

JINGLE

Written by

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**EXTREME CLOSE ON: LAPTOP SCREEN - A SMILING FACE**

NICK SNOW (30s, slight, boyishly handsome) headphones on, eyes bright, leans toward an unseen camera. Behind him: a generic FESTIVE BACKDROP (cheap LED fairy lights, a tiny fake tree jammed onto a shelf).

He's mid-full-cheese performance. We don't know who he is yet, just that he's GOOD.

NICK

(singing, big and bouncy)  
*When your wallet's lookin' empty  
and your list is still long,  
You don't need a miracle, you just  
need our song!  
SleighPay's here, bringin'  
Christmas cheer,  
Cash in a flash, spread joy this  
year!*

He lands the last note with a perfect AD-SMILE – eyes crinkled, teeth, just a hint of festive head-tilt.

HOLD on that beaming face...

...then:

A RED "REC" LIGHT on the tiny camera goes DARK.

ON NICK – the smile drops off his face like someone flipped a switch. Eyes dull, jaw slack, shoulders sag.

WIDER REVEAL:

**INT. THE SNOW'S HOUSE - NICK'S BEDROOM - DAY**

A grown man in a teenage time capsule.

A faded FORREST HOLLOW WOLVES pennant, an old SPICE GIRLS POSTER, a crooked high school PHOTO in marching band gear. A rainbow sticker half-peeled off a dresser.

Now: ring-light, open LAPTOP, decent MIC on a stack of paperbacks.

ON SCREEN – a CLIENT (40s, chipper, dead-eyed) on a Zoom call with a tiny AD AGENCY TEAM in little squares.

CLIENT

(on screen)  
Great. Oh, and we love the "When  
your wallet's feelin' empty" line.  
Just wondering if it could feel  
more... Christmassy?

NICK

It's a payday loan app, Trisha. How much more Christmas do we want than "buy stuff now, regret it in January"?

Polite chuckles from the AGENCY. The client doesn't clock the joke.

CLIENT

What if choir kids sang it? With sleigh bells? I'm seeing snow, families, twinkle lights -

Nick glances around at his actual surroundings: scuffed baseboards, the Wolves poster curling at the corners.

NICK

Okay. So we keep the hook, add a kids' choir and some jingle bells.  
(thinks, automatic)  
"When your wallet's feelin' empty" becomes... "When your heart is full and your list is long." Get that Christmas feel now, Trisha?

CLIENT

Love it. Festive but aspirational. You're a lifesaver, Nick.

NICK

That's what it says on my diploma. "Major in English, minor in festive aspiration."

Polite laughter. Someone on the call checks the time.

ACCOUNT EXEC

(on screen)

We're good on our side, Nick. If you can get us the revised lyrics and a thirty-second alt by tomorrow?

NICK

You'll have it tonight.

CLIENT

Great. And hey, Nick - it's really kind of you working remote like this. Your mom said -

Nick stiffens just slightly.

NICK

Yeah. It's, um, good. Really. I can work from anywhere.

He pastes on a professional smile.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Happy almost-Christmas, everybody.

They wave, the call ends. The Zoom grid disappears, replaced by his screen saver: Justin Timberlake, circa 2005.

NICK (CONT'D)  
(melodramatically)  
Oh Justin, how did it come to this?

For a second, the room is very quiet. Just the faint hum of the old house heating.

Nick closes the laptop, lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding.

A soft KNOCK at the door.

MAGGIE (O.S.)  
You done with the jingles, honey?

NICK  
Yeah. You can enter safely, mom -  
no late-stage capitalism in  
progress.

The door opens. MAGGIE SNOW (50s) leans in, still in her "nurse who's been up all night" scrubs and cardigan, trying to look better rested than she is.

MAGGIE  
They're starting your dad's new  
chemo round in twenty.  
(soft)  
You coming?

Nick nods, already half-standing.

NICK  
Yeah. Sorry. Client wanted more  
sleigh bells on the crushing debt.

Maggie manages a weary smile.

MAGGIE  
Of course they did.

She takes him in - grown man, back in his teenage room.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)  
You don't have to keep working, you  
know. Not while you're -

NICK

Mom. If I sit still, I'll start Googling politics, and you'll find me rage-crying into the air fryer. This way I can at least pay for the air fryer.

That gets the tiniest real laugh out of her.

MAGGIE

Alright, Jingle Boy. Put on your "visiting Dad" face. Ryan and Chloe are already there.

Nick grabs his coat from the back of the door, shrugging into it.

NICK

How is he this morning?

Maggie hesitates a fraction too long.

MAGGIE

Tired. Sore. Still complaining about the food, so it's not all bad.

She reaches up, straightens his collar like she used to when he was a kid.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I'm glad you're home.

Nick softens.

NICK

Me too.

He glances once around the room - the posters, the laptop, the strange overlap of past and present - then follows her out.

#### **INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY**

A bland corridor trying hard to be festive: PAPER SNOWFLAKES, a drooping GARLAND, a handmade "ONCOLOGY WISHES YOU HAPPY HOLIDAYS".

Nick walks beside Maggie, carrying a tote of TUPPERWARE. CHLOE (40s) - Nick's sister - trails with a grocery bag; RYAN (16) scrolls on his phone, earbuds around his neck.

NICK

Wow. Nothing says "state-of-the-art healthcare" like dime-store snowflakes.

CHLOE

Hey - trash the décor, they revoke  
your visiting privileges.

Maggie gives them both a look.

MAGGIE

Can we park the double-act until  
after we've seen your father?

Ryan pockets his phone.

They stop at a door with a SANTA STICKER and "FRANK S." taped  
to it. Maggie takes a breath, pastes on a smile, and pushes  
it open.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

FRANK SNOW (60s) is propped up in bed, thin, skin sallow,  
nasal cannula in place. TWINKLE LIGHTS taped around the  
curtain rail, a GET WELL card, a small RADIO playing carols.

Frank looks over, brightening.

FRANK

Well, look what the cat dragged in.

Nick crosses to him, keeping it light.

NICK

If I'd known the dress code was  
"Grey's Anatomy chic," I'd have put  
on a tie.

Frank barks a laugh, winces, waves it off.

Maggie is already unpacking food onto the tray.

MAGGIE

We brought real food. Not the beige  
crap they keep pretending is the  
"chef's special."

Ryan leans in; Frank ruffles his hair with a shaky hand.

Chloe drags up a chair; Nick sits on the other side of the  
bed, really taking his father in now that the jokes have  
burned off.

NICK

So. How bad is it if you'll  
willingly eat Mom's lasagna?

MAGGIE

Nicholas.

FRANK

They say the cancer's back, moved into the bones. New chemo, some fancy cocktail they're all very excited about.

NICK

But there's a plan, right? Doctors love plans.

FRANK

Plan is: zap it, poison it, annoy it until it leaves out of sheer frustration.

Maggie's hand stills on a Tupperware lid.

MAGGIE

They're talking about "managing expectations."

A beat. Chloe blows out a breath.

CHLOE

Which is doctor for "this sucks."

The door opens; a DOCTOR (40s, kind, brisk) steps in with a tablet.

DOCTOR

Sorry to interrupt. Frank, mind if I steal a minute?

FRANK

As long as you're not here to sell me on a time share, doc.

The Doctor glances at Maggie.

DOCTOR

We can do this in private.

MAGGIE

No. No. We're doing this together.

The Doctor nods.

DOCTOR

Okay. The scans show the lymphoma has spread to the bone marrow.

(beat)

We're going to start a more aggressive chemo regimen to control it, slow it down, keep you comfortable.

Nick stares at the blanket.

NICK

And "cure" isn't on the menu?

DOCTOR

We don't use that word here... now.

(soft)

We talk about time. Months, maybe longer if you respond well. And about making that time as easy as we can.

Maggie nods, jaw tight. Ryan looks away fast; Chloe's eyes are locked on a spot on the wall.

Frank watches them all, then huffs.

FRANK

So bottom line, I'm not getting out of shoveling the driveway permanently.

The Doctor gives him a small smile.

DOCTOR

Not yet. I'll come back later and go over details.

She leaves. The door clicks shut. Silence.

FRANK

Hey.

Nick looks up; Frank tips his chin.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Don't start writing my eulogy. You'll make the damn thing rhyme.

Nick lets out a short, broken laugh.

NICK

What can I say, I'm a hack.

He reaches for Frank's hand and holds it.

NICK (CONT'D)

Okay. So we do time. Good time, weird time, whatever-we-get time. Yeah?

Frank squeezes back, stronger than expected.

FRANK

Yeah.

He glances at the radio, the lights, his family.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Guy like me, at Christmas... I'll  
take all the love I can get.

Nick looks around this cramped, overdecorated room: his mother, his sister, his nephew, his father in a too-big gown.

NICK

Alright, old man. Challenge  
accepted.

We HOLD on the four of them around the bed - messy, scared, trying to be brave - as a faint CHRISTMAS CAROL drifts in from the corridor.

**EXT. FORREST HOLLOW - MAIN STREET - DAY**

Bright winter sun. Snow piled at the edges of the sidewalk.

Nick walks down the street, hands in his pockets, taking in the familiar storefronts with an unfamiliar distance.

He slows as he reaches a corner. Something catches his eye.

NICK'S POV - ACROSS THE STREET

The FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE. One bay door open, wreath hanging over it, "TOY DRIVE" sign taped a little crooked.

A VERY HANDSOME FIREMAN steps out of the open bay, wiping his hands on a rag. PULSE GYM hoodie, beanie, work boots. Solid, easy, annoyingly good-looking.

He stretches his shoulders, breath clouding in the cold.

BACK TO:

Nick, half-hidden behind a lamppost banner, watching longer than he means to.

NICK

(under his breath)

Oh. Hello, small-town thirst trap.

As if he senses it, the fireman glances over. Their eyes meet.

The fireman's face breaks into a big, open, neighbourly smile. He lifts an arm in a broad wave - friendly, zero hesitation.

Nick startles, then waves back, awkward but charmed.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (murmured)  
 Okay, rude. You can't be that hot  
 and that friendly.

A PHONE BUZZ cuts through the moment.

Nick checks the screen: DEEDEE - "Where are you???"

He looks back up - the hunky fireman has already turned toward the bay, back to work.

Nick blows out a breath, shoves his hands deeper into his pockets, and heads off down the block.

**INT. 'BEAN THERE, BREWED THAT' COFFEE SHOP - DAY**

Warm, crowded, the town bulletin board exploding with flyers.

Nick sits at a two-top, shoulders a little hunched, staring out the window - where, in the distance at the end of the street, we can just see the FIREHOUSE wreath catching the light.

A COFFEE slides into frame.

VOICE (O.S.)  
 That's the same face you had junior  
 year when Coach Klein said "shirts  
 or skins" and you said "Valentino."

Nick looks up. DEEDEE JACKSON (30s) - Black, larger-than-life, fabulous in every respect - stands there in a huge sweater and a bigger scarf, all sharp eyes and soft concern.

NICK  
 That bad?

She drops into the chair opposite, already unwrapping a muffin.

DEEDEE  
 Worse. Sit up, you're depressing  
 the scones.  
 (re the cup)  
 Oat milk latte, two pumps vanilla,  
 "Childhood Trauma"-hot.

NICK  
 You ordered for me?

DEEDEE  
 Please. I've been ordering for you  
 since you were the only gay kid in  
 a three-town radius and I was the  
 fat Black girl with the sassy  
 mouth.

He can't help the tiny smile.

NICK

That sassy mouth saved my ass.  
Repeatedly.

DEEDEE

And this latte will do the same,  
sugar. Drink.

He does. It's exactly right. A beat, then:

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

Okay. Frank. Lay it on me.

The smile drops. Nick stares into the foam.

NICK

It's back. Bone marrow this time.  
(searching)  
We're not talking "beat it"  
anymore. Just... "time". "Good  
time," "quality time."

His voice catches on "time." DeeDee reaches across and grabs his hand, no hesitation.

DEEDEE

I'm so sorry, baby.

He nods, blinking hard.

NICK

I found out right after recording a  
jingle about buying Christmas on  
credit. "Why wait to feel rich?"  
(grim little smile)  
Turns out I'm more "limited-time  
offer."

DEEDEE

And yet, here you are. In the  
flesh. With terrible jokes.

She lets his hand go, but stays leaned in.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

How's Maggie holding up?

NICK

Doing the "we're managing" thing  
and then alphabetizing the canned  
goods so she doesn't cry.

DEEDEE

Very on-brand.

NICK

Chloe's mad I haven't been here more. Ryan wants to cancel me for "propping up predatory capitalism with jingles."

(soft)

Dad's acting like bone cancer is a batting slump.

DEEDEE

So the Snows are still Snowing.

A tiny laugh, then he looks at her.

NICK

I told you; you didn't have to come, Dee.

She gives him a look.

DEEDEE

I know. It was adorable. Very "I've got this, don't worry about me." I ignored it.

(shrugs)

I told the TV station my best friend's dad was sick and I needed to be here. They offered me a Christmas special. I said no. It was empowering; I might do it again.

That lands. He's genuinely moved.

NICK

Deeds -

DEEDEE

Hey. Who got you through high school?

NICK

You did.

DEEDEE

Exactly. Skinny gay band kid, fat Black library girl. We made a pact: nobody gets left behind in Forrest Hollow without back-up.

He looks out the window again - the faint view of the FIREHOUSE.

NICK

Back-up noted.

(beat)

Meanwhile...

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

I just came past the fire station.  
There was this... guy...

She perks up just a little.

DEEDEE

Tall, arms for days, beanie; "I  
lift trucks for fun" energy?

He blinks.

NICK

Okay: disturbingly specific.

DEEDEE

Chloe texted me. That's the new  
fire chief. Also owns the gym. Oh,  
and coaches JV football.

Nick tries not to respond, fails.

NICK

Fantastic. The hottest thing in  
town is also saving people from  
burning buildings and rescuing  
kittens. I hate him already.

DEEDEE

You have bigger things to worry  
about than whether the Hose Master  
is into show tunes.

(gentler)

Like your dad. And your mom. And...  
me.

She lifts her cup.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

To Frank. To Maggie and Chloe and  
Ryan.

(beat)

And to us. Accidentally back in  
Forrest Hollow, whether we like it  
or not, girlfriend.

Nick clinks his cup to hers.

NICK

Amen, sister. Oh, speaking of Fire  
Chief Studmuffin - my mom needs us  
to run an errand. (beat, arch)  
"Hose Master"?

They laugh and start to gather their things.

WIDE ON the café: life going on, kids in puffy coats at a  
corner table. Through the window, the FIREHOUSE at the end of  
the street, wreath catching the light.

**EXT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - DAY**

Snow clouds rolling in. A wreath over the bay door, a "TOY DRIVE" banner flapping in the cold.

The big bay door is half-open; FIREFIGHTERS move around inside.

Nick and DeeDee stand on the sidewalk, each holding a foil-covered tray.

NICK

Last chance to bail. We drop the cookies and run.

DEEDEE

And miss 220 lbs of hot fireman?  
Have you lost your damn mind?

A slick patch of ICE right in front of the station.

Nick's foot goes out. He SLIDES.

NICK

Oh, come oooooooooonnnn-

A hand grabs him, steady, hauling him upright before he hits the ground. The tray tilts, cookies somehow stay put.

Nick finds himself in a classic dip - half-reclining in a pair of solid arms.

He looks up at: Big. Musclebound. T-shirt, work pants, smudge of soot on his cheek; easy, concerned smile: JAKE HOLLIDAY (30s).

JAKE

Whoa. You okay there, buddy?

Nick blinks, short-circuited.

NICK

Yeah. No. My dignity's on life support, but the rest is fine.  
Thanks.

Jake laughs, keeps hold of him a second longer than necessary, then rights him.

JAKE

(pats his impressive chest)

Sorry about the crash mat.

NICK

Do not apologize. I've humiliated myself in this building before.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)  
Might as well keep the streak  
alive.

DeeDee appears at Nick's shoulder, checking he's steady, then  
clocking Jake like a work of art.

DEEDEE  
Hi. Hello. I mean: wow.

Jake smiles, amused.

JAKE  
(to Nick)  
New in town?

NICK  
Old. I mean, I grew up here. Nick.  
Nick Snow.

He shifts the tray, offers a hand. Jake shakes, firm.

JAKE  
Jake Holliday. Fire Chief.  
(beat, clocking it)  
Wait: Snow as in Frank Snow?

NICK  
Yeah. My dad.

Jake's face softens.

JAKE  
Your dad's a legend, man! Best  
Chief this station ever had - or so  
he tells me. Still yells ladder  
tips at me from his car. Loudly.

That lands. Nick can't help a small smile.

NICK  
Checks out.

He remembers the tray, lifts it.

NICK (CONT'D)  
These are from my mom. She wanted  
to say thanks for the hospital  
visits, nurse-charming; all that.

Jake takes the tray.

JAKE  
Tell Maggie they're totally  
unnecessary - and also the best  
thing that's happened to me all  
week.

He glances at DeeDee, recognition dawning.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 (recognising her)  
 Hey, you're...

DEEDEE  
 DeeDee Jackson. "Wake Up,  
 Connecticut."

JAKE  
 Right. Yeah. I know your show.

DEEDEE  
 You watch?

JAKE  
 Sometimes - in the locker room. And  
 my ex was obsessed.  
 (chuckles)  
 He'd text me every time you roasted  
 some city council wingnut. "That's  
 my girl!" All caps.

It hangs there a beat. Nick and DeeDee both clock it: "he".

NICK  
 (playing it casual)  
 Your... ex?

JAKE  
 Yeah. Great guy, mostly. We didn't  
 survive football season, but his  
 taste in TV was solid.

DeeDee tries not to beam.

DEEDEE  
 I approve of his choices. (giving  
 him another once-over) All of them.

From inside:

VOICE (O.S.)  
 Chief! You said five minutes, bro!

Jake calls back over his shoulder:

JAKE  
 Two more! Move it, ladies!

He looks to Nick.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
 I gotta get these guys through  
 drills before they mutiny.  
 (beat)  
 It's really good to meet you, Nick.  
 Your dad talks about you. A lot.

NICK  
The truck-in-the-ditch story.

JAKE  
Especially that one.

They share a quick smile that feels like a spark.

Jake nods to DeeDee.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
And seriously – big fan.

DEEDEE  
Your demographic always is, honey.

Jake backs toward the bay, tray in hand.

JAKE  
I'll see you around.

NICK  
Yeah. Around.

Jake disappears inside.

Nick and DeeDee stand there a beat, snowflakes drifting.

DeeDee slowly turns to him, eyes wide.

DEEDEE  
You wanna sit down? Breathe into a  
paper bag?

Nick stares at the bay door, dazed, a smile tugging at his  
mouth.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)  
Fire chief, gym guy, football  
coach, queer, and he thinks I'm  
iconic. Christmas in Forrest Hollow  
just got a whole lot more...  
pumped.

NICK  
Sure did. (beat) C'mon. I told  
Chloe and Ryan we'd meet them at  
that dumb town meeting thing.

DeeDee pulls a face, but links her arm through his.

DEEDEE  
Will there be snacks?

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW COMMUNITY HALL - DAY**

A multipurpose room trying to be festive: PAPER SNOWFLAKES, a drooping GARLAND, a half-lit plastic TREE.

FOLDING CHAIRS in rows, about half full. TOWNSFOLK in winter coats, murmuring.

At the front: a cheap podium with a "FORREST HOLLOW TOWN COUNCIL" sign.

MAYOR (50s, tired, earnest) taps the mic.

MAYOR

Okay, folks, let's bring it to order. First and only agenda item: Forrest Hollow Fire & Rescue.

Down front, Jake is there too.

At the back, NICK and DEEDEE slip in beside CHLOE, who shoots Nick a quick "brace yourself" look.

MAYOR (CONT'D)

As you know, the station's been operating under a mortgage agreement with Grayson Properties since the state cuts in 2016.

(making herself do it)

Walter, you wanna walk us through where we are?

WALTER GRAYSON (60s, expensive coat, local-boy-made-money) stands from the front row and comes to the podium, smile set to "helpful."

WALTER

Evening, folks. As many of you know, my company stepped in when the state pulled funding from the firehouse. We've kept the lights on. We've been patient.

He holds up a SHEET - the dreaded numbers.

WALTER (CONT'D)

But the town's been in arrears for a long time. We've extended, renegotiated. There's nothing left to shuffle.

(beat)

So, effective January first, we'll be moving ahead with foreclosure on the firehouse property.

A stunned beat, then a low RUMBLE of voices.

Nick exhales sharply.

Jake stands, controlled but simmering.

JAKE

Dammit, Walter, you told me we had time.

WALTER

I said I'd see what we could do. I did. We can't keep subsidising a building the town can't afford, Chief.

JAKE

It's not a damn boutique, Walter. It's the fire station.

TOWNSWOMAN

(calling out)

What happens when there's a fire, Walter?

Walter shifts into polished reassurance.

WALTER

Now, now. The service isn't going away. We're proposing consolidation with the county station on Route 12. Better equipment, proper budget – it's a win-win.

Chloe leans to Nick.

CHLOE

Route 12 is twenty minutes on a good day.

NICK

And on a bad one, God help Forrest Hollow.

Up front, Jake stays on him.

JAKE

You know those minutes aren't hypothetical, right? You've seen the call logs.

MAYOR

Jake, nobody's questioning what you and your crew do. We just don't have the money. The town's tapped. The state's tapped.

Walter shrugs, palms out.

WALTER

Look, no one's padlocking the doors tomorrow.

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

(checks his watch,  
magnanimous)

If the town can clear the arrears  
and cover next year's payments by  
Christmas Eve, we can revisit. If  
not... we convert the property in  
the new year.

A MAN in the crowd calls out:

MAN

Convert it to what?

Walter's salesman smile returns.

WALTER

Well, we're in talks with a  
financial services franchise, Karl.  
Offices. Jobs. Foot traffic.  
Revitalization.

Nick mutters.

NICK

Yeah. Nothing says "revitalisation"  
like selling overdraft fees where  
the ladder truck used to live.

Jake turns to the room, not the podium.

JAKE

You all know what this place is.  
Four-minute response times. Kids'  
car seats checked. Your grandma's  
not stuck on her bathroom floor  
because county was twenty minutes  
out when she fell.

He looks to the Mayor, then back to the crowd.

JAKE (CONT'D)

We lose this building, we don't  
just lose a roof. We lose those  
minutes.

The room quiets. Everyone feels it.

The Mayor looks genuinely heartsick.

MAYOR

If anyone has ideas - grants,  
fundraisers, anything - we're  
listening. But we need one-fifty in  
three days. That's the reality,  
folks.

Silence. People shift, helpless.

DeeDee glances at Nick. His jaw's tight; the wheels are turning.

Walter steps back from the mic.

WALTER  
I'm genuinely rooting for you,  
Chief. All of you. But hope doesn't  
pay the bills.

He sits. The RUMBLE starts up again.

ON NICK, watching Jake stand there with the whole room's fear on his shoulders.

DEEDEE  
(quiet, to Nick)  
I know that look.

NICK  
What look?

DEEDEE  
The "I'm about to go insane" look.

He doesn't deny it.

We HOLD on Nick as the murmur swells.

**EXT. COMMUNITY HALL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

Snow starts again, fine and cold. PEOPLE spill out to their cars, voices low, angry, scared.

Chloe, Nick and DeeDee walk toward Chloe's beat-up SUV.

**INT. THE LANTERN PUB - NIGHT**

Nick, DeeDee and Chloe are sitting glumly in the near-empty pub - empty cocktail glasses on their table. A sad Christmas song on the jukebox does nothing to lift the mood.

NICK  
Well. That was festive.

CHLOE  
Nothing says "welcome home" like  
seeing a foreclosure sign on Dad's  
whole life.

NICK  
I knew things were tight. I didn't  
know "sell the firehouse to the guy  
with the five-hundred-dollar  
loafers" tight.

CHLOE

Yeah, well. Hard to keep up with local disasters when you're busy teaching America to buy Christmas on credit.

It stings. Nick takes it.

NICK

Okay. Fair. Ouch, but fair.

Chloe sighs, softening.

CHLOE

I'm not saying it's your fault, Nick. I'm just...

(beat)

Dad gave that place his back, his knees and his heart. Watching it go under while you're home? That's gonna suck.

Nick looks out of the window, towards where the firehouse sits; wreath just visible in the distance.

NICK

They close that station, it's not just a building. It's his whole... everything.

DeeDee watches him clock it.

DEEDEE

So, let's go see what that muscle-mountain over there needs to save the firehouse. Before you spiral.

Nick looks at her.

NICK

You don't have to -

DEEDEE

Baby, I came here to avoid my crazy family. Let me channel my avoidance into something useful.

Chloe nods toward the firehouse.

CHLOE

Go. Ask Jake what they actually need.

(beat)

And try not to start a fight in the first five minutes.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

I'll get Mom and Ryan to the hospital. You text me if you come up with a miracle.

NICK

I write jingles, Chloe (he looks at a tacky Santa cut-out on the wall) Miracles are someone else's department.

Chloe gets up and leaves. Nick and DeeDee exchange a look.

DEEDEE

Firehouse?

Nick squares his shoulders.

NICK

Firehouse.

They get their coats and make for the door.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - NIGHT**

Quieter now. Only a few overheads on. The ENGINE hulks in the bay, wreath on the wall, old CREW PHOTOS watching.

A MAKESHIFT GYM is spread out between the trucks:

TANK (40s, ridiculously gigantic and surprisingly cut), presses dumbbells on a flat bench like they're balloons.

TY (20s, tanned, pretty, perfect hair; jacked like an Instagram fitness model) is jump-roping shirtless, pausing between sets to sneak looks at his reflection in a dark window.

WES (30s, Black, serenely calm, the best body of them all) does slow, perfect pull-ups on a bar bolted to a beam.

Jake, sexy in a faded T-shirt and sweats, stands by a workbench, flipping through a thin FOLDER – red underlines, overdue notices. He looks tired and wired.

The front door opens. Cold air. Nick and DeeDee step in, a little hesitant.

Everyone looks over.

JAKE

Hey, Snow.

NICK

Hey.

(beat, clocking the scene)  
(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

Wow. I... I think I bookmarked this movie.

Ty immediately drops into a cool-guy stance, pretending he wasn't just checking himself out.

TY

Gotta stay tight, bro.

Tank sits up, sets the weights down gently.

TANK

Or in my case, tight-ish.

Wes drops from the bar, wiping his hands on a towel, watchful.

Jake closes the folder, sets it aside.

JAKE

What's up, Snow?

Nick takes a breath.

NICK

We were at the meeting.

(beat)

Chloe filled me in on the numbers, but... I wanted maybe ask what you actually need: y'know, instead of just sitting at home bitching about it.

Jake looks impressed, then gestures them a little further in.

JAKE

Short version? Town's behind on the firehouse mortgage. Back payments plus next year or Walter Grayson gets the building.

TANK

One-fifty by Christmas Eve, man.

Nick winces.

NICK

So not a "sell a few raffles and bake some cookies" situation.

TANK

More like "sell a kidney and a truck" situation.

TY

Not this kidney, dude. I worked too hard for these obliques.

WES  
We know, Ty. We live with your  
Instagram feed.

Nick looks around: the trucks, the gear, the makeshift gym,  
the old photos.

NICK  
So, they rip Dad's name off the  
side of that engine and what? Stick  
a Wells Fargo logo there?

JAKE  
Something like that.

A beat. Nick's a little raw.

NICK  
He gave this place everything. You  
guys, too. You shouldn't have to  
stand on the street and beg to keep  
it open.

Jake's jaw tightens.

JAKE  
Welcome to public service.

Wes steps in, voice steady.

WES  
Doesn't matter who broke it, Jake.  
Matters who fixes it.

Nick meets his eyes, grateful.

NICK  
Listen, I make stupid jingles for  
breakfast cereal and feminine  
hygiene products. That's my skill  
set.

WES  
Hey, that snowman cash-back jingle  
slaps.

Everyone looks at him.

WES (CONT'D)  
What? It does.

Nick lets out a tiny laugh despite himself, then lets his  
gaze wander, half to avoid their faces.

His eyes land on a CORNER WALL: there, thumb-tacked above a  
set of rusty plates, is an ancient SPORTS ILLUSTRATED  
SWIMSUIT CALENDAR – sun-bleached, curled at the corners,  
definitely from another decade.

He steps closer.

NICK

Oh my God. Is that... Tyra Banks?

Tank smiles.

TANK

Oh, yeah. Came with the building.  
Tyra's going nowhere.

DeeDee joins Nick, clocking the calendar.

Nick looks from the old calendar: to Tank, massive on the bench; to Ty - sweaty, sexy; to Wes, looking like a Men's Health cover model; to Jake, tired yet stupidly handsome.

DEEDEE

Oh, I know that face.

NICK

What face?

DEEDEE

You know the face, baby.

Nick shakes his head, backing off a little.

NICK

All I've got right now is static  
and this extremely nostalgic Tyra  
Banks situation.

(beat)

But maybe there's a way to turn all  
this -

He gestures at the crew, the trucks, the gym, the old calendar.

NICK (CONT'D)

- into something people will  
actually throw money at.

Jake studies him.

JAKE

You don't owe this town a miracle,  
Snow.

NICK

A miracle. Huh. Maybe not.

(beat)

But I owe my dad better than going  
back to New York and pretending I  
didn't watch them put a demolition  
order on his legacy.

That lands.

Tank speaks up, quieter than you'd expect.

TANK

For what it's worth, he'd be happy  
you're here. Even if you are a  
"jingle sell-out."

(beat)

His words. Not mine.

Nick's eyes shine; he swallows it down.

NICK

Actually, that tracks.

He looks back at Jake, steadier now.

NICK (CONT'D)

Give me a night, Chief. Let me see  
if there's an idea somewhere that  
isn't completely insane.

DEEDEE

Oh, it'll be insane. (beat) I hope.

Jake nods once.

JAKE

We'll be here, Snow. Until they  
change the locks, it's still a  
firehouse.

Wes gives Nick a small, respectful nod. Ty tries to look casual; Tank offers a hopeful half-smile.

DEEDEE

What you got, baby?

Nick manages a crooked grin.

NICK

I don't know. Yet.

He backs toward the door.

NICK (CONT'D)

If I come back with something  
stupid, you can say no.

JAKE

If it keeps this place open, I'm  
fine with stupid.

Their eyes hang for a beat – something unspoken sparking under the stress.

Nick and DeeDee slip out into the cold.

Jake looks back at the folder. The numbers haven't changed, but he glances up at Tyra on the wall, then at his crew.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
C'mon, guys. These weight ain't gonna lift themselves.

We HOLD on the gym corner: rusty plates, old Sports Illustrated, and four very real firefighters – the rough draft of what's to come.

**INT. 'BEAN THERE, BREWED THAT COFFEE SHOP - DAY**

CLOSE ON a fresh FLYER being pinned to the community board: "FORREST HOLLOW FIRE & RESCUE CALENDAR. All proceeds to save the station. Pre-orders now."

Rough but charming: Chloe's design, with a silhouetted FIREFIGHTER and a big red heart.

PULL BACK to reveal Chloe taping it up. The BARISTA snaps a pic on their phone.

BARISTA  
I'm sending this to my sister. She lives for firemen... and charity.

Chloe just smirks, already pinning another.

**INT. HOSPITAL NURSES' STATION - DAY**

A NURSE tapes the same FLYER beside the "HAND HYGIENE" poster.

NURSE #1  
You see this? Frank Snow's crew is doing a calendar.

NURSE #2  
Oh, well if it's for a good cause...

They laugh. In the b.g., Maggie clocks the flyer, amused and a little touched.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - APPARATUS BAY - AFTERNOON**

The bay is half-converted into a PHOTO STUDIO.

The ENGINE is parked outside. A white BACKDROP is clamped up (slightly crooked). TWO SOFTBOXES hum. A SPACE HEATER rattles.

LADDERS, COILED HOSES and a POLISHED HELMET have been arranged "artistically."

Chloe, camera on a strap, is tweaking a light.

Ryan is nearby with his BAND: MICAH (15, bass), JARED (14, cajón) and JESSIE (14, keys/guitar). They're setting up a tiny RIG in one corner.

Max hovers proudly near Jake, watching everything.

Jessie taps a key – nasty FEEDBACK.

JESSIE

Sorry!

Tank looms in FIRE PANTS and boots, looking like a wall with nerves. Ty is in fire pants: abs for days, jaw locked. Wes stands arms folded; calm but clearly not thrilled. A couple of EXTRA VOLUNTEER FIREMEN hover in similar stages of undress, trying to be cool.

A preppy young man bounces into the bay. This is IRVING (20s) carrying a DRUGSTORE BAG: perky, boy-next-door – in short, utterly adorable: bow tie and horn-rims and joyful energy.

IRVING

(spotting Ty)

Hi Theodore!

Ty looks up at Irving and a look of sheer joy spreads across his face. Then he realizes what Irving has just given away.

TY

Irv! Bro! It's "Ty" now, remember?  
(trying to play it cool and  
failing) Hey. I... Whatever, dude.  
It's, like... Hey. 'Sup?

The side door BANGS open. Jake enters, carrying armfuls of gear. Irving is in his way.

JAKE

Move it, Poindexter.

DeeDee's head snaps around.

DEEDEE

Excuse me, you walking protein bar,  
I will not allow name-calling on my  
set, and if you –

Jake's already grinning; Irving pops his head around a rack.

IRVING

Irving Poindexter, Ms. Jackson.  
(beat) Poindexter's Drugstore?

He reaches into the bag, pulling out PLASTIC BOTTLES.

IRVING (CONT'D)  
 Four-pack of baby oil. I thought  
 you might need it. (beat) On the  
 house, of course.

DeeDee blinks, recalibrates.

DEEDEE  
 (realizing)  
 Poindexter is your name.

IRVING  
 Yes, ma'am.

DEEDEE  
 Then I withdraw my fury at Chief  
 Bench Press over there and replace  
 it with gratitude to you, doll.

Jake chuckles, sets his bundle of gear by the workbench, and  
 leans against it with a mug of coffee. Nick is taking stock.

NICK  
 (looking at the crew)  
 Okay fellas, right now this looks  
 less "calendar" and more "perp  
 walk."

DEEDEE  
 Which is why God invented me.  
 (to the room)  
 Okay, guys! This is for the  
 firehouse. We want "strong," we  
 want "sexy", we want "guy next  
 door" - if you happen to live next  
 door to the Chippendales. We do not  
 want "mugshot."

She points at Ty.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)  
 (smiling)  
 "Theodore", you're up.

Ty groans and steps into the lights. The body is ridiculous;  
 the face is panic.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)  
 Jacket over the shoulder, baby,  
 hand on the hip. Think "Merry  
 Christmas, Forrest Hollow."

Ty hits the pose. It's physically perfect. Emotionally DOA.

NICK  
 Ty, you look like someone is  
 holding your family for ransom.  
 Don't you do this all the time?  
 (MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

Aren't you, like, the shirtless  
selfie king of Forrest Hollow?

A couple of guys snort. Ty bristles.

TY

This is different, okay? It's not  
my phone in the locker room. This  
is my fourth-grade teacher. And my  
mom. And her book club. It's...  
it's a lot.

Tank nods, sympathetic.

TANK

My wife's gonna roast me for this.

WES

Then make it worth it, chumps.

Chloe lowers the camera, frustrated.

CHLOE

Alright, everyone reset. In through  
the nose, out through the "we're  
saving the damn firehouse."

They inhale/exhale. Still awkward as hell.

Jake pushes off the bench.

NICK

You run into burning buildings,  
fellas. We're not asking for Swan  
Lake.

TANK

Fire doesn't ask you to "find your  
light," Nick.

Ryan watches, wincing.

RYAN

(to Micah, low)  
This is painful.

MICAH

It's hot, though.

Ryan rolls his eyes.

MICAH (CONT'D)

What??

Nick looks from the guys, to Chloe's waiting camera, to the  
kids and their instruments – something clicks.

NICK

Okay. Okay, we're doing this wrong.

Everyone looks at him.

JAKE

You got a fix, Snow?

NICK

Yeah. You're not models. But you are guys that move. So let's move.

He turns to the band.

NICK (CONT'D)

Ryan (realizing he knows no-one's names)... band of misfit toys - you up for a groove? Medium tempo, something you can clap to?

Ryan brightens.

RYAN

Totally.

Jessie hits a simple G-C-D pattern. Micah drops in a bass line, Jared taps a beat on the cajón. It's rough, but it's a groove.

Nick drags over an extra KEYBOARD.

He faces the firefighters, claps on two and four.

NICK

Alright, Firehouse Heroes, on me. Shake it out, forget the lens. This is just us.

He nods to the band - the groove settles.

Nick leans into the mic, eyes on the guys:

NICK (CONT'D)

Okay, everybody, we're gonna do this the only way I know how: loud, proud, and slightly embarrassing.

He points at the firefighters.

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*You're flexin' like a statue,  
frozen to the spot.  
Acting like you've never taken off  
your top.  
It's just a little calendar, it's  
just a little skin.*

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)  
*We're saving up a firehouse, so let  
 the fun begin.*

Ty struggles not to smile. Tank and Wes look bemused.

Nick turns to face them fully, now using the song as a pep talk.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*It ain't about perfect, it ain't  
 about tough.  
 It's about showing this town that  
 they're loved.*

The band leans in; the groove tightens.

Nick launches into the chorus, pointing at them, inviting them in:

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*So show 'em what you've got,  
 Firehouse heroes.  
 Big soft hearts and the bench-press  
 kilos.  
 Flash that grin, let the guard drop  
 down.  
 We're not just hot, we're holding  
 up this town.  
 Strike that pose, yeah, mess it up  
 a lot.  
 We're here to help, so show 'em  
 what you've got.*

DEEDEE  
 Okay, that's... that's what I'm  
 talking about.

Nick paces in front of the guys, working them into the verses now, teasing them by name.

NICK  
 (singing, grinning)  
*Tank's built like a mountain,  
 acting all shy.*

Tank ducks his head, blushing, but the guys cheer.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*Ty's in the mirror like: "Oh hey,  
 guy".*

Ty - looking in the mirror - can't help laughing at himself.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*Drew's in the corner counting one,  
 two, three.*

DREW (20s) - muscly, cute, volunteer fireman - has indeed been lifting a barbell and counting.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*Wes is playing quiet, keeping it  
 low-key.*

All eyes on Wes. He tries to stay stone-faced. Fails. A slow smile creeps in.

WES  
 You know it.

Laughter breaks out.

Nick leans in, voice growing more sincere under the jokes.

NICK  
 (singing)  
*It ain't about macho, it ain't  
 about fake.  
 It's about hearts on display for a  
 good cause' sake.*

He sweeps them into the chorus again, louder this time. Even the guys start to mumble along.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*So show 'em what you've got,  
 Firehouse heroes.  
 Big soft hearts and the bench-press  
 kilos.  
 Flash that grin, let the guard drop  
 down.  
 We're not just hot, we're holding  
 up this town.  
 Strike that pose, yeah, mess it up  
 a lot.  
 We're here to help, so show 'em  
 what you've got.*

Jessie punches a little riff on the keys. Jared adds a fill. Ryan is hitting the cajón like his life depends on it.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing/calling)  
*Hands up if you're here for the  
 hometown crew.*

He thrusts his hand up.

BAND/FIREFIGHTERS  
 (as one, shouting)  
*Hey! Hey! We are, we do!*

NICK  
 (singing)  
*Hands up if you're doing this for  
 love, not fame.*

EVERYONE  
 (shouting)  
*Hey! Hey! Put our name in the  
 frame!*

The room is alive now – claps, stomps, a couple of whoops.

Nick takes it home, voice riding the groove, eyes on the guys.

NICK  
 (singing)  
*We're not models, we're the  
 midnight call,  
 But if this helps, we'll give you  
 all  
 A little flex, a little smile, a  
 little extra hot.  
 Forrest Hollow, this is what we've  
 got.*

He lands the last line, the band hits a button ending. The sound echoes in the bay.

Beat of silence.

Then: APPLAUSE, LAUGHTER, WHOOPS from everyone present – the teens, the guys themselves.

Ty shakes his head, grinning.

TY  
 Okay... that was actually kind of  
 fire.

He looks at Irving, who is beaming with delight.

WES  
 I hate how much I liked that.

Wes looks at Nick with a new level of respect.

DEEDEE  
 Gentlemen, congratulations. You  
 have a theme song.

Jake, at the edge of it all, watches Nick. Pride, amusement, and something warmer all mixed together.

Nick looks back at him, a little breathless, cheeks pink from singing. He gives a tiny shrug, like: sorry, got carried away.

Jake just smiles, shakes his head.

JAKE

Alright, "firehouse heroes". While you're all feeling yourselves - as it were - you heard the man.

(to Chloe)

Chloe, let's take some damn pictures.

The band starts the groove again, lower this time, as Ty, Tank, Wes and the others move back into the light - looser now, laughing, bumping shoulders as they try poses.

Chloe snaps the first real shot of the day.

We HOLD on a frame in her viewfinder: the firefighters mid-laugh, Nick blurred in the background clapping along.

#### **INT. THE LANTERN PUB - NIGHT**

Worn wood, string lights, a crooked 1998 WOLVES photo, neon beer sign.

A FEW REGULARS at the counter. SPORTS on mute. Low CHRISTMAS MUSIC from a tired speaker.

The door opens. A GUST OF COLD AIR and SNOW as Nick and Jake step in, still a little wired from the calendar shoot.

NICK

Funny how this place always smells the same.

JAKE

Beer, fryer oil, bad decisions.

They move to the bar. FLO (60s, dry, un-shockable) looks up from polishing a glass.

FLO

Well, look what the reindeer dragged in. The Prodigal Snowman and our fearless fire chief.

NICK

You remember me, Flo?

FLO

Sure. Only kid I ever had to cut off from Shirley Temples.

(beat)

What're we having?

JAKE

Two beers, Flo. Anything not from that craft brewery over on Howard. Or anything with the word "ale".

FLO

The good stuff. Got it.

She moves off. Nick and Jake slide onto stools. Jake's shoulders finally drop a notch.

Flo returns, sets down two frosty bottles.

FLO (CONT'D)

First round's on the house. I saw the flyers. You idiots might actually pull it off and save that damn place.

NICK

If they save the firehouse, you should name a drink after them.

FLO

Already did. Call it the "Thirst Responder."

(beat, deadpan)

Whiskey, cinnamon, and baby oil.

Nick snorts; Jake smiles. Flo wanders off.

They drink. A quiet beat.

NICK

So. How's it feel knowing your pecs are about to be on every refrigerator in New England?

JAKE

Like I should've done more cardio and less... whatever the hell that was today.

Nick laughs, then his PHONE BUZZES on the bar.

Nick stares at it, then lets out a short, disbelieving laugh.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Good news?

NICK

Lou Carver at the Gazette. He's printing the calendars tonight. All of them. For free.

JAKE

You're kidding me?

NICK  
Apparently, Dad dragged him out of  
a ditch one New Year's. This is his  
payback.

Jake exhales; you can see a little weight come off his back.

JAKE  
So tomorrow we're officially merch.

NICK  
Tomorrow you're officially a  
centerfold, my friend.

They CLINK bottles. A small, earned victory.

A beat. They both stare at the labels more than each other.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Hard to believe we actually pulled  
off half-naked civic duty.

JAKE  
You pulled it off. I just tried not  
to drop the hose.

NICK  
You walked into that town meeting  
and said "over my dead body."

Jake shrugs, uncomfortable.

JAKE  
Somebody had to say it.

NICK  
Yeah. But it was you.

That sits between them.

JAKE  
You're good at this, you know.

NICK  
At what, exactly? Public  
humiliation?

JAKE  
At walking into a room that feels  
like a funeral and making people  
think: maybe it's not over yet.

That hits. Nick's deflection falters for a second.

NICK  
Careful. That sounded dangerously  
like praise.

JAKE

Don't get used to it, Snow.

A small smile passes between them.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You could've stayed in New York.  
Sent flowers. Texted "thinking of  
you" with a sad emoji.

NICK

I brought cookies and chaos  
instead. It's my process.

JAKE

Could've fooled me. Looks a lot  
like showing up.

Nick looks down at his beer, that landing deeper than he  
wants to show.

NICK

Yeah, well. You're the one holding  
the line while some guy in a coat  
from Bergdorfs screws the town.

JAKE

Comes with the badge. Everybody  
leans on you, nobody asks if you're  
okay.

NICK

Comes with the badge? Oh, please.  
It looks like you're the reason  
we've got a fighting chance.

Jake glances at him, a little thrown by the clarity of it.

JAKE

Says the guy who got all the way to  
Madison Avenue and still ended up  
back at this lousy bar.

NICK

I contain multitudes, Chief. Guilt,  
neurosis, and an alarming number of  
frequent flyer miles.

Jake laughs.

JAKE

You still built something. Life.  
Career. Whatever you call it.

NICK

I write jingles for Bitcoin and  
payday loans, Jake.

JAKE

And a plan that might actually save my station in, what, twenty-four hours.

Nick shifts, uncomfortable with the praise.

NICK

Panic productivity. It's a thing.

JAKE

Whatever you call it, Snow...  
(beat, sincere)  
I'm glad you're here.

Nick feels that. Really hears it.

NICK

Yeah. Me too.  
(covering)  
Don't tell my agent. She likes me cold and dead inside.

The CHRISTMAS TRACK on the speaker shifts to something softer. The bar fuzzes out a little around them.

NICK (CONT'D)

If – and it is a very big if – this actually works, what then?  
(beat)  
You just keep running into burning buildings forever?

JAKE

Pretty much the dream. I mean: I got Max. He's my kid. He's great. But I'm not sure running-into-burning-buildings is great parenting. Especially when it's just me and him.

They hold each other's gaze a beat too long. It's there, clear, and neither of them names it.

Flo passes by, clocking the charge but saying nothing.

FLO

You boys need anything else?

JAKE

We're good, Flo. Thanks.

NICK

I should head back. Hospital run in the morning. Gotta show up looking at least medium festive.

JAKE  
Tell Frank I said hi.

NICK  
I will.

They both stand. There's a tiny, awkward beat where a hug might happen; instead, Jake settles for a warm clap to Nick's shoulder, his hand lingering half a second longer than strictly necessary.

JAKE  
Night, Snow.

NICK  
Night, Chief.

Nick pulls on his scarf and heads for the door. Jake watches him go.

The door opens, letting in a gust of cold and snow, then swings shut again, leaving Jake with his beer and whatever that just was.

**EXT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - DAY**

Cold grey light. WREATH a bit sadder in daylight. A dusting of new snow on the roof.

A too-shiny SEDAN pulls up. Grayson climbs out in an expensive overcoat and leather gloves, carrying a COFFEE TRAY.

He takes in the building like he's already redecorating it, then heads inside.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - APPARATUS BAY - DAY**

Quiet. The ENGINE and RESCUE TRUCK sit ready. A COFFEE POT gurgles on a side table.

Jake, in hoodie and beanie, stands by a workbench with a CLIPBOARD: call logs, overdue notices, the GRAYSON MORTGAGE STATEMENT on top.

The door opens. Cold air. Walter.

WALTER  
Morning, Chief.

Jake looks up, instantly wary.

JAKE  
Walter. Town meeting's not till next week.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

Must be a few widows and orphans to run outta town before then.

WALTER

Relax, wiseguy. I come in peace.  
(raises tray)  
And come bearing caffeine.

He offers a cup. Jake hesitates, then takes it – reflexive manners.

JAKE

Thanks.  
(beat)  
What do you want?

WALTER

Straight to it, huh?

He strolls a few steps in, looking up at rafters, old photos, patched ceiling.

WALTER (CONT'D)

I used to sit on that bumper as a kid. Thought firefighters were superheroes.

JAKE

They still are. Only with more paperwork.

Walter gives a thin smile.

WALTER

Look, Jake. The foreclosure – it isn't personal. It's math.

JAKE

Your math. And people waiting twenty minutes for a truck while their kitchen goes up.

WALTER

Or they get a properly funded regional station with real equipment and pensions that don't bounce. It's not villainy. It's consolidation.

Jake takes a sip, unimpressed.

JAKE

You didn't drive over here with foam art to explain "consolidation."

Walter nods at the clipboard.

WALTER

You're in a tight spot, Chief.  
Crew's looking to you for miracles.  
Kid at home.

(beat)

And now you're betting it all on  
some cockamamie calendar idea.  
Seriously?

Jake's jaw tightens.

JAKE

Nick's trying to help.

WALTER

I'm sure he is. But you know as  
well as I do: you're not making six  
figures in three days selling  
tasteful thirst traps.

Jake doesn't answer. He doesn't have to.

Walter shifts into "reasonable" mode.

WALTER (CONT'D)

I like you, Jake. The town likes  
you. You've done good work here.  
I'm not here to bury you.

JAKE

Could've fooled me.

WALTER

I'm here to offer you a way out  
that doesn't involve you going down  
with the building.

He steps closer.

WALTER (CONT'D)

When we convert this place, we're  
putting in a regional financial  
hub. Offices. Call centre. Training  
suite. It needs a head of  
operations. Someone local. Trusted.

Jake stares.

JAKE

You're offering me a desk?

WALTER

I'm offering a salary, real  
benefits, and working hours that  
mean you never have to leave Max  
with a neighbour at midnight ever  
again.

(beat)

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

You take it, I lean on County. Your guys get priority when spots open. We work out a transition. Soft landing.

Jake lets that sit, then:

JAKE

And in return?

Walter doesn't bother pretending now.

WALTER

You ease off.

(beat)

No more "Save Our Station" crusade. No more fantasy that this shitty building can be saved.

Jake leans back against the bench, coffee forgotten in his hand.

JAKE

So I help you shovel dirt on it. Smile for the cameras, tell everyone it's for the best.

WALTER

You do what a responsible father does, Jake: you choose stability over sentiment. This place is dry wall and nostalgia. (beat) Max is real.

That lands. Jake swallows, eyes hard.

JAKE

You ever pull someone out of a burning house?

Walter blinks.

WALTER

No, but -

JAKE

Ever stood in a driveway with a family while their living room turned orange and told them "it's just dry wall and nostalgia"?

Walter's patience thins.

WALTER

This isn't about -

JAKE

It is. To them. To this town. To Frank Snow. To me.

He sets the coffee down on the workbench, untouched.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I know the numbers, Grayson. I know we might lose. But as long as I'm Chief, my job is to fight for this station. Not help you padlock it and call it a gift.

Walter's charm cools.

WALTER

I'm trying to keep you from going down with a ship that's already sunk, son.

JAKE

Or you're just scared a calendar full of half-naked firefighters and DeeDee Jackson is going to make you look like the goddam Grinch.

That hits a nerve. Walter's eyes flash.

WALTER

Clock's ticking, Jake. Christmas Eve's coming fast. This offer? It doesn't live past that.

Jake doesn't flinch.

JAKE

Then I guess you'd better drink your coffee before it gets cold.

They hold each other's gaze. Walter realises he's not moving him.

He lifts his own cup, gives a tight almost-smile.

WALTER

You're a good man, Chief. I kinda hoped you be a smart one.

He turns and walks out. The door closes behind him.

Jake stares at the door for a beat, then at the trucks, the gear, the old photos.

He picks up the clipboard again, jaw set.

He gets back to work.

**INT. JAKE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

COZY, not fancy. WOLVES pennant, team photos, LEGO FIRETRUCKS, FOOTBALL TROPHIES.

Jake, in sweats, stirs a pot of boiling pasta way too hard.

At the table, Max does homework, earbuds out, watching.

MAX

Go easy on that, Dad. It's not the penne's fault.

Jake blinks, eases off.

JAKE

Yeah. Sorry, Max. Long day.

MAX

"Fancy car, zero morals" kind of day?

Jake looks over.

JAKE

You clocked him?

MAX

In this town, that shiny sedan is basically a siren. Grayson, right?

Jake huffs, kills the burner, leans back against the counter.

JAKE

Yeah. He came by to "talk options."

MAX

How bad?

JAKE

Same as the meeting. Foreclosure's coming unless we pull off a miracle by Christmas Eve. But he did dangle a back-up plan. Desk job. Good salary. No 3 a.m. calls. More nights home.

Max absorbs that, pencil tapping.

MAX

And you already hate it.

JAKE

Didn't say that.

MAX

You don't have to. Your "I hate this" face is pretty loud.

A beat. Jake can't quite argue.

JAKE

He made it sound... responsible.  
"Stability. Health insurance. More  
time with your kid." Hard to argue  
with that.

MAX

Yeah, but would you actually be  
okay? Or just home more and  
miserable about it?

Jake looks at him; that hits.

JAKE

You wouldn't mind? Fewer missed  
dinners; no "sorry, buddy, got a  
call".

MAX

I'd like seeing you, sure.  
(beat)  
But I also like you not turning  
into "that grumpy guy who used to  
be a firefighter."

Jake studies him.

MAX (CONT'D)

You love the station. And those  
guys. And, like, dragging people  
out of burning stuff. (beat) If you  
quit because you want to, okay. If  
you quit 'cause some guy in a suit  
says it's safer for me? That's you  
using me as an excuse.

Jake takes that in, quiet.

JAKE

I just don't want you paying the  
price if this all goes south.

MAX

Newsflash: it already kinda sucks.  
(softening)  
But I'd rather watch you fight for  
it than watch you give up and  
pretend you're okay.

A beat. Jake's shoulders drop; something settles.

JAKE

So the verdict is... keep swinging.  
Even if the odds suck.

MAX

Pretty much. Also, don't burn the sauce. It's suffered enough.

Jake snorts, turns back to the stove.

JAKE

Yes, sir.

Max gets up, grabs plates, moving around the kitchen in easy, practiced rhythm.

MAX

Hey, Dad?

Jake glances over.

JAKE

Yup.

MAX

Nick.

JAKE

(tensing)

What about him?

MAX

He's weird... but, like, in a good way. (beat) And real funny. And he's super smart and... y'know: cool. He's cool.

JAKE

Yeah?

MAX

I like him. He's... He's a good guy, Dad. Just saying.

JAKE

Yeah... Yeah. He is.

Max smiles.

Jake start dishing up.

**EXT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - DAY**

Cold grey light. Frost on the bay doors, wreath a little lopsided.

A PICK-UP is already backed up. A couple of BOXES labelled "FORREST HOLLOW FIRE & RESCUE CALENDAR" sit just inside.

Nick takes the last box from LOU CARVER (60s, ink on his hands).

NICK

Lou, you didn't have to haul all this over by yourself.

LOU

Your dad's pulled this town out of more fires than I can count, son. Least I can do is drop off a few boxes.

Nick flips open the top box, sees the glossy cover – Jake's cover shot.

NICK

It's beautiful, Lou. Thank you.

LOU

Then go sell 'em before I change my mind about using the good paper.

He claps Jake on the shoulder and heads back to his truck.

LOU (CONT'D)

Proud of you, kid.

DeeDee strides up with COFFEE and a CLIPBOARD, CHLOE and RYAN behind her with armfuls of FLYERS.

DEEDEE

Okay, Santa's got his goodies, the elves are caffeinated – let's move, people.

CHLOE

Town's split into zones: Main Street, strip mall, church, gas station.

RYAN

(holding up a tablet)  
And I made a sales tracker. You're welcome.

Ty emerges in a beanie and parka, phone already out. Wes and Tank trail with boxes.

TY

First Insta drop's at ten: "They put the fire in Fire & Rescue." Too much?

WES

Definitely. (beat) Post it.

Tank hefts a box like it's empty.

TANK

Where d'you want me?

DEEDEE

You and Ryan: Main Street. Wes and  
Chloe: church and community centre.  
Ty, you're with me – doorstep sales  
plus content.

She turns to Nick and Jake.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

You two are the faces. Hospital,  
grocery store, anywhere people feel  
too guilty to say no.

Jake glances at Nick; Nick gives him a quick conspiratorial  
grin.

NICK

Weaponising small-town guilt. My  
speciality.

Everyone starts to fan out with boxes.

JAKE

Hey –

They pause, turn back.

JAKE (CONT'D)

This isn't about looking pretty,  
fellas. Every calendar we sell is  
one step closer to staying alive.  
Copy?

WES

Got it, Chief.

DEEDEE

Alright, team "Thirst Responders" –  
hit it.

They spill out into the cold with calendars and flyers.

We HOLD a beat on the remaining STACKS OF BOXES in the bay –  
a wall of hope waiting for whatever comes next.

**MONTAGE - "SELL, SELL, SELL" - DAY**

Tank and Ryan at the Bakery counter. The OWNER laughs at a  
calendar page, stuffs cash into a donation jar.

Ty and DeeDee at the COFFEE SHOP. Ty takes a selfie with the  
flustered BARISTA.

Wes and Chloe at the CHURCH HALL. An OLDER LADY fans herself  
at one of the hotter months.

QUICK INSERT: a DONATION THERMOMETER on Ryan's tablet, the bar ticking up. Still a long way from the goal, but climbing.

**EXT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - NIGHT**

The station sits quiet under a sky full of stars, wreath lit, a soft dusting of snow starting to fall.

A DARK SUV rolls slowly to a stop down the block, lights off.

**EXT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - NIGHT**

The station sleeps under a crust of frost. WREATH dark, bay doors shut, only a faint glow from inside.

A SLEEK SUV idles across the street, lights off.

**INT. SUV - NIGHT**

Walter Grayson in the driver's seat, collar up, face set. His eyes stay on the firehouse.

In the passenger and back seats: TWO MEN in dark hoodies. They watch Walter.

Walter gives the smallest nod.

**EXT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - BACK DOOR - NIGHT**

The two men slip through the shadows to a PLAIN METAL DOOR.

A gloved hand produces a TOOL.

CLICK. The lock pops.

They ease the door open and disappear inside.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - NIGHT**

Dim SECURITY LIGHTS halo the sleeping ENGINES.

The men move past them, quick and purposeful, toward the STACKS OF CALENDAR BOXES.

A beat as they take in the wall of cardboard.

One man's gaze tracks from the boxes to the WALL-MOUNTED HOSE REEL.

CLOSE ON:

Hands snapping the hose loose.

The nozzle dragged across the floor, leaving a wet trail.

A hand cranking the VALVE. WHOOSH.

A savage burst of WATER slams out, then steadies into a heavy stream.

They drive it straight into the stacks.

Cardboard DARKENS. Boxes BUCKLE. Glossy pages inside twist, collapse, turn to PULP.

They sweep the stream back and forth, methodical.

Water rivers across the concrete, spreading under boots, under workbenches.

CLOSE ON: a single CALENDAR page peeled back by the force – JAKE'S COVER SHOT – before it disintegrates into mush.

The valve is slammed shut. The hose is dropped, coiled in a dirty LOOP on the floor, nozzle abandoned in a widening puddle.

The bay now looks like the aftermath of a bad mistake, not a break-in.

**INT. SUV - NIGHT**

Walter watches the dark firehouse.

The SUV pulls away, taillights disappearing down the quiet street, leaving behind a dark building slowly filling with cold water and ruined paper.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - DAY**

Early. Pale light creeps in through the bay windows.

The floor is a patchy MIRROR of dried and still-damp water. The boxes of calendars are sagging heaps of warped cardboard and swollen, ruined paper.

Jake unlocks the side door, stepping in with a thermos and his keys tucked between his fingers.

He stops dead.

JAKE

No.

He moves forward slowly, taking in the destruction.

CLOSE ON a calendar page half-stuck to the floor, ink run, image distorted.

Nick bursts in from the main door, scarf half-on, hair still damp from a rushed shower.

NICK  
Morning, Chief. I -

He sees it, freezes.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Oh, come on!

He splashes through a shallow puddle, grabs a half-collapsed box, wrestles it upright. Calendars slide out - a thick, soggy brick.

He tries to peel one free. The pages tear in his hands.

NICK (CONT'D)  
They're toast.

Jake kneels by another box, pulls back the flaps. Same story: pulp.

He nods toward the hose lying limp across the floor, a subtle kink where it was turned on too fast.

Nick looks at the hose, then the boxes, then Jake.

JAKE  
We don't have anything worth stealing. We do have one thing worth soaking.

Nick gets it. Fast.

NICK  
Was it an accident?

JAKE  
Nick, I've been a firefighter long enough to know hoses don't turn on by themselves.

Deedee strides in with a coffee, mid-sentence.

DEEDEE  
You guys, I.... (seeing the ruined calendars) Shit.

She tiptoes forward, looking down at the soggy wreckage.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)  
Tell me this is a joke.

Nick holds up a ruined page; ink streaks his fingers.

NICK  
If it is, it isn't funny.

Wes arrives, carrying a bag of muffins for the crew. He sees the scene. He stops in his tracks

WES

What the...? Aw, man - all of them?

Jake stands, wiping his wet hands on his jeans, trying to stay calm.

JAKE

Looks like it.

DeeDee slowly turns to him, eyes blazing.

DEEDEE

Walter.

Jake doesn't answer, which is as good as a yes.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

We can ask Lou to reprint, right? I know it'll cost, but I can -

NICK

DeeDee, It took all night and every favor we had to get these.

DeeDee kicks at a bit of soggy cardboard, furious.

DEEDEE

Grayson did this on purpose.

JAKE

He's just trying to get what he wants, Dee. We're just... collateral damage.

Nick runs both hands through his hair. This was his plan, his crazy idea. Now it's a literal puddle.

NICK

Wait.. wait... no, we could...

His phone RINGS in his pocket.

He pulls it out. Sees the caller ID. His face drops.

INSERT - CALLER ID: "MOM"

The room fades in his periphery. He answers.

NICK (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hey, Mom. We're kind of in the middle of a -

He listens to her for a moment.

NICK (CONT'D)

Okay. I'll be there. I'm on my way,  
Mom, okay?

He hangs up. He looks at his friends.

The room is still. Jake, DeeDee and Wes all watch him,  
surrounded by soggy cardboard and paper mush.

DEEDEE

Nick?

NICK

I need to go. Dad's... it sounds  
serious.

He's trying very hard not to lose it.

NICK (CONT'D)

Has anyone seen my keys? I...

JAKE

I'll drive you.

Nick turns to him.

NICK

Jake, you don't have to -

JAKE

You're not getting behind the wheel  
like this.

His tone is gentle but firm. He's already pulling his truck  
keys out of his pocket.

JAKE (CONT'D)

There's nothing we can do here  
right now except stare at...  
Listen, your dad comes first.

Nick looks around helplessly at the ruined boxes, then back  
at Jake.

NICK

I... I'm really sorry, Chief. This  
was my whole big idea and now  
it's... just...

JAKE

Hey. (beat) Hey.

Jake steps a little closer, grounding.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You tried to save us, Nick. Save  
this. That's a damn sight more than  
most people ever did.

Nick swallows hard, nods once.

DEEDEE  
Go, baby. Seriously. This mess  
isn't going anywhere.

She forces a crooked little smile.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)  
We'll... do what we do. Go.

Nick gives her a faint, grateful look.

NICK  
Call me if -  
(he catches himself,  
shakes his head)  
I'll check in when I can.

Jake heads for the bay doors. Nick follows, pausing just long enough to look back at the wrecked calendars - then forces himself to turn away. They head out.

CLOSE ON: DeeDee, furious, staring at the drowned, pulped calendar boxes.

Wes steps into frame beside her, taking in the wreckage too.

DEEDEE  
(simmering)  
Wes and I are getting coffee.

She turns to him, eyes still blazing.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)  
You know when I say "coffee" I mean  
"alcohol," right?

Wes nods, accepting his fate.

WES  
Yes, ma'am.

**INT. HOSPITAL - FRANK'S ROOM - DAY**

Soft BEEPING. Winter light through the blinds. A little FAKE CHRISTMAS TREE on the sill, its lights faint against the hospital glare.

Frank lies propped up in bed. Paler. Oxygen in his nose, an IV in his arm.

In his hands: a SLIGHTLY WARPED, WATER-DAMAGED FIREHOUSE CALENDAR - one of the survivors. His thumb rests on a buckled edge.

Nick sits in a chair pulled close, shoulders rounded, trying to look brighter than he feels. Jake stands back near the window, hands in his pockets, giving space.

Frank studies the calendar a beat, then looks up at Nick with a faint, wry smile.

FRANK

So, we had... a setback.

Nick winces.

NICK

Yeah. "Somebody" left the hose on.

Frank glances down at the ruined pages, then back up. His voice is soft, breathy, with tiny pauses.

He runs his thumb along a warped corner. A beat.

FRANK

(to Nick)

You okay, kid?

NICK

I'm fine. It's just... a hundred and fifty grand, and the place you spent your whole life in and my one big idea turned into... mulch. And... I...

He tries to smile. Frank watches him, gently.

FRANK

Nick.

Just his name. Nick exhales.

NICK

I really thought... for just a minute... we were gonna pull it off. Calendar, buzz, the whole town buying into the crazy.

(beat)

Now we've got a pile of soggy centerfolds and a foreclosure notice.

He shuts his eyes briefly, ashamed.

NICK (CONT'D)

I feel so stupid, Dad. Like I came home to slap glitter on the Titanic.

Frank's fingers tighten very slightly on the calendar. He takes a breath before speaking.

FRANK

Look at me.

Nick does.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You tried, son. That's the opposite of stupid.

He lets that sit. Nick blinks hard.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You remember that first jingle of yours? Carlucci's? The tool store?

Nick gives a faint, strangled groan.

NICK

Dad, you really don't -

FRANK

I won't sing it. Nurse threatened to sedate me if I did.

A tiny ghost of a smile. Frank's eyes stay on Nick.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Point is... it stuck. Ten years later, I still hear it when I walk past a toolbox.

(soft, matter-of-fact)

That's what you do. You make things stick.

Nick half-shrugs, lost.

NICK

Yeah, well... stuck jingles ain't gonna keep the firehouse open.

FRANK

Maybe not.

He lifts the damp calendar an inch.

FRANK (CONT'D)

But this? The whole town saw it. For a second, everybody believed... we could save something. Something important. (beat) You did that. With one idea and what looks like a whole heap of protein shakes.

Jake laughs.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Fire goes out and it's gone, son. Stuff like you do, it...

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)  
hangs around. Gets in your bones.  
Keeps it alive.

Nick looks away, jaw tight. Jake shifts very slightly at the window, quietly agreeing.

NICK  
Dad...

FRANK  
You know what I tell the nurses  
when they ask what you do?

Nick doesn't answer.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
I don't say "jingles." (beat) I  
say: my boy writes the songs  
everybody knows.

That hits. Nick's eyes shine; he tries to blink it back.

NICK  
You could've led with that, you  
know. Like, earlier in my life.

FRANK  
Some of us are better at running  
into buildings than into feelings,  
son.

A beat. His gaze drifts toward the little fake tree, its plastic branches and too-bright star. When he looks back at Nick, he's a little further away, but clear.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
You remember what you used to say  
when you were eight; bossing  
everyone around at Christmas?

Nick shakes his head, half-smiling through the tears.

NICK  
I said a lot of things when I was  
eight, Dad.

FRANK  
That's for damn sure.  
(beat)  
You'd march around the house in  
your reindeer onesie and tell  
anyone who was bitching and  
moaning. You'd say: "Christmas is  
love."

Nick goes very still.

FRANK (CONT'D)

God, it was... Not presents. Not candy or decorations. Just... us. In the same room. Together. Too much food. Bad TV. You were very firm about it, I recall. Eight-years-old.

A tiny smile.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You were right, Nick. Christmas is love. (beat) The rest is just gift wrap.

He's tiring now, breath a little rougher. Nick absorbs the line, the simplicity of it. Jake does too, eyes on Frank, memorising.

Frank squeezes a bit more strength into his voice.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You wanna help, son? Do what you do best.

(beat)

Make something that sticks.

Nick frowns faintly.

NICK

About... what?

FRANK

About why the firehouse matters. Why Jake and the crew matter. Why you matter. Because you do, son. To me, and Chloe and Ryan and...

Frank grabs his son's hand.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You matter, Nick. You always have.

He shifts, small wince, then settles back.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Town won't remember Walter Grayson. But they'll remember what you gave them: something to hang on to.

Nick looks at him, really seeing how fragile he is, how much it cost to say that much.

NICK

Okay, Dad. I'll try.

Frank nods, satisfied, eyes heavier now.

FRANK

That's all we can do, kid. (beat)  
Try.

He lets his hand fall away from the calendar, eyes drifting closed.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Now... let an old man take a nap  
while you go tell Forrest Hollow  
what's what.

Nick huffs a wet little laugh.

NICK

Deal.

He reaches up, gently straightens the blanket, leaves the calendar resting on Frank's chest.

Frank is already half-asleep, breathing shallow but peaceful.

Nick sits back, quickly swipes his eyes with the heel of his hand, trying to pull himself together.

Jake steps a little closer, keeping his voice low.

JAKE

He's right, Snow.

Nick gives him a wobbly look.

NICK

You're agreeing with my dad now?  
That's a slippery slope.

JAKE

Guy's got pretty decent instincts.  
(beat)  
"Christmas is love." That's...  
beautiful.

Nick turns the phrase over, like he's tasting it.

NICK

Yeah.

He pulls a crumpled notebook from his pocket, quietly writes:

"CHRISTMAS IS LOVE."

Jake watches, soft, proud.

JAKE

Looks like step one.

Nick nods, eyes on the words.

NICK

Of what?

Outside, snow starts to fall.

**INT. THE LANTERN PUB - DAY**

Same old bar: string lights, crooked WOLVES photo, muted SPORTS on one TV, LOCAL NEWS on the other. A few REGULARS. Quiet.

In a corner booth: DeeDee and Wes. In front of them, two surprisingly classy COCKTAILS.

DeeDee eyes hers.

DEEDEE

Since when does this place serve anything that doesn't come in a pitcher?

Wes nods toward the bar, a small smile.

WES

I asked Flo for something strong and pretty.  
(beat)  
Like you.

It lands. DeeDee blinks, then smiles despite herself.

DEEDEE

"Strong and pretty." I'll allow it.  
(beat) Could say the same about you.

She takes a sip. It's actually good.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

I can't believe the calendars are gone. Feels like I dreamed the whole thing and woke up in a damn puddle.

WES

Still better than what we were doing before.  
(off her look)  
Which was sitting on our glutes doing nothing.

That hits. She exhales.

DEEDEE

I was supposed to blow into town,  
help my best friend, go back to  
yelling about oatmeal and snow days  
on morning TV.

WES

You woke us up, Dee. That counts.

A little silence. She eyes him, curious.

DEEDEE

(changing the subject)  
Okay, Mister "Strong and Pretty."  
Explain the bodybuilding thing. And  
if you say "gains," I'm walking.

WES

I like the discipline. And the  
quiet.

(beat)

And it's... I don't know: shapes  
and light. Beauty, I guess. One  
pose, one angle, whole story  
changes.

That surprises her.

DEEDEE

You talk about it like it's art.

WES

Kinda is. Just sweatier.

(beat)

On stage I'm not thinking "look how  
big I am." I'm thinking, "does this  
read from the back row?" "Is the  
line clean?"

He shrugs, a little self-conscious, but sure of himself.

WES (CONT'D)

People can think "meathead" if they  
want. I know what I'm about.

DeeDee smiles, genuinely impressed.

DEEDEE

You're annoyingly deep for a man  
whose hobby is lifting heavy  
things.

He's about to answer when his eyes flick up to the TV above  
the bar.

ON TV - LOCAL NEWS, sound low, captions on. Lower third:  
"HOLIDAY PAGEANT HOST ARRESTED."

Promo still of news anchor in a red velvet blazer. Then a freeze-frame of dash-cam footage: Anchor mid-rant by the roadside.

CAPTION: "ALLEGEDLY USING LANGUAGE 'INCOMPATIBLE WITH FAMILY PROGRAMMING.'"

WES

He one of yours?

DeeDee looks up, grabs the remote, bumps the volume.

TV ANCHOR (V.O.)

Veteran presenter Brad Kline was taken into custody last night after what state police are calling "an escalated misunderstanding" with a highway patrol officer -

DeeDee slaps a hand over her mouth, half horrified, half delighted.

DEEDEE

Oh, Brad.

WES

Friend?

DEEDEE

Co-worker. Ego in a blazer.

ON TV:

ANCHOR (V.O.)

Kline remains in county custody. The network has not confirmed whether he will host tomorrow night's live Christmas Eve pageant, saying only that they are "reviewing contingency plans."

DeeDee's eyes have that "look".

WES

Explain that face.

DEEDEE

That's my "some poor producer crying in a bathroom stall" face.

(beat, gears turning)

Three hours of choirs, kids and fake snow, live, tomorrow night... and no host.

WES

You're a host.

DEEDEE

... who knows the producer.

She leans in.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

I don't need three hours, Wes. I just need a five-minute slot.

WES

For what?

DEEDEE

For you guys. Forrest Hollow Fire & Rescue.

(beat)

We put you on stage in front of the whole state, roll a toll-free number and a pledge link, and let people see what Forrest Hollow's about to lose.

WES

We can't just stand there in our Calvin Kleins asking for money.

DEEDEE

You're right.

WES

Wait... I am?

DEEDEE

You can't just stand there.

(beat)

You need a number. A song.

She taps the table, momentum building.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

Something tight, fun, catchy. People see you in all your beefcake glory, hear that tune, and suddenly they care about some firehouse they've never even heard of.

(beat)

A jingle that went to theatre camp.

Wes half-groans, half-smiles.

WES

We're still just standing there, Dee.

DEEDEE

No sir. Not with you planning the routine.

(beat, pointed)

(MORE)

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

You already think about how things read from the back row, Wes. Line, shape... meaning. You can make it look like a real routine, not six musclemen lost in a Walmart.

He realises what she's asking.

WES

You want me to "choreograph" this?

DEEDEE

Congratulations, Wes. You're now creative director of Forrest Hollow beef.

He hesitates, then checks his watch, doing the math.

WES

We've got, what: a day?

DEEDEE

We've got a day and a songwriter whose whole job is making people feel things in under eight seconds.  
(beat)

Listen: I call the station, pitch it as a gift to the community. The day after their golden boy gets hauled off in cuffs? That's some serious Christmas right there.

Wes thinks it through, then nods, slowly.

WES

You think Jake'll sign off on this?

DEEDEE

He wants to save the station, doesn't he? (beat) Baby, this is the only lever I know I can pull.

She looks him dead in the eye, no joke now.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

But I can't wrangle six half-naked meatheads on live TV by myself. I need somebody they trust.

A beat. Then Wes nods, decision made.

WES

Okay.

(beat)

Let's go ask the crew how they feel about local TV and more baby oil.

DeeDee laughs, tension cracking.

DEEDEE

There he is.

She grabs her coat and phone, slides out of the booth.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

You drive. I'll call the station  
and sell the dream.

WES

I would not want to be them right  
now.

DeeDee pushes the door open. A swirl of cold air and snow as she and Wes step out – a team now, walking straight toward their insane, last-ditch plan.

**INT. JAKE'S TRUCK - MOVING - NIGHT**

Snowy back road. Headlights cutting through the dark. Faint CHRISTMAS MUSIC on the radio.

Nick stares out of the window, still raw from the hospital. Jake drives, steady.

Jake's phone sits in the cupholder on SPEAKER.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

First things first: how's your dad?

Nick blinks back to the moment.

NICK

Tired.

(then)

But, you know – still Frank.

Jake smiles, eyes on the road.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

Okay. Second thing: I did a thing.

NICK

Define "thing."

DEEDEE (V.O.)

I called the station.

Jake's eyes flick down to the phone, back to the snow.

JAKE

WHRT?

DEEDEE (V.O.)

Smart-mouth. Christmas Eve pageant,  
three hours of choirs and sponsored  
cocoa.

(MORE)

DEEDEE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Their host got himself arrested  
 last night for... it doesn't  
 matter.

Jake snorts.

JAKE  
 Oh, I heard. Big "do you know who I  
 am?" energy.

DEEDEE (V.O.)  
 They're panicking. No host, live  
 tomorrow. I pitched them a story.

Nick closes his eyes, already bracing.

NICK  
 Dee —

DEEDEE (V.O.)  
 "Small-town firehouse in peril.  
 Crew makes a calendar, calendars  
 get wrecked, now you save the  
 heroes."  
 (beat)  
 They ate it up. We've got five  
 minutes.

Jake tenses.

JAKE  
 Five minutes of what, exactly?

DEEDEE (V.O.)  
 You. The guys. The g-strings. Live  
 segment in the middle of the show.  
 They'll put a toll-free pledge  
 number and a QR link along the  
 bottom. Every pledge goes straight  
 to the fire station.

Nick processes.

NICK  
 So: a mini telethon inside the big  
 telethon?

DEEDEE (V.O.)  
 Exactly. A telethon turducken.

Jake shakes his head.

JAKE  
 DeeDee, no. We're not props. It's a  
 firehouse, not half-time at the  
 Super Bowl.

WES (V.O.)  
 (faintly, in the  
 background)  
 Told her that.

NICK  
 Is that Wes?

WES (V.O.)  
 Hey, Nick.

NICK  
 Hey.

DEEDEE (V.O.)  
 Look, you're not just standing  
 there in your scanties with a  
 bucket. You do a number. And while  
 people feel something... the toll-  
 free number's right there.

Nick leans back, head against the rest.

NICK  
 I just watched my dad fall asleep  
 holding the one calendar that isn't  
 papier-maché. I'm not exactly in  
 "let's go on TV" mode.

DEEDEE (V.O.)  
 I know.  
 (softening)  
 But the calendars are gone, baby.  
 Grayson played dirty, and that's on  
 him. Karma's a bitch. But this is  
 the only ladder out.

Jake glances at Nick; he looks wiped.

JAKE  
 Maybe we don't climb this one, Dee.  
 We can't fix everything.

DEEDEE (V.O.)  
 We also can't raise one-fifty  
 passing a hat, Jake. The channel is  
 offering a phone bank with actual  
 human beings in headsets, waiting  
 to take donations. That does not  
 grow on Christmas trees.

Silence. The hum of the engine.

NICK  
 Even if I say yes, songs don't just  
 appear, Dee. I'm empty.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

You write songs in your sleep,  
baby. Evil little ear worms that  
make people buy shit they don't  
need.

NICK

Those are thirty seconds about cash-  
back offers. This is -

He searches for it.

NICK (CONT'D)

This is Dad. And this place. And  
Jake. If it's wrong, it's just more  
noise between toothpaste  
commercials.

A beat.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

Then don't write toothpaste, Nick.  
Write the truth.

WES (V.O.)

For what it's worth, we're scared  
too.

(beat)

But if this is how we save the  
station, I'll stand there naked if  
I have to. As long as it doesn't  
make what we do a joke.

Jake takes that in.

JAKE

I'm not worried about looking like  
a joke, buddy. I'm worried about  
turning what we do into a gimmick.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

Then don't. Let the song say why  
you matter. Four-minute response  
times. Kitchen saved versus whole  
house gone. That's not a gimmick,  
Chief.

Nick stares at the dash.

NICK

And if I screw up the song?

JAKE

You won't.

NICK

You can't know that for sure.

Jake hesitates, then:

JAKE

I heard him today. Your dad.

(beat)

He remembered every word of your hardware jingle. Ten years later. That's what you do, Nick. You get stuck in people's heads.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

I say amen.

JAKE

This time, it means more.

(beat)

So start where he told you.

NICK

Where?

JAKE

(soft, remembering)

"Christmas is love."

Nick goes still. The phrase hits him again.

NICK

Yeah.

(quiet)

He did say that.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

Oh, that's good. I want that on a mug.

Nick rolls the words around.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

There's your hook. Start there, baby. Do your thing.

Jake watches him, sees a little spark rekindle.

NICK

We get five minutes?

DEEDEE (V.O.)

Five minutes with the testosterone Rockettes, your song, and a toll-free number right there on the screen. (beat) People will have eaten pie, Nick. They'll be emotional, they'll be sleepy... and probably drunk. It's perfect.

Silence, except for the tires on snow.

NICK

Okay.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

Okay "I love you but 'no'"? Or okay  
"I'll write the song"?

Nick looks at Jake. Jake keeps his eyes on the road, voice low.

JAKE

If you don't do this, Snow, we  
don't.

(beat)

But if you do - we're with you. All  
the way.

Nick takes a breath.

NICK

Okay, I'll try, Dee. But, hey... no  
promises it won't be a train-wreck.

DEEDEE (V.O.)

Honey, it's live TV. Train-wreck is  
our brand.

(beat, gentler)

Send me a demo when you've got it.  
Nick... I believe in you.

The call clicks off. The truck is quiet again.

JAKE

For the record: DeeDee's not the  
only one who knows you can do this.

Nick meets his eyes in the dim.

NICK

Yeah?

JAKE

Hell, yeah.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - JAKE'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

A cheap but trusty PORTABLE KEYBOARD on the desk, LEDs  
glowing.

Nick tries a progression. Winces. Crosses out a line. Starts  
again.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - JAKE'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Nick at the keyboard, headphones half-on. Plays a short hook,  
rewinds, plays again.

Jake appears, sets a mug by the notebook. Nick gives him a tired, grateful half-smile, bites a cookie, keeps working.

Jake sets down a photo: Frank in his prime and Nick as a young boy sitting on the fire truck fender.

Nick picks it up, smiles. Goes back to work.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - DAY**

Bright winter light floods the bay. Controlled chaos.

DeeDee strides in, coffee in hand, scarf.

Max, Ryan, Micah, Jared and Jessie haul in a drum pad, guitar, keyboard, amp, cables.

Tank, Ty, Drew and a couple of PTs from the Jake's gym arrive with duffels.

Wes comes in with a clipboard and a roll of gaffer tape, already in production mode.

They're mid-chatter, then slow... and stop.

REVEAL:

Nick and Jake fast asleep on the equipment pile.

Nick is slumped against the pads, head back, mouth slightly open.

Jake is beside him, shoulder leaning gently into Nick's, chin on his chest.

It's not exactly an embrace, but it's unmistakably adorable.

Jessie instinctively raises her phone. DeeDee gently nudges it down.

DEEDEE

(low)

No, sweetie. That's just for them.

A tiny, awkward beat among the adults.

Ty leans toward Wes, whispering:

TY

So do we, like say something? To the kids? About...

Before Wes can answer, Max cuts in, flat:

MAX

Guys. Micah and Jared have been together since eighth grade. This isn't 2010.

Micah and Jared are holding hands and grinning. The adults look confused.

JESSIE

(to Ty)

We're cool, grandpa.

Ty is mortified. The adults share a quick, sheepish look: lightly roasted, slightly relieved.

WES

Let 'em sleep five more minutes.  
C'mon.

Everyone moves into action, keeping voices down: band setting up near the keyboard,

Wes taping cables,

Tank rolling mats and clearing space,

In the middle of it all, Nick and Jake sleep on.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - DAY**

Rehearsal BREAK.

The TEEN BAND noodles in the corner. Tank stretches. Wes sips water, mental-mapping choreography. Ty paces, nervy energy.

DEEDEE

Five minutes: I want you back on this stage. It's good, but it ain't right yet.

TANK

Question. What are we wearing for this? Because right now we're "guys at a barbecue," not "save the firehouse."

WES

Yeah, nobody's pledging for my old gym shorts.

DEEDEE

I would, baby, but Tank's right. We need a little more "oomph," a little less "laundry day."

From a paint-splattered ladder, painting a cardboard snowbank, Irving - same glasses, Christmas bow tie - looks over.

IRVING

What about all that free underwear people send Ty?

All eyes swivel to Ty. Huh?

TY

What? That's, uh... it's... product placement?

IRVING

Sure. Product you can't keep at home because your mom would pass out.

(beat)

So it lives here. In a box. In the locker room.

Ty's busted. Tank perks up.

TANK

We've been sitting next to a secret underwear vault this whole time, bro?

Ty glares at Irving.

TY

Dude. What the hell?

IRVING

What? I follow you on Insta.

(shrug)

You post all your workouts in that stuff. And you're... y'know: kind of great. (beat, blush) Not just the abs. Like, you, Ty... as a person.

That lands. Ty blinks, thrown.

TY

You like my content?

Irving blushes even more. A quick, awkward beat.

DEEDEE

Okay, whatever "this" is: later. Costumes now. Chief?

All eyes to Jake, who's been watching this from by the whiteboard.

Jake thinks, glances at the guys, then at the half-painted set, the band, the chaos.

JAKE

Nobody wears anything they're not cool with. But if we've got fancy underwear sitting around?

(beat)

I'm down.

Ty heads off toward the lockers, resigned; and a tiny bit excited.

DEEDEE

And bring options, Instaboy! DeeDee Jackson is all about range.

Irving goes back to his painting, hiding a grin. Ty meets his eye; Irving just lifts his brush in a tiny salute.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

Alright, reset everybody.

(beat)

When you come back, I wanna see six men who look like they own being half-naked, not hostages in BVDs.

The guys peel off toward the locker room.

Irving hovers a moment, then clears his throat, a little shy.

IRVING

Ms. Jackson?

She turns, still scanning her notes.

DEEDEE

Poindexter?

IRVING

I, um... I brought a few things from the make-up counter at the store.

(beat)

Nothing crazy, just some... stuff. Concealer, bronzer, setting spray, couple shadows. Maybe... zhuzh things up a little?

DeeDee really looks at him now, intrigued.

DEEDEE

"Zhuzh"?

IRVING

Tiny zhuzh. Micro-zhuzh. They just have to look less like they just rolled out of bed. In a dumpster.

A slow grin spreads across her face.

DEEDEE

Irving Poindexter, you beautiful  
secret weapon. Go. Take your tiny  
zhuzh and my terrified firefighters  
and do... whatever it is you do.

Irving beams, then hurries after the guys, clutching his  
little make-up bag like a mission case.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - DAY**

The bay is half TV studio, half fire-station: lights on  
stands, a little haze.

Nick is at the KEYBOARD, flipping through the "CHRISTMAS IS  
LOVE" lyric sheet, quietly testing the opening line:

NICK

(murmuring)

*Snow on the sidewalk, coffee in  
hand,*

DeeDee checks her phone, then paces toward the LOCKER ROOM.

DEEDEE

(shouting)

Alright! We are losing light and I  
am losing patience! Thirty seconds  
or I start without you!

Silence. A muffled:

TANK (O.S.)

On our way, boss.

The LOCKER ROOM DOOR OPENS.

Ty, Tank and Wes step out together. Then they shrug off their  
robes

Ty: white posing trunks, white wrist wraps, filigrees of  
white make-up across his chiseled torso, a sweep of soft  
feathers over one shoulder – less guy-in-his-underwear, more  
winter spirit come to life.

Tank: deep green boxer trunks, muscles highlighted in gold  
shimmer; tiny pine sprigs woven into his hair.

Wes: silver posing trunks, light oil, arrows of SILVER  
GLITTER across his musculature. Against his dark skin, he  
looks like a Christmas star with killer abs.

The room actually goes quiet.

MICAH

Whoa.

Jared smacks Micah playfully on the shoulder in mock annoyance. DeeDee just stares; delighted.

DEEDEE

Okay, I can work with this.

Irving appears at the doorframe, arms folded, quietly satisfied.

IRVING

Poindexter's Drugstore. We zhuzh.

Wes shifts under the attention, deadpan:

WES

Please note: I am also very intelligent.

A quick ripple of laughter. Tension breaks.

DeeDee clocks the line-up, then the empty doorway.

DEEDEE

We are missing one very important torso.

She cups her hands toward the locker room.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

Chief! Bring that perfect, peachy behind to mamma and hit your mark, baby.

A beat.

Jake steps out. Chiselled perfection. Everyone stares.

Small - very small - red leather trunks. Calf-length leather boots. A leather belt with a brass buckle. No feathers, no glitter - just clean, carved lines and Irving's featherlight dusting of white on Jake's stubble.

Under the lights, he looks like every "hot Santa" fantasy anyone's ever had.

JAKE

For the record, this is the weirdest thing I've ever done... in this building, anyway.

Nick just stares.

NICK

(very quiet)  
Help me, Jesus.

DEEDEE  
 (smiling, to Jake)  
 You'll do.

Ty throws a quick glance back at Irving – his paint-smudged hands and pleased little smile. Ty's breath catches; he looks away too fast – then sneaks one more look.

Jake notices Nick watching him, a little dazed.

JAKE  
 You okay there, Snow?

Nick blinks, drags his eyes back to the pages.

NICK  
 Yeah. No. Just recalibrating my understanding of "small-town cardio."

More laughs, looser now.

Wes claps once, slipping into coach mode.

WES  
 Alright, meatheads, listen up. Remember: we're not dancing: we're posing. Slow, clean, classy. Let Nick's song do the work, alright?

He nudges them into their first positions under the lights – it's... oddly elegant.

DeeDee moves to Nick's side at the keyboard.

DEEDEE  
 (quiet, to Nick)  
 You sing it like you mean it, baby.

Nick looks at the four of them, ridiculous and beautiful, then back at his lyric sheet.

He sets his fingers on the keys.

NICK  
 From the top.

He plays the INTRO, bright and modern.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*Snow on the sidewalk, coffee in hand,  
 Same old carols from a cover band.*

The four men step into a slow, sculpted group pose under the lights – classy, sexy, surprisingly elegant.

Nick smiles into the lyric, finding the pocket.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*People rushing, trying to get it  
 right,  
 Perfect pictures, perfect lights.*

They move through a simple Wes-designed sequence: clean quarter-turns, weight shifts, arms carving strong lines. It looks more like living sculpture than "dancing."

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*But the best things never make the  
 feed,  
 Just a couch, a friend, a simple  
 need.*

As he sings, little human beats sneak in: a clap on a shoulder, an exchange of grins. It feels like real guys, not pin-ups.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*You knock on my door with your  
 cheeks all red,  
 Say, "Got room for one more?" and I  
 just nod my head.*

Ty and Irving catch eyes for half a second; Irving gives a tiny, sincere thumbs-up. Ty almost breaks, then channels it into a softer, less "posed" stance.

Nick's voice warms.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*It's not the gifts or the glitter  
 in the air,  
 It's every little way we show we  
 care.*

On "show we care," the men settle into a simple tableau: some standing, one kneeling by the truck, hands resting on shoulders and bumper – strong, protective, grounded.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*Christmas is love, not the bows or  
 the boxes,  
 Not the lists or the wins or the  
 losses.*

The guys step forward in unison, three beats, then hit individual variations on the same idea – proud, playful, fully owning being seen.

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*It's a hand on your back when the  
night gets tough,  
It's "I've got you" when the road  
is rough,*

Jake falls in behind Tank for a beat, palm between his shoulder blades – a literal echo of the lyric. A couple of the others mirror the gesture without making it cute.

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*From the city lights to the stars  
above,  
Whatever else we call it, Christmas  
is love.*

Wes takes one measured step forward, arm lifting, silver glitter catching like a star. The others fan subtly behind him in a loose V.

DeeDee can't help it.

DEEDEE

(half-whisper)

Oh, that's money right there.

NICK

(singing)

*Some are flying home, some can't  
afford the flight,  
Some are working late through the  
silent night.*

The shapes get quieter: leaning on a ladder, sitting on the truck step, backs to each other but connected at the shoulders – less "thirst trap," more "night shift."

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Some are lighting candles on a  
cracked-up roof,  
Some are holding on, waiting for  
good news.  
We pull one more chair up to the  
table,  
Do what we can, give what we're  
able,*

Two of the guys mime pulling someone into the group; the line subtly closes their spacing, shoulder-to-shoulder.

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*You lean into me when the choir  
starts to sing,  
(MORE)*

NICK (CONT'D)  
*And it feels like enough, it feels  
 like everything.*

On "lean," a couple of them let their weight rest briefly against the man beside them.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*It's not the snow or the stories  
 that we tell,  
 It's the way we hold each other  
 when we're not doing well.*

They fold back into a loose huddle, hands landing naturally on backs and arms. It's simple, and it reads.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*'Cause Christmas is love, not the  
 bows or the boxes,  
 Not the lists or the wins or the  
 losses.*

They break the huddle on the downbeat into a short, synchronized phrase: steps, turns, a clean hit to camera. It's basic, but on them, it feels effortless.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*It's a text that says "hey" when  
 you've had enough,  
 It's a ride when the night's too  
 rough.*

Jake gestures toward the bay door like he's helping someone up into the truck. You believe he's done it a hundred times.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
*From the busy streets to the skies  
 above,  
 Whatever else we call it, Christmas  
 is love.*

The bay lights seem a little warmer now. Off to one side, Max is unconsciously mouthing along.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (singing; more intimate)  
*Love for the lonely, love for the  
 scared,  
 Love for the ones who don't know  
 they're prepared.*

The guys spread out, each in his own small pool of light, holding simpler, more open stances. Less flex, more heart.

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Love for the families we choose  
along the way,  
Love for the hearts that made it  
through another year's fray.*

On "families we choose," they drift back together into a line, brushing shoulders as they go, found family forming in real time.

DeeDee glances at Wes, impressed in spite of herself.

DEEDEE

(under her breath)

Okay, sculptor. I see you.

NICK

(singing)

*You don't have to be okay to show  
up,  
You don't have to have it all to be  
enough.*

Ty lets a picture-perfect flex go, arms dropping to something looser, chest open, vulnerable.

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Just bring your broken, bring your  
bright,  
We'll light it up tonight.*

On "light it up," Wes cues the one big image: in a well-rehearsed lift, the crew boosts Jake up onto Tank's solid base. Jake ends up slightly elevated, one arm raised, gold band at his wrist catching the light like the top of a tree.

Fairy lights glint on oiled shoulders.

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Christmas is love, not the bows or  
the boxes,  
Not the lists or the wins or the  
losses,  
It's a laugh in the dark when the  
lights go out,  
It's a voice on the line when  
you're full of doubt.  
From the ones we miss to the ones  
we touch,  
Whatever else we call it, Christmas  
is love.*

They lower Jake down in a smooth sequence, ending in a clean line across the backdrop – six variations on one proud, heroic silhouette.

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Yeah, whatever else we call it,  
Christmas is love,  
Christmas is love, Christmas is  
love.*

On the final "love" all of them bring a hand to their chests, heads dipping just a fraction toward Nick; toward the song, the station, everything they're trying to save.

The last chord hangs. Then just the sound of breath in the bay.

DEEDEE

Okay... so, we're absolutely not ready at all and also... that was insane!

A beat, then the room breaks – laughter, cheers, a whoop from Ryan.

Ty glances over at Irving; Irving is already looking at him, eyes bright. For once, Ty doesn't look away.

TY

Nice zhuzh, bro.

Irving smiles, a little breathless, trying not to let his eyes wander.

Jake turns to Nick, still buzzing, still a little stunned by how well it worked.

JAKE

If that's rehearsal...

Nick, flushed, out of breath, grins back.

NICK

Tonight is gonna break the phone bank.

DeeDee raises her clipboard like a conductor's baton.

DEEDEE

Alright, "Thirst Responders". Five minutes to recover, then we do it again. Only this time, imagine drunk people are watching and their credit cards are within arm's reach.

Groans. Laughter. But the fear has been replaced by something else now: belief.

We HOLD on Nick and Jake, eyes meeting across the bay – both of them knowing this might actually work.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - DAY**

Rehearsal has just wrapped. The "stage" area is half-struck — stands pushed aside, cables coiled, the KEYBOARD back on its stand.

The GUYS drift toward the locker room, buzzing, tired and wired all at once. Max and the band haul gear toward the door. DeeDee calls after them:

DEEDEE

Call time at the station's six,  
people!

The bay settles. Quieter now.

Nick lingers by the keyboard, gathering his lyric sheets, stuffing them into a folder. He looks wrung out but humming inside.

Jake kills a row of harsh overheads, leaving the warmer strings of CHRISTMAS LIGHTS and a couple of work lamps. The space feels suddenly more intimate.

He crosses over, hands shoved in hoodie pockets.

JAKE

Band sounded great.  
(beat)  
You did too.

Nick gives a little shrug, embarrassed.

NICK

Let's see if anyone's still awake  
enough to clap after the theater  
kids and tap-dancing reindeer.

Jake laughs, then lets the smile hang there a second longer, working up to something.

JAKE

Still.  
(beat, a little shy)  
Feels good... Having you around.

Nick freezes for half a beat. That lands. Too close to something real.

He immediately busies himself with straightening a mic stand that doesn't need it.

NICK

Oh. Uh. Yeah. It's been... nice.  
(rambling)  
You know, in a "seasonal special"  
kind of way.

Jake tilts his head.

JAKE

Okay. What does that mean?

Nick fumbles, words running ahead of his brain.

NICK

Just - I mean, this is...  
Christmas. Limited-time offer. I  
swoop in, we do the whole "save the  
firehouse" thing, and then I go  
back to New York and spend January  
writing jingles about gym  
memberships and clearance sales.

He winces at himself, but keeps going, digging.

NICK (CONT'D)

I'm not - I'm not a small-town guy,  
Jake. Not really. I'm... noise and  
deadlines and takeout and...  
whatever that life is.

(beat, softer, honest)

If I start pretending this is more  
than a visit, I'm gonna hurt  
somebody. Probably me. Maybe...  
you.

That last word slips out before he can catch it. He looks  
away, embarrassed.

Jake takes that in. A little sting, but he doesn't blow up;  
instead, he pulls back just a fraction.

JAKE

Hey. It's okay. Nobody's asking you  
to sign a lease.

Nick shakes his head, frustrated with himself.

NICK

I know, I just...

(searching)

I'm bad at... here. At staying.  
Every time it starts to feel  
like...

He gestures vaguely around them - the bay, the lights, the  
lingering warmth of rehearsal.

NICK (CONT'D)

... like this, my brain sprints  
straight to the airport. It's a  
reflex.

A beat. Jake's face softens; he gets it, even if it stings.

JAKE  
You don't have to apologise for  
being honest.

He glances toward the locker room, then back.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
We've got, what, two hours before  
we have to smile into cameras and  
try not to...? Anyway.  
(trying to keep it light)  
Let's just get through tonight. One  
thing at a time, right?

Nick looks at him, wanting to fix it and not quite knowing  
how.

NICK  
Jake, I -

JAKE  
(gentle, putting up a  
small wall)  
It's fine, Snow. Really.

He manages a small smile.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
You came back. You're helping us.  
Me. Max... well, he thinks you're  
the coolest thing since Wi-Fi.  
That's already more than I expected  
out of this week.

Nick huffs a tiny, guilty laugh.

NICK  
His bar is low.

JAKE  
Not as low as you think.

That hangs between them for a moment.

Jake nods toward the back.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
We should get changed. DeeDee will  
hunt us for sport if we're late to  
the studio.

Nick clutches his folder like a shield.

NICK  
Yeah. Right. Can't keep live  
television waiting.

Jake takes a step back, giving him space.

JAKE

I'll lock up after I grab my stuff.  
You catching a ride with Dee?

NICK

Yeah. She likes to terrify me with  
her "pre-show energy".

JAKE

(brief smile)  
Good luck with that.

For a second, it looks like one of them might say something else. They don't.

Jake turns and heads for the locker room.

Nick watches him go, kicking himself, then looks around the bay – at the lights, the trucks, the remnants of rehearsal.

He exhales, quietly.

NICK

(to himself)  
"Sprint for the airport??" Idiot.

He flicks off the last little work lamp and follows out, the echo of what almost was hanging in the air as we move toward the telecast.

**INT. CHANNEL 7 STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT**

Controlled chaos. GARLAND, FAKE SNOW, a giant "CHRISTMAS EVE SPECTACULAR" LOGO spinning on a screen.

CREW in headsets weave around CHOIRS, TAP-DANCING KIDS, and a PRECIOUS LITTLE GIRL dressed as an angel, crying into her halo.

A SIDE STAGE MONITOR shows the live broadcast: a CHURCH CHOIR mid-"O Holy Night," lower-third: "LIVE - CHRISTMAS EVE SPECTACULAR."

By a stack of SPONSOR GIFT BASKETS, our crew huddle:

Nick in black jeans and dark shirt, mic pack clipped on. The band with their gear cases, PERFORMER laminates around their necks. Jake, Tank, Wes, Ty, Drew and TWO GYM GUYS in full costume and make-up on. DeeDee in full "network holiday" mode: killer jumpsuit, subtle sparkle, CHANNEL 7 LANYARD, headset around her neck.

A HARASSED ASSISTANT PRODUCER barrels past, then double-takes.

ASSISTANT PRODUCER

Oh thank God, DeeDee. You made it.

DEEDEE

Wouldn't miss a chance to be  
exploited on my day off.

ASSISTANT PRODUCER

(already briefing)

You're Segment 5 live toss.  
Firehouse package rolls, you intro,  
then straight into the song. Five  
minutes total. Phones and pledge QR  
go hot on your first line.

She glances at the others.

ASSISTANT PRODUCER (CONT'D)

(to the firefighters)

You must be Forrest Hollow. Big fan  
of the baby-oil, by the way.

TY

(quiet panic)

Oh God, she saw the calendar!

DEEDEE

Relax, Instaboy.

The AP points to Nick.

ASSISTANT PRODUCER

You're Nick, right? Jingle guy  
turned feelings guy?

NICK

Apparently.

ASSISTANT PRODUCER

You're live from center, straight  
out of the package. Band on your  
right, firefighters behind you on  
the riser. Camera two loves you,  
don't cheat to three.

She's back in full producer mode with DeeDee:

ASSISTANT PRODUCER (CONT'D)

Dee, standards note: no f-bombs, no  
more gratuitous biceps than  
required, and if you're gonna drag  
Walter Grayson, make it "colorful"  
not "actionable."

DEEDEE

Please, Estelle. I host the morning  
show. I know how not to get sued.

ASSISTANT PRODUCER

(to DeeDee)

You toss from two, cross to them  
for the live. We'll throw you the  
phones and the QR in the prompter.

She swivels back toward the group.

ASSISTANT PRODUCER (CONT'D)

You're all gonna be great. Don't  
puke on the jib and we're gold.

She peels away.

Max peers toward the wings, where CAMERAS and LIGHT TREES  
loom.

MAX

What is that stuff?

RYAN

TV. It's TikTok for people with  
back pain.

Irving appears like a festive logistics elf, canvas DRUGSTORE  
TOTE in hand.

IRVING

Wardrobe department, reporting for  
duty.

DEEDEE

My angel of aisle seven. They look  
good, Poindexter.

IRVING

I think the word is: "fierce?"

DEEDEE

I say amen.

Irving herds the guys toward their positions.

The ASSISTANT PRODUCER pops back in, breathless.

ASSISTANT PRODUCER

(to DeeDee)

You'll hear your intro. Wait for  
the downbeat, then start. Sound  
will murder me if you step on the  
track.

Jake gives Nick a sideways look.

JAKE

You okay? (beat) You got this,  
Snow.

Nick nods, taking that in.

A FLOOR MANAGER hustles over, checking a watch.

FLOOR MANAGER

Okay, Channel 7 family: package out  
in sixty. DeeDee to two, Forrest  
Hollow to stage right holding.  
Phones go live on the cue word:  
"love".

On that word, Nick and Jake's eyes meet.

DeeDee steps into full HOST MODE and moves toward her mark  
downstage.

The BAND are waved to their tiny riser; techs plug in cables,  
clip mics.

The firefighters remove their robes. They're stunning, even  
under crappy backstage fluorescents.

FLOOR MANAGER (CONT'D)

(points toward the  
curtain)

Forrest Hollow: you're up next.  
Stand by.

GRAPHIC: "COMING UP LIVE: FORREST HOLLOW FIRE & RESCUE."

We PUSH IN on the monitor as DeeDee walks into frame,  
Christmas glow behind her, smile ready.

CUT TO STAGE.

A HIGH SCHOOL SHOW CHOIR in matching red sweaters is just  
finishing on the adjacent soundstage.

Nick clutches his mic, bouncing his knee.

A FLOOR MANAGER with a clipboard leans in.

FLOOR MANAGER (CONT'D)

Cameras two and three.

NICK

Thanks.

An ANNOUNCER VOICE (V.O.) booms over the P.A.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Let's hear it for the West Hartford  
Snowflakes!

Applause from the studio audience swells, then starts to  
fade.

Jake's PHONE BUZZES in a concealed pocket. He frowns, pulls it out. The screen: "DISPATCH - FORREST HOLLOW."

His stomach drops. He steps back a pace, thumb already swiping.

JAKE  
(into phone, low)  
Holliday.

We only hear his side.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
... yeah.  
(beat)  
How bad?  
(another beat, goes very still)  
Copy. We're in Hartford with one engine. We can be rolling in five. Get county and mutual aid en route. Keep the drive clear.

He hangs up, already moving.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
(to his crew, clipped)  
Gear up. We've got a working structure fire.

The guys stiffen, no hesitation. Whatever nerves they had about TV vanish.

TANK  
Where, Chief?

JAKE  
Grayson's place. Big house on the hill.

Nick hears that, turns.

NICK  
Wait... Walter Grayson?

Jake nods once. All the firefighters start to move towards their gear.

The FLOOR MANAGER appears again, panicked.

FLOOR MANAGER  
Okay, firefighters, places - you're on in sixty -

JAKE  
We're not, pal. We got a fire in Forrest Hollow. Confirmed entrapment.

FLOOR MANAGER

What the...? You can't just...  
we're about to go live!

JAKE

Then the folks out there will see  
how we do our job.

He looks to his crew.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Crew – engine. Now. Full kit.

They're already shrugging into masks and helmets, moving as a unit.

Nick steps forward, tearing off his mic pack.

NICK

I'm coming with you.

The Floor Manager grabs at the pack.

FLOOR MANAGER

You're our singer!

NICK

Yeah, well... they're my firehouse.

He drops the mic belt into the floor manager's hands and bolts after Jake.

ACROSS THE STAGE -

A STUDIO HAND waves frantically at DeeDee, who's just been handed a handheld mic. She's in full holiday-host glam, expecting to intro a feel-good segment.

STUDIO HAND

(urgent whisper)

Fire guys are walking! We lost the act!

DEEDEE

What?

DIRECTOR (V.O.)

DeeDee, we've got a live hole.  
Intro package is done in ten seconds. You're up. Can you stall the fire guys?

DeeDee glances toward the wings just in time to see helmets disappearing through the loading dock doors.

Her face tightens; then the host smile snaps into place. She strides out.

ON STAGE - CONTINUOUS

APPLAUSE for the kids dwindles. The choir shuffles off. DeeDee crosses into the spotlight, seamless.

DEEDEE

Wasn't that... festive? One more hand for the West Hartford Snowflakes, everybody!

She leads another burst of applause, buying seconds, her eyes flicking to the now-empty wing where the firefighters should be.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

Now... we were supposed to bring out a fire crew from a little town called Forrest Hollow right now. They came here tonight to say "Merry Christmas" in the most, uh... visual way possible.

A ripple of laughter. In her ear:

DIRECTOR (V.O.)

Dee, they're gone.

She takes that in, eyes softening, decision made.

DEEDEE

But here's the thing about firefighters, folks.

(beat)

When a call comes in, they don't get to say: "Sorry, no can do: I've got a spot on local TV."

BACKSTAGE /  
LOADING DOCK -  
INTERCUT

The FIREHOUSE ENGINE, already dressed for the show with a wreath on the grille, is roaring to life.

Tank swings up into the driver's seat. Wes, Ty, Drew and the couple of extra guys pile on, snapping buckles, tightening straps.

Jake and Nick are heading for Jake's truck. Jake yanks on his headset.

JAKE

(to his crew, on cans)

Big house. Christmas Eve. Scared folks. We go in fast, we go in smart.

Tank hits the siren.

DEEDEE (V.O.)  
I gotta tell you, folks... these  
firefighters just got that call.

ON STAGE -

A CAMERA catches, for half a second, the engine nosing past the open dock doors, lights already spinning.

DeeDee turns to camera, dropping the cutesy tone.

DEEDEE  
Right now, instead of standing here in itty-bitty shorts trying to save their fire station, the Forrest Hollow crew is driving into the dark to pull someone out of a burning house.

LOWER THIRD GRAPHIC pops up: "SAVE FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - DONATE NOW" with a TOLL-FREE NUMBER and QR CODE.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)  
(in her ear, resigned)  
Okay, okay - we're up on the pledge graphic. Keep talking, Dee. Sell it, girl.

DEEDEE  
So, here's what we're gonna do instead. If you're watching this with a full house and a full belly... and, if you've ever had somebody in turnout gear show up when you were scared out of your mind... this is your moment to say "thank you."

She gestures to the graphic.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)  
That number at the bottom of your screen? That's a direct line to our phone bank here in Hartford. Every dollar you give during the next few minutes goes to keep that firehouse open. To keep that engine five minutes away instead of twenty.

She looks straight down the lens, eyes bright.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)  
They can't dance for you tonight, folks. They're a little busy saving someone's Christmas. (beat) Let's see what kind of Christmas we can give them.

Phones begin to RING in the b.g. at the PHONE BANK.

**EXT. CHANNEL 7 BACK LOT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS**

The ENGINE blasts out into the snowy street, siren WAILING, lights painting the studio walls red and blue.

Jake's pick-up fishtails after it - Nick in the passenger seat, DeeDee in the back with her coat clutched around her, still in full makeup, phone in her hand.

JAKE  
(shouting back)  
You two stay outside the tape at  
the scene. I mean it.

NICK  
(sincere)  
Yes, Chief.

DEEDEE  
I'll call in updates if they let  
me. Live cut-ins.

Jake manages a quick, tight half-smile.

He guns it.

**EXT. HIGHWAY / BACK ROADS - NIGHT - INTERCUT**

The FORREST HOLLOW ENGINE tearing down the interstate, wreath on the front now streaked with road grit, siren howling.

Jake's TRUCK right behind.

ON DEEDEE'S PHONE - a live text thread to the control room:

DEEDEE (TEXT)  
Cut away to a puppet choir and I  
swear to God, I will end you,  
Estelle.

BACK TO:

INSIDE ENGINE -

Tank, Wes, Ty ride the sway of the road, faces set.

TY  
We still got county?

WES  
County's five out. We're first in.

Jake's voice comes over their headsets from the driver's cab.

JAKE (V.O.)  
 We go in like we've got three  
 minutes, guys, not thirty.

**EXT. GRAYSON HOUSE - NIGHT**

The curve of the road reveals WALTER GRAYSON'S HOUSE – huge, expensive... and burning. Flames lick out of a front window, smoke boiling into the winter sky.

Neighbours and FAMILY cluster at the end of the drive, lit by patrol car flashers. A LITTLE GIRL'S MOTHER is screaming. WALTER stands beside her in an open coat, stricken.

The ENGINE skids to a stop. The crew is off it before it fully settles.

JAKE  
 (shouting)  
 Tank, hydrant! Wes, Ty, line to the  
 front! Drew, 360, check the rear!  
 Move!

Nick and DeeDee pull up in the truck behind, climbing out into the cold, stopping just outside the chaos.

Nick takes in the scene: the fire, the terror, the crew already doing what they do.

He glances at DeeDee, breath clouding. He is afraid. He knows what fire can do.

She lifts her phone, already framing the engine, the fire, the men from Forrest Hollow running toward it.

**EXT. GRAYSON HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - NIGHT**

The house ROARS, flames punching out of upstairs windows, embers spiralling into the cold Christmas sky.

DEEDEE  
 (into phone)  
 It's DeeDee. Yeah. Patch this  
 straight to air. Now, Estelle!

She FLIPS the camera back around, now a live POV s – hoses coming off the truck, Tank dragging line, Wes masking up.

INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. CHANNEL 7 CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT**

Panic. PRODUCERS, TECHS, ASSISTANT DIRECTORS watching DeeDee's feed pop up on a MONITOR.

ON-SCREEN GRAPHIC: "DEEDEE JACKSON - LIVE FEED INCOMING"

PRODUCER

We got her on remote.

DIRECTOR

Take it. Take it now.

(to Graphics)

Lower-third, roll the donation  
ticker, keep the pledge number up.

A FINGER hits a button.

ON AIR:

**INT. CHANNEL 7 STUDIO - SAME TIME**

The slick ANCHOR is mid-intro with a the West Hartford  
Snowflakes - back for an unplanned encore.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

(into his ear)

We're cutting to DeeDee. Hard cut.  
Read the banner.

He blinks, recovers.

ANCHOR

We're... We're going now to a  
developing situation in Forrest  
Hollow -

The image SMASHES TO:

**EXT. GRAYSON HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - LIVE (TV VIEW)**

DeeDee's slightly shaky phone image fills the screen.

LOWER THIRD: LIVE - HOUSE FIRE, FORREST HOLLOW

TICKER ALONG BOTTOM: HELP PROTECT LOCAL DEPARTMENTS - 1-800-  
555-0199 - DONATE NOW

BACK TO:

**EXT. GRAYSON HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - NIGHT**

From DeeDee's POV: Jake barking orders. Walter and his  
family: pacing, frantic.

WALTER

She's still in there! Callie!  
CALLIE!

Jake goes straight to him.

JAKE  
Where? Which room?

WALTER  
(back of his hand to his  
mouth, coughing)  
Top of the stairs, left side. Her  
room – she was asleep, or... we  
tried –

The words crumble. Jake nods once. No time for comfort.

JAKE  
Tank, charge that line! Wes, keep  
it on the front – don't let it roll  
to the trees.

WES  
Yes, Chief!

Jake masks up, pulls his hood on.

Nick grabs his arm before he can turn.

NICK  
Jake –

Jake looks at him through the half-pulled mask for a heartbeat. There's a lot in that look: fear, resolve, something like apology.

Jake pulls the mask down, checks his seal, and runs for the door with Ty on his heels. They disappear into the blazing house just as more flames break out.

DeeDee instinctively tracks them with the phone, breath hitching.

DEEDEE  
(into camera, trying to  
stay steady)  
You're watching Chief Jake Holliday  
and his crew from Forrest Hollow  
Fire & Rescue going in on a rescue.  
(beat) I... there's a six-year-old  
girl trapped inside that house.

She shifts the frame to show Tank bracing on the nozzle, hose SNAPPING as it charges, water smashing against the flames.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)  
These are the calls they take on  
holidays, in the middle of dinner,  
in the middle of their lives. They  
don't ask whose house it is. They  
just go.

Nick stands just behind her, arms wrapped around himself, eyes glued to the front door.

The fire BELLOWS as fresh air hits it, orange crawling up and out.

INTERCUT - CHANNEL 7 BROADCAST - NIGHT

The same image, now with a SPLIT SCREEN: on the right, a PHONE BANK of VOLUNTEERS in Santa hats, phones already RINGING.

GRAPHIC:

FORREST HOLLOW FIRE & RESCUE RELIEF FUND

COUNTER: \$18,250... \$21,900... climbing.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

If you're just joining us, that's a live feed from Forrest Hollow, where a volunteer fire department fighting to stay open is on the scene at a major house fire. Stay tuned as we...

BACK TO:

**EXT. GRAYSON HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - NIGHT**

A front window BLOWS OUT, heat popping the glass. A few bystanders GASP and stumble back.

Walter stares at the door, hands clenched uselessly at his sides.

WALTER

(hoarse)

Oh God. Oh God, please -

Nick can't tear his eyes away. The sound of the fire is a living thing, a roar in his ears.

One beat. Two. It's been too long.

DEEDEE

(very soft, to herself)

Come on, Chief. Come on, baby, come on.

Nick's voice cracks, barely audible.

NICK

He said: "top of the stairs, left"- that's - that's a chimney route, right? That's - that's bad.

DeeDee doesn't answer. She can't, but she takes Nick's hand. Her jaw is tight, eyes shining but locked on the door.

The hose stream slams into the open doorway, steam blasting.

Then – for a moment, it seems like the noise and the fire stop: suspended.

Nick breathes in sharply.

A SHAPE in the smoke.

Jake appears in the door, hunched, one arm around a SMALL BUNDLE under his coat. Ty is beside him, steadying him as they clear the threshold.

DeeDee's phone ZOOMS in slightly, unsteady hands trying to keep focus.

DEEDEE  
 (barely containing it)  
 Oh my... There he is! He's got her  
 – he's got her!

Jake stumbles into the cold air, yanks his mask up with his free hand, coughing, eyes streaming.

INTERCUT – INT. CHANNEL 7 STUDIO – PHONE BANK – LIVE

The PHONE BANK erupts.

VOLUNTEERS, in Santa hats and headset mics, CHEER with abandon, some jumping out of their chairs, others wiping at their eyes as they keep answering CALL AFTER CALL.

ON MONITOR: DeeDee's live feed of Jake carrying Callie out.

DONATION COUNTER in the corner JUMPS: \$63,400... \$78,900... \$91,250...

A VOLUNTEER slaps a POST-IT on the edge of a monitor:  
 "FORREST HOLLOW PASSES \$100K!"

PRODUCER  
 (shouting over the noise)  
 Stay on DeeDee, stay on DeeDee –  
 leave the ticker up. Don't change a  
 goddam thing.

Phones keep RINGING. A VOLUNTEER answers, beaming through tears.

VOLUNTEER  
 (into headset)  
 Yes ma'am, Forrest Hollow Fire &  
 Rescue – I... thank you so much.  
 I'll tell them you said so, ma'am.  
 I know. I know. It's...

She starts to cry.

VOLUNTEER (CONT'D)

Thank you. (beat) Merry Christmas,  
ma'am.

SMASH BACK TO:

**EXT. GRAYSON HOUSE - NIGHT**

Tank is moving towards Jake and Callie. A PARAMEDIC with an OXYGEN KIT runs with him.

Jake peels his coat open with shaking fingers.

Inside: CALLIE (6), face streaked with soot, hair damp with sweat and smoke. She coughs, a thin rasp that turns into a whimper.

It is the best sound anyone has ever heard.

MOTHER

Callie!

She lunges, but the paramedic gently intercepts. Jake looks like he's about to pass out.

Tank scoops the girl up from Jake's arms like she weighs nothing.

TANK

I got you, kiddo. I got you.

Callie blinks up at him, dazed, then clutches at his neck, burying her face against his soot-stained collar.

CALLIE

(muffled)

Don't let go, sir.

TANK

Not gonna happen, kid. You're stuck  
with me now, okay? Okay, honey.

He carries her toward the medics. Her mother staggers alongside, sobbing, reaching to stroke her hair.

DeeDee's breathing is audible on the feed, but her VOICE when she speaks is surprisingly steady.

DEEDEE

(into camera)

The little girl you're seeing right  
now is six-year-old Callie Grayson,  
folks.

(MORE)

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

She's alive because this crew of firefighters ran into that house when every instinct told them to run the other way.

She pans slightly to catch the fire still chewing at the roof, the line crews working the stream.

Beat.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

So, if you ever wondered what "four-minute response time" really means... this is it. It's the difference between a scare and a funeral, people. Between smoke in your curtains and losing your whole world.

INTERCUT - CHANNEL 7 BROADCAST

Same shot, full frame.

DONATION COUNTER: jumping in real time.

WIDER: the STUDIO, phone lines lighting up, volunteers rattling off pledges, wiping their eyes.

BACK TO:

**EXT. GRAYSON HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - NIGHT**

Jake is on his knees in the grass now, mask off, gloves half-peeled, gulping cold air, coughing hard. Steam rises off his gear in the frosty night.

For a beat he just kneels there, shoulders heaving.

Nick takes a half-step like he's going to run to him... then stops, watching instead. Whatever crush he had has been replaced by something deeper, sharper. Awe. Fear. Love, though he wouldn't dare say it yet.

DeeDee keeps filming, but her tone shifts - less broadcaster, more witness.

DEEDEE

(soft, into phone)

This is what they do when no one's watching, folks. Christmas Eve. A Tuesday in February. Three in the morning in the rain. They get the call. They go.

Jake groans and forces himself back to his feet, even now already scanning the structure.

JAKE

Wes, keep that line on the B-side!  
Don't let it climb that tree! Ty,  
check that attic vent, buddy.

The crew MOVES – tired, soaked, but relentless.

DeeDee lifts the phone a little higher, getting the whole tableau: fire, engine, men, medics, the crying family, snow starting to drift through the smoke.

DEEDEE

(to camera)

Tonight you're seeing one crew in  
one little town. But there are  
thousands more like them out there  
looking out for you. (beat) Times  
are hard, I know, but if you can...  
that number at the bottom of your  
screen is how you say: "We see you.  
We need you. Thank you."

She disconnects the feed. DeeDee speaks quietly, almost to himself.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

I knew fire was dangerous. I  
just... didn't know it looked like  
that.

Nick nods once, still watching Jake and the others working the lines.

NICK

Nobody does. Not really.  
(beat)  
Not until they're standing on a  
lawn like this.

Walter stands a few yards away, frozen. His face is a mess – soot, tears, shock. He can't quite bring himself to step closer to Jake.

Jake, still coughing, finally notices him. Their eyes meet.

For the first time tonight, Walter looks away first, shame slamming into him.

INTERCUT – CHANNEL 7 BROADCAST

COUNTER: over \$200,000 now, phones STILL RINGING.

A PRODUCER scribbles something, thrusts it at the ANCHOR.

The ANCHOR looks back to camera, moved.

ANCHOR

We... Ladies and gentlemen, I have just been told that, thanks to your calls, Forrest Hollow has surpassed the amount they needed to keep their station open.

Applause breaks out in the studio, uncontrolled and completely genuine.

ANCHOR (CONT'D)

But, if you'd like to help them rebuild after what you're seeing tonight - and to support departments just like them all across our state - please, please keep those calls coming.

BACK TO:

**EXT. GRAYSON HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - NIGHT**

The worst of the flames are knocked down now, the house a smouldering, steaming ruin. The ladder is being bedded, hose lines repacked. It's the messy, tired end of the call.

Walter finally forces himself forward, crossing the wet, churned-up lawn toward Jake.

Jake is wiping his face with a soot-blackened towel, exhausted.

WALTER

(voice low, wrecked)  
Jake. I...

Jake looks up, wary, too tired to hide it.

Walter's eyes are wet. He swallows hard.

WALTER (CONT'D)

I... I don't know how thank you for what you did. For my granddaughter. For my family.

Jake starts to shrug it off.

JAKE

You don't have to, Walter.

WALTER

(over him, urgent)  
I do. And I have to say something else.

He glances around – at the truck, at Tank leaning against the bumper with Callie's stuffed toy tucked in his gear, at Wes coiling hose, at Ty joking with a paramedic.

Walter takes a breath like he's about to jump off a cliff.

WALTER (CONT'D)

The foreclosure? The arrears? It's done. Forget it.

(beat, clearer)

Grayson Properties is forgiving the debt. Every goddam cent.

Jake just stares at him. Nick, a few feet away, goes still.

WALTER (CONT'D)

And... And whatever else the station needs – repairs, new equipment, whatever those pledges tonight don't cover – I'll fund it. Personally. No strings. No leases. The firehouse stays the firehouse for as long as you, or anyone like you, wears that badge.

Silence. Even the other firefighters have gone quiet, listening.

Wes looks over and smiles. Tank straightens. Ty looks like he's about to cry.

Jake takes that in, jaw flexing.

JAKE

You don't have to do that because you feel –

WALTER

I'm doing it because I finally know what that crappy building in Forrest Hollow really is.

(glances at the ruins of his house)

It's not drywall and nostalgia, Chief. It's the place the people who just saved my granddaughter call home.

His voice cracks on "granddaughter." He clears his throat.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Son, tonight I watched my world almost disappear in eight minutes.

(beat)

I'm not gonna be the man who takes a firehouse away from the guys who run toward things the rest of us run away from.

Jake doesn't have a speech. He just looks... stunned. And, beneath it, relieved beyond words.

JAKE  
Thank you, Walter.

Walter nods, eyes glassy, and steps back before he loses it completely.

Nick moves closer to Jake, not quite touching him yet.

NICK  
You okay, big guy?

Jake lets out a ragged half-laugh.

JAKE  
Ask me after twelve hours' sleep.

Nick nods, eyes bright.

NICK  
You just saved a kid, a mansion,  
and a firehouse. That's... kind of  
a lot for one night.

Jake looks at him, something new and unguarded in his gaze.

JAKE  
I didn't do it alone.

Nick and Jake look at the crew - still hard at work. Snow drifts down around them, soft on soot and steam and Christmas lights from the distant town.

DeeDee looks between the two of them, then back at the engine, at the crew.

DEEDEE  
(softly, to herself)  
You said it, baby. Christmas is  
love.

We PULL BACK:

The charred house, the engine, the tiny knot of people - family, firefighters, friends - lit by strobes and the last guttering flames.

WE HEAR:

ANCHOR (V.O.)  
... and to every first responder  
out there on duty tonight - and  
every night - we see you, we love  
you, and we are so, so grateful.  
(beat, full of emotion) Merry  
Christmas, everyone.

The camera holds just a little longer on Jake and his crew, framed by falling snow.

**INT. FORREST HOLLOWES FIREHOUSE - DAY**

The bay has never looked warmer. TWO LONG TABLES pushed between the trucks, covered in mismatched holiday tablecloths, paper plates, crockpots, casseroles.

STRING LIGHTS run along the rafters, the big WREATH still hanging over the main door. The place hums with voices, LAUGHTER, CLINKS.

ANGLE ON:

Maggie at the "carb end" of the table, dishing potatoes, laughing with Flo from the Lantern Pub, who's brought two giant foil pans of wings.

Lou from the Gazette, in his nicest flannel, arguing cheerfully with anyone who'll listen about whether this counts as a "real" pierogi.

Chloe snapping candid photos, Max and Ryan beside her, loading plates like teenage boys on a mission.

A COUPLE OF COPS, NURSES, and TOWNSFOLK who clearly don't have anywhere else to be - and are totally at home here.

At one table, Tank sits at the head like a gentle mountain, an arm around his WIFE (30s, tiny next to him) while THREE LITTLE GIRLS (8, 6, 4) in matching sparkly dresses climb all over him, putting reindeer antlers and tinsel on his head.

Nearby, Wes stands by the coffee urn, topping up cups, quietly making sure everyone has what they need.

DeeDee swoops over, balancing a plate in one hand, a plastic cup of punch in the other.

DEEDEE

You know this is your fault, right?

WES

The fire? The fundraiser? The carbs?

DEEDEE

All of it. No one got to see your beautiful choreography, Wes.

He smiles, a little shy. A beat.

WES

You did.

She grins, eyes soft. Above him, a SMALL PIECE OF MISTLETOE hangs from a string on the light cord.

She clocks it. So does he. A beat.

DEEDEE

Huh. Look at that. Holiday regulations.

WES

Think we're obligated?

DEEDEE

Pretty sure it's the law.

She leans in. He meets her halfway. A warm, unhurried KISS. A couple of FIREFIGHTERS at the next table HOOT; Tank's girls GIGGLE.

DeeDee pulls back, gives Wes a "we'll talk later" look that's basically a promise.

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

Merry Christmas, Strong-and-Pretty.

WES

Merry Christmas, Bossy-and-Terrifying.

They clink plastic cups.

ON ANOTHER CORNER

Ty and Irving stand near the dessert table, holding hands.

They are VERY OBVIOUSLY a matched set: same deep green, same red-and-cream plaid, but:

Irving's outfit is full PREPPY: sweater neatly over a collared shirt, jeans. Bow tie.

Ty's midriff-tee is cropped worryingly short; plaid shirt tied at his waist, showing off the abs, even on Christmas.

TY

(to Nick, excited)

Bro, you gotta see this. We... uh, we took it this morning.

He shoves his phone in Nick's face – an INSTAGRAM POST: Ty & Irving in MATCHING CHRISTMAS PJs. Ty is only wearing the bottoms, of course. Hashtag: #instaofficial.

NICK

Oh my God!

TY

I told Irv there's no point being hot if you don't hard-launch occasionally.

Nick looks between them, genuinely happy.

NICK

About time, lovebirds. You two were basically subtweeting each other in real life anyway.

Irving blushes; Ty beams and leans into him just a little.

TY

(kissing Nick on the cheek)

Merry Christmas, Jingle Daddy.

NICK

You too, Instaboy. (beat) Wait... "DADDY"???

ACROSS THE ROOM

Maggie wipes her hands on a dish towel, crosses to Nick with a warm hug and another quick kiss to his cheek.

MAGGIE

He called again.

Nick's face softens instantly.

NICK

Daddy? (realizing) Uh, I mean Dad?

MAGGIE

Nurse said he's been making them replay DeeDee's clip every hour.

NICK

Every hour? That's so... Dad.

MAGGIE

Apparently he keeps saying, "That's my crew."

(beat, a little teary, proud)

He's so proud of you, Nicky. We both are.

Nick swallows, moved.

NICK

We'll go see him after. Bring him leftovers. Tell him the potatoes were a triumph.

MAGGIE

They are a cry for help is what they are, but I'll allow it.

She squeezes his arm and moves off to refill someone's plate.

Jake appears at Nick's shoulder, two mugs of coffee in hand. He offers one over.

JAKE

You okay?

Nick takes it, nods.

NICK

Yeah.

(beat)

Dad's still watching it. The clip. Dee says the donation website almost crashed twice already.

Jake smiles, a little overwhelmed.

JAKE

Max saw it on the morning news. The money from last night is gonna go to first response units all over the state.

They stand a second, taking in the room: Tank with his kids; Chloe, Max and Ryan; Flo arguing with Lou about whose stuffing is better; DeeDee and Wes trying not to dodge the mistletoe. Ty - shirt off, for reasons no one understands. He and Irving are taking totally unnecessary but adorable selfies in front of the shiny truck.

It's a family - the chosen kind.

NICK

Jake?

JAKE

Yeah?

NICK

I... there's something I think I need to say.

Jakes looks at him as if to say "and?"

NICK (CONT'D)

But... just give me a second, okay?

JAKE

Sure.

Nick heads over to DeeDee and the kids in the band, whispering something Jake can't hear. They head over to the instruments set up in the corner.

NICK

(on mic)

I think this is probably - sorry,  
 Mom - the best Christmas I...  
 (emotional) And to be here with...  
 And this place... And you guys...  
 and (beat) Wow, I really suck at  
 this. Anyway, I just wanted you  
 to... Y'know what? (to the band)  
 Just hit it.

The band nods and smiles. Ryan looks proud enough to burst. DeeDee steps up to stand beside Nick.

NICK (CONT'D)

(singing)

*City streets are shining, but I  
 still feel alone.  
 Every song I'm writing sells a  
 dream I don't own.  
 All the neon halos, all the silver  
 and gold  
 Can't compare to a porch light in  
 the cold.  
 Caught up in the hurry, in a world  
 moving fast,  
 Chasing every jingle for a check  
 that won't last,  
 But then I see your smile in this  
 old hometown glow  
 And suddenly I'm not so scared to  
 slow  
 And the snow keeps falling down On  
 this little nowhere town,  
 But in your eyes I see the  
 brightest spark.  
 So, light up my heart this  
 Christmas night,  
 Turn on the stars with a single  
 smile.  
 Take all the dark I've carried for  
 miles,  
 And chase it away with your  
 candlelight.  
 If home is a place where the  
 healing starts,  
 Then baby, you light up my heart.*

DEEDEE

(singing)

*Christmas windows shining warm  
 through the frost.*

(MORE)

DEEDEE (CONT'D)

*Every face a story of a battle  
we've lost,  
But we keep on standing, side by  
side in the storm  
Holding out for a better kind of  
dawn.*

NICK

(singing)

*Your boy's in the doorway, in his  
too-big coat  
Humming my old jingle like a secret  
note  
And somehow this station, with its  
cracked red doors,  
Feels like something I've been  
searching for,  
And the bells are ringing clear  
Saying "you belong right here".  
In every broken, beautiful part.  
So light up my heart, this  
Christmas night,  
Turn on the stars with a single  
smile.  
Take all the dark I've carried for  
miles  
And chase it away with your  
candlelight.  
If home is a place where the  
healing starts,  
Then baby, you light up my heart.  
I was lost in the noise, in the  
jingles and lines,  
Selling joy in a bottle, never  
tasting mine.*

DEEDEE

(singing, taking Wes'  
hand)

*But your hand in my hand is a brand-  
new refrain:  
A melody stronger than the cold or  
the pain.  
Let the snow fall, let the nights  
get long.  
If I've got your love, I've already  
won.*

NICK

(singing, taking Jake's  
hand)

*I don't need the city, I don't need  
the fame,  
Just whisper my name.  
Light up my heart this Christmas  
night.  
Hold me close under twinkling  
skies.*

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

*I don't need gifts, I just need  
your eyes  
To tell me that everything's gonna  
be alright.  
So light up my heart, this  
Christmas night.  
Turn on the stars with a single  
smile.  
Take all the dark I've carried for  
miles,  
And chase it away with your  
candlelight.  
If home is a place where the  
healing starts,  
Then here in your arms, in this old  
small town,  
With the firehouse glow and the  
snow coming down,  
You're the only wish on my midnight  
chart.  
Oh baby, you light up my heart.  
Yeah, baby, you light up my heart.*

The bay erupts in applause, love and laughter. Jake looks on the verge of tears. He pulls Nick into an embrace and kisses the top of his head.

Max and Ryan are watching intently - they beam with joy. They high-five. Ryan puts a brotherly arm around Max.

RYAN

I told you, bro.

Max rests his head on Ryan's shoulder. A big brother, at last.

Nick takes Jake's hug in his stride, and then - everything goes quiet for a moment: time, suspended - he melts into Jake's big chest. This is where he's meant to be. Nothing else matters.

After a moment, Nick and Jake look into each other's eyes: nothing hidden, nothing held back.

JAKE

That was... I... You... That was...  
Wow.

Jake's eyes fill with tears.

NICK

Oh, I... Jake. I'm sorry. I  
thought...

JAKE

You are amazing. Nick, I...

He pauses; looks at the door.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You wanna, maybe, get some fresh air?

Nick looks at him. The "temporary" is gone for good.

NICK

I really do.

Jake nods them toward the bay door.

JAKE

Hey, Max — ten minutes. Don't let anyone torch the place while the firemen are drunk.

MAX

No promises, Dad.

LAUGHTER. Jake and Nick head for the big door.

**EXT. FORREST HOLLOW FIREHOUSE - NIGHT**

COLD AIR and WINTER LIGHT spill in. The FIREHOUSE is dressed in its finest: the big RED DOOR, the huge WREATH, a dusting of snow on everything.

Jake shoves his hands in his coat pockets; suddenly a little shy.

JAKE

So.

NICK

So.

A beat. Their breath clouds in the air between them.

NICK (CONT'D)

I, uh... never said thank you. For... literally everything.

JAKE

You dragged my crew into designer undies, a calendar, a TV show, and a burning building, and yet somehow we still have a firehouse. Call it even.

Nick smiles, then grows serious.

NICK

Listen: I was an idiot. Yesterday. With that whole "temporary" speech.

Jake looks at him, listening.

NICK (CONT'D)

I was scared. Of this place. Of you. Of...

(gesturing back toward the bay)

All of it. It felt easier to pretend I was just visiting. Helping out. Going back to my shiny, morally questionable life.

JAKE

And now?

Nick takes a breath, surprising himself with how simple it is to say.

NICK

Now my dad's watching a video of you running into a house fire, and this town still has a station because a bunch of sexy idiots took their clothes off.

(long beat)

And I've fallen for the guy who made me remember that Christmas is...

He stops, but Jake knows the rest.

JAKE

... love.

Nick nods, a little helpless.

NICK

You remembered.

A quiet smile from Jake.

JAKE

For the record, you're not the only one who panics when things get real.

NICK

Yeah?

JAKE

Yeah.

He steps a little closer.

JAKE (CONT'D)

So, if you wanna be "temporary," Snow, say it now. (beat) I mean: Max already put you on the family WhatsApp group. (gesturing to the firehouse) And the guys.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

Irving, of course... Also Flo, for some reason?

(beat, laugh)

It's a big group.

Nick swallows, eyes shiny.

NICK

Jake, I don't want temporary.

(beat, honest)

I want here. You. The station. This crazy family we have. All of it.

That lands. Jake's face opens in quiet, relieved joy.

JAKE

Okay then.

NICK

Okay.

Jake reaches up: one hand gently at the back of Nick's neck, thumb brushing the line of his jaw.

FRAMED in the giant WREATH on the red firehouse door behind them, they finally KISS.

It's not movie-perfect – a little laugh, a nose bump, more real than slick – but it's sure, warm, absolutely right.

From inside, we HEAR a CHEER and a WOLF WHISTLE – DeeDee and Wes are peeking through the bay door.

DEEDEE

It's about damn time!

WES

Now that's what I call Christmas.

I'm just saying.

DeeDee and Wes head back in to the party, laughing.

Beat.

NICK

We're never gonna hear the end of this, are we?

JAKE

Good. (beat, earnest) I don't want to hear the end of it. Ever.

NICK

Neither do I, Chief.

The snow is coming down heavily now. Nick and Jake look out on Forrest Hollow – the warmth from the firehouse; the glow of friends and family – and love.

They look into each other's eyes.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Merry Christmas, Holliday.

JAKE  
Merry Christmas, Snow.

Beat. They suddenly clock the irony.

NICK  
That's not weird, right? The whole  
Holliday/Snow thing? I didn't  
even...

JAKE  
Get your ass inside, Snow.

Beat.

NICK  
You kept those itty-bitty red  
shorts though, right?

JAKE  
Inside!

They both laugh. Jake pulls Nick back in for one more kiss.

JAKE (CONT'D)  
(whispering in his ear)  
'Course I did.

Nick beams. Jake opens the door. Warm LIGHT and CHEERS spill out.

They go inside together; into their chosen family, and the noise, love and chaos of a firehouse Christmas.

FADE OUT.

**THE END.**