

ELF-ANALYSIS

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. BOSTON SUBURB - LATE NOVEMBER - NIGHT

Snow-covered streets. Cold, quiet night. Christmas lights adorn most of the homes. All but one.

INT. VERDEN HOUSE - CAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stuffed animals, neatly arranged. The room is dim but for the sparkling Christmas lights from outside. They taunt CAL VERDEN, 7, who watches from his window. He sighs on the glass.

His mother, JOY, 30, cynical masquerading as skeptical, enters holding a mug of hot cocoa. Cal notices her in the doorway.

CAL
Can we go sledding tomorrow?

JOY
We'll see.

CAL
You always say that. Can't we at least put our Christmas lights up?

Joy stalls.

CAL
We'll see, right?

JOY
I wasn't gonna say that. We can if you want to.

CAL
Even Holly's dad put up his lights. And he's lazy.

JOY
In a month it all comes down anyway.

CAL
Isn't that supposed to happen?

Joy gives him the minor victory. Cal props his elbows on the window sill and sulks. Joy sneaks up on him and draws a heart on the foggy window before exiting. Cal scribbles the heart away. Back come the taunting lights.

INT. JOY'S OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - MORNING

Joy's secretary, MARTI, 20s and aglow with the euphoria of newfound love, hums as she strings Christmas lights. Joy stomps in wearing shades and a black leather coat.

JOY

Traffic was a nightmare. What are you smiling about?

MARTI

Met someone. Is it that obvious?

Joy removes her shades in time to roll her eyes.

JOY

When did this happen?

MARTI

Over the weekend. Over coffee.

JOY

Ahh... a Thanksgiving arrival.

MARTI

What's wrong with Thanksgiving?

JOY

Nothing, it's my second favorite holiday. But aren't you a little suspicious of the timing?

She smirks at the Christmas lights Marti is clinging to.

MARTI

It's a good thing you're not cynical, Joy.

JOY

(whisking away)
As long as he makes you happy...

MARTI

He won't.

JOY

(spins back)
What?

MARTI

... make me happy. Or unhappy.
That's up to me.

Another eye roll from Joy. She disappears into her office.

MARTI

What's your favorite holiday?

JOY (O.S.)

Boo!

INT. JOY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Utilitarian. Joy hangs up her coat. Powers up her laptop. She straightens out a desk already neat.

LAPTOP SCREEN

Muted blue. Joy finds a wallpaper befitting the season - Christmas wrapping paper. Saves it. Then un-saves it.

A knock on the door frame. A handsome MAN, 30s, sharply dressed, stands in the doorway.

HANDSOME MAN

Joy Verden?

JOY

Yes?

He glides over and hands her a large envelope.

HANDSOME MAN

Happy holidays.

He strides away.

JOY

Likewise.

She tears into the envelope, skims the contents, drops it on her desk and stews.

JOY

Marti, get in here.

Marti appears in the doorway.

MARTI

What's up?

JOY

What'd I say about letting people in off the street?

MARTI

He was so well-dressed.

JOY

All the more reason. Don't let it happen again.

MARTI

What's wrong?

Joy debates whether to open up to Miss Newfound Love.

JOY

Ted's filing for divorce.

MARTI

I'm so sorry.

JOY

You can go back to decorating now.

INT. MR. TECLER'S OFFICE - LATER

Drab, no windows. A small desk in the corner. Joy squints at MR. TECLER, 50s and slicked-back hair. He cleans a walk-in bird cage that takes up a good chunk of his office.

MR. TECLER

What you're suggesting is preposterous. Ludicrous. Zany, even.

JOY

If you don't give your employees more latitude, they're gonna walk. I've seen it happen before.

Mr. Tecler approaches Joy ominously. Gazes at her through the bars.

MR. TECLER

You psychiatrists slay me.

JOY

Psychologist.

MR. TECLER

Why don't I put every decision into the grubby little hands of my employees? Wouldn't that be nice?

JOY

You'll grow your company. Move to Cambridge. Maybe even get yourself a window.

Mr. Tecler lowers his head. And raises his eyes.

MR. TECLER

I've been in this room for six years now, Joy. I know they'll never let me out while I'm alive.

Joy furrows her brow.

MR. TECLER

You know what you look like to me with those Dolce and Gabbana shoes?

JOY

Armani.

MR. TECLER

You look like a rune.

JOY

A rune is a symbol. Are we done?

MR. TECLER

And that accent. Pure Revere Beach.

JOY

I grew up in Connecticut.

MR. TECLER

What does your father do? Is he a fisherman? Does he stink of the clams?

JOY

Fffeffffefffeffe.

Mr. Tecler looks at her like she stole his line.

JOY

Is your AC running?

INT. BLACK VOLVO - PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Christmas tree vendor. Joy searches impatiently for a parking spot. Cal plays with a Rubik's Cube in the back seat.

JOY

I just looove the holidays.

CAL

Me, too.

Joy spies a spot, flicks on her blinker. A large SUV beats her to the punch.

JOY

Real nice. And a Happy New Year...

She zooms away. Joy has to slam on her brakes as a HAPPY COUPLE, 20s, crosses her path. Joy strums the steering wheel. Insult to injury, the Couple waves at Joy.

JOY

... Isn't that sweet.

She honks her horn, startling them. Finally, a smile from Joy.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE VENDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Joy and Cal walk through a maze of Christmas trees.

JOY

See one you like?

Cal points to the biggest one. Joy sighs.

JOY

Of course.

She turns to the ATTENDANT, 30s.

JOY

How much for the tall one?

ATTENDANT

Eighty.

JOY

Eighty?

ATTENDANT

That's right.

JOY

Don't you have any cost-effective trees? You know... less insane.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

A few icy patches. Joy looks on as the Attendant ties a mid-sized tree to the roof of the Volvo. Her cell phone rings, she checks the display: Unknown Caller.

JOY
Hello?

STAN (phone)
Is this Joy Verden?

JOY
Speaking. Who's this?

STAN (phone)
My name is Stan Lacusa. I understand
you're the one to call.

JOY
For what?

STAN (phone)
I could really use some help with my
workforce.

JOY
How did you get this number?

STAN (phone)
I Googled "Best behavioral
psychologist in the world" and clicked
"I'm Feeling Lucky." Was I wrong?

Joy turns a look at Cal. He waves at her through the window.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The mood is festive. Tiny Christmas lights adorn the walls. Joy is greeted by the HOSTESS, 20s.

HOSTESS
Hi. Do you have a reservation?

JOY
I'm meeting Stan Lacusa. Is he here?

HOSTESS
(big grin that
unsettles Joy)
Follow me.

Joy follows her through a maze of tables and wait staff.

Seated at a corner table is STAN LACUSA, 35, full beard and boyish, blue eyes. A little chubby, but an even bigger smile. Before him lies a smorgasbord of food. As Joy nears, Stan checks his watch, playacting that she's late.

STAN
(leading an orchestra)
Joy to the world... the --

Joy's look stops him cold. The Hostess smiles and leaves.

STAN
I'm happy to finally meet you. Thanks
for coming.

JOY
Is this all for you?

STAN
Now what kind of host would I be?

Joy gawks at the table: serving dishes filled with ribs, fish, and roast beef garnish a Thanksgiving-sized turkey.

JOY
A hungry one?

STAN
I hope you packed an appetite.

JOY
I'm vegetarian.

STAN
Oh no, not that.

He gleefully uncovers a serving dish stacked with falafel, decorated with hummus, tabouleh and warm pita.

STAN
Do you falafel?

Joy squints at him. Stan lets it go, hurries to pull out her chair. He pops the cork, pours the champagne.

STAN
A little Christmas spirit.

JOY
Tell me, Mr. Lacusa --

STAN
Stan. Please.

JOY

Are you from Boston?

STAN

Not especially. But I visit as much as possible.

JOY

Not especially. What does that mean?

STAN

I travel a lot. Your hockey team could use a swift kick in the pants, lemme tell ya.

He tears into a turkey leg.

JOY

Where's your company?

STAN

Up north. I'm a toy manufacturer.

JOY

And it's a workforce problem you said?

STAN

They've gone completely lackluster on me. Completely.

He goes for a barbecued rib.

JOY

What seems to be the problem?

STAN

They just lounge around all day. It's pathetic.

JOY

How long has this been going on?

STAN

Columbus Day, I think.

JOY

(samples a falafel)
So fire them.

STAN

That doesn't sound very therapeutic.

JOY

Leave that to me. How far up north are you?

STAN

Don't worry about travel expenses. I got that covered. You feel like a trip?

He snags a slab of roast beef.

JOY

I'm not sure I could. It's just me and my son.

STAN

Bring him. We got day-care. What's your hourly rate?

JOY

I normally charge a flat fee.

STAN

How does twenty-five thousand sound for a month of your time? Too flat?

JOY

No... it's got a nice slope.

Stan goes fishing for a piece of scrod. Joy gapes at him.

STAN

Helps to put on a few where I'm from.

JOY

And where is that again?

Stan signals to a Waiter for more bubbly. He slides his business card over to Joy. Phone: 555-1225. Slogan: Make Merry Everyday.

STAN

I'll have a car pick you up. Tomorrow morning?

JOY

It's such short notice.

STAN

Hey, if I could change when Christmas falls, I would. Tuck it between Valentine's and Memorial Day.

JOY

All my clients are local.

STAN

Sounds sort of bland.

JOY

I didn't go into psychology for the entertainment.

Stan nods, she's got him on that one. Across the way, a HUSBAND, 40s, has it out with the CHEF over the tenderness of his steak. Very animated. OTHERS look on. Including Stan.

STAN

Look, there's a new client now. I really should visit the city more often. So much... activity.

His cat-that-ate-the-canary smile overpowers Joy.

INT. VERDEN HOUSE - JOY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Joy packs clothes into two giant suitcases.

CAL

But I don't wanna go on a trip.

JOY

You don't? Do you have a fever?

CAL

When's Dad coming home?

JOY

Forget about that for now.

CAL

Forget about it? How long's he gonna be away?

JOY

Guess who doesn't have to go to school for the rest of the year?

CAL

(looks at her askew)
Don't lie to me, Mom.

Joy nods with a big grin. Cal gapes. And does a dance.

JOY

Are you gonna be okay?

CAL
Oh I'll be okay, Mom.

He spins and spins, jigs his way out of the room.

JOY
Aren't you gonna help me pack?

No reply. Joy stares at the pillow on the right side of the bed. She tucks it underneath the bed. Centers the other.

EXT. AIRPORT - MORNING

A limo comes to a stop on the tarmac. Joy and Cal get out.

CAL
Whoa!

A private jet is parked twenty yards away. The outside is painted like Christmas wrapping paper, oddly similar to the wallpaper that Joy nearly downloaded to her laptop.

JOY
He didn't say anything about
airplanes.

Cal takes off toward the mobile staircase.

JOY
Cal, get back here!

INT. PRIVATE JET - CONTINUOUS

Joy rushes in. Stupefied. The entire plane is tricked out with toys. She scans them all: action figures, toy boats, stuffed animals, you name it.

JOY
Cal, where are you? Answer me.

A rustling from a mound of Nerf footballs. Joy hurries over, slips on a squeaky toy and falls. She's quickly covered in toys. Joy gets up, goes fishing in the mound of footballs and yanks out her son.

JOY
Cal Verden, don't you ever do that
to me again. You hear me? Say you're
sorry.

Cal reaches for a football like it's his dying wish.

JOY
Cal...?

CAL
Touchdown!

Joy drops him onto the pile. Cal can't stop giggling.

INT. PRIVATE JET - NIGHT

Joy sits at the rear of the plane writing a Christmas card. Signs it: JOY, TED -- scribbles through Ted's name. She tears up the card, discards it in the airsickness bag.

She leans back and shuts her eyes.

JOY
Make me sick.

INT. PRIVATE JET - LATER

Joy is asleep, cozy inside her blanket. Cal scampers down the aisle and shakes her awake.

CAL
Mom, wake up. We're here.

EXT. PRIVATE JET/RUNWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Joy and Cal step out onto a mobile staircase, their jaws drop. A vast landscape of snow and ice.

Down below, WOLF and AURA, 20s, wait beside a jeep. Wolf is rangy, with furry eyebrows. Aura has a slim nose and slender lips. They wave heartily at Joy and Cal, who stand frozen.

WOLF
Welcome to the North Pole.

AURA
How was your flight?

CAL
Whoa...

His awe is met by a gust of wind... shivering them both. Joy takes Cal's hand, stiffly descends the stairs.

JOY
You did not just say that.

WOLF

Let's get you two warmed up.

Wolf and Aura reach into the back of the jeep and remove extra large jackets, gloves, hats, scarves and ear muffs. They get to work bundling up Joy and Cal, who can't move.

AURA

Better?

Joy exhales a cloud of steam in her face.

INT. JEEP - MOMENTS LATER

They rumble along the snow and ice. Joy and Cal cling to each other in the back seat.

JOY

You're driving us to a warmer airport.
Isn't that right? Hello?

Out of the darkness, lights begin to appear. Christmas lights. More and more. Cal sits up.

CAL

Awesome...

A sprawling Winter Wonderland. The Christmas lights are strung between candy canes the size of telephone poles.

CAL

Look, Mom!

He points at a herd of reindeer. The jeep veers down a hill.

CAL

This is cool.

JOY

This is cold.

EXT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - CONTINUOUS

The size of a skyscraper, the shape of an oversized candy cane. Red and white swirls climb 77 stories high.

INT. JEEP - CONTINUOUS

Joy and Cal gawk at the monstrous candy cane.

JOY

This better not be a reality show.

EXT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - CONTINUOUS

Stan waits out front. Dressed head-to-toe as none other than Santa Claus. He wears neither a fake (white) beard nor a wig. But he does carry four hot cocoas in a cardboard holder. The jeep comes to a stop, everyone exits.

STAN

Merrrry Christmas! And welcome to the North --

JOY

Are you crazy?! What the hell do you think you're doing?!

STAN

I'm sorry, Joy, we don't use that word around here.

JOY

I don't care what word you use.

STAN

It frightens the elves.
(points at Cal)
Train set and an Xbox, right?

Cal hollers in delight, jumps up and down.

JOY

Hell, hell, hell.
(points at Stan)
Paranoid schizophrenic with delusions of grandeur, right?

STAN

If I was, would I know?

Joy stops to give it a think. She spots Cal by her feet, making a snow angel.

JOY

Cal, get up here.

STAN

They grow up so fast, don't they?

JOY

You shut up. Did somebody put you up to this? My lecherous husband, for example?

STAN

No, ho, ho... Please, have some hot cocoa. It'll make you feel better.

JOY

I don't want any stupid cocoa. You tricked us.

CAL

Can I have some, Mom?

JOY

No, you can't. You don't think you should've *mentioned* your company's in the North Pole? Who does this?

STAN

(peers down at himself)
I thought it would be obvious.

JOY

I'll show you "up north."

She nears Stan with a clenched fist. Wolf and Aura step in her way. Joy tries to deke around them but Wolf and Aura are well-trained defenders of Santa Claus.

JOY

You're a stalker, aren't you. I should've known.

STAN

Research is part of my job.

WOLF

He makes lists.

AURA

And checks them.

WOLF

More than once.

JOY

I meet an eccentric millionaire and he's some lunatic up in the North Pole. It's just my luck.

STAN

I'll grant you eccentric. Lunatic's a bit of a stretch. But what makes you think I'm a millionaire?

JOY

You'd have to be to hire these... helpers. This elaborate... candy structure of some sort. And you in that getup.

Again, Stan gives himself the once-over.

STAN

Is that what this is?

JOY

Everyone knows there's no such thing as...

Stan tilts his head at Joy, peeks at Cal.

JOY

It's just a hoax. That's all.

STAN

Tell you what... If you feel that way in the morning, I'll fly you back myself. Paid in full. Doesn't that just make your cheeks rosy?

JOY

You get your mind off my cheeks.

Stan turns with a grin and moseys toward Candy Cane Central.

STAN

Fa la la la la... la la la la.

JOY

You get back here!

WOLF

There goes the hot cocoa.

AURA

See what you did?

INT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Spectacularly Christmas. Not gaudy but grand. An enormous tree, decorated to the hilt. A fountain in the shape of a giant Gingerbread Man gurgles eggnog.

Joy marches in with Cal who openly gapes. Joy tries to dismiss the wonderment.

CAL
Can we move here, Mom?

JOY
Don't you start.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

A silver bell jingles, elevator doors open. Joy and Cal follow Aura out. Wolf lags behind, pushing a luggage cart.

They arrive at ROOM 331.

AURA
You made it.

JOY
We'll just see about that.

Aura hands her a key. Wolf sets down the suitcases.

JOY
I'm sorry, were you expecting a tip?

AURA
A smile's considered legal tender in the North Pole.

Joy amuses them... tries. Can only manage a twisted scowl.

WOLF
Now we really feel gypped.

INT. ROOM 331 - CONTINUOUS

A ceramic Christmas tree sparkles in the corner. Twin beds, the headboards adorned with tinsel. Joy and Cal rest their suitcases on the beds. Cal moves to unzip his.

JOY
Not so fast, Xbox. We're not staying.

CAL
Mo-om!

JOY
Don't Mo-om me. This guy's obviously not playing with a full deck.

CAL
What?

JOY
He's a few bulbs short of a Christmas
tree -- how's that?

CAL
Huh?

JOY
Cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs -- work with
me here.

CAL
But we just got here.

JOY
And tomorrow we'll just be leaving.

CAL
We never have any fun.

JOY
You call this fun? We were
practically kidnapped by Santa Claus.

CAL
At least he knows what I want!

He marches into the bathroom and slams the door.

JOY
(to herself)
That's not fair.

INT. ROOM 331 - LATER

Joy is asleep, Cal's wide awake, lying atop the covers. He stares at the Rubik's Cube sitting on his chest. He picks it up, tries to solve a color. No dice. He tosses the cube onto the floor. Joy turns to her other side.

INT. ROOM 331 - MORNING

It's a new day in the North Pole, nice and dark. Cal sulks in a chair. Joy whisks in from the bathroom, putting on her earrings.

JOY
Ready to go?

Cal doesn't respond. A knock at the door. Joy answers.

AURA

Mornin'. Just thought you might want some breakfast before you left.

She rolls in a serving cart.

JOY

How'd you know we were leaving?

AURA

Doesn't take a psychologist to know that.

She sets a large platter filled with goodies on the dresser.

AURA

Try the hot cocoa before you go.

She rolls away and shuts the door.

JOY

Want some breakfast?

CAL

Not hungry.

JOY

You haven't eaten since yesterday.

No reply. Joy spies a regal-looking coffee urn on the cart.

JOY

You want something to drink?

Cal doesn't respond. Joy gives into temptation, pours herself a mug of hot cocoa. Dismisses it before trying it. She then draws the mug to her lips and sips. Her eyes light up. She holds the mug away from her. It must be poisonous.

A knock on the door, Joy spills her drink. The mug shatters on the dresser. Cal giggles.

JOY

It's not funny.

She runs around, picking up ceramic, blotting the dresser with toilet paper. Cal can only smirk.

More knocking.

STAN (O.S.)

Should I try the chimney?

He chuckles. Joy composes herself, answers. Stan stands there with a big grin, wearing corduroys and a flannel shirt.

STAN

How's everyone doing? Did you try the cocoa?

JOY

We're ready to leave.

STAN

Sure thing. Jet's being gassed up.

An awkward silence. Stan finally peeks over at Cal. Joy's squint says: Don't even try it.

STAN

Wanna check out Santa's workshop?

CAL

Yes!

He leaps out of the chair. Goes barreling out of the room, his arms spread like wings.

JOY

Cal, get back here!

CAL (O.S.)

I wanna see Santa's workshop... !

JOY

You need therapy. You know that?

STAN

I'll go check on him.

He takes off after Cal. His arms spread like wings.

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Wide plank flooring, maple desk, and a swivel chair. A long window, shade drawn. On the opposite wall, a row of seven closed-circuit TVs (turned off), and hockey memorabilia.

Cal hops on the swivel chair and slides across the room.

CAL

Whreeeeeeee!

In the corner sits a giant hourglass in the shape of Mrs. Claus. Hands on her hips, she's looking rather impatient.

JOY

Interesting decor. Is that your wife?

STAN

Used to be.

He finally winks at Joy. She rolls her eyes. Snowflakes pass through the mid-section of the hourglass.

STAN

She's counting down to Christmas Eve. Game-time.

JOY

So what's the deal with Stan Lacusa?

STAN

Anagram. I get bored, you know. With all the snow.

JOY

Check out the posters. Cal, you have posters too, right?

Static emits from Stan's belt, he removes his walkie talkie.

STAN

We good for takeoff?

AURA (walkie talkie)

We are good.

STAN

Thanks. Kids, it's time to go.

CAL

I don't wanna go!

STAN

Now there's a dilemma.

He slyly flicks open the window shade.

STAN

Oops.

Through the window, a marvelous sight. ELVES. Dozens of them, spread out over a giant, elaborate workshop. They're horsing around, juggling ornaments, skipping rope with garland. Not one appears to be working.

CAL

Whoa...

Joy moves in for a better look.

STAN

Two are actually working. That's
Noel and Hark in the corner. They're
an item.

Cal swivels over to Joy, kneels atop the chair. They gape
through the window.

STAN

As sure as a snowflake... Christmas
is in trouble.

INT. STAN'S WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

A Christmas Carol meets a kindergarten class. The Elves
laugh at a GANGLY mate - far taller than the others - who
breakdances barefoot. Lively music plays.

It quickly turns into a hoedown. The Elves pound their little
feet on the sawdust-covered floor.

A trio of blue-haired Elves breaks free from the pack: ODE,
on the skinny side; SCHMELF, on the dopey side; and ANCY, on
the backwoods side.

ODE

(jiggy wid it)
Whenever I dance, I go into a trance,
before I know it y'all, I pullin'
down my pants.

SCHMELF

Walnuts roasting on an open fire...

ODE

It's chestnuts, dumbnuts.

SCHMELF

Bob Frost nipping at your nose...

ODE

It's Jack, you hack.

ANCY

Shut up, the both of ya's! I gotta
uh... UH... UHH...

She verges on a sneeze, but it just doesn't come.

ANCY

Jerk-in-the-box thumbsucker!

ODE

A swear should be rare or else it'll wear.

Ancy screams out of frustration. She karate chops a rocking horse in half. Through the window, Stan shakes his head.

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Stan turns an expectant look at Joy.

STAN

Stuff it in my corn cob pipe and smoke it?

JOY

We really should go.

STAN

You really should stay. Christmas is going to heck in a gift basket.

JOY

I'm not equipped for this.

STAN

Don't do that. There are no high roads outta the North Pole.

JOY

I treat people, Stan. Humans. Homo --

STAN

I heard you the first time. You're telling me they're not dysfunctional?

JOY

I wouldn't go that far.

STAN

That one there - Ancy - with the blue cornrows? All she does is break rocking horses all day. I can't have that.

JOY

Can't you just fly in some fresh ones?

STAN

They're elves, Joy. Not eggs. Don't you realize these are the only ones left? Without them, there is no Christmas. Is that what you want?

CAL

Mo-om!

STAN

Meet them. You'll change your mind.

JOY

I don't want to. Don't --

Stan presses a button on the desk. The wall rises.

JOY

You did not just do that.

CAL

Coo-wool.

Suddenly, nothing separates them from the Elves. Everything comes to a halt in the workshop. The Elves stare at Joy. Stan pulls out a megaphone shaped like a Christmas stocking.

STAN

Alright, everyone, listen up. This here's Joy. She's a damn good therapist. And she's here to help save Christmas. Any questions?

An elf with a red Mohawk steps closer. This is LEON.

LEON

What kinda therapist?
(wriggling his eyebrows)
Massage therapist?

JOY

Oh he's fancy.

STAN

You be nice. She's a psychologist. And you've got a small brain.

A few snickers are quickly silenced by Leon's look. He raises both hands ceremoniously, brings two thumbs crashing down. Suddenly, boos fill the workshop.

STAN

Need I remind you folks that this building is climate-controlled?

The boos come to an abrupt halt. In their place, the sound of planes. Paper airplanes, hundreds of them, made of Christmas wrapping paper. Headed straight toward them.

STAN

You should all be ashamed of yourselves. Look at you. Christmas is a tradition. It stands for something. What do you stand for?

Joy leans over to Stan, he brings down the megaphone.

JOY

This is just too weird. We should go.

A plane bops her in the head.

JOY

Before it gets out of hand.

STAN

If that's how you really feel.

CAL

I don't want Christmas to go away, Mom.

Joy peers down at Cal, tries to remain firm with Stan.

STAN

You know any therapists that might be better qualified?

JOY

Try to be more subtle, huh?

STAN

I didn't mean it that way.

LEON

We don't need no Efficiency Experts!

The Elves cheer. Joy pivots. The moon turns blood red.

JOY

What did you call me?

LEON

You heard me.

Joy hardens her stare. A few Elves step back. Joy reaches her hand out for the megaphone.

JOY

Now hear this: You need to actually *work* before someone can rate your efficiency. See how that works?

LEON

Get lost, humanoid.

JOY

I got news for you. I'm in the middle of the bleeping North Pole. It's wintertime. And I'm staring at an ugly elf with a red Mohawk. Does that sound lost enough for you?

LEON

Who are you calling ugly?

JOY

If the stocking fits...

LEON

(raises his fist)

How 'bout I slip you some closure?

JOY

Try me. Christmas Eve is twenty-five days away. And I don't see a lotta toy-building going on. Just a bunch of yo-yos. Now I'm either gonna bring you back up to speed...

She needs a punchline. Anything. But Joy's got nothing. She pivots a look at Stan who just shrugs. The Elves turn to each other like: What the heck is this?

LEON

Or what?

JOY

Or we're all going straight to hell.

Gasps fill the workshop. The Elves are bug-eyed.

HALF-ELF #1

She used that word.

HALF-ELF #2

Let it go.

Joy drops the megaphone proudly. Feedback echoes throughout.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The walls are swirly-striped. Joy holds Cal's hand as she marches along with Stan. The hall slowly gets narrower and shorter.

JOY

What's the deal with this hallway?

STAN

It's the guy who designed it. He was this short... fickle-minded dwarf.

JOY

That's a little mean.

STAN

No, I mean he was a dwarf. With a beard down to his bellybutton. He could cast spells, too.

CAL

Could he make me invisible?

STAN

If you gave him enough apple cider, sure.

JOY

I don't have to worry about that with these guys, do I? They're not... necromancers.

STAN

I had them fixed.

They turn the corner, Stan passes her a green key with a snow globe on the end of it.

STAN

Gimme a jingle when you're ready.

Cal sprints down the hall, Stan gives chase.

STAN

Extension seventy-seven!

Joy notices that the floor is now at a steep incline. She climbs up a few yards. No sign of a door. Oops. There it is, above her.

JOY

He really was fickle-minded.

INT. JOY'S OFFICE SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Holly leaves and finger paints. Joy shimmies her way up through the hatch, dusts herself off. She fishes for a light switch, finds a Christmas tree instead. Plugs it in.

A zillion white lights illuminate the room. A tiny armchair, a puny couch. Behind the couch, a fireplace.

JOY

This is crazy.

Suddenly, the fireplace lights up. Joy jumps back.

JOY

No, that's crazy.

The fire goes out. Joy's now intrigued. She peeks around, making sure no one is within earshot.

JOY

(Patsy Cline)

Crazy...

(fire's back)

I'm cra -- shut up.

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The wall is down again. All the closed-circuit TVs are on.

CAL

You watch a lot of TV.

STAN

They're not really TV.

CAL

They look like TVs.

STAN

They're for surveillance.

CAL

What's that?

STAN

I look at them to see if anyone's doing anything untoward.

CAL

Untord?

STAN

To make sure no one's being naughty.

CAL

Huh. Is that untord?

ON CLOSED-CIRCUIT TV

Ancy has Ode in a headlock. Stan moves in for a closer look.

STAN

This is what happens when you lose
your HR.

INT. STAN'S WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

The Elves pump their fists. Ancy continues to give Ode the business. Leon looks on, cleans his teeth with a toothpick.

ANCY

Are ya gonna stop with the poems?
Or do I need to beat the livin'
Shakespeare outta ya?

ODE

I promise to stop. If you could
just let me go...
(Ancy releases him)
... so my head doesn't pop.

Back in the headlock he goes.

JOY (over loudspeaker)

Ancy Williams?

Everything stops. Ancy retains hold of Ode, glances around.

JOY (over loudspeaker)

Please see me in my office.

ELVES

Oooo... you're in trouble...

Crazy game show music plays. Ancy lets go of Ode. The Elves look around for the source of the music. Through the window: Stan waves at them.

ODE

It's a shame you got called away.
(forever beat)
What can I say?

Ancy takes off after Ode. He screams for dear life.

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Cal watches the chase scene on TV.

CAL

Get him!

INT. JOY'S OFFICE SUITE - MOMENTS LATER

Joy blots black paint onto a sheet of white posterboard, scrutinizes her work, places it on a stack of others.

She breaks off a sprig of holly, tucks it in her hair. A knock on the door.

JOY

Come in.

Ancy pops in, flushed and out of breath.

JOY

Are you okay?

ANCY

I will be.
(mutters)
Soon as I catch 'im.

JOY

What?

ANCY

Let's get this thing over with.

JOY

The road to mental health has a low speed limit.

ANCY

Oh jeez.

She keels over onto the couch. Joy brings the poster boards, struggles to squeeze into the armchair. She gets up for a moment, bringing the armchair with her.

JOY

Was just starting to like my hips.

ANCY

Once you got kids...

JOY

Shut up. Okay, let's get started. Stan told me you have a habit of breaking rocking horses. Is this true?

ANCY

So?

JOY

So let's see if we can get to the root of your hostility.

ANCY

Can't I just watch the Doctor Phil?

JOY

Tell me about your parents.

ANCY

Why do ya wanna talk about them?

JOY

They brought you into the world, didn't they? You didn't crawl out of a tree, did you? Don't answer that.

ANCY

I was born in 1806. Things were different back then.

Joy scribbles on a notepad with a quill. Ancy removes a bit of straw from her back pocket, gnaws on it.

ANCY

Just so ya know, you're climbin' a slippery slope being here. We elves ain't big fans o' change.

JOY

I can't place your accent. Were you born in the North Pole?

ANCY

Born and raised in Greenland. We moved after the first heat wave.

JOY

Are you close to your mom?

ANCY

Was. Right up until she died. I'd only turned a hundred 'n thirty-five.

JOY
What happened?

ANCY
Got run over.

JOY
I'm sorry to hear that.

ANCY
By a reindeer. Damnedest thing.

Joy's quill stops, she peers up at Ancy.

JOY
Are you playing with me?

ANCY
Gosh, no. You think I'd joke about
a thing like that?

JOY
Did your father raise you?

ANCY
More or less.

JOY
What does that mean?

ANCY
Means he was there. More or less.

JOY
And how long have you been wreaking
havoc on rocking horses?

ANCY
Since October, I think. Who cares.

Joy reaches for the poster boards, can't quite get to them.
She's locked in her chair. Ancy snatches them off the floor.

JOY
Thanks. I'm gonna show you a series
of inkblots.

ANCY
Aw jeez, not the Rowshack.

JOY
You've heard of it?

ANCY

We elves can read, ya know.

JOY

Play with me then.
(presents an inkblot)
What do you see here?

ANCY

Paint by Numbers.

JOY

Funny.

Another inkblot.

ANCY

Looks like an action figure. With
an oral fixee-ation.

JOY

(rolls her eyes)
And this one?

She presents another.

ANCY

That's a choo-choo. Choo.

JOY

Huh?

ANCY

UH... UHH...

She closes in on a sneeze, Joy pulls away.

JOY

God bless you.

No sneeze for Ancy.

ANCY

You Bundt cake!

JOY

What'd you call me?

ANCY

You never say "God bless you" before
the sneeze come. That's how you
jinx it!

She flings her straw, jumps up and down on the couch like a lunatic. Moaning, growling. Joy glances around the room.

JOY
Security?

INT. JOY'S OFFICE SUITE - LATER

MONTAGE: ELFIN THERAPY GONE WILD

Elves pop in and out of Joy's office. Some hang off the couch. Others pace the room. Many squint at inkblots and shake their heads. One is engrossed in her shoelace.

SURLY ELF
(shrugs at inkblot)
You tell me what it looks like.

Joy yanks at her own hair.

Moments later: She sits by the fire and laments.

Moments later: Joy breathes in a scented candle for relief.

THERAPY WITH SCHMELF

He lies on the couch, extra casual.

SCHMELF
*Surly head dolls that coddle and
poo, elephant goats and titty bars,
too... Santa --*

Joy holds up a stop sign. The singing stops.

THERAPY WITH ODE

He plays Twister by himself. Joy furrows her brow at him.

JOY
And when did you start with all this
poetic verse?

ODE
October.
(collapses on the mat)
And it's been getting worse.

END MONTAGE

INT. STAN'S WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Flaxen-haired elf NOEL, pretty and psychedelic, stands at a workbench making toys with vainglorious elf HARK. He smokes an ornate pipe.

HARK

You see, darling... there are male screws and there are female screws. A male screw has threads on the outside. They enter the grooves of a female screw on the inside. Doesn't life just make sense sometimes.

NOEL

Gee, when you put it that way...

One workbench back, Leon looks on. He doesn't appear happy.

HARK

Stick with me, kiddo. I've got considerable monies stashed away.

NOEL

If you've got considerable monies, what're you doing here?

HARK

Isn't it obvious?

NOEL

Uh, no.

HARK

My sweet, naive buttercup... It is but for the pleasure of your company that I brave the torrents --

Ancy comes sprinting across the workshop floor... leaps Crouching Tiger style over the heads of Noel and Hark, and lays waste to yet another rocking horse.

NOEL

How many times does that make today?

HARK

Thrice.

NOEL

What the heck is thrice?

HARK

Three times, darling. Three times.

NOEL

You can't just say three?

Hark flashes three red roses out of nowhere. Noel can't help but smile. Hark throws Leon a be-envious-of-me smile. He grimaces back.

Stan crosses the workshop floor with Cal, who plays with a yo-yo.

STAN

Yo-yos are the second oldest toy in the world. Did you know that?

CAL

Older than you?

STAN

Yup. Weird, huh?

CAL

What's the oldest toy?

Stan snags a doll off a workbench, hands it to Cal.

STAN

Keep it.

CAL

Thanks!

They arrive at Hark's workbench. Noel sniffs her roses.

STAN

How'd you guys make out today?

HARK

We began by necking in her dorm room. Then I --

STAN

Hark. I meant, how many toys did you make.

HARK

Very well then. Noel here most certainly made her quota.

STAN

And you?

HARK

I'm not one to boast but...

(smooths his hair)

I quadrupled mine.

Stan turns - in alarm - to see Joy headed his way. Her hair's all frizzy. There are inkblots on her cheeks. Unique designs.

STAN

Tough first day?

JOY

You could say that. I'm gonna need a bigger chair.

STAN

Done. Hark, build her a chair.

Hark frowns.

JOY

Hey, kiddo. Did you have fun today?

CAL

I watched a lot of TV.

JOY

Yeah, that's what I wanna hear.

INT. ROOM 331 - BATHROOM - LATER

Joy soaks in a hot bath. Shuts her eyes.

JOY

*Oh the weather outside is terrifying.
Da dum, da dum... horrifying...*

CAL (O.S.)

Mom, are you singing?

JOY

Nope.

CAL (O.S.)

Liar.

JOY

(to herself)

Yup.

CAL (O.S.)
Is Dad coming to visit us?

JOY
... Jingle hell... Jingle hell...

She submerges. Bubbles surface as she continues to sing.

CAL (O.S.)
Mom?

EXT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - MORNING

Pitch black. Joy is bundled up like a marshmallow. Stan helps her put on skis.

JOY
What time is it?

STAN
A little after ten.

JOY
That's A.M., right?

STAN
What's the difference?

Joy smirks at him.

JOY
How do you get used to this?

STAN
Not bad if you like the night life.

JOY
Not sure I'm ready to hear Santa likes the night life.

Stan grins at her. They swoosh away.

STAN
Cal's a bright kid.

JOY
Thanks.

STAN
Super-bright, actually. You must be real proud.

An awkward moment. Joy turns her focus on her skiing. Stan does the same.

He then peers over at Joy. She searches for a segue.

JOY
Does the sun ever come back?

STAN
It always comes back. Eventually.

Joy holds his look. They slalom through giant candy canes.

JOY
Where are you taking me?

STAN
To show you the rest of my support staff.

JOY
I'm not psychoanalyzing them.

STAN
I'm sure they'll appreciate that.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

Joy and Stan traverse a large sheet of ice. The stalls are ripe with reindeer, noshing on lichen. Joy tries to wave away the aroma.

JOY
Aren't you taking this a bit too far?

STAN
Oh, you mean them? I like to think of it as perfecting a charade.

A reindeer with long, branched antlers sulks in the corner.

JOY
What's his name?

STAN
That's a she. They all have antlers.

Joy looks around. Indeed, all the reindeer have antlers.

JOY
She seems sad.

STAN
No analyzing, you promised.

JOY
What's her name?

STAN
Caliopi. Her boyfriend passed away
two months ago. She won't eat.

Joy holds out her hand. Stan - mocking surprise - passes her a can of alfalfa pellets. Joy reaches in. Caliopi watches her, unmoved.

JOY
Come on... No? She's stubborn.

Stan wears a funny smile.

JOY
What, like me?

She shoves him. A little too hard. Stan falls to the ice.

JOY
I'm sorry. No, really...

STAN
You.
(pointing to a stall)
Penalty box. Ten minutes for
projection.

INT. JOY'S OFFICE SUITE - LATER

The fireplace is lit. Joy now sits on a gold throne, fits her nicely. She snuffles, scribbles some notes. Joy looks up to find Leon on the couch, straightening out his Mohawk.

JOY
So. Leon. We meet again.

LEON
Charmed.

JOY
Today we're gonna play a round of
word association.

LEON

That's original. I heard Stan the Man's paying you twenty-five G's to be here. That's a lotta green to just play some games. Or is it.

JOY

Tone down the ugly. It's only a fifty-minute session.

LEON

Hit me, Hotcakes.

Joy makes a fist, tempted to comply. She squares herself.

JOY

Hopeless.

LEON

Me, or did the game just start?

JOY

Both. But would you just answer?

LEON

Okay, fine. Sexy.

JOY

You get Sexy from Hopeless?

LEON

We know different people.

JOY

Spirit.

LEON

Moonshine.

JOY

Elves.

LEON

Minions.

JOY

Dark.

LEON

(wriggles eyebrows)
Dewy.

JOY
 (meeting his challenge)
 Dewy.

LEON
 De-lightfulll...

Joy shivers, adjusts her sweater.

LEON
 At what point do we determine I'm
 crazy?

The fire goes out behind Leon, Joy notices.

JOY
 You're not crazy.

The fire is pleasantly back.

LEON
 The Mohawk, the lewd comments... you
 can tell me. I'm a crazy little
 elf, aren't I.

Bye-bye fire.

JOY
 You're being way too hard on yourself,
 Leon.
 (fighting herself)
 I don't find you crazy at all.

Sweet, glorious fire. Leon scoffs at her.

LEON
 Stan's overpaying ya. I mean...
 You gotta be crazy if you don't think
 I'm crazy. You crazy thing...

Off to On to Off. Joy needs a new plan.

JOY
 Okay, fine. You're as crazy as
 Frosty's half-cousin. Are we happy?

Fire's back. Leon leans back, satisfied. He gives Joy a
 salacious look. Struts over to her, props up his collar.

Joy grabs a water bottle from the floor, squirts Leon silly.
 He retreats to the sofa. Quickly fixes his Mohawk.

JOY

You're kind of vain, aren't you.

Leon doesn't like the dig. Gives Joy a discerning look.

LEON

It's just you and your son, right?
In this big, huge building?

Joy leaves it alone. But registers the threat. Leon sits back. They're even. Until he casts yet another lewd look.

LEON

This place can get kind of drafty at night. We all need to keep warm.

JOY

You realize I am bigger than you.

Leon slowly nods with a grin. Joy stepped in it. Regroups.

JOY

Speaking of warm... How are you enjoying the fireplace?

She calmly raises her sleeves. Looks blankly at Leon.

JOY

Toasty, isn't it?

Leon peeks over his shoulder at the raging fire. Back to Joy.

LEON

Our time's up.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Two Elves do battle at chess. Others read and tap away on their laptops. Joy and Stan sit at a corner table.

JOY

Why didn't you tell me about this place sooner?

STAN

I'll give you the grand tour sometime. Maybe in the off-season?

Joy manages a nod that no-way-in-heck means Yes.

STAN

It gets up to freezing in July.

JOY

Sold. So what's the deal with Leon?

STAN

I was hoping you might know.

JOY

He's a little depraved.

STAN

He's a little a lot of things. Not so big into working.

JOY

Are you nervous about the deadline?

STAN

With you? Not a chance.

Joy catches the double-meaning. A little smile from Stan.

JOY

(leading the witness)

Must get lonely up here.

Stan gestures grandly at all the Elves surrounding him.

JOY

I meant non-elves.

STAN

If you wanna be specific about it. I got friends all over the world, Joy.

A little too cavalier to be believed. Joy squints at him.

STAN

How's life since Ted?

JOY

How did you --

STAN

We went over this. And no, I'm not a stalker. Not technically. Think of me as a jolly... researcher.

Joy debates how much to open up. Plays it close to the vest.

JOY
I can't complain.

STAN
Can't because things are so great,
or can't because who the hell --
heck -- would listen?

A few Elves turn a worried look, Stan shakes his head,
reassuring them.

JOY
What's the difference?

STAN
There's a big difference.

He won't let her off the hook. Joy must choose.

JOY
Things are really... really... great.

Seals it with a smile. Stan openly stares at her.

STAN
One more like that and you're on the
other list.

INT. STAN'S WORKSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Ode, Ancy and Schmelf play footbag.

ANCY
You knuckleheads are cramping my style.

ODE
We only play once in a while.

Ancy glares at him. Joy glides in.

JOY
Have you seen Cal?

ODE
He was here before.

ANCY
Check the R&D Lab.

ODE
Thirty-eighth floor.

Sensing Ancy's wrath, he takes off down the hall.

INT. R&D LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Test tubes, Bunsen burners, nifty gadgets and gizmos, plastic jugs filled with colorful goo. The last place a child should be unsupervised. Cal sits at a table, stuffing a toy dog.

TOY BOX COVER: "Don't Bury Fido. Burrito him!"

CAL
*Jingle Bells, Batman smells, Robin
laid an egg... Batmobile --*

Joy bursts in - gawks at the decor - races over to Cal.

JOY
Cal, what're you doing here?

CAL
I'm playing.

Joy wraps him in a tight hug.

JOY
Are you okay? Why weren't you in
the workshop?

CAL
But he said it was okay.

JOY
Who said it was okay?

INT. CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

The kitchen's closed, but the Elves are whipping up a fresh batch of crazy. Waving their fists in the air and shouting. Except for Noel and Hark, everyone's present.

ON STAGE

Leon, in a green cape, yells propaganda into a megaphone.

LEON

Every year, it's the same thing. We bend over backwards for these people. Making toys. And for what? Is there any appreciation from the human population?

Ode flashes a thumbs-up.

ELVES

No!

LEON

Do we get a bonus of some kind? Some recognition?

ELVES

No!

LEON

Course not. The more we build, the more they want. Wanna know something? There's a word for that.

On a dry erase board, Leon writes: SANTA'S ELVES. He draws a slash through the apostrophe, erases the first "E".

LEON

You carry the "A" from Santa and what do you get?

He squeezes an "A" before the letter "V". The Elves gasp when they see the word "SLAVES" spelled out.

LEON

It's not such a mystery, is it. And now they've flown in this *female* to help us. Do we need any shrinks telling us life ain't fair?

ELVES

No!

LEON

They're gonna try to break us. That's what they do. But are we weak?

ELVES

No!

LEON

What was that?

ELVES

No!!!

LEON

They'll tell you: you have an Edible Complex. Or it's all your mamma's fault. Or you just need some closure. Or you just have some trust issues. Or maybe you're bipolar. Or maybe you're bi-curious. Or maybe you're just secretly in love with some blonde bimbo.

The Elves look at each other a bit confused.

LEON

(smacks himself)

Are we stupid?

ELVES

No!

LEON

Are we weak?

ELVES

No!!

LEON

One more time, my fellow North Poleans...

ELVES

No!!!

A wave of cheers. At the back of the room...

HALF-ELF #1

Did he say Edible Complex?

HALF-ELF #2

Maybe it's an eating disorder.

INT. STAN'S WORKSHOP - MORNING

Noel builds a toy. Beach balls are flying back and forth all around her. Hark combs honey through his hair.

HARK

Perhaps if I tied one hand behind my back, you and I might finish up the same today.

NOEL
Elf, puh-leeze.

HARK
I have no idea where I find such
energy. Especially after last night.

NOEL
See, I just assumed you'd have tons
of energy left.

Joy enters with Cal, she grips his hand tightly.

CAL
You're hurting my hand, Mom.

JOY
I don't want you going near him.
You understand me?

CAL
I won't. Happy?

JOY
And if he says anything to you, you're
gonna tell me, right?

CAL
Fine. I will.

JOY
You promise?

HARK
Doctor Verden. Am I to be your next
victim?

JOY
(narrows her eyes)
We'll see.

Hark's smile vanishes. Joy spots Ode up ahead, nursing a
black eye with a steak.

HARK
I'd be happy to show you the ropes.

He pulls out a bucket of ropes.

NOEL
Wise guy. Go tie yourself up now.
(smiles at Joy)
You and Cal can work with me.

She takes out a box of stuffing and empty teddy bears.

NOEL
Ever stuff a turkey, Cal?

CAL
Yup.

NOEL
Today we're stuffing teddy bears.

CAL
Coo-wool.

He gets to work. Noel dumps out a pile of Legos.

NOEL
Just build whatever. We're not picky.

Joy rolls up her sleeves. A PORTLY elf moseys by.

NOEL
I thought my 401k deduction was
supposed to happen last week.

PORTLY
Take it up with HR.

NOEL
Hellooo. I thought you were HR.

PORTLY
Still in training.

She waddles away.

NOEL
You can't get good elves these days.

Two workbenches up, a GUY and GIRL elf make out. No other
Elves seem to notice.

JOY
What's up with them?

NOEL
Casual Monday.

JOY
Oh.

Schmelf swooshes by on a skateboard.

SCHMELF
I'll be gnome for Christmas...

NOEL
 (giggles)
 I just love his songs.

Hark throws Schmelf a look.

CAL
 What's a gnome?

NOEL
 They're little men who live
 underground.

CAL
 Why do they do that?

NOEL
 They're kinda ugly. And they're
 mischievous, too.

CAL
 Mischeffous?

NOEL
 They're sneaky. And they fight dirty.

CAL
 Oh, I don't like gnomes.

HARK
 Darling, you mustn't frighten the
 poor boy.

He tousles Cal's hair.

JOY
 You get your hands off him.

Hark shrivels up and skedaddles. Joy spies Leon across the aisle, solving a Rubik's Cube. He turns a sneaky eye at Joy, who glares right back. Leon tosses the cube high in the air, it crashes to bits on the workshop floor.

LEON
 (stern look at Ode)
 You got one minute.

He sets his watch timer. Ode drops his steak, scrambles to pick up the pieces.

SOME ELVES

Hurry!

JOY

Not very productive.

NOEL

Welcome to my workshop.

JOY

(confiding)

What's the deal with him?

NOEL

Everything he's made is on the Worst
Toys Ever list.

JOY

Everything?

NOEL

Stan had to set aside room for them
all.

Ode finishes picking up the pieces and reassembling the
Rubik's Cube perfectly. He struggles to catch his breath.

Joy looks down at her Lego creation. It seems a surprise,
even to herself: a revolver.

NOEL

Look at you...

Joy smiles, a bit proud, a little embarrassed. She wraps
her hand tightly around the revolver. Aims it in Leon's
direction. He turns, she fires. Leon smiles back at her.

INT. JOY'S OFFICE SUITE - MOMENTS LATER

Joy enters, pale with concern. She wrings her hands, paces.
Marches to a file cabinet. Removes a gargantuan folder.

FILE: LEON HURTZ

Joy skims through it. A series of green Absent Notices and
red Warnings. She flips to the end to find Medical History.
Allergies: Nicotine. Joy contemplates. The lights on the
Christmas tree flicker. She rushes to return the folder.

INT. ROOM 331 - NIGHT

Joy and Cal stand side by side in the dresser mirror, getting ready for a dinner out. Joy brushes, Cal combs. They seem to be in rhythm. Joy peers over at Cal's Christmas sweater.

JOY

Didn't you wear that last year?

CAL

Uh huh.

JOY

Take it off. It's too small for you.

CAL

No, it's not. Dad gave me this.

Joy doesn't push it. She goes to her purse, uncovers a handful of candy canes.

JOY

What's all this?

She peeks over at Cal who comes running over.

CAL

Can I have them?

JOY

On one condition.

She slides out a packet of gum, the pieces sealed in plastic.

JOY

If Leon ever tries to put you in that room again, I want you to give him this.

CAL

What is it?

JOY

Bubble gum. For grownups.

CAL

Can I have a piece?

JOY

Not. Even. One. Is that clear?

(Cal frowns)

Will this help?

Another fistful of candy from her bag. Cal smiles.

INT. PENTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Five stories, sort of. Two floors up, then three floors down. Basically, the hook of the candy cane. A central staircase lined with silver and gold garland runs throughout.

INT. PENTHOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Stan bastes a goose on a rotisserie.

STAN
 (O Christmas Tree
 melody)
*Rotisserie... rotisserie... much
 pleasure thou --*

Jingle bells ring.

STAN
Can't give me.

INT. PENTHOUSE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Stan answers the door with a big grin.

CAL
 Merry Christmas!

STAN
 You stole my line.

JOY
 I thought you said there were seventy-seven floors.

STAN
 I live in a candy cane, remember?

INT. PENTHOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

The table is abundant with holiday goodies, candles are lit. Cal tries a bite of the goose.

CAL
 Tastes like roast beef.

STAN
 You should try our roast beef.

CAL
How come you don't look like Santa
Claus?

STAN
Whaddaya mean?

CAL
Your beard's supposed to be white.

JOY
Yeah, Stan. What gives?

STAN
It'll get white when I get older.
Unless I go through a mid-life crisis.

CAL
Midwife crisis?

JOY
Mid-life.

STAN
That's when a person experiences a
formidable sense of anxiety.
Apprehension. Because their life is
halfway over. Essentially.

Cal furrows his brow, turns to his mom for help.

JOY
What he means is --

STAN
It's a time of great reflection.
And introspection. A lot of times
the person will feel they haven't
done enough. With their life.

He peeks over at Joy. Who now wonders if the comment was
directed at her. She frowns.

STAN
Emotions can range from boredom to
risk-taking behavior. They might
change their job... their partner...
their hair... their partner --

JOY
You said that.

INT. PENTHOUSE - PLAYROOM - LATER

The room is mostly dark. There are no toys, but one. Cal and Stan play air hockey center stage, under a bright light. Joy watches them from a director's chair, sipping cocoa.

Stan scores, shouts. Cal smacks the table.

CAL
I always lose.

STAN
Don't say that. You can't win every game.

He peeks at Joy, wonders if she thinks he overstepped.

CAL
But I wanna win every game.

STAN
Think of it like trades.

CAL
Huh?

STAN
Hockey trades. Sometimes, you find a great guy. Other times... you find an even *greater* guy.

Joy shakes her head. Santa's a real pisser.

Cal scores. Dances up a storm.

CAL
Woo hoo, I scored! In your face, Santa! Ha haa!

A round of applause from Joy, to boot. She cheers.

STAN
How's about some Silent Night?

INT. PENTHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Cal dozes on the couch. A toy string quartet plays romantic music. Joy and Stan sit by the fire, roasting chestnuts. Stan ladles some from the pan into a ceramic bowl.

JOY
Roasting them was always my favorite.

STAN

What were some of your other favorites?

JOY

I outgrew most of them.

STAN

Nobody should be that grown up.

He attempts to crack a chestnut. Too hot, he tosses it to Joy. Ouch, she tosses it back. Back and forth they go until Stan finally breaks it open and they share.

JOY

You lived here your whole life?

STAN

Yup.

JOY

What about your parents?

STAN

My dad retired three years ago. They moved down to Saskatchewan.

JOY

Were you ever married?

STAN

Came close. Twice.

JOY

Just didn't work out?

STAN

North Pole's a tough sell. As you know.

Joy holds his look.

STAN

Plus it doesn't help when people think you don't actually exist. That includes you, doesn't it?

JOY

Look, I'm sure you're real... lly... dedicated.

Stan gives her an obligatory nod.

JOY
With lofty ambitions, and --

STAN
Don't hurt yourself. So you've been
raising Cal solo?

JOY
It'll be a year in February.
Fifteenth, actually.
(accusatory)
But you already know that.

Stan gives her a guilty look. Joy peers into the fire.

INT. GREEK RESTAURANT - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

A flaming plate of saganaki.

WAITER
Opa!

The WAITER, 30s, sets down the plate. Joy sits across from
TED, 36, cool blue eyes and a sharp, dark suit.

JOY
Cal painted a picture of the house
today.

Ted's immersed in his BlackBerry. Joy openly stares...
finally gives up.

JOY
(to herself)
Opa...

INT. VERDEN HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - FLASHBACK - MORNING

Joy wakes up. Ted's side of the bed is vacant.

EXT. VERDEN HOUSE - BALCONY - FLASHBACK - MOMENTS LATER

Ted, showered and dressed, chats away on his pride and joy.

TED
Come on... I'll take you to that
place you like. The one with the
crème brûlée. I miss you.

He turns to find Joy standing in the doorway, in her pajamas. Her married life passing before her eyes.

INT. PENTHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - BACK TO PRESENT - NIGHT

Joy finds warmth in the fireplace. But no solace.

STAN
Cal's doing well.
(beat)
You've talked to him... about this?

JOY
More or less.

STAN
Sooner is better than later.

JOY
That's my decision.

STAN
(nods)
Unless you're still holding out hope.

A discerning look from Stan: Will she ever be available?

JOY
Not sure what I'm holding onto.
Christmas miracle?

STAN
Do you believe in such a thing?

JOY
If I say No, will I still get
presents?

STAN
From who?

JOY
Whom.

STAN
Exactly.

INT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Joy stops Ode coming the other way, now with two black eyes.

JOY

Have you seen Leon? He's late for his session.

ODE

They took him to the infirmary. They were in such a hurry.

Joy's eyes bulge. She takes off running.

ODE

(calling)
Some sort of allergic reaction.
(louder)
Is that an infraction?

INT. 38TH FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Joy springs off the elevator. Sprints down the hall, passes Gangly who juggles Nerf footballs. He drops them all.

INT. R&D LAB - CONTINUOUS

Joy flings the door open. No sign of Cal. Or anyone. A contraption in the corner tips... crashes to the floor.

INT. INFIRMARY - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

A RECEPTIONIST elf spins a top while on the phone.

TOPSPIN

That means three a day. One with each meal. If you eat six times -- Yes, I know it's supposed to be better for you.

She rolls her eyes. Joy barges in.

JOY

Have you seen my son? Cal Verden? Have you seen him?

TOPSPIN

(continuing on phone)
Miss, I have no idea what IGF is. But if you'd like to set up an appointment...

JOY

Hellooo?!

She waves her arms, but Topspin ignores. Joy ditches her.

INT. INFIRMARY - ROOM 102 - CONTINUOUS

An elfish DOCTOR, with a medical smock and tartan bow tie, hovers over a prone Leon, whose Mohawk is now emerald green.

BOW TIE

Such a bizarre reaction. Fascinating.

LEON

When will it be normal again, Doc?
You can tell me.

Bow Tie shines a light into his eyes. Joy bursts in.

JOY

Where's my son, you little freak?!

Bow Tie now points the light in her eyes.

JOY

Get that thing away from me!

LEON

What in the South Pole are you talking
about?

Joy grabs him by a spoke of his hair. Leon yelps, squirms.

JOY

I know it was you. I know it!
Where's Cal? Where is he?!

LEON

Doc, please help me. I need help.
Wait a second! Owww!

Joy yanks him off the table, onto the tile floor.

LEON

Doc, aren't you listening to me? I
need help! That means now!

BOW TIE

This is highly irregular. You'll
need to contact your HMO.

He stows the light in his smock. Joy drags a screaming Leon into the...

INT. INFIRMARY - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Three Elves look up from their dated magazines.

JOY
See this? This is your fearless leader!

The Elves trade looks, afraid to speak.

LEON
Don't listen to her, she's nuts!

The door opens. Noel enters with Cal. His hand is bandaged.

JOY
Oh my God, Cal!

She lets go of Leon - he clonks his head - she rushes to Cal.

JOY
What happened to your hand?

NOEL
He cut it on a jigsaw.

JOY
What?!

NOEL
Puzzle. Sorry. It's just a paper cut.

Joy hugs him. Tightly.

CAL
I'm fine, Mom.

Joy finally lets go. Turns back to Leon.

JOY
Look, Leon... I'm sorry if I --

Leon pulls a miniature Stop sign from his back pocket.

JOY
(to Noel)
He goes off on a tangent sometimes.

NOEL

That's okay. He's just a kid.

Leon's eyes fixate on lovely Noel as she fixes her hair. A children's choir sings The First Noel.

Joy peeks over at Leon, recognizes the faraway look in his eyes. True love.

Leon glances up at Joy, notices that she noticed. Uh oh.

INT. HOCKEY RINK - AFTERNOON

Joy teeters along the ice next to Stan.

JOY

It's been forever since I wore skates.

STAN

They're like sneakers up here. So what's up?

JOY

Another piece of the puzzle has drifted into place.

STAN

I'm listening.

JOY

Our boy Leon? Has got the hots for Noel.

STAN

Get out.

JOY

Oh he has got a crush on her...

STAN

I had no idea.

JOY

How long has she been going out with Hark?

STAN

October, I think.

Joy stops short. Stan doesn't. They fall at center ice.

FROM THE STANDS

Cal watches them slowly get untangled. He scurries off.

STAN

Are you okay?

JOY

I'm fine. You probably should be sitting for this anyway.

STAN

Why's that?

JOY

Leon's your rotten apple.

STAN

What?

JOY

He's displacing his feelings for Noel by causing an all-out work stoppage. It's textbook.

STAN

Are you sure?

JOY

You said it yourself. October's when everything went bad. You see the influence he has over everyone.

STAN

So this was about... love?

JOY

Should've known it was messing up the works.

STAN

That's real optimistic.

JOY

It's reality. Santa.

She gets up, brushes the snow off of her and skates ahead.

STAN

(catching up)

You know what you need?

JOY

I need to be warm. Out of the North Pole. With a large peppermint coffee. And under a thousand blankets.

STAN

Then what?

Joy stops short, a blank look at Stan.

JOY

Then... we'll see.

STAN

We'll see? That's your answer?

JOY

I don't need an answer.

STAN

We all need an answer.

JOY

I don't need to answer you.

STAN

Ouch. So we're just guinea pigs. You're the scientist.

JOY

Excuse me, you hired me.

STAN

You're right. Boy, are you *right*. Did you punch the clock this morning?

JOY

Don't tempt me.

STAN

Be sure to examine your check stub. We tax for everything up here.

JOY

What is wrong with you?

A pained look from a lonely man whom, with each passing year, fewer people believe in.

STAN

I guess that depends who you ask.

He skates away. Off the ice and into the penalty box. He shuts the door and takes a seat. Joy stares at him from afar.

INT. ROOM 331 - BATHROOM - LATER

Cal cleanses his paper cut in the sink.

He towel dries his hand. Tries to reapply the wrap, but is foiled.

Cal groans in frustration, bangs his hand on the sink.

CAL
Ow! Stupid thing.

He shakes out his hand. Joy glides in.

JOY
What's going on?

CAL
I hate this. I can't do it.

JOY
Why didn't you ask me?

She tosses the soiled bandage, fishes for a fresh one under the sink.

JOY
I'm not putting a dirty wrap on you,
thank you very much.

She kneels, applies a new wrap to Cal's hand.

JOY
Did you have fun this afternoon?

CAL
No.

JOY
Why not?

Cal doesn't respond.

JOY
If you don't wanna talk about it,
that's fine.

She studies Cal. He doesn't budge. But then...

CAL
Are you gonna marry Santa?

JOY
What?

CAL
I said, are you gonna marry Santa?

JOY
No. What're you talking about?

Cal turns and leaves, the wrap dangling from his hand.

JOY
Cal, come back here. I'm not finished yet.

No response. Joy stands up. Turns a look at herself in the mirror. Her last sentence ringing in her ears.

INT. GYM - CONTINUOUS

The room is tiny, but the free weights are human-sized. Leon does bicep curls in solitude. The mood is bleak.

TATTOOS

riddle Leon's body. And they all seem to have an anti-holiday bent: the Easter Bunny dons an executioner's mask; reindeer with fangs; Count Dracula holds a sackful of toys; a Valentine heart split down the middle with a samurai sword.

Leon snarls as he ekes out a few more curls. He tosses the dumbbells to the floor with a clang.

EXT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - NIGHT

Joy and Stan sit apart from each other on an icy park bench. Both trembling. Christmas lights shine down from the candy cane poles. The wind picks up...

JOY
Why are we doing this outside?

STAN
If you wanna quit, that's fine with me.

JOY
I don't quit.

A hard look. A reprieve. They both stare straight ahead. Christmas lights dance upon the snow.

JOY
You want a laugh?

STAN
I wouldn't turn it away.

JOY
I never built a snowman before.

Stan turns to Joy like she sprouted three heads.

JOY
Shocked?

STAN
I don't even know what to say to that.

JOY
Is it true you rejected all of Leon's toys?

STAN
Who told you that?

JOY
Does it matter?

STAN
If it didn't, I wouldn't have asked.

JOY
I have a question for you. It's five years from now. Dead of winter. The usual. And the Bruins are having a horrible year.

STAN
Save it. I don't quit either.

Silence. Another blast of wind. The space between Stan and Joy is like a cavern. They both steal looks at it.

The sound of snow crunching under heavy boots. Here comes Leon. Vastly underdressed and sneering.

STAN
Let me do the talking.

JOY
What'd you want me here for?

STAN
Your Christmas spirit.

Leon plops down between them. Joy squirms away.

LEON

Tick tock...

STAN

We got a problem.

LEON

Why is she here?

STAN

Is there something we should know about?

LEON

We? Aren't you two gettin' along.

STAN

There's a school of thought that says you're behind the work stoppage.

Leon exhales a ring of steam Joy's way.

LEON

Who goes to this school? Anyone I know?

STAN

I need answers, Leon.

LEON

Then gimme some questions.

STAN

Noel Parker.

LEON

That's not a question.

STAN

Are you in love with her?

What starts out as a giggle, grows and grows. Leon keels over onto the snow.

LEON

Where'd you get that? Popcorn psychologist over here?

JOY

Notice he didn't say "no"?

STAN

I did happen to notice that, yes.

LEON

Did you notice Shrinkwrap is off her chestnut?

JOY

Noel is going out with Hark, Leon.
You can't always get what you want.

LEON

Are you for real? Nine years of higher education and this is the best ya got?

(glares at Stan)

You know she pulled me out of the infirmary the other day? By my hair? Or did she forget to mention that during your last powwow?

JOY

I am sick and tired of all your innuendo. That stupid haircut. Oh yeah... you're a real macho elf.

Stan buries his head in his hands.

LEON

Go back to Beantown, Sweetcheeks.
No one wants you here.

JOY

Unlike you, I don't need everyone to love me!

Leon hops up, makes an "L" on his forehead and strolls away.

JOY

Fine, go. You believe that guy?

LEON

Oh... and just one more thing.

Joy swivels. Leon hums a snowball at her chest.

LEON

Your time's up.

Joy turns to Stan. They get to work making snowballs. Leon's smirk withers, heads for the hills.

Snowballs rain down on Leon, dropping him face first into a pile of snow.

JOY

Consider it a co-pay.

INT. SALON - MORNING

Two ELVES wearing cockscombs are busy giving pedicures. The size of the feet they're working on varies considerably.

Joy leans back in her chair, reading Psychology Today. Next to her is Noel, she flips through an Elven Times newspaper.

NOEL

This is such a treat. Thank you so much.

JOY

My pleasure.

She peeks down at her feet, notices the nails are alternating red and green.

COCKSCOMB

What?

JOY

Nothing. Nice work.

NOEL

You should pamper yourself more.

JOY

So how are things with you and Hark?

NOEL

Good, thanks for asking.

JOY

That's good.

She waits for Noel to elaborate. She doesn't.

JOY

He seems really... sure of himself.

NOEL

He is.

JOY

That's important. To have such strong opinions.

Noel nods. But her discomfort is growing. Joy notices.

JOY

My guess is you and Leon never went out.

NOEL
(crinkles her newspaper)
Huh? No.
(uncomfortable beat)
Why do you ask?

JOY
No reason.

Shoe's on the other foot. Joy's coy and Noel wants answers.

NOEL
He's too angry to go out with anybody,
if you ask me.

JOY
Yeah. But psychology's funny
sometimes.

NOEL
What do you mean?

JOY
Sometimes people put on their mean
face to hide something else.

NOEL
Like what?

JOY
Fear. Acceptance, maybe. Or...
whatever.

She returns to her magazine. Noel is left wondering.

JOY
This is such an interesting article.

INT. STAN'S WORKSHOP - AFTERNOON

Leon works on a word jumble. Two workbenches up, Noel chats
with Hark. She glances back at Leon, he doesn't notice.

Portly sidles next to Leon.

PORTLY
Doing anything later, Big Boy?

LEON
I don't know. Might hang myself.

PORTLY
Let me know how that goes.

She stomps away. Leon solves the word jumble: "Unrequited."
He scribbles through it. Looks up. Noel's there.

NOEL

Hey.

LEON

What do you want?

NOEL

Just wanted to say Hi.

LEON

Mission accomplished.

He begins a new puzzle.

NOEL

That's a little chilly.

LEON

Don't you have work to do?

NOEL

That makes one of us.

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Stan and Joy watch the drama unfold on a closed-circuit TV.
They munch away on caramel popcorn.

JOY

He looks standoffish to me. Does he
look standoffish to you?

STAN

Now what would that look like.

JOY

Shut up.

CAL (O.S.)

I did it!

He holds up his solved Rubik's Cube.

STAN & JOY

That's great, kiddo.

Responding in unison makes them both uncomfortable. They
lose themselves in more popcorn.

INT. STAN'S WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

Noel and Leon are eye-to-eye.

LEON

Don't you think you should be running
back to your beau? He might get
frostbite standing there by himself.

Noel peeks back at Hark. He applies more honey to his hair.

NOEL

Maybe. He's very sociable.

LEON

Like a butterfly.

NOEL

Are you depressed or something? A
few hours under the lamp might do
you some good.

LEON

You came to talk to me. Remember?

NOEL

And boy, was it worth it.

A cool look from Noel, she turns on a dime and leaves. A
few Elves look back at Leon. He stares them all down.

LEON

(to himself)

Nobody turns Leon Hurtz into a
laughingstocking.

INT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The hallway twists and turns. The sound of chanting in the
distance. Growing louder. Getting closer.

INT. CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Cheers fill the air as Leon struts across the stage in a
tux. With a wave of his hand, he silences the Elves.

LEON

(into mike)

Some people think they're so smart,
don't they. They go to college.
Get a degree.

(MORE)

LEON (CONT'D)

Sprinkle a few initials after their name, and what do you get? They're telling you *your* life story.

He guzzles a mug of mead that rests on a barstool. Flings it over his shoulder.

LEON

But do they really know what it's like to be you? Up here in the dark? The cold? Or are they just guessing.

SOME ELVES

(nod)

Guessing.

LEON

They jot down some notes... give you that oh-so-concerned look... But are they really that concerned? Maybe. But not about you. In a week, they'll be windsurfing in Bora Bora. And they just heard a tropical storm might hit. Sound nice?

Murmurs of dismay from the crowd. Momentum builds...

LEON

Know what? I think they're full of it. And tonight... I'm gonna show you just how much.

He drops the mike. Electricity fills the air. Leon nods to someone in the crowd, and suddenly heavy music comes on.

The Elves get into it. Ancy starts a mosh pit. Toys are tossed into the mix and quickly stomped.

THROUGH A GLASS PANE

in the rear door, Joy watches it all unfold. Mouth agape.

On stage, Leon strolls to a crank on the wall. From the ceiling, a piñata descends. A JOY-piñata. It's disturbingly accurate.

Leon lifts a hockey stick off the floor, points it at the crowd.

LEON

My friends. I was never much of a hockey player. But you know something? It's never too late to try.

He pivots. Slashes away at the piñata.

ELVES

(with each whack of
the stick)

Yeah!

Joy looks on in sheer horror. Suddenly, the floor is flooded with bits of black licorice.

LEON

You tell me. Was she full of it?

The Elves holler and whistle. Leon raises his stick like he scored a game-winning goal.

LEON

(chants)

No more Joy...

ELVES

(chant)

No more Joy...

INT. JOY'S OFFICE SUITE - MORNING

Joy sits defiantly on her throne. No notepad. Ancy is sprawled out on the couch. Joy squints at her.

JOY

You look tired. Can't be overworked.

ANCY

Went to a shindig last night.

JOY

Oh is that what you call it?

ANCY

Yeah, that's what I call it. What's it to you?

JOY

Maybe when Christmas is officially canceled, I can drown out my sorrows... In Bora Bora.

ANCY

(sits up)

You were spyin' on us?

JOY

Boy, if it weren't for brainwashing, some of us would never get cleaned up.

ANCY

You take that back.

JOY

I paid for it. It's my choice not to take it back.

ANCY

Huh?

JOY

How long have these shindigs been going on? Oo, lemme guess. October?

ANCY

How could you know a thing like that?

JOY

And the last time you sneezed... Same month, right?

ANCY

You're a witch, aren't you. I knew it.

JOY

Maybe. There's initials after my name. Look, Ancy... not that I care, but... these Leon concerts you've been going to? They're affecting you psychosomatically.

ANCY

Who?

JOY

Sorry, that's a college word. His brainwashing has lowered your self-esteem.

ANCY

Elf-esteem.

JOY

What?

ANCY

We knock off the "s".

JOY

Whatever. The point is, his rants have affected you emotionally. You keep things bottled up. It manifests itself in different ways.

ANCY

I thought sneezing was involuntary.

JOY

It is for people. I don't know about you folks.

ANCY

You think you're so special?

JOY

No. But why do you think you break rocking horses?

ANCY

... What about Ode?

JOY

You beat him up just for fun. My guess... you chose rocking horses because they remind you of something.

ANCY

Like what?

JOY

Like the reindeer. That ran over your mom. Or was that just a lie?

INT. JOY'S OFFICE SUITE - LATER

Ode sits in a wheelchair wearing a full body cast. His hands and feet stick out. They're especially bandaged and billowy.

ODE

But I thought rhymin' was stylin'.

JOY

Ode... When it comes to rhyme, there's a place and a time. You wouldn't put the cart before the horse. That would only make things... worse. I think poetry is meant more for journals and books. And that's okay. If it gets you off the... hooks. In the end, we should all practice safe poetry. Otherwise, we might end up looking like toiletry.

Ode blushes. Aroused. Joy shudders, regretting her poetic verse.

ODE

Okay. Doing anything today?

INT. ROOM 331 - AFTERNOON

Cal pouts on the bed, staring at his solved Rubik's Cube. He flings it in the corner, it rolls under a chair. Joy enters, spots his mood, sits on the bed across from him.

JOY

Is something wrong?
(no response)
Cal...

He won't look up at her.

JOY

Cal, you're scaring me. What is it?

CAL

He's not coming back. Is he.

Finally, he does look up. And Joy has nowhere to run.

JOY

No.

CAL

Why not?

JOY

Sometimes... things just don't work out. Between two people. And it's no one's fault.

CAL
How could it be nobody's fault? You
had a fight?

JOY
Yes, but --

CAL
But what? Whose fault was it?

JOY
... Mine.

CAL
What did you do? *Mom.*

His last utterance slays her.

JOY
I stopped paying attention. To the
little things.

CAL
I don't know what you mean.

Joy wracks her brain for the best way to explain.

JOY
You know Tommy. He's your best
friend, right?

CAL
So?

JOY
But last year you hung out with Billy.
Remember?

CAL
So?

JOY
So sometimes things change. They
don't stay the same. No matter how
hard we try.

CAL
What about Santa?

JOY
What about him?

CAL
He's nice.

JOY
Yes, he's nice.

CAL
But what?

JOY
It's not a question of nice. Or
naughty.

CAL
Why not?

JOY
... Why not?

She stares at him. Devoid of answers. Cal tilts his head.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

The reindeer are asleep. The sound of the door opening - gusts of wind whipping by - the door closes.

Joy trudges in. Makes her way past the bulk of stalls.

Caliopi stands at the back of her stall, awake. Languid.

Joy stops and watches her. Moves in closer.

She eyes the can of alfalfa pellets, but knows it's no use. Joy leans tiredly against the railing, shuts her eyes...

She peeks up. Caliopi now stands at the front of her stall. They exchange a prolonged look.

Joy reaches for the alfalfa. Pours a mound into her palm.

She reaches into the stall. Caliopi begins to nibble.

Stan appears at Joy's side, startling her.

STAN
Sorry.

Caliopi continues to chow down. Joy studies her.

JOY
You've got a lot of catching up to
do.

Stan gets down on one knee. Joy spots him, jumps back, dropping the pellets.

Stan smiles up at her as he ties his boot.

STAN
What?

JOY
Nothing.

STAN
(stands back up)
If you're free, there's something I
wanted to show you.

JOY
Indoors or outdoors?

STAN
Yes.

EXT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

It's snowing. Joy and Stan sit atop harnessed reindeer.

JOY
Now I *know* you're taking things too
far.

STAN
I gave you Vixen. I hope you don't
mind.

JOY
Dreamer.

STAN
Hold on tight. Are you ready?

JOY
For what?

STAN
He shoots... He scores!

The reindeer, and their jockeys, are airborne.

JOY
Whoa God...

She wavers to one side, clutches the reins.

JOY
This can't be happening!

STAN
You just keep telling yourself that!

JOY
These things are mechanical, right?

STAN
Do they smell mechanical? Woo hooo...

They bend, dip and soar through snowy skies.

INT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - HALLWAY - LATER

The jingle bell rings. Joy and Stan bound off the elevator, rosy-cheeked.

They open the door to Room 331.

JOY
Cal, are you in here?

She breezes through the rooms. No sign of Cal.

JOY
Let's try Santa's workshop, shall we?

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Mrs. Claus (the hourglass) is up in arms -- literally. Portly watches a hockey game on TV, her feet up on the desk.

PORTLY
Shoot the puck! You wingnut.

Joy and Stan stride in.

JOY
Have you seen Cal?

PORTLY
A few minutes ago, why?

JOY
Where?

Portly bites into a snack. Stan and Joy wait for her to finish chewing.

PORTLY
He was with Leon.

JOY
What?!

Portly falls off the swivel chair, takes the snack with her.

JOY
Where were they?

PORTLY
On the stairs.

Stan and Joy bolt. Portly gets up, licks her palms clean.
Joy pops her head back in.

JOY
Up or down?

PORTLY
Yeah.

INT. STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Joy and Stan drive through a set of double doors.

JOY
Where are we going?

STAN
I don't know.

Joy chases after him down the steps.

INT. TOY ROOM 12 - MOMENTS LATER

They search a room filled with beach balls.

STAN
Do you think he'd really hurt Cal?

JOY
I wouldn't put anything past him.
Cal? Cal...?!

INT. TOY ROOM 11 - MOMENTS LATER

They search a room with wall-to-wall action figures.

JOY

I'm losing my mind here.

STAN

I've known Leon a long time. He wouldn't do that.

JOY

Don't defend him.

STAN

I'm trying to put your mind at ease.

JOY

First off, you don't have kids. You don't have a frame of reference. Second, you really expect me to trust an elf with a Mohawk?

STAN

He's a little peculiar, I'll give you that.

JOY

A little? Do you even know what goes on here late at night?

STAN

No, what?

JOY

... or early at night? Cuz who the hell knows, it's always freaking dark around here!

STAN

Calm down. Tell me.

JOY

Next time you can't sleep, try the cafeteria for some cookies and milk. Your friend Leon is quite the inspirational speaker.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Joy and Stan sprint along. They run out of gas.

JOY

If he does anything to Cal, I swear to God I'll kill him.

STAN

Don't jump to any conclusions, okay?
He's probably fine.

JOY

You don't know that.

STAN

You don't think you're overreacting?
Maybe just a little?

JOY

Overreacting? My son's missing and
we're in the bleeping North Pole.
I'm overreacting?

STAN

They couldn't have gone far.

JOY

Don't you have a police force or
something? God, this is so
irresponsible.

STAN

Look, we're a decent bunch up here,
okay? Why can't you see that?

JOY

A decent bunch of slackers, is more
like it.

STAN

Whose fault is that?

JOY

You're blaming me?

STAN

No, but...

JOY

(huffs, exasperated)
My God...

STAN

What?

JOY

I don't know why I didn't see it
sooner.

STAN

See what sooner?

JOY

You really live in a dream world,
don't you. Up here in all the snow
and ice. You lost touch with reality.

STAN

No I haven't. I'm just not as
paranoid as you.

JOY

Paranoid? How dare you judge me?
You live in a giant candy cane and
I'm the one who's delusional?

STAN

It's not an actual candy cane, Joy.
I don't lick the sides of the
building.

JOY

Is that supposed to be comforting?

STAN

You know something? You're right.
You could never do it.

JOY

Never do what?

STAN

Live here. Your attitude is all
wrong for this place.

JOY

Attitude? My son's been abducted,
and you're criticizing my attitude?
Does Santa want a fat lip?

STAN

You always expect the worst from
people. And when they deliver, you
give them a gold star.

JOY

Yeah? Well put away the Santa suit
and come live in my neck o' the woods
for a change. You'll see it doesn't
just happen by accident.

STAN

All of this because of Ted?

JOY

I share something personal with you,
and you throw it back in my face?!

STAN

Just because I'm bringing him up
doesn't mean I'm throwing him in
your face.

JOY

How naive can you be? Baby New Year,
wake up! You cram blind faith into
everything.

STAN

You mean like you?

Joy's thrown by this, tries hard not to show it.

STAN

Blind faith? Is redundant. Faith
is always blind. But you gotta have
it to know it.

JOY

I don't know how I could be so blind
about you or this place. You might
want to close up the workshop, Stan.
I don't think you're going on tour
this year.

She smacks her way through the double doors.

INT. 3RD FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Joy runs along, her mascara streaked. She tries a door.

INT. TOY ROOM 3 - CONTINUOUS

The room overflows with gigantic stuffed animals. They hang
from tall metal shelves in countless rows.

JOY

Cal?! Cal, where are you?

She peeks down each aisle. Looks up. Straight ahead is a
white elephant as tall as the room. It glares down at Joy.

She doubles back. The inside of the door reveals a dartboard:
A photograph of Joy is decorated with darts.

INT. TOY ROOM 2 - MOMENTS LATER

The room is bedecked with baby dolls. No shelving, only dolls. Joy steps into the mix and sets one off: "Mama."

She nearly loses her balance, sets off another. Joy hurries to get away. More and more dolls call out to her.

She makes it to the other side. And cries.

INT. LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Joy leaps off the elevator, dashes toward the fountain, which has stopped gurgling. No sign of anyone.

EXT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - CONTINUOUS

Joy races outside without her jacket. Gusts of wind rasp. There is nothing but black, frigid emptiness.

Joy trudges as fast as she can to the backside of the candy cane. She spots Wolf and Aura loading boxes into the jeep.

JOY

Have you seen Cal?

AURA

No.

WOLF

I hope he's not out here.

JOY

I looked everywhere, I can't find him.

AURA

Did you check the basement?

WOLF

That's where Stan keeps the toy rejects.

INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Joy bursts in. Searches for a door to the basement.

JOY

Wait for me, Cal. Mommy's coming.

She turns a corner and finds a door without a sign.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Ominous. Dank. Joy descends the stairs.

She nears an ugly, steel door. Turns the knob...

INT. REJECT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Total darkness. Eerie as hell. Joy slowly enters.

A faint wind whistles. She steps on a glass ornament.

CAL (O.S.)
(calling)
Mom?

JOY
Cal, where are you?

The room is suddenly engulfed in Christmas lights. An

ELABORATE MAZE

unfolds. Row upon row of intersecting Christmas trees.

JOY
My God... What is this?

She turns the corner and nicks her leg on a misshapen toy.

JOY
Ow!

She spins back around, cuts herself on another.

JOY
Ow! These are like the Worst...
Toys... Ever!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
Fine, rub it in.

Joy glances around for the source of the voice.

JOY
Is that you? Gimme back my son!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
Oh, Joy. The fun has just begun.
How 'bout a game of hide 'n seek?

JOY
No. I want my son back now!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
We can't always get what we want.

JOY
Stop it! You're scaring Cal.

She winds her way through the maze.

LEON (over loudspeaker)
There's something you should know
about this place. I put a spell on
it.

JOY
Stan told me he had you people fixed!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
I called in sick that day.

JOY
There's a shocker.

LEON (over loudspeaker)
And "you people" is so declassé.

JOY
Maybe I'll fix you myself!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
Anyone who dares enter this room must
have faith in yours truly. If they
care to find their way out.

He chuckles heartily.

LEON (over loudspeaker)
Otherwise, it's round and round you
go. Ingenious, don't you think?

JOY
I want my son back now, you nutcake!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
Turn the record over, Joy. You're
starting to skip.

JOY
Cal, where are you? It's me, Sweetie!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
Must be awkward for you. Me sitting
on the throne and you on the couch.

JOY
 Shut up. What's this all about,
 Leon? I didn't do anything to you.

She peers through the trees, the branches are far too dense.

LEON (over loudspeaker)
 You didn't open that big trap of
 yours to Noel?

JOY
 What're you talking about?

LEON (over loudspeaker)
 A psychologist and a liar. Or am I
 just being redundant.

JOY
 You shut up!

She kicks one of Leon's misshapen toys.

LEON (over loudspeaker)
 You violate my confidentiality and
 I'm the bad guy?

JOY
 I did not!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
 I could've died back at the infirmary.
 That was you, wasn't it.

JOY
 You deserved it!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
 Ahh, the marvels of a God Complex...

JOY
 Get lost, you weirdo!

LEON (over loudspeaker)
 I must be lost. Because you can't
 find me.

He laughs. The sound of Cal's footsteps, running.

LEON (over loudspeaker)
 Get back here!

Joy throws it into fifth gear, rounds the bend. Spots Cal
 ten yards away! He holds an odd-shaped club in his hand.

She chases after him. Suddenly, Leon steps in her path.

Joy pounces on him like a wildcat. They crash to the ground.

JOY

You're mine, Mohawk!

She grabs Leon by the throat.

CAL

Mo-om!

JOY

Don't Mo-om me!

LEON

Go ahead. I'm not exactly filled
with the Christmas spirit.

Joy stops choking Leon. And slaps him in the face!

JOY

Yes you are!

LEON

No I'm not.

JOY

(slaps him again)

Yes you are!

LEON

No I'm not.

Joy resumes the chokehold.

JOY

You are full of it.

(relents)

Are we still talking about the same
thing?

LEON

I'm not sure.

Stranglehold it is.

LEON

Doesn't matter. Not without her.

JOY

Have you even tried talking to her?
Nicely?

LEON

You mean like a normal conversation?

JOY

Yes. Like a normal conversation.

Leon shakes his head. Joy suddenly lets go. Leon coughs like crazy.

LEON

What's the point?

JOY

God, Leon... She's not a mind reader.

LEON

Why be with me when she can marry him?

JOY

You're referring to Hark, I presume?

LEON

He's suave and polished. With a thick head o' hair. Look at me. I'm this craggy loser with a poor track record. You do the math.

JOY

You're sure that's how she sees you... and not how you see yourself?

LEON

What's the difference?

JOY

And her feelings for Hark. You know all about that, too, huh?

LEON

Like two stockings over a fireplace.

STAN (O.S.)

(calling)

Joy?

JOY

Yeah!

STAN (O.S.)

Where are you?

JOY

I don't know!

She turns to look Leon square in the eye.

JOY
Is that what this was about? Fear
of rejection?

Leon gazes down an aisle of his toy rejects.

LEON
Can you blame me?

JOY
They're just toys, Leon.

LEON
Yeah. And I'm just an elf.

The look on Joy's face softens, she puts the pieces together.

CAL
I want a baseball. I want a baseball.

He swings his club like a baseball bat.

JOY
Cal, what are you doing with that
thing? Get rid of it, it looks
dangerous.

CAL
Leon made it.

JOY
I mean... what is it?

CAL
It's a bracketstaddle.

JOY
A what?

CAL
A bracketstaddle. Look.

He shows his mom a series of buttons on the side of the club:
Baseball bat, tennis racket, hockey stick and ping pong paddle.

JOY
Let me see that.

She tries a button. The bat changes into a ping pong paddle.

JOY
Has Stan seen this?

LEON

I wouldn't wanna ruin my streak.

Stan turns the corner.

STAN

There you are.

Joy twirls the paddle, hands it to Leon.

JOY

Now's your chance, Sport.

STAN

What happened here? It looks like
The Shining on happy pills.

LEON

Remember about a month ago... I
told you we were short a bunch of
trees?

STAN

Yeah...?

LEON

I lied.

STAN

Great. It's coming outta your
paycheck. Oh yeah, that's right.
You don't get one of those.

(to Joy)

Let's get outta here.

He turns to leave.

LEON

Santa.

Stan stops cold. Leon has never called him that before.

LEON

I wanted to show you this.

He hands Stan the bracketstaddle.

STAN

What is it?

LEON

My latest catastrophe.

Stan scrutinizes it, presses the buttons. Watches it transform each time.

He turns to Leon. Very unimpressed.

STAN
I want it mass-distributed. Pronto.

LEON
Really?

STAN
(hands it back)
Can you handle that?

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Claus' foot taps on the floor, like the second hand of a clock. Her eyebrow rises and rises, until it pops off.

INT. STAN'S WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

Noel paints a baby doll. Hark sneaks up on her, sets a rope down on the table. Oddly enough, it's shaped like a noose.

HARK
Honeymoon in Iceland... your thoughts?

Noel stiffens, she eyes the noose.

HARK
They say it's not that icy.

NOEL
Interesting.

HARK
Splendiferous work on the baby.

NOEL
Thanks.

She quickly crams the baby doll into a bag, out of sight.

HARK
Anything wrong?

NOEL
Nope.

HARK
Are you certain?

NOEL

Yup.

HARK

Where would you like to conjugate?
You know, get hitched, as they say.

NOEL

Umm...

She turns a look back at Leon's empty desk.

NOEL

We'll figure it out.

HARK

(moves in tight)

I was thinking Corsica. Under a
moonlit sky. The faint whisper of
flutes... the melancholy hum of
clarinets. You and I, staring deep
into each other's eyes. Vulnerable.
Exquisite.

(with a deep sigh)

Breathtaking...

NOEL

We'll figure it out.

Joy, Stan, Cal and Leon march in. In the brightness of the
room, it's visible that Leon's mohawk is now part red and
part green.

HALF-ELF #1

Check it out.

HALF-ELF #2

Now that's the Christmas spirit.

Leon takes center stage. Stan hands him the megaphone.

LEON

Hi... Umm... Hello.

The Elves trade looks, surprised to see Leon nervous.

LEON

Over the past few months... I haven't
been the best influence. There were
things going on... Or not going on,
I should say.

Noel perks up. Hark turns and notices.

LEON

But it didn't need to involve everyone here. And for that, I'm sorry. I see tonight as my chance to make it right. So that's what I'm gonna do.

PORTLY

What're you talking about?

LEON

I think we should put Christmas back on track.

SOME ELVES

What? Why?

LEON

Because that's who we are. It's what we do.

ANCY

Why should we? We're no slaves!

MORE ELVES

Yeah! We're not slaves!

Leon glances around the room. Murmurs of dissension mount. For the first time, he recognizes it's his responsibility.

TOPSPIN

Humans don't appreciate us. You said so yourself!

MORE ELVES

Yeah!

Leon trades looks with Stan, who trades looks with Joy.

ELVES

(chant)

No more Joy...

Leon gapes at them. The Elves shake their fists in the air.

Noel lowers a hammer on the workbench!

NOEL

Merry Christmas!

The chant stops.

ELVES

What?

NOEL

You heard what I said! Look at us all! If we don't save Christmas, then who will? It's up to us. I say we listen to Leon!

Leon's eyes widen. He grins at Noel. She smirks back.

Hark catches the moment between the two. And snaps! He grabs a toy pirate sword, places it at Noel's throat. She shrieks.

HARK

No fast moves, you elves.

LEON

What're you doing?

HARK

You all make me sick! Especially you with the hair. Lazy as a pile of reindeer poop. And what are you supposed to be now? A born-again?

LEON

Let her go.

Two burlier Elves make their way toward Hark.

HARK

Get back, you buffoons! Or I'll turn her into The Last Noel.

The burly Elves stop short.

HARK

Wanna know something? Elves are overrated.

He kicks off what appear to be elevator shoes and removes a mask. Hark's now much smaller, and older-looking. Bald, with a gnarly white beard.

ANCY

Look, he's a gnome!

All the Elves gasp.

JOY

My God...

STAN

I gotta start doin' background checks.

Hark backs away with Noel.

HARK
That's right. Deal with it.

NOEL
Did I ever tell you your vocabulary's
beautiful?

HARK
Save it, you harlequin.

NOEL
What's that again?

HARK
Buy a dictionary.

He walks backward... into a finger. Spins to find Leon. He
holds his bracketstaddle. Fashions it into a hockey stick.

LEON
I said, Let her go.

HARK
Fat chance, Chia Pet.

LEON
Alright then. I'll fight you for
her.

HARK
What?

NOEL
What?

HARK
You have no chance against me.

LEON
Then it'll be a short fight. So to
speak.

HARK
Very funny. I accept your challenge!

He shoves Noel away. She lands safely on Ode.

CAL
Mom, he's ugly.

HARK
Quiet down, you brat!

He snags an oversized candy cane from Gangly's workbench.
Leon does the same.

HARK
En garde! Leon...

Dueling candy canes, followed by toy sword vs. hockey stick.
They alternate back and forth as they move in a circle. The
crowd draws near.

LEON
Should I get down on my knees so
there's no height advantage?

HARK
I just assumed you would.

LEON
It's on, Gnome-boy.

Hark swings the hook of the candy cane, Leon stops it cold.
Again on the other side, Leon stops it. He pushes Hark back.

LEON
She shot you down, did she, Hark?
Can't blame an elf for having class.

HARK
You wish you were a gnome!

LEON
Not really.

Hark aims high, grazes Leon's Mohawk.

LEON
Don't strain yourself.

Joy gets into the fight, punching Stan's bicep.

STAN
Ow...

Leon thrusts with the butt end of the stick, Hark ducks.

LEON
If you were any smaller, I'd have to
fight you with a lawn mower.

Hark swings, Leon sidesteps.

LEON
Speakin' of which... shouldn't you
be decorating a garden somewhere?

He thwacks Hark upside the head.

HARK

I decorated Noel's garden. What do you think of that, Boots?!

He pulls Leon in with the candy cane, delivers a slash to the neck with the pirate sword. Leon goes hurtling backwards, lands heavily over by Stan, Joy and Cal.

His world spins. An awful, confused meshing of Christmas songs swirls in his head. His head rolls back and forth. Slowly, he opens his eyes to find Joy.

LEON

Great. Another pep talk?

Now, it's Joy's turn to look dreamy. Her eyes and heart wide open, she stares serenely down at him.

JOY

I believe in you, Leon.

Something gives way inside of Leon. And something flicks on. Never has he heard these words before in his life.

Without a word, he springs to his feet. And marches back over to Hark who takes a few steps back.

LEON

Time for some closure.

He delivers a mean blow to Hark's ribs. Again on the other side. Hark's a hunted gnome. He swings at Leon's knees, he hops it with ease.

LEON

Try harder.

Sword and hockey stick cutting through the electric air. Noel cheers Leon on.

HARK

You traitor. You can't kiss for beans.

A mean shot to the face, Hark's nose is bent out of shape.

LEON

Not so tough without your high heels on.

HARK

Eat me.

LEON
Why don't you eat me?

HARK
No, you.

LEON
You.

LEON AND HARK
Eat me!

They both swing... smash! Bits of candy cane fly everywhere. Portly tosses a piece in her mouth. Recoils, spits it out.

Hark stares at his nub of a candy cane. Leon's is intact.

LEON
Size doesn't matter.

He hooks Hark off stage. He spins and spins until he lands hard against a rocking horse. And breaks it.

LEON
(points at Stan)
Take it outta my paycheck.

Hark tries to shake it off, looks up. Ancy stands over him.

ANCY
Now look what you did. I oughta...
uh... UH... UHH...

The Elves run for cover.

ANCY
Chooo!

A smattering of applause. When the dust finally settles, Hark is significantly more gnarly. Noel moves in...

NOEL
It's over, Hark. Thrice over.

SCHMELF
*Joy to the World... the Lord is
come...*

The Elves look at each other, confirm that he got the lyrics right. Then join in.

EVERYONE

*Let earth receive her King... let
every heart... prepare Him room...
and heaven and nature sing... and
heaven and nature sing... and heaven,
and heaven, and nature sing...*

MONTAGE: BACK TO WORK

- Schmelf builds an old-fashioned record player.
- Leon shows several Elves how to build a bracketstaddle.
- Joy peels the bandage off Cal's hand with a smile.
- Topspin shines a large colorful top.
- Portly paints a garden gnome. Ode winks at her.
- Noel fashions Legos into a heart.
- Next to Noel, Cal now stuffs a white elephant.
- Ancy builds a rocking horse, peeks at Joy.
- Joy turns to Stan. He jingles his keys.

STAN

Feel like goin' for a ride?

MOMENTS LATER

Schmelf does vocal exercises. Ode comes over.

ODE

Schmelf, with your voice and my gift
for rhyme, we can make great music
together.

The Elves stare at Ode, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

ODE

What?

Noel and Leon build a dollhouse.

NOEL

Don't forget to add the fireplace.
I want a fireplace.

LEON

Fine, I'll build you a fireplace.
What'd you ever see in that guy?

NOEL

He wasn't that bad. He just wasn't
my type. Or species.

They share a laugh.

EXT. CANDY CANE CENTRAL - RUNWAY - CONTINUOUS

Joy and Stan make their way toward the sleigh. The wind
fights them every step of the way.

JOY

I could see building a summer home
here.

STAN

Does that sarcasm keep you warm?

JOY

Not warm enough. Are we in a rush?

STAN

Sort of, why?

INT. STAN'S WORKSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Cal draws a large heart in the foggy window. He smudges a
peephole. He, Noel and Leon peek through.

CAL

Coo-wool...

INT./EXT. STAN'S SLEIGH - CONTINUOUS

Joy and Stan defrost in a passionate kiss. The wind howls.
They break. Christmas lights dance across Joy's face.

JOY

Is this the part when you fly around
the world in one night?

STAN

There's worse ways to make a living.

The reindeer neigh. Joy and Stan gaze at each other.

JOY

Probably should get going, then.

STAN

A lot of stops to make, yeah. Give
Cal a hug from me.

Joy nods. Then steals the reins away from Stan. He can
only gape.

Then smile. Joy smirks, shuts her eyes. Gets into it...

JOY

Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now --

STAN

We went over this.

Joy opens her eyes. Slowly... Eureka!

JOY

He shoots... He scores!

We have lift-off. Joy keels to one side, Stan catches her.

The sleigh fishtails away. Down below, Joy's first ever
snowman. Smiling at them as they soar higher and higher...

STAN

What the Bruins need is goaltending.
Strong goaltending always wins
championships.

JOY

Would you just shut the hell up.

They delve into the night.

FADE OUT

THE END