. That's life, son.

APRIL

You like who you are up there, with them? In that barn?

He thinks.

JACK

Yeah.

APRIL

And you like who you are when you're with her?

Jack looks up, caught.

JACK

With who?

APRIL

Don't be daft. I've seen the way you look at the vicar when you think no one's watching.

COLIN

Even I've seen it, and I can barely see the telly.

Jack flushes, caught.

JACK

It's not... I mean... it's complicated. She's...

(helpless)

Emma.

APRIL

Good complicated or bad complicated?

JACK

Good. Scary good.

April leans back, thinking.

APRIL

Alright. So on one side you've got: money, prestige, jazz, and someone else's story to tell. On the other, you've got: one night in a barn, a village that still thinks interval ice cream is glamorous, a woman you might be falling for, and a promise you've already made.

COLIN

Which one can they do without?

Jack looks between them.

COLIN

Netflix'll still be there in January. Or next year. Or when you're eighty-three.

(beat)

This lot - this one Christmas Eve - won't.

APRIL

We're not saying "stay", love. We're saying: whichever you pick, let it be because you can look yourself in the mirror afterwards.

Jack sits with that. The only sound is the Aga and the radio.

APRIL

And if you do stay, don't you blame us on some talk show in ten years saying: "My mum ruined my career."

JACK
I'll make sure to mention dad as well.

COLIN
Fair's fair.

Jack laughs, properly this time. He stands, goes to his Colin, and squeezes his shoulder; then kisses April's head.

JACK
Thanks.

APRIL
Whatever you decide, love, just tell the vicar sooner rather than later, yes?

JACK
Yeah.
(quiet)
Yeah, I will.

He pulls on his coat, steps back into the cold.

April watches him go through the window. Colin looks up.

COLIN
He'll stay.

APRIL
Maybe.

COLIN
You heard him talk about that daft panto. And her.

April smiles to herself, going back to the trifle.

APRIL
Well then. We'd best get good seats then, hadn't we?

INT. THE STAR PUB - NIGHT

A comfortable warmth and the low hum of chatter. The group sits at their usual table: Tyson, Kiki, Syd, Jack, Emma, Debbie, Sir Alastair. Laughter, drinks, crisps. Dean at the bar.

SIR ALASTAIR
You really pulled it off tonight, my dears. That last scene finally pops.

TYSON
Cinderella lives, Al.

They clink glasses.

KIKI
And I only fell off the stage once.
That's progress.

EMMA
We might just be making a pantomime
after all.

JACK
(nervous)
Actually... there's something I
should say.

They all look at him.

JACK
I got offered a job. A new series.
Netflix. Big. Starts filming...
Christmas Eve.

EMMA
(stiffens)
Oh.

JACK
I said no, Emma. I'm staying, of
course.

EMMA
Oh, Jack.

Syd shifts in his seat.

SYD
Blimey. You too?

SIR ALASTAIR
What do you mean: "too"?

Silence.

KIKI
I got a call. Concert at the Albert
Hall. Just one night, but...
soundcheck's Christmas Eve.

EMMA
You're not going, though? (beat,
nervous) Right?

KIKI
I haven't said yes. Yet.

TYSON
I got one too, guys. A face-to-face
with Christopher Nolan in LA.

██████████
 Could be: I dunno, career-changing,
 I guess. (beat) I haven't answered.

SYD

Morocco. Private gig. Enough cash
 to rebuild my old studio and then
 some.

Silence.

EMMA

You're all... leaving?

TYSON

Emma, we —

Uncomfortable silence reins. Emma's eyes redden.

EMMA

Just go. Say yes.

They exchange glances. No one speaks.

EMMA

Right.

She stands. Her voice is hollow.

EMMA

You came to save the panto. And
 now... you're off. That's...

JACK

Emma...

EMMA

No. Just... don't, Jack. Please.
 (beat, to Jack)
 You should take your Netflix thingy
 too. No reason you should lose
 out... like the rest of us.

She turns and walks out — real tears now. The pub quiets.

A long pause. A weight hangs over the room.

Kiki stares into her glass, ashamed but defiant.

Tyson's jaw works like he's trying not to crack.

Syd looks around as if he's waiting for someone else to take
 the blame.

Finally —

KIKI

I mean: it's just one night.

No one answers that. Because it's a lie. Or at least, not the point. Jack takes a beat. Then, quietly:

JACK

It's never "just one night", is it?

They look at him.

JACK

I do eight shows a week. Sometimes I'm ill. Sometimes I'm heartbroken. Sometimes I'm so tired I can hardly remember my name.

A faint, humourless smile.

JACK

And you know what gets me on that stage? Every damn night?

No one speaks.

JACK

Not ego. Not reviews. Not who's in the green room. (beat) The audience.

Beat.

JACK

People have booked trains. Dressed up. Got a babysitter. Taken time off work, maybe. They've built their week around it.

He looks at Tyson, then Kiki, then Syd.

JACK

Emma has held this whole thing together with tea and biscuits and... and sheer bloody force of will. For them. For the people in this village. For the community.

A beat.

JACK

And tonight – the first night she thought she could lean on you, on all of us – you... you bailed on her. On everyone. For... I don't know. For what? Huh?

Kiki's eyes sting. She blinks it back.

SYD

We didn't know she'd take it like that, lad.

Jack turns to Syd. Not angry. Just disappointed.

JACK

Of course she took it like that.
She's not running a "project."
She's single-handedly running a
village Christmas.

The radio coughs into a tinny "Silent Night". Someone – Dean, maybe – turns it down. The pub feels even quieter.

Jack leans forward, voice still low.

JACK

You don't get to decide what it
means to people. You don't get to
decide how much it matters. I...

With a last look of bitter disappointment, Jack picks up his coat and walks out of the pub.

A long beat. Tyson looks like he might stand up and flee.

DAME CECILY (O.S.)

Well.

All heads turn.

Dame Cecily rises from her corner seat by the fire. She doesn't need to shout. She has the room the way a blade has the air around it.

She looks at them – one by one – like she's counting sins.

DAME CECILY

I once had a power-cut mid-
performance. "Trelawny of the
Wells" in Sidcup, if you please.

A beat.

DAME CECILY

The stage went black. No spots. No
light at all. Nothing. The audience
started to murmur – you could feel
the panic.

She steps closer. Calm. Absolute.

DAME CECILY

We brought out those little tea
lights. You know the ones. We put
them along the footlights. On the
stage. Anywhere we could find.

The image lands. Everyone sees it.

DAME CECILY

Not because we were brave. Because we'd promised them a moment of magic. And once you've made a promise in this business — you keep it. (beat, breath) By God, you do.

Silence.

Cecily's gaze hardens.

DAME CECILY

What you did tonight was small. Petty. And oh so predictable.

She lets that sit. Then:

DAME CECILY

I wonder. At your shows, concerts. Did you ever think about all those wonderful people out there in the dark? Did you?

She turns and heads for the door, scarf lifting like a banner. As she goes, the radio timidly resumes its carol, as if asking permission.

A moment suspended in time.

All eyes are on Kiki, Tyson and Syd. They feel it.

TYSON

I wish I was dead.

KIKI

You dig the hole, I'll jump in right beside you.

SYD

(utterly sincere)
We need to fix this. And we need to fix it fast.

EXT. THE STAR PUB - NIGHT

Under the winter moon, Emma is crying heavily now. She's dabbing her eyes with her gloves.

Jack walks up and puts one hand gently on her shoulder.

JACK

Vicar?

She turns towards him, and Jack wraps his arms around her. This sets her off properly, and she is wracked with sobs.

JACK
Emma. Oh, Em.

INT. SIR ALASTAIR'S BARN - DAY

Chaos, but the good kind. People are actually in the right scenes. Emma hovers with her prompt script. Jack is helping the WI ladies find their positions.

The barn door suddenly opens with a blast of cold air. Frank Squires hurries in, cap in hand.

FRANK SQUIRES
(puffing, brushing off
snow)
Sorry, everyone, sorry I'm late -

He stops, realising everyone's staring.

EMMA
Frank? Are you alright? Where's
Bob?

Frank nods, trying to catch his breath.

FRANK SQUIRES
Mum's had a fall. They've taken her
into Norwich. She's... well, she's
alright, but they're keeping her in
overnight, just in case.

A murmur of concern.

EMMA
Oh Frank, I'm so sorry. Is there
anything we can do?

FRANK SQUIRES
Just pray, I s'pose, vicar. But
listen - Bob's with her. (beat) He
says... Well he says he can't do
the show. Not now. He's ever so
sorry.

Beat. That lands like a bomb.

DEBBIE
No Bob? But he's Baron Hardup!

FRANK SQUIRES
I told him I'd stay on. I'll do the
Dame - begging your pardon, Dame
Cecily - y'know: keep things
ticking over. But he won't leave
her side. Not Bob. You understand,
don't you, vicar?

Emma nods. Everyone nods.

DAME CECILY
Family comes first, Mr. Squires.
Always.

He heads off to hang up his coat.

EMMA
We can't recast.

JACK
We can't cut Baron Hardup either,
Emma. He's half the plot.

Dame Cecily has gone very still. She scans the room, eyes narrowing, assessing.

Her gaze lands on Tom across the barn, lugging a flat into place. Big, rippling - paint-spattered T-shirt and jeans.

DAME CECILY
Well now.

EMMA
We'd need someone who knows the
village, knows the cast. (beat)
Knows the bloody lines.

DAME CECILY
(loud, decisive)
Mr. Tate.

Tom looks up, startled.

TOM
Uh... yes, Dame Cecily?

She waves him over with a regal little flick of the hand.

DAME CECILY
Come here, would you?

Tom sets down the flat and trudges over, wiping his hands on his jeans.

TOM
If it's the stage brace, I've
already...

DAME CECILY
How do you feel about acting?

TOM
Well, um, I like Ryan Gosling...

DAME CECILY

We have lost our Baron Hardup, Tom.
We require a replacement. Reliable.
Local. Physically... present.

Her eyes flick, just for a second, to his pecs.

Tom blinks.

TOM

Me? No, no. I'm just a bloke with a
power tool.

Brenda sniggers.

WI LADY #1

Brenda!

EMMA

You know the scenes back to front,
Tom. You've been here for every
rehearsal.

BEN

And you know all the lines. I know
you do. You mouth along more than I
do, boy.

A couple of chuckles. Tom flushes.

TOM

I've just... heard it a lot; that's
all.

JACK

You'd be great, mate.

Tom looks from face to encouraging face - Emma, Jack, Ben,
the ensemble. Finally, to Dame Cecily, who's watching him
like she's already decided.

TOM

You really need me?

DAME CECILY

We do, darling. Desperately.

TOM

Then... I'll do it. But... no
tights, okay?

DEBBIE

Oh, Tom, my love. I think we can do
better than that.

She pats her sewing bag ominously.

Tom is in shiny black boots, very tight leather trousers and a waistcoat that absolutely will not fasten over his broad chest. Shirt: nowhere to be seen.

TOM

Aw, mate. This cannot be right.

DEBBIE

(firm)

Turn round.

He does. She eyes him like a sculptor admiring her work. It does fit awfully well at the rear.

DEBBIE

Oh, yes. Oh, I'm pleased with that,
I am.

One of the WI ladies is fanning herself with her script.

TOM

I'm meant to be Cinderella's dad;
not the entertainment at Kiki's hen
night.

KIKI

Child, I wish.

Debbie wrestles with the waistcoat button: a lost cause.

DEBBIE

Right. That's not going to happen
unless you stop breathing entirely.

She gives up, lets it fall open. Tom is, undeniably, sex on legs.

DEBBIE

There. See? Dashing.

TOM

I look ridiculous!

DAME CECILY

You look... perfect.

They all turn. Dame Cecily stands in the doorway, taking him in like a casting director who's just struck gold.

She steps closer, circling him once, appraising.

DAME CECILY

Hmm. (thinking) The standard Baron
Hardup is middle-aged and doughy.

(beat)

Clearly, you are neither.

TOM
I could slouch?

DAME CECILY
Don't you dare.

She thinks, eyes gleaming.

DAME CECILY
We shall make one adjustment.

Emma appears behind her, a stack of programmes in hand, and stops dead when she sees Tom.

EMMA
Oh... oh my.

DEBBIE
(proudly)
Thank you, vicar.

Cecily taps her pencil against her notebook.

DAME CECILY
I see no reason why Cinderella's
father always has to be Baron
Hardup. We'll change it.

EMMA
To what?

She doesn't even blink. Although her eyes narrow.

DAME CECILY
Baron Hardbody.

Beat. Debbie SNORTS. Even Tom, mortified, can't help a tiny, disbelieving smile.

TOM
You're joking? Right?

DAME CECILY
Where the theatre is concerned, Mr.
Tate: I never joke unless it is on
the page. You're just what we need.

Tom does not look convinced.

One of the WI ladies surreptitiously takes her phone from her handbag and snaps a pic.

INT. VICARAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Small, cosy, slightly chaotic. Fairy lights droop round the window. A half-iced CHRISTMAS CAKE sits on the table beside a stack of panto programmes.

Emma, in an old jumper and leggings, is stabbing cloves into an orange with rather more force than is strictly necessary. Jack leans against the counter, nursing a mug of tea, watching her.

A knock at the door.

Emma stiffens.

EMMA

If that's the bishop, tell him I've eloped.

JACK

You'd need someone to elope with.

A brief moment of... something. She throws him a look. He grins, goes to the door and opens it.

EXT. VICARAGE - NIGHT

On the doorstep: Kiki, Tyson and Syd. All three look done-in.

JACK

Oh, good. Three Judases for the price of one.

They wince. Emma appears behind Jack, freezing when she sees them.

EMMA

Oh.

KIKI

Hi, reverend.

TYSON

Evening, ma'am.

SYD

Alright, pet?

Jack steps back to let them in. They shuffle into the cramped kitchen, suddenly looking far too big and glamorous for the room.

INT. VICARAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Emma sits at the kitchen table. The others stand.

Awkward silence.

EMMA

Well?

Beat.

KIKI

Emma. We're... We're not going.

Emma blinks.

EMMA

Sorry?

Kiki pulls her phone from her pocket, thumbs a few times, then turns it round. An email on-screen:

ON SCREEN: "Thank you so much, but I have a prior commitment on Christmas Eve that I cannot break."

KIKI

I told the Albert Hall they can have me next year.

(beat)

This year I'm booked, honey. Hollowtrees Barn; one night only.

She gives Emma a small, wry smile.

TYSON

Same.

He holds up his phone. A message thread with his agent.

TYSON

Told them if Christopher Nolan really wants to meet, he'll meet in January. If not: well, his loss.

They all look to Syd, who is staring at the floor.

EMMA

Syd?

Syd sighs, digs in his jacket and produces a dog-eared printout of an email. He waves it.

SYD

"Dear Sheikh Whatshisface... shove your poxy concert up your..."

EMMA

Syd!

SYD

Alright, love. I put it nicer than that. I'm not stupid.

(looks at Emma)

Turning down that dosh wasn't nearly as tough as old Cecily kicking my bony arse round that pub.

He gives a tiny, grudging smile.

SYD

Look, vicar: I've played a lot of gigs for people I don't like. Thought it might be time I played one for people I do.

Emma looks from one to the other, trying to process.

EMMA

You... you've really turned it all down? All of you?

KIKI

We have.

TYSON

We were dumbasses, reverend; if you'll pardon the expression.

(beat)

We forgot.

EMMA

Forgot what?

Tyson gestures around - the cramped kitchen, the fairy lights, the cake, the clutter.

KIKI

We forgot this, Emma. The village. Miss Pritchard. Leonard. (beat)
You.

(smiles)

And, okay, maybe I like being Fairy Godmother to a girl who reminds me of me.

TYSON

Look, Emma. I've done the whole Hollywood circus. It's fun. Sorta. For a while.

He glances at Jack, then back.

TYSON

This is the first time in years I felt like I was part of something real. Not just: "Tyson Finch: shirt optional." I bailed on you; on this. And I am so, so sorry.

Emma's eyes are bright. She fights it.

EMMA

I... You don't owe me an apology, really. Any of you. You've given Hollowtrees your time, your fame, your hard work. That's already more than I ever dreamed.

KIKI
 Shut up, girl. We owe it you;
 that's for damn sure. And you're
 gonna take it, okay?

She steps forward and pulls Emma into a heartfelt hug. Emma stiffens, then melts into it.

Tyson offers his hand to Jack.

TYSON
 You made us look bad, Buttons.

JACK
 Yeah, I know, mate.

They shake. It turns into a hug.

The atmosphere is completely transformed.

SYD
 That cake going spare, vicar?

KIKI
 Oh, thank you, Jesus. I was hoping
 someone would ask.

JACK
 I'll put the kettle on.

Emma switches on the radio and Christmas music comes on. Jack boils the kettle. Tyson starts opening the cupboards and looking for mugs and plates. Syd starts slicing cake.

KIKI
 Ooh, I love this song. But I swear
 to God: if Mariah comes on, I am
 out that door. Bitch stole my damn
 career!

Everyone laughs.

KIKI
 All I want for Christmas for Mariah
 is laryngitis. You feel me?

Warmth, cake, tea and - inevitably - Mariah fill the room with light and love.

EXT. THE STAR PUB - DAY

The hapless electrician is still on the roof, and the lights remain resolutely off.

Last-minute shoppers bustle around: carrying presents, exchanging greetings.

EXT. VILLAGE HALL - NOTICEBOARD - DAY

Pasted over the pantomime poster: "TONIGHT!!".

INT. BARN - BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Narrow, chilly. Costumes on hooks, a faint smell of hairspray and dust. Muffled SOUND of the audience settling on the other side of the wall.

Tyson, half in his Prince Charming costume, paces with restless energy, script in hand. He takes a breath, trying to centre himself.

A SHADOW appears at the end of the corridor.

It's Ilsa - effortlessly chic even in a parka and no make-up.

Tyson freezes.

TYSON

Ilsa? What are you...?

ILSA

You think I would miss this? I just came to say... break a leg.

He swallows.

TYSON

Look, I... there's something I should tell you. There's this guy. Tom. And he's...

She raises a hand, stopping him.

ILSA

Ty. Babe, it's fine. I know.
(beat)

You think I didn't notice the way you talked about him?

He winces, busted.

TYSON

I never meant to -

ILSA

I know. Listen, Ty: we were good for each other when we needed to be. You got me through the worst of the press stuff after... I got you through that dumb superhero movie.

He huffs a little laugh despite himself.

TYSON

Yeah. Oh my God, did that suck.
(beat) You were never a cover
story, Ilsa.

ILSA

I know. And you were never just my
"plus one."
(then, light)
Also... I have Miquela in London.
I'll be fine.

He blinks.

TYSON

Miquela-from-the-gym Miquela?

She gives him a look: obviously.

ILSA

Don't make a big thing of it, Ty.
(smiles)
Point is: we're both landing where
we're supposed to.

He looks genuinely moved.

TYSON

You're kind of amazing, you know
that?

ILSA

I do. (beat) Now go be amazing out
there. For the place where we live.

She leans in and kisses his cheek - affectionate, done. From
the wings, someone calls:

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

Act One beginners, ladies and
gentlemen! Five minutes!

Ilsa squeezes Tyson's hand once.

ILSA

Go. (beat) Prince Charming.

He nods, takes a breath, then heads toward the light.

Ilsa watches him go - fond smile on her face - then turns and
disappears back into the shadows.

INT. SIR ALASTAIR'S BARN - NIGHT

A swirl of LIGHTS and COLOUR. The barn has been transformed: fairy lights strung along beams, simple but clever painted flats, bales disguised as palace steps. A HANDWRITTEN BANNER reads: "CINDERELLA - ONE NIGHT ONLY."

Over this: a BIG, JOYOUS CHRISTMAS CLASSIC (TBD).

MONTAGE - THE PANTO

The ensemble - in mismatched costumes - belting the opening number, faces shining. The WI ladies selling programmes and rustling into the chorus line at the last second.

Kiki - as a gloriously over-the-top Fairy Godmother, wand aloft - scattering glitter that clearly gets up Syd's nose as he plays.

Tamika - in a simple dress and tiara - stepping forward for her first big line - terrified - and then transforming under the warm glow of the footlights, voice soaring. In the wings, Kiki, hand over her heart, quietly proud.

Tyson and Alice as Prince Charming and Cinderella; spinning through a waltz.

Dame Cecily, at the back of the barn, in the shadows, mouthing every cue, every cross, every gesture.

Syd and the band, now tight and confident, ripping into a transformation number. Kids in the front row jump up and dance.

Tom and Tamika's MUM leans forward, eyes shining as Tamika sings. Beside her; a ruddy-faced, broad-shouldered FARMER - one look at him and it's obvious where Tom gets his build.

Jack - with the audience in fits of laughter as he smashes a custard pie into Tom's face, while Leonard the goat looks on. Several ladies (and one discreet farmer) snapping pics of Tom in his sexy Baron Hardbody costume.

Frank Squires' Dame - in a fabulously OTT costume, dragging one of the young farmers up on stage for a dance.

A RAPID-FIRE SEQUENCE of panto staples:

Kids screaming "HE'S BEHIND YOU!"

Kiki leading a call-and-response singalong, the whole audience on their feet, clapping and roaring.

Tyson catching Tom in a pratfall that turns - just for a moment - into something romantic and tender before they break back into character. The audience roars its approval

Alice and Ty's final high note ringing through the rafters as the audience erupts.

The entire company lined up: hands joined.

Debbie holding up a tablet. We pull around and on the screen: Miss Pritchard watching from her hospital bed. Santa hat on, and glowing with quiet pride.

Dame Cecily and Emma are pulled onstage by sheer force of will from the cast; both protesting and both secretly delighted. Cecily gives a tiny, formal curtsy.

Faces everywhere: laughing, crying, cheering. A village completely, utterly alive.

The music swells. The company and crew taking one last, shared bow.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN.

EXT. THE STAR PUB - NIGHT

Cold. Breath in the air. The village is gathered outside The Star; bundled in hats and scarves. Children wave sparklers. Brenda passes around steaming cups of mulled wine.

April and Colin stand with Jake and Emma, chatting.

Kiki stands with Tamika and Ben. Tyson and Tom are shoulder to shoulder, holding hands. Syd lurks by the wall with a hip flask, "just in case." Dame Cecily is wrapped in a magnificent scarf, looking every inch the grande dame, even in wellies.

A lull in the chatter. The moment before the fireworks.

DEBBIE

We did it, Sir Alastair, didn't we?
Somehow.

SIR ALASTAIR

We did indeed, Debbie. In direct
opposition to all known laws of
probability.

A small ripple of laughter. Then he looks out at the crowd, softening.

DAME CECILY

Alastair. Would you sat a few
words?

He looks touched.

SIR ALASTAIR
 (getting everyone's
 attention)

Friends. I've attended opening
 nights in London, New York... even
 Paris once, in a fit of very poor
 judgement.

Laughs from the crowd.

SIR ALASTAIR
 But this... a draughty barn, a cast
 held together with string and
 biscuits, one indomitable
 schoolmistress - and the best vicar
 this village has ever had!

A roar from the crowd.

He glances at Emma; she meets his eye and smiles.

SIR ALASTAIR
 This is the first time I've seen an
 entire community pull together in
 the same direction. (voice
 catching) For our friends who need
 a little support, and... well, and
 to give each other a jolly good
 night out.
 (beat)
 It's rather indecently moving.

Out comes the silk handkerchief.

A CHILD pipes up:

CHILD
 When are the fireworks, miss?

EMMA
 Any minute now, Samson. They're
 just...

She glances up at the pub. The Christmas lights are still
 stubbornly dark, as they've been all month. She sighs.

EMMA
 Of course.

INT. THE STAR - STOCKROOM - NIGHT

Dean - skin-tight T-shirt, jeans - rummages among crates of
 crisps and cases of beer. The muffled chat from outside
 filters in.

A dark-skinned MUSCLY LAD (20s) comes into the stockroom.

MUSCLY LAD

Dean?

Dean looks up. Smiles.

MUSCLY LAD

C'mon, mate. You're gonna miss the fireworks.

DEAN

One sec.

Dean grabs a box of plastic cups – once he's moved, it he sees the OLD FUSE BOX on the wall. One lever is clearly labelled: OUTSIDE XMAS LIGHTS.

It's DOWN.

DEAN

You're joking.

He hesitates, then flips it UP.

A low electrical HUM.

MUSCLY LAD

You absolute bell-end.

DEAN

(smiling)

Shut up, Rav.

Dean grabs the cups.

RAVI

Happy Christmas, you plonker.

EXT. THE STAR PUB - NIGHT

The crowd is mid-murmur when, suddenly:

The façade of the pub bursts into life with FAIRY LIGHTS: around the windows, over the door – and, last, at the very top of the gable, the big STAR flickers, then steadies into a bright, golden shine.

A collective GASP, then CHEERS and APPLAUSE.

Kiki laughs, wiping at one eye. Tyson pulls Tom into a proper Hollywood-style kiss. Syd just shakes his head in amused disbelief and swigs from a flask.

Jack and Emma stand a little apart, faces lit by the sudden glow. They look up at the star.

JACK

Guess the light was there all the time. Just needed someone to switch it on.

Emma laughs.

EMMA

That's literally the worst metaphor I've ever heard.

JACK

You love it really.

Beat.

EMMA

I do.

For a heartbeat, everything else drops away: the crowd, the cold, the noise.

Emma holds his gaze, then leans in.

They kiss. Simple, sure: exactly right. The whole village seems to emit a collective "Awwww".

From the vicarage end of the lane, we hear the distant WHOOSH of a firework being launched.

A FIREWORK explodes overhead in a burst of colour. The kids go wild, as do the grown-ups. More fireworks follow: painting the sky red, green, and gold.

WIDER:

The whole village: faces upturned. Dame Cecily, regal with a plastic cup of prosecco. Sir Alastair, pretending there's something in his eye. Kiki with arms around Tamika and Ben. Tyson and Tom laughing: talking deadlifts and protein shakes with Dean and Ravi.

Above them all: the star on the pub roof twinkles brightly against the winter sky.

HOLD on the star, then the kissing couple beneath it: framed by light and fireworks and love.

FADE OUT.

Beat.

FADE IN.

INT. THE STAR PUB - NIGHT

The party after the fireworks. Everyone has piled into the pub. The atmosphere is joyous.

Dean and Ravi are working the busy bar together: flirting with anyone and everyone.

The WI ladies are loving their tight T-shirts. Their husbands: not so much.

Syd and the pub band are getting set up.

EMMA
(to Sir Alastair)
What's going on?

SIR ALASTAIR
What's going on where, vicar?

Debbie hoves into view in a wonky turkey hat.

DEBBIE
Well, now, I was sworn to secrecy,
my loves, but I've had a - hic! -
Bailey's or... three... four?

Jack steps onto the stage. He looks at Syd, who gives him a thumbs-up.

JACK
How's everybody doing, Hollowtrees?

A roar from the crowd.

JACK
Listen... um, you've all been...

He falters.

FRANK SQUIRES
Spit it out, lad!

Much laughter.

JACK
Thanks, Bob.

EVERYONE
FRANK!!!

Even more laughter.

JACK
This has been... Well, it's been
the best Christmas since... since I
don't know when.

Another roar.

JACK

So, y'know... Kiki and Tyson and
Dame Cecily and... the one and only
Syd Blade, ladies and gentlemen!

The crowd goes wild. Syd raises his whisky.

JACK

Well... all of us, really. We've
put together a little something for
you that...

FRANK SQUIRES

Oh, for crying out loud, boy. Get
on with it! It'll be New Year's Eve
at this rate!

Jack laughs. He looks over to Syd, who cues the band.

JACK

Oh, bollocks. Right. Here we go.
One, two, three, four...

Everyone cheers.

JACK

(singing)

*Another year of ups and downs,
Good days, bad days, smiles and
frowns.
Lost some things you thought would
stay,
Found a few along the way.
Bills piled up and plans fell
through,
Telly full of doom and gloom.
But one small light still says
"come in",
Push that door and start again.
No one here will judge your scars,
We've all wished on broken stars.
Pull a chair and bend your knee,
This is where you're meant to be.
Raise the roof, let's have some
fun,
Christmas is for everyone.
Whatever the year has done, you'll
see,
Tonight we're one big family.
Raise the roof, the night's begun,
Christmas is for everyone.
Young and old and in-between,
Best coats, boots or ripped-up
jeans.
Office party, corner seat,
All end up on the same worn feet.*

[REDACTED]
 Single, sorted, married, split,
 Every kind of life in it.
 Round this room, for one night
 only,
 No one's odd and no one's lonely.
 Leave the past year at the gate,
 Love don't care if you're late.
 Round this table, A to Zed,
 We're the same once prayers are
 said.
 Raise the roof, let's have some
 fun,
 Christmas is for everyone.
 Whatever the year has done, you'll
 see,
 Tonight we're one big family.
 Raise your glass to what's begun,
 Christmas is for everyone.
 If this year has done you in,
 Took your job or took your grin,
 Lift your eyes and look around,
 You've still got this bit of
 ground.
 Name the ones who can't be here,
 Hold them close with every cheer.
 All our stories, wrong and right,
 Share the same warm fire tonight.
 Who's it for?
 Everyone!
 Rich or skint?
 Everyone!
 All as one, just once a year –
 Christmas brings us all in here!
 Raise the roof, let's have some
 fun,
 Christmas is for everyone.
 Whatever the year has done, you'll
 see,
 Tonight we're one big family.
 Hand in hand till night is done,
 Christmas is for everyone.
 Raise the roof, the night's near
 done,
 Christmas is for everyone.
 When the year feels dark and rough,
 One warm room can be enough.
 Raise the roof, 'cause when we're
 done,
 We'll remember we were one –
 Christmas...
 Christmas is for everyone.

Raucous applause that threatens to raise the roof. Syd stands to a tumultuous ovation.

EXT. THE STAR PUB - NIGHT

Outside, the gleaming star shines brighter than ever.

Tethered to a post beneath the shining star: Leonard - in his Santa hat - bleats.

THE END.