CARIBOU CHRISTMAS

Written by

Kate O'Hare

310-922-3442
Kateoharewrites@gmail.com

ACT ONE

INT. MANHATTAN APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Legend reads: SATURDAY NIGHT IN MANHATTAN

Swanky New York penthouse party with the glittering lights of the city in the background. Moving through the hip crowd with ease is SLOANE CAVANAUGH, early 30s, just to the elegant side of flashy, martini in hand. A NEWS ANCHOR crosses her path and smiles in recognition.

NEWS ANCHOR
Sloane Cavanaugh, we meet again.

Sloane looks around in mock alarm.

SLOANE
Oh, dear, America's anchorman is speaking to me. Have I done something newsworthy?

The anchor laughs.

NEWS ANCHOR
I enjoyed our debate on the Supreme Court's Kelo decision a couple weekends ago.

SLOANE
You mean the one about how states should fight back against the seizing of private property for the benefit of rich developers?

NEWS ANCHOR
You can take the girl out of the West... Coming back to the Hamptons soon?

SLOANE
Maybe, but not at the same villa, I'm afraid.

A flicker of sadness crosses her face. The anchor gets the hint and switches the subject.

NEWS ANCHOR
In the meantime, you should consider coming on my show as a legal analyst.

SLOANE
Only when my mergers and acquisitions become hot headline news.

NEWS ANCHOR
When will that be?

SLOANE
Never, if I do my job right.

They smile at each other and clink glasses, and then Sloane continues on her way, draining her glass as she does, and then grabbing another off a passing tray.

She drains that one while air-kissing and laughing her way through the crowd. Then her eyes are drawn to a HANDSOME MAN, 30s, clean-shaven, impeccably dressed and groomed, watching her with a bemused smile from a picture window across the room.

Noticing the attention, Sloane sidles up to her equally fashionable BFF, willowy socialite ARIANA VAN DER LEIDEN, late 20s.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Who’s that by the window? He’s new.

ARIANA
Why, Sloane, over Paolo so soon?

Sloane winces for a second, then recovers her cool face.

SLOANE
Are you asking as Ariana van der Leiden, Manhattan gossip maven, or as my BFF?

ARIANA
You’re safe. You know way too many of my secrets.

They clink glasses. Ariana then eyes the new guy.

ARIANA (CONT'D)
The hedge-fund guy Beth is dating brought him. She said they’re ski buddies. Don’t think he’s budged from that spot all night.

Curious, Sloane leaves and heads over to the Handsome Man.

SLOANE
Enjoying the view?

HANDSOME MAN
(eyeing her)
Indeed.

He smiles. A bit thrown off, Sloane fills in the space.

SLOANE
Rinaldo's parties are legendary, not least for that.

She gestures toward the city.

HANDSOME MAN
Penthouses have their privileges.

He just smiles again. Sloane plows forward.

SLOANE
There's nothing like New York. It's the center of the world.

HANDSOME MAN
Used to think that. Now, not so sure.

SLOANE
Where are you from, the wilderness?

HANDSOME MAN
Upper East Side. You?

SLOANE
I live in Chelsea.

HANDSOME MAN
Not what I asked.

Sloane ignores that.

SLOANE
What could be better than the City?

HANDSOME MAN
Clean air, open spaces, room to breathe. The beauty of nature.

SLOANE
Hah. Nature's overrated. It's full of rich tourists and poor locals.

HANDSOME MAN
Speaking from experience?

SLOANE
Look up Miner's Notch, Idaho, on the map, if you can find it.

HANDSOME MAN
I just may do that.

His knowing smile continues to irritate Sloane, but the way he looks at her melts her resistance. He leans in.

HANDSOME MAN (CONT'D)
Look, do you want to go get a drink...

Then the cellphone in his pocket buzzes. He looks down with a frown, his good humor suddenly disappearing. Insert: A text from COLE: DEAL HIT SNAG. POP SAYS GET BACK TO THE OFFICE!!

HANDSOME MAN (CONT'D)
(looking up)
Sorry. Some other time.

With a nod, he turns.

SLOANE
But, I...

He vanishes into the crowd. Sloane's about to follow when Ariana takes her elbow.

ARIANA
So?

Sloane empties her drink, hands it to Ariana and walks off. Halfway across the room, the cellphone in her purse begins buzzing. She pulls it out and looks, sees a call from "DAD."

Looking at the late hour, she answers the call.

SLOANE
Dad? What is it... what? I'm at a party; it's loud... Is it Mom? I thought she was getting better.

As she listens, her face falls.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Oh, no.

INT. SLOANE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Legend reads: ANOTHER SATURDAY NIGHT IN MANHATTAN -- THREE YEARS LATER.

Sloane, with a different haircut under a sparkly Santa hat, clad in a sequined, skimpy party dress with a fur jacket zipped over it, stumbles into a trendy studio loft apartment, with lots of glass and exposed brick.

There's a skeletal metal Christmas tree in the window, wrapped in lights, with the Manhattan skyline in the background.

In her little party purse, her cell buzzes. She fishes it out. The time reads 3:16 a.m., and she's gotten a text message from BROOKS, that reads, "Calling an all-hands at 10 a.m. Be there."

SLOANE
(slurry)
An all-hands? But it's Sunday.

With an angry snort, Sloane pulls off that hat and tosses it on a table beside her unmade bed. A little unsteady, she kicks off mile-high shoes and flops on the bed, face first, party purse beside her.

After a moment, she looks uncomfortable, rolls back and pulls a STUFFED REINDEER out of the front of the jacket. She tosses it next to the hat, flops back down and starts snoring.

INT. SLOANE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

The lights of the city, including Christmas lights, can still be seen through the windows. A TIMER next to the metal tree clicks, and the lights come on. The door opens and Sloane, in business clothes and looking stunned and ragged, enters and stumbles toward the bed.

She drops her briefcase on the floor, then kicks off a more businesslike pair of high heels and sits on the bed. She eyes the stuffed reindeer, before picking it up and hurling it across the room.

INT. SLOANE'S APARTMENT -- DAY

There's another, louder buzz. Sloane, asleep in her clothes, wakes up and groggily looks at her phone, wincing in the morning light. The buzz repeats, and she slowly realizes that it's the front door. Dragging herself upward, she shuffles to the door and looks through the peephole.

Closing her eyes and resting her head on the door for a moment, she then composes herself and puts on a smile. She then unlocks and opens the door, admitting Ariana, wearing a Moncler ski parka and furry boots.

ARIANA
I was halfway to Lake Placid to ski when I saw your text. I made Rodolfo turn the chopper around.

SLOANE
(airily)
Rodolfo? What about Donnie?

ARIANA
Rodolfo's a pal. Donnie's down in the car.

SLOANE
Donnie skis?

ARIANA
Well, no... stop it, Sloane. You're going to tell me the meaning of this.
(she pulls out her phone and reads)
"Done in, by a merger. Oh, the irony."

Sloane forces a wider smile.

SLOANE
I was just being dramatic.

Ariana walks to a leather sofa and sits with a flourish.

ARIANA
I'm staying right here until you tell me, if it takes all day.

SLOANE
What about Donnie?

Ariana just crosses her legs and stares, bounding one furry foot. Finally, Sloane slumps into a chair across from her.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Brooks called an all-hands yesterday morning for my division. We've merged with Galbini Stokes Frankel. It's being announced today. Apparently, they already have a large mergers and acquisitions legal team, and they don't need more.

ARIANA
Oh...

SLOANE
And, for the star on the top of the Christmas tree, after three years, Paolo's finally coming back from Italy. I have to be out of here by the end of the month.

ARIANA
Dang, girl. What are you going to do?

Sloane just shakes her head.

INT. SLOANE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Sloane's on the bed in sweats, with a wine glass in her hand and a half-empty bottle on the nightstand. She's flipping channels on the TV. Hitting a CHRISTMAS MOVIE showing a girl and guy petting a REINDEER, she snorts, shuts the TV off and tosses the remote on the bed. As she raises her glass, her phone starts buzzing.

SLOANE
What now?

She looks the phone, frowns, then answers with fake cheer.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Hey, Dad. What's up?

As she listens, her face darkens.

INT. AIRPORT LOUNGE -- DAY

Sloane, looking glum, slouches in a first-class lounge, nursing a glass of wine. Her phone buzzes, and she answers to a video call with Ariana.

ARIANA
Hey. Donnie found room for your stuff at his place on Long Island.

SLOANE
Thanks. Sorry about the short notice.

ARIANA
No worries. Daddy owns a moving company.

Sloane suppresses an eye roll, because she knows Ariana's just being, well, rich.

SLOANE
Tell him thanks, too.

ARIANA
Are you going to tell your dad about, you know, everything?

SLOANE
Of course not. He'll want me to stay.

ARIANA
Would you?

SLOANE
Not even a question.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

Sloane, decked out in a stylish shearling coat and driving a huge luxury SUV, passes a sign saying, "Welcome to Miner's Notch, Idaho. Established 1863, Population 2,112."

INT. SLOANE'S SUV, COUNTRY ROAD, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

Sloane looks up from checking a text on her phone just in time to see a MAN standing in the road, flagging her down. She skids to a stop, and the man, NATE GATHER (30s, long hair, bearded), wearing a Ski Patrol parka, comes up to the window. He looks at her and breaks into a big grin.

NATE
Hi!

He looks at her expectantly. Sloane replies tentatively.

SLOANE
Hi.

Nate eyes her for a moment, then moves on.

NATE
Got a car off the road in the ditch. Everyone's OK, just bumps and bruises, but more help is at least forty minutes away, and it's really cold.

He gestures toward a FAMILY -- parents, two school-age children and a bundled-up baby -- standing shivering by the side of the road, looking a bit banged-up.

NATE (CONT'D)
And you've got this great big warm SUV. Be a great place for them to wait.

SLOANE
Strange job for Ski Patrol...
(sees the name on the parka)
Nate.

NATE
I'm also a local EMT -- and my Jeep won't help much.

He indicates a battered, two-seater JEEP.

SLOANE
There's luggage in back.

NATE
No prob...
(looking comically at her coat for a name)

SLOANE
Sloane.

NATE
I'll take care of it, Sloane.

Sloane looks at the family. She wants to say no, but...

SLOANE
Are any of them bleeding?

NATE
Why?

SLOANE
It's a rental.

INT. SLOANE'S SUV, COUNTRY ROAD, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

Sloane sits in the SUV, nose in her phone, then Nate knocks on the window and motions for her to lower it - so she does. He holds the bundled BABY out to her.

NATE
Here, hold the baby while the family gets stuff out of the car.

Sloane stares at him, but he keeps holding the baby, so she reluctantly takes it and raises the window. As the baby yawns, Sloane softens. Then, the baby makes a face, and Sloane makes a face. She puts down the window...

SLOANE
Nate!

He runs over.

NATE
What?

SLOANE
(nose wrinkled)
I think it’s sick.

He sniffs then laughs.

NATE
I’ll get the mom to do a diaper change.

SLOANE
OK.

She starts to hold out the baby, but he’s already left. She sits for a moment, then shouts.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Where?

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- DAY

Legend reads: CARIBOU LODGE, MINER’S NOTCH, NORTHERN IDAHO

A placid antlered caribou, wearing a harness that says VIXEN, and a collar with jingle bells, stands in a snow-covered pen, staring straight out at us. Behind him a voice can be heard. A tour guide, GEORGIA -- female, 50s, in a Caribou Lodge parka (with her name on it) and boots -- leads a TEACHER and a group of bundled-up grade-school STUDENTS.

GEORGIA
This is our ambassador caribou, Vixen. Orphaned as a calf, she was raised by wildlife rescuers. But, because of a bad leg, Vixen can’t be released back into the wild.

CHILD 1
Isn’t she a reindeer?

GEORGIA
Same species, but different. Caribou live in North America, are larger than the reindeer of Europe and Asia and have never been domesticated. But, Vixen is quite small for a caribou, and very friendly, so it’s an easy mistake to make. Until very recently, a few woodland caribou still lived in the Lower Forty-Eight, right in Idaho’s own Selkirk Mountains. With Vixen’s help, we keep the memory of them alive, looking forward to a day when they, like the wolves of Yellowstone, will return.

Georgia picks out another kid, CHILD 2, in the group and pulls a green ball out of her pocket.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
This is made of lichen and moss, the caribou’s natural winter food.

She holds it out to the child.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
Want to feed her?

The child takes the ball, then gets a nudge from the teacher.

CHILD 2
Thank you, Miss Georgia.

GEORGIA
My pleasure. Feed her just like this.

Georgia demonstrates how to present the ball on the palm of a flat hand. The child sticks a hand through the fence slats in Vixen’s direction. Gently the animal takes the ball.

CHILD 2
She tickles!

Everyone laughs.

GEORGIA
As the centerpiece of Caribou Christmas, which crowns the holiday season here in Miner’s Notch, Vixen helps us raise funds to support woodland caribou in North America.
(MORE)

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
Of course, we all hope you'll come back to Caribou Lodge for the festival, which includes a torchlight ski procession, caroling, tree lighting, chili contest and Santa Claus!

The teacher and students nod assent. Georgia glances over at the lodge -- a rambling structure in a vaguely Nordic style, with a huge, not-yet-lit Christmas tree out in front -- and sees Sloane's SUV pull up. Out steps Sloane, and Georgia breaks into a smile. Leaving the group, she hustles over.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
Suzie!

Sloane looks over, and Georgia notes her expression.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
Sorry, *Sloane*. We've been wondering when you'd arrive.

SLOANE
Got delayed on the road.

Georgia notes the lack of a greeting but ignores it. Sloane reluctantly submits to Georgia's gesture for a hug.

GEORGIA
You're ice-cold. Doesn't that thing have heat?

SLOANE
Drove the last few miles with the windows down. Don't ask. Is my father in the office?

GEORGIA
Front desk. Clerk's got the flu.

Sloane drops her key fob into Georgia's hand.

SLOANE
Can you send someone out for my luggage? Dad put me in the Northwoods Suite. Thanks, Georgia.

Sloane starts to walk off, but stops when Georgia clears her throat. Looking back, she sees Georgia, smiling, drop the fob on the hood of the car.

GEORGIA
Sorry. No porter anymore. Gotta go let the goats out to keep Vixen company.

With that, she heads off toward the caribou pen. A little chastened, Sloane pockets the fob and heads into the lodge.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE LOBBY -- DAY

Sloane sweeps into the lobby, taking in the rustic decor, which includes a crackling fireplace and couch, along with Irish regalia and several fake mounted caribou heads (including wooden, metal, plaster and stuffed -- as in toy, not taxidermy) lining the walls. A life-size fake caribou stands to one side, wearing a saddle and placed in front of a forest backdrop. Pinned to the wall next to it are photos of guests perched on the caribou.

Over the top of the regular decor is woodland-themed Christmas decor, including a fully decorated real tree.

With a sigh, Sloane crosses the lobby, pulls off her coat and hangs it on a coatrack. She then peers over the front desk. Her father, JOE -- 60s, burly and bearded, wearing an embroidered Caribou Lodge shirt that says JOE under the logo -- crouches, rearranging plugs in a power strip.

SLOANE
Thought you were going to put in another outlet back here.

JOE
Priced electricians lately?

Then Joe looks up and realizes it’s Sloane. He beams, but there’s a sadness in his smile.

JOE (CONT'D)
Gosh, Suzie. You sound more like your mother all the time. For a moment, I... well, you made it.

SLOANE
Just about.

Joe hustles around the desk and hugs Sloane. She reluctantly submits. Joe gives her an appraising look.

JOE
I’ve heard they have food in New York. Is it true?

SLOANE
Dad.

JOE
I've missed you, Suzie.

SLOANE
Dad... it's Sloane.

JOE
You'll always be my Suzie.

Sloane sighs but doesn't push it.

JOE (CONT'D)
And here you are, for Caribou Christmas!

SLOANE
I'm here because you said there was trouble.

JOE
And I'm grateful, but first, lunch, before you waste away.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE KITCHEN -- DAY

Seated at table in a corner of the kitchen, Joe looks into a steaming bowl of chili, placed in front of him by the lodge's cook, TACK, a tall, cadaverous-looking 40-something man with his long hair up in a net, and many tattoos.

JOE
Tack, this looks marvelous. Thank you.

Tack puts another bowl in front of Sloane. Sloane seems prepared to ignore it, until she realizes Tack is staring at her. Uncomfortable, she picks up the spoon, scoops up some and puts it into her mouth, making a "delicious!" face. Tack nods and walks off. Sloane, with difficulty, swallows.

SLOANE
Another one?

JOE
Any man who kept maximum-security inmates fed and so happy that they cried when he left is a good cook.

SLOANE
What was he in for?

JOE
None of your business. Wait until you try his Key lime pie. Out of this world. Tack won a statewide prison competition with it.

SLOANE
Wonderful.

Putting down her spoon, she's all business.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
You called me here for a reason.

JOE
I'm fine, Suzie. Thanks for asking. How are you?

SLOANE
Dad...

JOE
Eat first, explain after.

Sloane looks at her chili and sighs. From the corner of her eye, she sees Tack watching from the other end of the kitchen, as he's chopping carrots with a huge knife. Reluctantly, Sloane begins to eat.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE, JOE'S OFFICE -- DAY

Tacked to the wall in the cluttered office is a huge map of the area. Drawn on it is a large square marked NEW RESORT, a small square marked CARIBOU LODGE, and a line, marked NEW ROAD, passing right through the lodge and ending at the resort. Sloane, popping antacids, peers at the map. Joe, sitting on the edge of a well-piled desk, looks at her.

SLOANE
So, let me see if I get this. The planned ski resort needs fiber-optic lines and electricity, and that needs to run along a new access road.

JOE
Right, and...

SLOANE
Hold on, I'm getting there. I'm a lawyer. We work systematically. One step at a time.

JOE
OK.

SLOANE
And the road can only go through here because, if it goes anywhere else, runoff could impact local streams, therefore local lakes, therefore the valley's whole water supply.

JOE
That's what the environmental-impact report said.

SLOANE
Right. So, the town buys Caribou Lodge from you under eminent domain. Then they bulldoze it.

JOE
Exactly, but...

SLOANE
And this all happened over the summer, and you're just telling me now.

JOE
I tried to fight it, but I got nowhere.

SLOANE
What was the town's argument to invoke eminent domain?

JOE
That the resort developed a local resource, and that the new power lines would also benefit other businesses.

Sloane's expression shows that she thinks it's a solid argument.

SLOANE
When's the last day to file an objection?

JOE
End of business, Dec. 24.

SLOANE
That's three days from now.

JOE
I know. Can you do anything? I saw you on TV, arguing about this very thing.

SLOANE
Yes, but it sounds like the town has a solid case. And they are going to pay you fair market value.

JOE
Your grandfather built this place. Your mother and I put our hearts and souls into it. You and Aidan grew up here.

Exasperated, Joe gets up and stares at the map.

JOE (CONT'D)
They can’t just destroy what we built. And they can’t destroy Caribou Christmas. It brings the town together.

SLOANE
If the economy doesn’t pick up around here, there won’t be much of a town left. The resort could change that.

JOE
What side are you on?

SLOANE
It’s not about sides. It’s a question of law.

JOE
If you won’t help me, why’d you come back?

Sloane gets up and walks over to him.

SLOANE
I’ll poke around.

Joe nods, and they hug. Over her, he eyes the wall clock and shakes himself out of his funk.

JOE
Dang, the planning committee’ll be here any minute now. If this is to be our last hurrah, we’re going to make it a humdinger.

With a kiss on Sloane's cheek, Joe hurries out. Once he's gone, Sloane looks up at the map and shakes her head.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE LOBBY -- DAY

Sloane emerges and sees Georgia at the desk. She reaches for her coat then pauses.

SLOANE
Sorry about the luggage, but we had a porter the last time I was here.

GEORGIA
Three years ago. And we had to give most of the staff time to find new jobs, in case Joe has to sell.

SLOANE
You're still here.

GEORGIA
Yeah. I am.

Sloane opens her mouth then decides to stop digging. With a nod and half-smile, she grabs her coat and goes outside.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- DAY

Sloane struggles to pull four large designer suitcases and two smaller ones out of the SUV. Georgia steps out of the front door, smiles and starts to go back inside when something catches her attention. Up the driveway comes Nate's Jeep. He pulls up next to Sloane and gets out.

NATE
We meet again.

SLOANE
Evidently.

NATE
Need some help?

SLOANE
Obviously.

Without saying anything more, he picks up two of the suitcases and takes them inside, as Georgia holds the door. As he passes...

GEORGIA
Northwoods Suite.

He nods and enters. Sloane starts to reach for a suitcase, but Georgia waves her off. After a long moment, Nate re-emerges, picks up two more and takes them inside. Sloane just watches. He then looks at the two smaller ones.

NATE
I take one, you take one?

She nods and reaches for one, but he snatches both.

NATE (CONT'D)
Gotcha.

He then walks those inside, Georgia following. Sloane waits a moment, then follows. When she gets inside, he and the suitcases are gone. Georgia, back behind the desk, looks up.

GEORGIA
He put them in the elevator. He'll leave them outside your door. You two know each other?

SLOANE
He's the reason I was late.

Before Georgia can ask more, Joe appears in the lobby.

JOE
Saw Nate's Jeep. We're ready to begin.

GEORGIA
He's just helping Suzie with her luggage. He'll be right down.

SLOANE
You know him?

At that moment, Nate reappears and hangs his Ski Patrol parka on the lobby coatrack.

JOE
Nate!

NATE
Hey, Joe, whaddya know?

JOE
I see you've met my daughter, Suz... *Sloane.*

NATE
Yes. She's got a lot of baggage.

With a wink, Nate passes Sloane by, takes Joe's arm and disappears with him into another room.

GEORGIA
He's on the planning committee for Caribou Christmas.

SLOANE
They seem rather close.

GEORGIA
Your folks always had a soft spot for Ski Patrol. In case you were wondering, he's single.

Sloane keeps her cool face on.

SLOANE
No wonder.

Sloane looks over and sees Nate's parka.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Ski hill still open?

GEORGIA
Hill, yes; base lodge, not so much. There's a rope tow and porta-potties. It'll probably be a bunny hill once the new resort develops the big mountain.

She thinks for a moment then grabs her coat.

SLOANE
I'll be back before dark.

INT. SLOANE'S SUV, COUNTRY ROAD, RURAL IDAHO, DAY

As she's getting ready to leave, she gets a TEXT from Ariana, reading, "So, what's up there?" Sloane texts back, "Me coming back might not come up," followed by a thunmbs-up emoji. Ariana: "????" Sloane: "More later."

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI HILL -- DAY

Sloane's SUV pulls up in front of a small, boarded-up ski lodge at the base of a mountain. Ski runs are visible in the distance, with a few skiers on them.

Sloane walks up to the building. At one end is a section with a serving countertop and a shuttered opening above it.

She fingers a worn sign next to the opening that reads, “Cavanaugh Ski Cafe.” Near it is another sign announcing the property as closed and forbidding entry.

In front is large, new sign that reads, “A Future Location of Peregrine Peak Ski Resort, a Gadrian Properties, Ltd. Project” The sign also has a map of the proposed resort. She then gives the shuttered serving area a wistful look.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. MINER’S NOTCH SKI CAFE -- NIGHT

Sloane sees a hazy memory of herself as YOUNG SLOANE, 12, with her MOTHER in the cafe, the shutters open, a woodstove burning behind her, handing out squares of dark cake and cups of cocoa. A handsome young man, AIDAN, 18, skis up, takes a slice of cake. He stuffs it whole into his mouth causing his mother and Young Sloane to laugh.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI HILL -- DAY

Blinking back tears, Sloane shakes herself back to the present and returns to her SUV.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

Sloane drives along the two-lane, poorly paved road, passing a sign that says, “Future Access Road for Peregine Peaks Resort.” She passes two SURVEYORS on the way, stops, and rolls down the window.

SLOANE
Hey!

The surveyors wave.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Can I ask a question?

The LEAD SURVEYOR walks up.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
I’ve heard the access road has to run here to protect water supplies.

LEAD SURVEYOR
Yes, ma’am, so we’ve been told.

SLOANE
By the company that did the study?

LEAD SURVEYOR
By Mr. Baird. He's the primary contact.

SLOANE
Rusty Baird? He hired you?

LEAD SURVEYOR
On behalf of the town council. Why?

SLOANE
Just wondering. Thanks!

With a wave, she puts up the window and keeps driving. The surveyor watches her go, then pulls out his phone.

EXT. NEW RESORT SITE -- DAY

Bouncing along a gravel road to the foot of a mountain, Sloane pulls up in front of what will be the new main entrance to Peregrine Peak Resort. There's a big sign trumpeting a spring groundbreaking, with colorful pictures of a glittering rustic-luxe resort, with ranks of condos, shops and groomed trails.

She hops out and looks closer. At the bottom, it just says, A Gadrian Properties Ltd., Project, with no other info. Looking back along the proposed route, Sloane sees just a wide, open valley floor, with only a few stands of trees.

SLOANE
Sure looks like one route's as good as another to me.

A curl of smoke from Caribou Lodge is visible in the distance. Gazing out, Sloane looks conflicted. She pulls out her phone and Googles Gadrian Properties, but has no service. Sloane shrugs and hops back in her SUV.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE LOBBY -- DAY

Sloane walks back into the lodge, carrying a large bag from a gourmet-food store. Some GUESTS are taking a picture with the fake caribou. Georgia looks up and notes the bag.

GEORGIA
You drove an hour to Coeur d'Alene?

SLOANE
Of course not. I called and someone met me halfway with the order. People there understand basic needs.

Georgia shakes her head. At that moment, the door to the private dining room opens, and out comes Joe, Nate, MAYOR CASEY (50s, female); diner owner DOUG (60ISH, wearing a MINER DINER sweatshirt) and FATHER RICARDO (40ish, Latino).

JOE
My daughter, Suz... Sloane -- she uses her middle name now -- here from New York City. You remember Mayor Casey and Doug?

SLOANE
Of course. Good to see you again. How's life on the town council?

She gives a hard look to Doug and Mayor Casey, who avert their eyes. Joe pushes Father Ricardo forward.

JOE
This is Father Ricardo. He took over St. Bernard's, dog and all.

Sloane shakes his hand.

SLOANE
How do you like the wilderness?

FATHER RICARDO
Very much. I'm from Montana.

SLOANE
Oh, OK.

JOE
We're going to Miner Diner for dinner and some of Kelsey's sweet-potato pie. Care to join?

Sloane looks again at Doug and Casey and gives them a tight smile. They do the same.

SLOANE
No, thanks. Gonna sack in early.

JOE
OK. Sleep well.

The whole crowd piles out, with a lot of bonhomie that doesn't quite look real to Sloane. She turns to Georgia.

SLOANE
Rusty, Casey and Doug are on the council, right?

GEORGIA
No matter what, we'll all still live here.

Sloane nods, not quite convinced.

SLOANE
Kelsey, Doug's niece, right? Didn't she marry some guy she met at UCLA?

GEORGIA
Yeah. Died in a car accident a year ago. She moved back for a bit, figure out her next step.

SLOANE
Oh.

Sloane lifts up her bag.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Gonna put stuff in the fridge.

GEORGIA
Keep it in the bag, or Tack will add it to breakfast.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Sloane has her head in the fridge, tying her bag tightly and pushing it toward the back. When she closes the fridge, she nearly jumps out of her skin, since Tack is looming over her.

SLOANE
Jeez, you scared me.

Tack holds up three large trout.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Don't people usually fish in the morning?

Tack just looks at her.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
The stuff in the bag is mine.

She grabs crackers and other shelf goods from the counter.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Taking these up to my room.

Tack nods silently. Sloane skedaddles out of there.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE LOBBY -- NIGHT

On her way to the elevator, Sloane pauses by a large framed photo of a family in parkas gathered in front of the lodge in winter. It features Young Sloane (seated on the fake caribou), her Mother, a YOUNG JOE, and smiling Aidan.

The photo sits on a shelf, flanked by a box frame containing two military medals -- a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star -- a smaller framed photo of Aidan in Marine blues, and an American flag folded into a tight triangle, also inside a frame. Above it, a plaque reads, “In memory of USMC Corporal Aidan Cavanaugh: Beloved Son and Brother. He Gave All He Had for All He Loved.” Sloane touches Aidan’s face in the photo briefly.

EXT. MINER’S NOTCH MAIN STREET -- DAY

Sloane drives up the center of Miner’s Notch’s business district -- or what’s left of it. There are more closed stores than open ones. The town’s very picturesque but obviously in trouble economically.

At a stoplight, she winds up behind a battered van proclaiming “BAIRD BROS. ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY EXTERMINATORS,” above LOVE YOUR MOTHER (with a picture of the Earth) bumper sticker.

As the van turns left at the green light in front of her, she sees scruffy RUSTY BAIRD behind the wheel. The VAN belches black smoke right into the front of Sloane’s car. Sloane wrinkles her nose and coughs.

EXT. MINER’S NOTCH GENERAL STORE -- DAY

Sloane pulls up to the general store, which looks like a fantasy five-and-dime -- with a chainsaw-cut bear out front.

INT. MINER'S NOTCH GENERAL STORE -- DAY

Inside, Mayor Casey is in the middle of the floor, testing the balance of a new chainsaw (a crate with more of them is on the floor). She whips it expertly upward, causing Sloane, who just entered, to jump back.

MAYOR CASEY
Sorry. It's not on.

SLOANE
Good to know. Got a few?

MAYOR CASEY
Sure. Come on back.

INT. MAYOR CASEY'S OFFICE, GENERAL STORE -- DAY

Sloane perches on the edge of a chair in the cluttered office, coffee cup in one hand. Mayor Casey leans back in a well-worn leather chair behind her piled-high desk.

MAYOR CASEY
We all feel terrible, but the study was unequivocal about the threat to the watershed.

SLOANE
Since when do we lack water?

MAYOR CASEY
We don't, or at least, we haven't. But add the resort, condos, and that puts serious pressure on the existing supply. If runoff contaminates local streams or creeks, all we need is a low-snow winter to impact the whole valley.

SLOANE
At the cost of Caribou Lodge.

MAYOR CASEY
Joe can relocate. We even found a sanctuary willing to take Vixen.

SLOANE
You know Dad's dead-set against it.

MAYOR CASEY
We need the tax revenue and the jobs -- badly. Have you seen the shuttered storefronts?

Sloane puts the cup on the desk.

SLOANE
Just wanted to check with you, make sure I have all the facts.

MAYOR CASEY
Wish I had better news. But the way we're structured politically, I'm just one voice on the council, and the council has spoken.

SLOANE
Did the council's voice sound a lot like Rusty Baird?

MAYOR CASEY
He is passionate about the environment.

SLOANE
Not so much about the environment right behind his tailpipe, though.

Mayor Casey nods knowingly. Sloane heads out of the office and is surprised to run into Rusty, who's been eavesdropping.

MAYOR CASEY
Didn't know we had an appointment, Rusty.

RUSTY
(handing over an envelope)
Just came by with the latest surveyor's reports.
(to Sloane)
Heard you went up to the site.

SLOANE
Just wanted to have a look.

RUSTY
It's all settled, you know. The council has spoken.

SLOANE
So I'm told.

RUSTY
Joe's just delaying the inevitable.

MAYOR CASEY
Rusty...

RUSTY
She’s got to hear the truth, before she tries any fancy New York legal maneuvers.

SLOANE
Just here for Christmas.

RUSTY
Doesn’t look like that to me.

He gets in Sloane’s face a bit.

RUSTY (CONT'D)
Don’t know what Joe’s worried about, anyway. It’s not like he’s got someone to run the lodge after he’s gone. Let him take the money now when he can still enjoy it.

Mayor Casey steps between them.

MAYOR CASEY
That’s quite enough, Rusty.

Rusty opens his mouth, thinks the better of it, then turns on his heel and marches out.

MAYOR CASEY (CONT'D)
Sorry about that.

SLOANE
Opinions are like noses, everybody’s got one.

MAYOR CASEY
(smiling)
Is that what they say?

SLOANE
Close enough.

EXT. MINER DINER -- DAY

Sloane parks in front of the Miner Diner, with has a chainsaw-hewn miner, holding a pan and wielding a pickaxe, out in front. She looks at it.

SLOANE
Definitely a thing.

INT. MINER DINER -- DAY

Inside, the rustic, traditional diner has a long counter and booths, peered down upon by mounted pickaxes, miner's pans and snowshoes. Sloane steps up to the counter. Doug waves from the kitchen, and she waves back.

KELSEY, very attractive, around Sloane's age, comes up. There's a blink of recognition, and a half-second of awkward.

KELSEY
Heard you were back.

SLOANE
This town doesn't need the Internet.

Kelsey points to a sign that says, "Free Wifi!"

KELSEY
And yet, we have it.

Sloane gives her a half-smile.

SLOANE
Sorry to hear about your husband.

KELSEY
Thanks. What can I get you?

SLOANE
Cobb salad and a Reuben to go.

KELSEY
Sure thing.

She steps off, and Sloane sees Nate a few seats down, hunched over a big sandwich. He looks up and cracks a big smile.

NATE
Hey.

SLOANE
(trying not to smile back)
Hey.

NATE
No lunch from Coeur d'Alene?

She gives him a look.

NATE (CONT'D)
Georgia told me.

SLOANE
My dad loves the Reubens here. I have my doubts.

NATE
They’re good as New York.

SLOANE
How would you know?

NATE
Been around.

SLOANE
Yet, you’re here.

NATE
Yup.

SLOANE
Why?

NATE
It’s awesome.

SLOANE
Come on. Nobody wakes up in New York or Paris or L.A., wishing they were in Miner’s Notch.

Kelsey, busy making the salad, looks up for a moment.

NATE
Maybe only because they haven’t heard of it.

SLOANE
They will once the resort’s built.

NATE
Yeah, I know.

Nate buries himself in his sandwich, so Sloane pulls out her phone and Googles “Gadrian Properties.” One result comes up, but when she looks at the homepage, it just has the company name, with New York, N.Y., under it. She looks back at Nate.

SLOANE
By the way, what do you know about this Gadrian Properties?

NATE
Nothing. Neither does anybody else, except the town council, and they're not talking.

SLOANE
Why not?

NATE
Some developers hide behind shell companies, don't show their hand until the groundbreaking.

SLOANE
That sounded informed, for an EMT slash Ski Patrol guy.

NATE
Told you. Been around.

Kelsey returns with Sloane's bag of food.

KELSEY
That'll be twenty dollars.

As Sloane fishes out a bill, Kelsey gives a smile to Nate, who playfully winks at her. This is not lost on Sloane. Then the radio on Nate's belt squawks. He looks at the display.

NATE
Gotta go.

Kelsey grabs Nate's plate

KELSEY
The sandwich'll be here when you're done. And some bonus pie.

NATE
Thanks, Kelsey!

With a wave, he shoots out the door. Kelsey watches him go, and Sloane watches her watching. Kelsey notices.

KELSEY
(to Sloane)
Not my type.

Sloane's rattled.

SLOANE
Uh, we just met.

KELSEY
He’s here for the duration. Just sayin’. He’s not like us.

SLOANE
What’s “us”?

KELSEY
Always looking for the exit.

SLOANE
But you’re here.

Kelsey gets a faraway look.

KELSEY
Yeah. So, I am. For now.

There’s an awkward pause, then Sloane hands over the money and takes her bag. Kelsey starts to go the back of the diner.

SLOANE
Hang on.

She fishes out another bill.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Tip. Sorry.

Kelsey takes it. Sloane points to the door.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Exit, right?

KELSEY
Not much gets past you.

Kelsey grins and returns to the kitchen. Grabbing her bag, Sloane, smiling as well, heads out.

EXT. MINER DINER -- DAY

As she puts her bag in the back seat of her SUV, Sloane sees a wealthy couple, BRIAN and DEBORAH, next to a luxury SUV similar to hers -- except that it has ski gear lashed to the top, and steam pouring out of the open hood. A TOW TRUCK is parked behind Sloane’s SUV, blocking her as he prepares to tow the other car. Sloane leans against her SUV and waits.

SLOANE
(to herself)
In the middle of nowhere...
traffic.

Her attention goes to the couple. Brian hangs up his phone.

BRIAN
(to Deborah)
Now what are we supposed to do? We're stuck here until tomorrow at least, if not longer.

DEBORAH
We can just call my folks to come get us from Boise.

BRIAN
I'd rather walk.

DEBORAH
You did want a couple nights at the furthest ski hill in Idaho from their house.

BRIAN
Do you blame me?

Deborah rolls her eyes. Then Brian's phone boops. He looks at it and panic spreads across his face. He spots Sloane and notes the similar luxury level of their cars.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Oh, thank goodness. Someone from civilization.

Deborah sighs, and the driver looks up briefly with a shake of his head. Brian hustles over to Sloane, who's been watching this whole exchange with amusement.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
I need to move some Bitcoin, or I'm going to miss the Hong Kong market window. You don't happen to have a working wifi hot spot in your car?

SLOANE
No, but the diner has wifi.

Without even saying thanks, Brian hustles into the diner. Deborah steps up.

DEBORAH
Sorry about that. He's always like this when we visit my folks for the holidays. Or, anytime he's not at work. If Brian had his way, we'd never leave Palo Alto.

SLOANE
Well, you're certainly not in Silicon Valley now. Car trouble?

DEBORAH
Blew a hose or a gasket or something like that. The guy says he can't fix it until tomorrow. Maybe. Guess we'll have to get an Uber to Coeur d'Alene and find a room.

SLOANE
Good luck with that so close to Christmas.

Deborah looks crestfallen. Sloane thinks a minute and sighs.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
There is a hotel here in town, and it's near a ski hill. Your sojourn in Miner's Notch needn't be a total waste.

DEBORAH
Would they have a room?

SLOANE
I might have some pull with the owner.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- DAY

Sloane pulls up and is startled to see a vet's van at the barn and several GUESTS clustered around. She hops out and runs over. As she does, she passes a SOBBING GUEST holding tight to a Jack Russell TERRIER.

INT. BARN -- DAY

Sloane goes to Joe, who's standing next to Vixen's large box stall.

SLOANE
Dad?

Joe gives her a pained look.

JOE
A guest's dog got loose and chased her around. Her bad leg gave out, and she went down hard.
(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)
Thank God for Big Billy. He kept the dog at bay until the owner got there.

Sloane looks into a neighboring stall and sees a huge horned billy goat, looking like you don’t want to mess with him.

SLOANE
You’re a stud, Billy.

The goat looks back, as if agreeing. Sloane then looks down into the box stall and sees Georgia holding Vixen’s head, as the VET works on her. Although Sloane tries to hide it, she’s scared, too. She almost jumps when Joe speaks to her.

JOE
Could you deal with the guests outside, please?

Sloane nods and steps outside.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- DAY

Sloane walks up the assembled guests. She takes a deep breath and puts on a smile.

SLOANE
OK, everybody, back to the lodge, let the vet do his work.

She looks at the sobbing guest. Resisting the impulse to say anything to her, Sloane plasters on a smile again.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
We know nobody meant harm. Please, everybody back to the lodge.

One of the other guests puts an arm around the upset guest, and the crowd slowly starts to make its way back to the lodge. Sloane goes back into the barn.

INT. BARN -- DAY

Sloane comes up behind Joe. He smiles and hugs her.

JOE
Suzie, please mind the store. Georgia’s needed here.

SLOANE
Should I tell anyone else?

JOE
Everyone will know in an hour. Just make sure the guests get lunch.

SLOANE
Your Reuben’s in the kitchen.

JOE
Thanks. Later.

Sloane nods and leaves the barn.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE KITCHEN -- DAY

Sloane enters the kitchen and doesn’t see the cook.

SLOANE
Tack?

She pokes her head into all the corners, seeing nothing. Finally, she’s passing the pantry when she hears a noise. She’s about to open the door, when out comes Tack. He’s holding a cellphone and looks upset. He tucks the phone away, and he and Sloane stare awkwardly at each other.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Dad was wondering about lunch.

Tack opens the fridge door, revealing plates of sandwiches and cold cuts.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Hot food?

He walks over to the stove and lifts the lids on two huge pots, revealing steaming soup and stew.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Dessert?

Tack lifts a lid over a large plate on the counter and reveals an elaborate pile of Christmas cookies. He then replaces the lid and stares at Sloane.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
So, it’ll be, what, ten minutes?

Tack nods. Sloane eases her way back out of the kitchen.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE LOBBY -- DAY

Sloane sits at the desk, dispiritedly tapping on her laptop, when Father Ricardo rushes in, wearing a stole over his priest blacks and coat, carrying a book and a vial of holy water. On a leash at his side is GUS, a huge ST. BERNARD DOG.

FATHER RICARDO
Candles? Forgot mine.

SLOANE
Just blackout ones. Will those do?

FATHER RICARDO
Perfect.

Sloane reaches down below the desk and pulls out a bag with white candles and matches. She hands it over.

FATHER RICARDO (CONT'D)
Sorry to rush, but I'm needed in the barn.

Tack emerges from the dining room, holding a cellphone. Father Ricardo sees him and makes a quick Sign of the Cross.

FATHER RICARDO (CONT'D)
(to Tack)
Thanks for the call.

Tack puts his hand over his heart and bows slightly. With a nod, the priest and the dog hustle out. Without a look at Sloane, Tack turns and returns to the dining room. Sloane sits for a moment, perplexed, then shrugs.

SLOANE
Guess it can't hurt.

She then looks after where Tack went again, thinking.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI HILL -- DAY

Nate skis to the bottom of the hill, pulls off his skis, and walks up a rise toward the closed cafe. As he comes over the top, he stops dead.

NATE
Cole?

The middle man of a trio of MEN in overcoats, standing next to a black SUV parked in front of the old cafe, looks up. He's COLE GATHER, late 30s, tall and elegantly turned out.

COLE
(to his companions)
Excuse me.

He walks over to Nate, who is just dumbfounded.

COLE (CONT'D)
Nate.

NATE
Is it you and Pop after all?

COLE
You know the deal.

NATE
Doesn’t mean you can’t tell me.
It’s because I’m here, right?

COLE
You lit the fuse, but...

At that moment, Nate’s phone rings. He answers.

NATE
Yeah? When? Whoa... can I help?...
I’ll be right there.

He hangs up.

NATE (CONT'D)
We’ll talk later.

He hustles off. Cole sighs, brings out his phone and texts to “Pop”: “Cat’s out of the bag.” Text comes back, “Will he talk?” “No. He knows better.” “Good.” With that, he tucks his phone away and returns to his companions.

EXT. BARN -- NIGHT

Sloane, carrying two Thermoses and a large bag, walks toward the barn to see a group of TOWNSPEOPLE, gathered around a barrel fire, holding lit candles and quietly praying. Eyebrow raised, she skirts around them and enters the barn.

INT. BARN -- NIGHT

All the barn’s lights are on, and a fire burns in a corner woodstove. The box stall is open. Georgia pets Vixen’s head, pillowed on a pile of straw. No vet, but Nate sits in the straw next to Vixen, minding an I.V. Gus cuddles next to Vixen.

Joe and Father Ricardo sit on a nearby bench, doing a rosary, a lit candle stuck in a bottle between them. Joe looks up at Sloane.

JOE
Everything OK inside?

SLOANE
Everyone's at dinner. I brought coffee and sandwiches.

JOE
Like old times, huh?

SLOANE
I guess.

FATHER RICARDO
Hospitality is a grace.

Sloane gives him a look.

JOE
My wife used to say that.

FATHER RICARDO
Wise woman.

Feeling a lump rising in her throat, Sloane distracts herself by unloading the coffee and food.

SLOANE
Where's the vet?

JOE
He got a call. Nate's minding Vixen until he comes back.

SLOANE
How is she?

JOE
Leg's swollen but not broken. Her breathing's a little ragged. But she's hanging in.
(indicating the dog)
Having Gus here helps.

SLOANE
(to Father Ricardo)
Those your folks outside?

FATHER RICARDO
Parishioners. They wanted to help.

SLOANE
If you could spare a few to give Tack a hand in the kitchen, that'd be a lot more useful than praying.

JOE
Suzie.

FATHER RICARDO
No, that's OK. I'll go see if we have some volunteers.

He exits.

JOE
The parish was very good to your mother.

SLOANE
I know, Dad. But without you and Georgia, we'll barely clean up from dinner before I have to start laundry.

JOE
OK. Thank goodness you're here. And thank you for giving up your suite to that stranded couple.

SLOANE
No big deal. The new room has a view of the Christmas tree, anyway.

Sloane and Joe hug. Over Joe's shoulder, she meets eyes with Nate, who smiles at her.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE LOBBY -- NIGHT

The lobby lights are down, and the wall clock shows nearly midnight. Sloane stands at the credenza behind the main desk, sorting towels of different sizes from a big basket into neat folded piles. Nate enters and raps on the desk.

SLOANE
(without turning around)
Sorry, desk is closed. Reopens at eight a.m.

NATE
But, I hear hospitality is a grace.

Sloane jumps and looks around.

SLOANE
How's Vixen?

NATE
Vet's back. Says her breathing is better; swelling's gone down a bit. It's still touch and go. You know, Vixen's no spring chicken.

SLOANE
I was fresh out of undergrad when she showed up, and the Caribou Lodge Christmas Ski Fest became Caribou Christmas. All through law school, Mom insisted I come back every year and help get it off the ground.

NATE
Did you also become a caribou expert?

SLOANE
Hardly. Most I ever did was muck out stalls.

NATE
Those serve who only stand and shovel.

SLOANE
Oooh, he saves people, helps animals and paraphrases Milton.

Nate laughs.

NATE
Joe says Caribou Christmas goes on, Vixen or not.

SLOANE
Not a great way to go out.

NATE
Maybe it doesn't have to end.

SLOANE
You know something I don't?

NATE
Maybe. Need to make some calls tomorrow. I'll get back to you.

SLOANE
Nate, whatever, International Man of Mystery. What is your last name, anyway?

NATE
Tell you tomorrow.

SLOANE
I'll just ask Dad.

NATE
Why ruin the mystery?

INT. BARN -- DAY

Sloane peers over the box stall to see Vixen half-upright, bandaged leg stuck out in front of her, dozing. Sloane turns, and sees Georgia walking in, carrying a steaming bucket.

SLOANE
Morning. How's the patient?

GEORGIA
Won't eat. Going to try hot mash.

Sloane opens the door for her. Vixen wakes. Georgia kneels and puts the bucket under Vixen's nose. She doesn't really respond.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
Might take a while.

Vixen just turns her head away. Georgia and Sloane exchange worried looks. Sloane's about to leave when she turns.

SLOANE
Georgia, can I ask you about something?

Georgia pets Vixen, leaves the bucket and steps out of the stall. She stands in front of Sloane, looking expectant.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Can Tack talk?

GEORGIA
Of course. Why?

SLOANE
Hasn't said a word to me since I got here.

GEORGIA
What did Joe tell you?

SLOANE
That his food made inmates cry, and his Key lime pie rocks. He said the rest was none of my business.

Georgia thinks for a moment.

GEORGIA
It isn't, but, so you don't keep wondering, I'll tell you this much. Tack spent 15 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, because he had a very bad lawyer.

SLOANE
I don't do criminal law.

GEORGIA
And no one's ever been done wrong by a corporate lawyer?

Sloane's jaw drops.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
Obviously I don't mean you, but some people don't trust lawyers.

SLOANE
Well, maybe if Dad had called a property-rights specialist before this, he wouldn't be in this mess. But hey, he called me. Nobody likes a lawyer until they need one.

GEORGIA
He didn't call just because you're a lawyer. He called you because he wanted you home for Christmas.

SLOANE
Then he could have said that.

GEORGIA
He said it last year.

SLOANE
Yeah, two days before Christmas, when I already had plans.

GEORGIA
He was hoping he wouldn’t have to ask at all.

Sloane opens her mouth but closes it again. Georgia sighs and exits. Sloane looks down at Vixen, who looks up at her.

SLOANE
Oh, shuddup.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE, JOE'S OFFICE -- DAY

Sloane walks into Joe’s office. He’s got his back to her, staring at the map.

SLOANE
Hey, Dad, I wanted...

Stone-faced, he turns and holds out a folded slip of paper. Sloane takes it, concerned. She opens it, and the color drains from her face.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Dad.

JOE
Hudson Highlands Senior Community. Sounds nice. Apparently they have a bistro and a bowling alley.

SLOANE
I was just checking...

JOE
They said your assistant was out of the office, and you didn’t respond to a text. They just needed some clarification on the numbers, you know, how much it would cost for me to live there.

SLOANE
It was just an idea.

JOE
If you didn’t want to help me, you could simply have said no.

SLOANE
Of course I want to help you. I said I would. It’s a backup plan if it didn’t work out.

JOE
They seem to think you're serious.

SLOANE
It's due diligence.

JOE
Is it? You think I don't know what's going on here, Suzie?

SLOANE
Dad, I...

JOE
Ever since Aidan died, you've been terrified you'd be trapped into running this place, waiting on guests for the rest of your life, instead of being the one waited on. Your mother knew this, and so do I.

SLOANE
That's not fair.

JOE
I just wanted to end my days in a place I helped my father build, a place your mother and I poured our hearts and souls into.

SLOANE
A place you wanted to leave to your son. But you got screwed out of that. You got stuck with just me.

JOE
You're the only one who thinks that.

SLOANE
Is it some kind of a crime, that I don't want to have to fly to the middle of nowhere to visit the last member of my family? If that makes me a monster, then so be it.

Joe throws his hands up.

JOE
I don't want to fight, Suzie. I release you from your promise to help me. Feel free to go back to New York.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)
Just don’t expect me to move into some old folks’ home because you don’t want to visit, you know, the middle of nowhere.

He walks out, leaving Sloane shell-shocked and in tears. She drops into a chair, and then lowers her head into her hands.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE LOBBY -- DAY

On the way back to her room, Sloane again passes the shrine to Aidan. She pauses at it for a moment, then calls the elevator and steps aboard.

INT. SLOANE’S HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Lying on her bed, Sloane wipes away tears. She thinks for a moment, then gets a determined look on her face and reaches over to grab her laptop. Opening it, she thinks another moment, then clicks on something and begins typing.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE LOBBY -- DAY

Joe enters the lobby from outdoors. From behind the desk, Georgia sees that he looks upset. So, she comes out and draws him aside.

GEORGIA
You all right?

JOE
I went to the churchyard. I talked to them both.

GEORGIA
And?

JOE
Maybe it is time to let go.

GEORGIA
It’s way too soon for that.

Joe pats her on the arm and heads into his office, with Georgia looking after him. The expression on her face shows that she keenly feels his suffering.

INT. SLOANE'S HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Sloane sits at the desk in her room, on her laptop. Her Skype boops, and she opens it to a video call from Ariana, sitting in front of a window with a Manhattan skyline behind her.

ARIANA
Hey, got your text. What's up? Run out of MAC eyeliner?

SLOANE
Just sent you an email. Can you open it and the attachment?

ARIANA
So serious.

SLOANE
Yeah.

Ariana nods. After clicking around, she says...

ARIANA
What am I looking at?

Sloane opens up the attachment. It's the map from Joe's office, with the new road outlined in red.

SLOANE
Still dating that commercial real-estate guy?

ARIANA
Donnie? Yeah, why?

SLOANE
He handles Western lands, including shale-oil tracts, right? Knows geology, water, stuff like that?

ARIANA
He bored you long enough with it on our last double date.

Sloane gives her a look.

ARIANA (CONT'D)
Yeah. He does.

SLOANE
I need a big favor from you both.

ARIANA
I can speak for me, but...

SLOANE
You can't get Donnie to do whatever you want?

ARIANA
Didn't say that.

SLOANE
It's all spelled out in the email, but basically I need to know if the proposed road in red is the only viable environmental choice. And I need to know fast.

ARIANA
Is this about your dad's lodge? Thought it was a done deal. He was going to sell and move here.

SLOANE
That may still happen, but either way, I'd like him to still be speaking to me.

ARIANA
Sounds grim.

Sloane nods.

SLOANE
One other thing. Need to know if any of the names on the list in the email have a financial interest in land near the red road. Can Donnie check that, too?

ARIANA
If it's public record. Are you now trying to save the lodge?

SLOANE
More than that. Are we a go?

ARIANA
Only for you, girl.

SLOANE
I owe you a martini.

ARIANA
You owe me a vat of martinis, and I plan to collect. Let me call Donnie, and I'll get back to you.

SLOANE
You're the best.

ARIANA
Don't I know it.

Sloane signs off from Skype. Then her phone buzzes. It's a text from Nate, saying, "Meet me at Miner Diner in 30. Dress for a business meeting."

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH MAIN STREET -- DAY

Sloane pilots her SUV into the town, looking at it as if with new eyes. She sees the Christmas decorations, the TOWNSPEOPLE on the streets, talking and laughing and greeting each other. She passes by the general store. Mayor Casey, who's just opening the store, waves at her, and Sloane waves back.

Father Ricardo and Gus walk down the street. He waves her to come over. She pulls to the curb, and he steps up.

FATHER RICARDO
Afternoon. How's the patient?

SLOANE
Not eating, last I saw.

FATHER RICARDO
Oh, dear. We'll keep praying. I'll bring Gus by again later.

He starts to go.

SLOANE
Father Ricardo.

FATHER RICARDO
Yeah?

SLOANE
You're in the advice biz, right?

FATHER RICARDO
(with a glance skyward)
I try, when I can.

SLOANE
What if you're just trying to help someone, but they don't see as help? To them, it's more like, betrayal.

FATHER RICARDO
Why would they see it this way?

SLOANE
They don't trust your motives.

FATHER RICARDO
Ah. Then ask, is the help coming from a place of compassion, generosity, love, or, is more like greed or fear or selfishness?

SLOANE
I-I, don't know.

FATHER RICARDO
(patting her on the arm)
Just think about it.

SLOANE
Thanks.

FATHER RICARDO
Anytime. You know where to find me. It's the big building with the cross on top.

He gives her a wave and walks off with Gus.

SLOANE
My mom would love that.

Sloane then sees Nate's Jeep parked in front of the Miner Diner. Putting the SUV in gear, she drives that way.

EXT. MINER DINER -- DAY

Sloane (in designer slacks and sweater under her coat, with high-heeled boots) pulls up in front of the diner. She sees Nate's Jeep, but not Nate. Then the diner door opens and out steps Nate -- clean-shaven, hair cut, also in upscale slacks and a sweater, under a tailored overcoat. Sloane looks at him, at first not realizing who it is. He smiles at her.

NATE
Hey, Sloane. Thanks for coming.

She looks him up and down, confused. Then awareness slowly spreads across her face.

SLOANE
I met you, but not here. New York.

NATE
Party, three years ago.

She gets a brief flash of Nate, the Handsome Man, standing by the high-rise window, and herself talking to him. Her confusion transforms into anger.

SLOANE
Are you some kind of stalker?

NATE
You told me to look up Miner's Notch on a map, if I could find it.

SLOANE
Did I tell you not to introduce yourself on the road the other day? Have you been having a good laugh at my expense ever since?

NATE
That's not it at all.

SLOANE
Then what is it?

NATE
If I didn't have to, I didn't want to be this guy...
(indicating how he's dressed)
I wanted to be that guy. Besides, it's not like we were friends. We talked for, what, two minutes?

SLOANE
You're friends with my dad!

NATE
I'm in the poker and cigar group, like two-thirds of the guys.

SLOANE
Yeah, it's obvious you've made yourself at home here.

NATE
Why not? It's a great place.

Sloane is about to argue that point, when the oddness of the whole situation hits her.

SLOANE
Wait a minute, what's going on here? What is your last name?

NATE
Thought you were going to ask Joe.

SLOANE
(harshly)
It didn't come up.

NATE
Gather.

SLOANE
Gather. Nate Gather. From Manhattan. Any relation, perhaps, to Brock Gather, big-time New York resort developer?

NATE
He's my father.

SLOANE
So this is all your fault.

NATE
Not directly. I didn't know it was the Gather Group until I ran into my brother, Cole, yesterday. I told you some developers don't go public until everything's in place.

SLOANE
What does "not directly" mean?

NATE
When I told Cole that I was here and extolled the place's virtues -- should've known that would perk up his ears. The company's always looking for the next great undeveloped area.

SLOANE
So this is all your fault.

NATE
Maybe I can fix it.

SLOANE
How?

Nate checks his watch.

NATE
Can we talk on the way? The Gathers are sticklers for punctuality.

Sloane leans back against her car, arms crossed.

NATE (CONT'D)
OK. Pop wants me back in the company, so I have leverage.

SLOANE
Not unless you're willing to go back.

He shrugs.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
You'd give up the wonders of Miner's Notch to return to New York?

NATE
To a job I hated, that was killing my soul by inches. But if I could save the town and the lodge? In a hot minute. You in?

She eyes his Jeep.

SLOANE
I'm driving.

As they get in the car, Sloane catches sight of Kelsey looking at them from inside the diner. She catches Nate's eye and makes a teasing tie-tightening gesture. Nate smiles back. Sloane watches this without comment, but with a sharp look in her eye, before putting the SUV in gear.

INT. SLOANE'S SUV, COUNTRY ROAD, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

Sloane and Nate drive along the gravel road across the valley, heading to the new resort site. The silence is palpable. Nate finally breaks it.

NATE
We should talk before we get there.

SLOANE
Still trying to decide if you're a creepy stalker.

NATE
You told me to come here.

SLOANE
I didn't tell you to become BFFs with my dad and everyone I grew up with.

NATE
It's a friendly small town.

SLOANE
You didn't grow up here.

NATE
What's your issue?

SLOANE
None of your business.

NATE
Do you want the town to survive?

SLOANE
What kind of question is that?

NATE
Apparently, the kind that gets answered with a question.

SLOANE
You don't know anything about what I want.

NATE
I'm trying to find out.

SLOANE
(after a long pause)
Didn't you abandon the family business and leave your hometown to pursue what you wanted out of life?

NATE
Yeah.

SLOANE
So did I.

NATE
Fair enough. But I'm willing to reverse gears if it saves the town.

SLOANE
The town will be fine, better, even.

NATE
Not necessarily. I'm convinced that, without the lodge, Miner's Notch eventually turns into just another glitzy ski resort, all upscale gift shops and day spas. If you're really lucky, you'll get a film festival.

SLOANE
You're exaggerating.

NATE
I'm dead serious. I've seen it happen too many times. Towns give in, lose their soul.

SLOANE
And the soul of Miner's Notch...

NATE
Is the lodge and Caribou Christmas.

Sloane starts to speak, then thinks the better of it. She refocuses on the road and continues driving in silence.

EXT. NEW RESORT SITE -- DAY

The SUV rolls up to the big sign at the new entrance to the resort. Two black luxury SUVs are there, along with a pickup truck and a huge luxury RV. A couple of WORKERS confer with a couple of SUITS. Sloane and Nate park and hop out. One of the SUITS looks up and points them toward the RV.

INT. RV, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

Sloane and Nate enter the RV's plush interior to meet Cole.

NATE
Cole, this is...

COLE
Sloane Cavanaugh, I know.

He extends his hand, and Sloane shakes it.

COLE (CONT'D)
We've met.

SLOANE
When?

COLE
Met Gala, four years ago. I stepped on your dress by mistake, and your date gave me an earful in Italian.

He smiles. She smiles back at the memory.

SLOANE
Paolo. Big city, small world. Surprised you remembered.

COLE
Not an everyday occurrence.

Cole turns his attention to Nate, looking him up and down.

COLE (CONT'D)
Back from the wilderness, I see.

Nate doesn’t respond. Cole sits in a chair and motions them to a sofa. They sit.

COLE (CONT'D)
What can I do for you?

Nate jumps in before Sloane can speak.

NATE
You know about the eminent domain seizure of Caribou Lodge?

Cole nods.

NATE (CONT'D)
If you can save the lodge, I’ll come back. No conditions.

Cole leans back, looking at him. He then switches his gaze to Sloane.

COLE
Are you here in a legal capacity?

SLOANE
Just an interested party, trying to help my father.

COLE
Have you reviewed the contracts?

SLOANE
Only the town’s offer to my father.

Cole gives her a long look, which discomfits her.

COLE
(to Nate)
What's your interest in this?

NATE
Losing the lodge would be terrible for the town.

COLE
Town doesn't seem to think so.

SLOANE
They're desperate for jobs.

NATE
Which means they'll agree to whatever you want.

COLE
Is that what you think is going on here?

NATE
What else?

Cole shakes his head and looks back at Sloane.

COLE
Sorry, but I can't help you.

NATE
That's not possible.

Cole puts out a hand and continues talking to Sloane.

COLE
Since both of you are ignorant of the situation, I'll enlighten you. In each development, we control some elements and local officials control others. In this case, the small section of the road in the town limits is the town's responsibility -- and that includes the lodge. They offered, and since it saved us money, we agreed.

NATE
That's not how it usually goes.

COLE
No, but the council was adamant.

SLOANE
So, you don't consider the lodge competition?

Cole laughs.

COLE
No. And, for the record, we're sorry to see it go. It adds considerably to the local color.

SLOANE
If the road could be moved...

COLE
Miss Cavanaugh, all we care about is breaking ground on time. The environmental impact study held us up for a year. If that happens again, we're going for the alternate site.

NATE
You expect us to believe you're powerless to help.

COLE
We don't interfere in what's contractually not our concern.
(to Sloane)
As an attorney, you should appreciate that.

Sloane reluctantly assents. Cole stands up.

COLE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry you came all this way for nothing.
(to Sloane)
Hope your dress wasn't damaged.

SLOANE
(meeting his eyes)
Nothing that couldn't be fixed.

After a beat, Cole extends his hand and shakes hers warmly. He smiles, and she smiles back.

COLE
Now, if you'll excuse us, I need to talk to my brother.

Sloane hesitates but senses she's shut down, so she exits. As soon as she's outside, Cole rounds on Nate.

COLE (CONT'D)
Have you really come to your senses?

NATE
Yeah. I've been happier the last two years than the previous ten. I have friends; I have work that matters; I can breathe.

COLE
Give me a break. This is a fantasy. Would you love this place so much if you had to live on what you made here? You're a tourist, just like every other fool who thinks he wants to live where he vacations. Come back where you belong.

NATE
Is that what Pop wants?

COLE
Of course.

NATE
Here I am. You both have my address and cell. He can reach out anytime.

COLE
I could say the same about us. We're not the enemy here. The town has chosen a real future over a romantic past.

Unwilling to concede the point, Nate changes the subject.

NATE
You were getting romantic enough with Sloane.

COLE
Right. The last thing I need is another Manhattan girl.

NATE
She's from here.

COLE
Not so you'd notice.

Nate just shakes his head and leaves. Cole sits. After a beat, he pulls out his cell, only to find there's no service. He sighs and opens a voice-memo app.

COLE (CONT'D)
Add cell towers to the plan.

INT. SLOANE'S SUV, COUNTRY ROAD, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

Nate climbs back into the SUV, where Sloane, who's been ruminating, glares at him.

SLOANE
I've been sitting here thinking, and I realized our situations are different after all.

NATE
How?

SLOANE
Your older brother is still alive to pick up the slack.

Nate opens his mouth, but she continues.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
No matter what we do, even if we save the lodge, once my dad is gone, it gets sold.

NATE
Maybe a new owner could love it just as much.

Sloane gives him a long look.

NATE (CONT'D)
What? It could happen.

Sloane shakes her head with a rueful laugh.

SLOANE
You didn't live through hard times there, when the roof leaked, or the furnace failed, during recessions when there weren't enough guests to cover the bills. You haven't had city people treat your mother like a maid, and your father like their butler, and see them just have to take it. All you see is what a guest sees, and guests see nothing. Hospitality is a grace -- for the visitors. All they see is comfort and care. They don't know what it takes to make that happen.

NATE
I never knew your mother, but I don't think that's what she meant.

SLOANE
She took care of them through Aidan's death. She took care of them through chemo. And they left happy, because they never saw any of it.

Nate puts his hand on her arm, and she shakes it off. He puts it back, squeezing gently this time. Without looking up, Sloane allows it.

NATE
I lost my mother, too, not long before you lost yours. She was always doing for someone else, never enough for herself. I do understand, even about the lodge -- more than you know.

He looks steadily at her until she looks back. Seeing the concern in his eyes, she softens.

SLOANE
I'm sorry. This isn't your fault. I know you're trying to help.

NATE
I'm sure she was very proud of you. I know Joe is. Tells everyone about his daughter, the beautiful hotshot corporate lawyer, living in a Manhattan high-rise, going to all the glamorous parties.

SLOANE
Yep, that's me all right. Livin' the dream.

She puts out a hand to end the conversation, and turns on the SUV.

INT. SLOANE'S SUV, COUNTRY ROAD, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

Sloane and Nate drive back, not speaking. Then they spot the surveyors up ahead. Only this time, they're not beside the road but quite a distance back from it. Sloane gives them a long look as she drives by.

NATE
Sloane.

SLOANE
Shhh. I'm thinking.

Nate follows her gaze but keeps his mouth shut.

INT. SLOANE'S SUV, MINER'S NOTCH MAIN STREET -- DAY

Sloane pulls in next to Nate's Jeep. He's about to try speaking again, when his cell buzzes. He looks at it.

NATE
Someone's lost on the mountain.
Gotta go. Call you later.

He hops out. He strips off his topcoat as he reaches his Jeep, tosses it in the back, grabs his parka. Kicking off his shoes and tossing them in also, he pulls out boots and puts them on. Hopping in the Jeep, he pulls out and zooms off.

At that moment, Sloane's cell also buzzes. It's Ariana.

SLOANE
Hey, girl... no, I'm out... OK, let me get my laptop open. I'll call you back.

INT. MINER DINER -- DAY

At a back table of the diner, Sloane, wearing earbuds, coffee in front of her, hunches over her laptop. She's also videochatting with Ariana on her phone, keeping her voice low. Behind the counter, Kelsey shoots her an occasional glance but keeps her distance.

SLOANE
You sure about all this?

ARIANA
Totally. Donnie did a deep dive. Land in the middle of nowhere is suddenly on the road to somewhere.

SLOANE
If this got out, Rusty'd be toast.

ARIANA
Unless they’re all in on it. Girl, you’re not in squeaky clean Bedford Falls; you’re in skanky Pottersville.

SLOANE
Since when do you watch “It’s a Wonderful Life”?

ARIANA
Donnie loves it.

Sloane shakes her head.

SLOANE
How about the geology bit?

ARIANA
Donnie’s waiting for a call from a Boise State guy. He knows every geologist west of the Mississippi. It’s kinda sexy.

SLOANE
OK. Thanks a million.

ARIANA
Upside, me and Donnie make a great Scooby squad. He’s a keeper. Ciao!

Ariana signs off. Sloane stares at the laptop for a long minute. She jumps when Kelsey appears, coffeepot in hand.

KELSEY
Need a warm-up?

SLOANE
No, thanks.

She start to turn.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
I already found the exit.

KELSEY
Thought I did, too. Life happens.

With a smile, Kelsey leaves. Doug emerges from the back and sees Sloane’s laptop.

DOUG
Enjoying the new wifi?

SLOANE
Yeah. It’s good.

DOUG
It’s only the beginning. Had a guy in here last month, said we could transform the place into a gastropub.

SLOANE
What’s wrong with the Miner Diner?

DOUG
We gotta keep up with the urban clientele the resort will bring in.

SLOANE
I’m urban clientele, and I prefer this place exactly as it is.

DOUG
You’re just being nostalgic.

SLOANE
Maybe. Doesn’t mean I’m wrong.

Doug frowns a bit, then heads into the back. Sloane closes her laptop. Then, she gets an idea and goes to the counter, where Kelsey is working.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
How many pies can you spare?

INT. SLOANE’S SUV, COUNTRY ROAD, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

As she drives, Sloane dials Nate’s number. Coming through the car’s Bluetooth, it goes to voicemail.

SLOANE
Hey, it’s Sloane. Remember those surveyors we passed? Turns out pie and coffee makes them talkative. Rusty owns the parcel they’re working on and, you’ll love this, they’re mapping out the site of a new water park. A water park. Right along the proposed new road. We’re all worried about the water around here, and that’s what Mr. Environment is doing. Can you believe it? Hope you find your guy. Going to go tell Dad now. Call me back, OK?

INT. CARIBOU LODGE LOBBY -- DAY

Looking eager to dump intel, Sloane sees Georgia behind the desk and begins to breeze by.

SLOANE
Dad in his office?

GEORGIA
No. Haven't you heard? There's a man lost on the mountain. Joe's gone to open up the old cafe to use as a warming hut for the searchers.

SLOANE
I was with Nate when he got the call. Can't Ski Patrol handle it?

GEORGIA
The man's not answering his cell, and his wife is not sure when she left him behind while skiing down the hill. There's also snow coming in, so they've called an all-hands.

SLOANE
(blinking, momentarily confused)
Oh, right. Our all-hands.

GEORGIA
Can you man the desk? I need to take out some food and coffee.

SLOANE
I'll take it.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI CAFE -- DAY

Arms full of supplies, Sloane walks up to the now-opened cafe and peers through the opened shutters. Joe tosses wood into the stove, which is already glowing.

SLOANE
Hey, Dad.

Joe turns, surprised. Sloane smiles and starts setting bags and Thermoses on the counter. Joe smiles back.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI CAFE -- DAY

Sloane busily hands out sandwiches and steaming cups to shivering RESCUERS. One SKI PATROLLER comes up.

SKI PATROLLER
Where’s the spice cake you used to have here, the one with the walnuts and raisins? Only thing that wouldn’t freeze in your pocket on patrol. The guys are asking.

SLOANE
You mean my mom’s ski cake. Sorry, we didn’t have any on hand.

Tack appears as if from nowhere, bearing a box full of plastic-wrapped cake squares. He sets them on the counter, and the Ski Patroller eagerly grabs some and turns around, shouting to some other SKI PATROLLERS.

SKI PATROLLER
Hey guys, ski cake! Load up.

As the Ski Patroller grab the cake squares and tuck them away, Sloane looks over at Tack. He does a slight, almost formal, bow and turns abruptly to go. Sloane calls after him.

SLOANE
Thanks!

EXT. MINER’S NOTCH SKI HILL -- DAY

TOWNSPEOPLE have gathered at the site, bringing FLASHLIGHTS, HEADLIGHTS, WALKIE-TALKIES and other supplies. Someone sets up a GENERATOR in the back of a pickup and plugs in LIGHTS and a HEATER. Every now and then, people glance up at the cloudy sky, worried.

The light begins to fail. Sloane hands blankets to very cold rescuers who just came down from the mountain, as more shed their blankets to head up the mountain. Sloane steps out of the cafe for a moment and looks around. Then she turns back to Joe.

SLOANE
You seen Nate at all?

Joe shakes his head, but he’s distracted by carrying wood. Sloane looks around, concerned. Fat snowflakes begin to fall.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI HILL -- NIGHT

It’s now dark, and snowing steadily. Bobbing lights are visible up on the hill, and the generator has thrown a pool of light in front of the cafe, where Sloane is still at work.

She pauses and goes out to look at the mountain, worry on her face.

INT. MINER’S NOTCH SKI CAFE -- NIGHT

Sloane fills a thermos from a teakettle on the stove, pours in cocoa packets and gives it a good shake.

She looks out and sees Joe in earnest conversation with Rusty. Rusty shoots her a couple of significant looks, then scurries off. Joe comes into the cafe. Sloane braces herself.

JOE
He told me about you snooping around, and the water park.

SLOANE
I was going to tell you later.

JOE
Can’t blame him for cashing in. And it’ll boost summer tourism.

Before Sloane can reply, he walks up and gives her a big hug.

JOE (CONT'D)
Thanks for digging, Suzie.

He kisses the top of her head, then spots the few remaining cake squares.

JOE (CONT'D)
Ski cake! Aw, Suzie, how wonderful.

She’s about to speak when there’s a sudden commotion at the base of the mountain.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI HILL -- NIGHT

Joe and Sloane run out of the cafe, crossing paths with MEDICS pulling a gurney. The crowd parts and two SKI PATROLLERS ski into view, pulling a STRETCHER. The medics quickly unbuckle a MAN and lift him onto the gurney.

To Sloane's shock, it's Brian from the diner. Just as she's registering that, she looks up and sees that one of the Ski Patrollers is Nate, and he looks half-frozen.

With all the attention focused on the patient, Sloane makes a beeline for Nate and grabs him.

SLOANE
You gave me an awful scare.

NATE
(shivering)
Sorry.

Sloane puts an arm around him and leads him into the cafe.

INT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI CAFE -- NIGHT

She sits him next to the hot stove, opens up the gate to reveal the flames, and throws a blanket over him. Then she pours a cup of the hot cocoa, but sees that, as he pulls off his gloves, that his hands are cold and stiff. So, sitting next to him, she takes his hands in hers and rubs them.

Then she holds the cup to his lips and helps him drink. Pulling off his snow-encrusted cap, she pulls the blanket over his head. She then gives him more cocoa.

SLOANE
Were you up there the whole time?

He nods and motions for more cocoa. She complies. He drains the cup, and Sloane, worried, puts an arm around him, rubbing to warm him up.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Are you insane?

He manages a weak, shivery smile.

NATE
Maybe.

They meet eyes for a long moment.

NATE (CONT'D)
Were you really worried?

Sloane lets her mask slip for a moment and blinks back tears. Then she snuffles and pulls herself together.

SLOANE
Shuddup and drink your cocoa.

Nate manages another shivery smile as he sips his cocoa.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI CAFE -- NIGHT

A few minutes later, as Nate still sits by the woodstove, Sloane spots Rusty walking by.

SLOANE
(to Nate)
I'll be right back.

She walks out of the cafe.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI HILL -- NIGHT

Reaching Rusty, Sloane gets in his way.

SLOANE
Don't know what you told my dad, but I'm on to you.

RUSTY
On to what? Trying to help this town? Because that's all I'm doing.

SLOANE
Help the town, or help yourself?

RUSTY
Joe's smart enough to realize that I can do both. Surprised a college girl like you can't see that.

SLOANE
You're awful eager to put my dad out of business.

RUSTY
Gonna happen, no matter what.

SLOANE
Or, maybe more so, to start a new business of your own.

RUSTY
You don't know what's at stake here.

At that moment, he catches sight of Joe walking up. Stopping mid-sentence, he snorts and disappears into the crowd. Joe arrives, not having seen the exchange.

JOE
Nate here?

SLOANE
Inside, warming up.

INT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI CAFE -- NIGHT

Joe sticks his head over the counter.

JOE
You OK?

NATE
Bit frosty, but, yeah.

JOE
Having a little deja vu?

NATE
A little.

Joe laughs.

JOE
(to Sloane)
You OK here if I go help folks pack up?

She nods. Joe leaves. Sloane turns to Nate.

SLOANE
What's he mean, deja vu?

NATE
(lifting his cup)
Hit me again, and I'll tell you.

She pours him another cup of cocoa and sits. He sips his cocoa and then, staring into the flames, begins to speak.

NATE (CONT'D)
My brother called me a tourist, someone who wants to live where he vacations -- and doesn't depend on his meager salary. And you keep asking me why I love this place. A few months after we met, early in ski season, I came on a week's vacation. Stayed at the lodge, did all the usual stuff, had a nice time. Quaint town, friendly people, but that's not what hooked me.

He takes a long drink and swirls the cocoa in the cup.

NATE (CONT'D)
Day before I was supposed to leave, decided to hit some of the upper runs. Joe warned me -- it's a small hill, but those runs are tricky. Ice, rocks, twisty, easy to lose your way. Stay on the main trail.

SLOANE
I've gotten the same lecture.

NATE
I've skied all over the world -- Alps to Andes. Did I listen? No. Took a side trail, hit ice, caromed off a rock, landed in the trees -- concussion, broken nose, ribs and leg. Rock took out my cellphone. Perfect storm of stupid. Started to think they'd find me in the spring. But, when I missed lunch at the diner and dinner at the lodge, people noticed. Joe alerted Ski Patrol, and they called an all-hands.

SLOANE
It is a town tradition.

NATE
It's not just that. When they found me, I got choppered to a hospital in Coeur d'Alene. Joe, Georgia, Doug, even Mayor Casey, took turns to visit me every day. When I got released, Joe brought me back to the lodge, insisted on putting me up at no charge. Because of the concussion, the doctors warned against flying, so I stayed. They took me to all my doctor appointments, all my physical therapy. By the time I was well enough to leave, I never wanted to.

Sloane feels her eyes filling. Nate gives her a long look.

NATE (CONT'D)
There are a lot of picturesque little towns, but not many with that much heart for a stranger.

SLOANE
(wiping away a tear)
That wasn't long after my mom died.

NATE
Yeah, Joe told me about her.
Everyone told me about her.

Sloane blinks hard and changes the subject.

SLOANE
I met the guy you saved. He was acting like a jerk outside the diner.

NATE
Sorry I missed that. But you know we save everyone, even the jerks.

SLOANE
And I moved to a regular room and gave them my suite at the lodge.

NATE
Hospitality is a grace, indeed.

Nate chuckles, as does Sloane. She then rests her head on his shoulder and they gaze into the fire in the woodstove in silence.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI HILL -- NIGHT

Sloane is packing the last of the supplies in her SUV, when she looks through the now-thin crowd to see Nate approaching his Jeep. She walks over.

SLOANE
You OK to drive?

NATE
All thawed, thanks to you.

There's an awkward pause. Nate finally breaks it.

NATE (CONT'D)
Heard your message about the water park.

SLOANE
Rusty ran up here and told Dad, and Dad's like, whatever, summer tourists, it's fine.

NATE
Sure Rusty put his own spin on it.

SLOANE
He did. But I wonder if Dad is losing steam.

NATE
So, is that it? Are we done?

SLOANE
No. I've still got my New York peeps on it.

NATE
What?

SLOANE
All the Christmas magic doesn't happen in Miner's Notch.

NATE
You're full of surprises.

SLOANE
You should talk.

There's another long pause. Sloane looks over and sees Joe laughing with some TOWNSPEOPLE. She turns back to Nate but has trouble meeting his eyes at first.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
I don't actually hate this place, you know. I just couldn't be who I wanted to be if I stayed here. My folks understood, but...

She meets eyes with him.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
I had to.

NATE
I know.

He reaches up and brushes some snowflakes off her hair. One last awkward pause, then Nate puts on a smile.

NATE (CONT'D)
I'm going to go home, take a hot shower or two, or three, and sleep for about 24 hours. I'll be up just in time for Caribou Christmas.

Nate leans in for a hug, and Sloane obliges, holding on a beat or two too long for just a friendly embrace. He squeezes her a bit before releasing her.

NATE (CONT'D)
You smell good.

SLOANE
I smell like woodsmoke.

NATE
Like I said, you smell good.

He smiles, hops in his Jeep, starts it up and waves as he leaves. Sloane waves and watches him go, finally smiling.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI CAFE -- NIGHT

Sloane stops back at the cafe, where Joe is making sure the woodstove is out. She leans over the counter.

JOE
Sorry I snapped about the place back East. Know you meant well.

SLOANE
I’m really trying to help.

JOE
I know, baby.

SLOANE
Don’t give up, Dad.

JOE
I’m heading back.

SLOANE
Got to pack up my car. Be along in a few.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Sloane pulls up and sees the light on in the barn.

INT. BARN -- NIGHT

Curious, Sloane enters and sees Joe and Georgia with their backs to her, leaning over Vixen’s stall. She’s about to speak, when Joe reaches over and rubs Georgia’s back.

She leans into him, and he kisses her cheek and puts an arm around her shoulder.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Stunned, Sloane steps back quietly out of the barn. Outside in the dark, she stands for a moment. Then, as if out of nowhere, a light snow begins to swirl around her. She looks skyward for a moment, then heads into the lodge.

INT. SLOANE'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Sloane, in a robe and slippers, is on her laptop on the bed when there’s a knock on the door. She opens it to see Georgia. Stiffly, she stands back to let her in.

GEORGIA
You didn’t say hello.

SLOANE
When?

GEORGIA
When you came into the barn.

Sloane doesn’t reply and sits. Georgia sits next to her.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
You should have seen Vixen. She’s much better, eating and everything.

SLOANE
Good.

GEORGIA
It’s very new. It’s barely anything yet. We’re going very slow.

SLOANE
Too slow to tell me?

GEORGIA
Things are so uncertain right now. Joe didn’t want to add a complication.

SLOANE
Does he know I saw you?

Georgia shakes her head. She reaches out to touch Sloane, who pulls away. Georgia lets out a long breath and stands.

GEORGIA
Want me to tell him?

SLOANE
He’ll tell me when he’s ready.

With a nod, Georgia rises and slips out. Sloane rubs a hand over her face and leans over to curl in a ball on the bed.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE KITCHEN -- NIGHT

The clock on the microwave reads 3:16 a.m. Sloane, in her PJs, pads in and looks into the fridge for a snack. When she stands up, Tack is there, and she jumps.

SLOANE
Jeez, you scared me... again.

He hands her an envelope. In it is a Christmas card that shows the Nativity. Sloane opens it and sees the ski-cake recipe neatly written inside it.

TACK
She’d want you to have it.

Sloane looks up at him, speechless.

TACK (CONT'D)
Merry Christmas.

With a little bow, he leaves. Sloane stands there, shocked, then looks again at the card and presses it to her chest.

INT. SLOANE'S HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Sloane wakes to the sounds of shouting and hammering outside.

SLOANE
Merry Caribou Christmas
construction.

She puts a pillow over her head, but at that moment, her phone starts buzzing. Reaching for it, she looks. It’s a text from Ariana, saying, “Call me, ASAP!”

INT. SLOANE'S HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Sloane sits up in bed. Ariana is on her laptop, looking apologetic.

ARIANA
Got kinda good news, pretty bad news, really good news and sorta bad news.

SLOANE
Just hit me.

Ariana reaches to one side and pulls in DONNIE -- early 30s, bespectacled, geek-cute. Ariana leans in over his shoulder.

ARIANA
First the kinda good news and pretty bad news, from Donnie.

Smiling nervously, Donnie holds up a map. The familiar, straight red line for the new road is in the middle, with a big dot along it for Caribou Lodge, and a dotted black line for the town limits. Next to the town line is a big dot called “Rusty’s Land,” with the red road running past it.

There’s a new, wiggly red line that departs from the red road as it enters the town limits, winds around the lodge, then exits the town limits to the north. A dotted red line connects the wiggly road line back to the original red line (but far past where Rusty’s land is).

DONNIE
Saying the current road is the only environmentally acceptable route is a lie.

Sloane starts to respond; before she can...

DONNIE (CONT'D)
But, if they said it was the most direct route, that’s the truth. As you see on the map.

Sloane sighs. Behind Donnie and unseen by him, Ariana points at him, mouthing, “So cute!” at Sloane, who struggles not to visibly react. Donnie points at the wiggly red line.

DONNIE (CONT'D)
There’s another route to the north, an existing two-lane gravel road crossing unused ranchland at the edge of the town limits. But it’s longer, so it’ll be more expensive.

SLOANE
If that route was used, though, the town wouldn’t have to buy out my Dad.

DONNIE
No, but they have to buy other land. Financially, that's a wash. But the town doesn't have extra construction costs in the budget.

SLOANE
How do you know?

DONNIE
I got a guy who got access...

Sloane puts up a hand.

SLOANE
Never mind. Don't tell me. I'm an officer of the court.

Ariana elbows in next to Donnie.

ARIANA
Now the really good news. We decided to do a Bedford Falls.

SLOANE
A what?

ARIANA
Remember how, in "It's a Wonderful Life," the town gave money to save George Bailey from the bank examiner? Well, we called everybody we could reach and hit them up for donations.

SLOANE
Our New York friends?

ARIANA
Of course, and Palm Beach. Some are typical rich-people tightwads, but others really came through.

DONNIE
Ariana made the case that this bit of true Americana deserved to survive. It was amazing to watch.

Ariana does a "oh, pshaw" gesture and blushes.

ARIANA
Would have kicked in more myself, but the trustee on my trust fund only let me draw out five percent. Donnie kicked in a chunk.

DONNIE
Christmas bonus. I was going to use it to go to Hawaii, but this has been way more fun.

Ariana kisses him on the cheek.

DONNIE (CONT'D)
Also, I grew up in a small town in North Dakota. Within a year of the oil boom, it was unrecognizable. I can relate.

Ariana gives him a hug.

ARIANA
So, the really good news is that we raised a bunch of money and put it in an account for you. The sorta bad news is, not quite enough.

DONNIE
We’re fifty percent there. I’ve emailed the actual figures.

Sloane opens an email and looks. Her face falls.

SLOANE
That’s a lot. But, hey, I don’t know how to thank you guys.

ARIANA
Donnie and I even lit candles at St. Patrick’s.

SLOANE
You went to a church?

ARIANA
We did virtual ones online. It’s the thought that counts, right?

Sloane nods, honestly touched. Ariana leans in.

ARIANA (CONT'D)
Chin up, girl. The money will show up. I just know it!

Sloane manages a wan smile. Ariana nudges Donnie, and they start singing, “Auld Lang Syne” (off-key). Sloane laughs.

EXT. BARN -- DAY

Sloane sticks her head in the barn and sees Georgia brushing Vixen, who’s standing in the entrance to his stall.

SLOANE
Well, look who’s better.

Georgia looks up, and they share a tentative smile.

GEORGIA
Finished her mash and everything.

SLOANE
Not a moment too soon. Where’s Dad?

GEORGIA
We had a visitor early this morning. Big SUV, with a driver. Didn’t get the name, but I think they headed down to the creek.

SLOANE
In the dead of winter?

Georgia shrugs. Sloane hesitates a moment.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Was laying there thinking last night about Mom’s old costume.

Georgia looks up expectantly.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- DAY

Sloane tromps in the direction of the treeline when she sees Joe and a tall, white-haired MAN in an overcoat come into view. They’re walking toward a black SUV with the engine running. Catching sight of the man’s face, Sloane is astonished. Joe sees her, waves and brings his guest over.

JOE
Honey, this is Brock Gather, Nate’s father. Brock, this is my daughter ...

Brock extends his hand. Sloane composes her face.

BROCK
Sloane Cavanaugh, esquire.

Sloane holds her surprise in, and they shake.

SLOANE
Have we met?

BROCK
No, but I golf with one of your senior partners. Brooks spoke highly of your work to save the Tokyo deal.

SLOANE
Did he? Wow. Um, I was wondering...

Brock interrupts her.

BROCK
I hope to have this pleasure repeated, but for now, I have to get back to work. I'll say my goodbyes.

JOE
Come back soon, Brock.

The men shake hands, Brock smiles at Sloane and gets into the SUV, which drives off. When he's gone, Sloane turns to Joe.

SLOANE
What was he doing here?

JOE
He wanted a tour of the lodge, and he's very interested in fly fishing. So I showed him my favorite spot.

SLOANE
He's the owner of the Gather Group, a k a Gadrian Properties. He's the developer of Peregine Peak. He didn't mention that?

Joe takes that in for a moment.

JOE
He said he was in the hospitality business. Why didn't Nate tell me?

SLOANE
He just found out. Brock wanted a tour and to talk fishing? That all?

JOE
It is possible he’s here to see his site and visit his son for the holidays?

SLOANE
Yeah, and Vixen has a secret life pulling Santa’s sleigh.

JOE
Why’d you come looking for me?

SLOANE
Well, I...

Sloane sputters then changes direction.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
I had an idea about you and Georgia, for tonight. I’m sure Mom would approve.

EXT. NATE’S APARTMENT-HOUSE DOOR

Sloane raps on Nate’s door, waits, listens, then raps again, harder this time. Then she hears a muffled voice from inside.

NATE
Coming, coming. Keep your pants on.

NATE, half-draped in a plaid blanket and with serious bedhead, cracks the door and peers out. Sloane gives him a long look, and he self-consciously pulls the blanket up higher. Sloane blinks and recovers herself.

SLOANE
I texted and called.

NATE
Phone’s off. Is everything OK?

SLOANE
Your father was at the lodge this morning.

NATE
What?

SLOANE
Can I come in?

Nate glances behind him, and looks back apologetically.

INT. SLOANE'S SUV -- DAY

Nate, hastily dressed and still with bedhead, sits in the passenger seat next to Sloane.

SLOANE
You must have an inkling what he wants.

NATE
Nope.

SLOANE
Go find out.

NATE
We haven't spoken lately.

SLOANE
Time for a Christmas reunion. Because I may have a way to save the lodge.

Nate gives her a startled look.

EXT. RV, RURAL IDAHO -- DAY

Nate is sitting inside the RV, on one side of a table fiddling with a cup of coffee, when the door opens and the man, BROCK GATHER, enters. Nate stays put. Brock doffs his overcoat, under which he wears an elegant sweater and slacks and sits across from Nate.

BROCK
Nathaniel.

NATE
Pop. Surprised to see you here.

BROCK
I was at the new project in Utah when Cole called to fill me in on your meeting. Wanted to come up and see what all the fuss was about.

NATE
You went to Caribou Lodge and talked to Joe.

BROCK
Yes. It’s a lovely property.

NATE
You know it’s set to be bulldozed.

BROCK
You know that’s not our doing.

There’s an awkward silence.

BROCK (CONT'D)
Anyway, we didn’t discuss that. Wasn’t appropriate.

NATE
Then what did you talk about?

BROCK
Fly fishing. The hospitality industry. Running a family business. Being a father. Being widowers. We had quite a lot in common. He lost his son, you know.

Nate nods.

BROCK (CONT'D)
Very sad. Made me realize how fortunate I am to have both of you.

Nate isn’t sure what to say.

BROCK (CONT'D)
Cole says you’re well. I missed you last Christmas.

NATE
Thought you were in Hawaii.

BROCK
With Cole putting out fires at the Slovenia project, was hardly going to stay in New York alone.

There’s another awkward silence. Nate breaks it.

NATE
There’s a way to save the lodge.

BROCK
I know. But you need money.

Nate is surprised.

BROCK (CONT'D)
Really, Nathaniel, do you think that Ariana Van der Leiden could be calling half of Manhattan and Palm Beach, and I wouldn't hear about it? Her father's hedge fund is one of our silent investors.

NATE
Big city, small world.

BROCK
You know I can't contribute cash.

NATE
If I sign over my trust fund early to our foundation, it could contribute the money.

Brock is surprised but tries not to show it.

BROCK
Your mother chose to give you that money at forty so it would be there for you and your children. Never crossed her in life and not going to start now.

Brock stands, as does Nate.

BROCK (CONT'D)
Now, if you'll excuse me, your brother insists on having breakfast at the local diner.

Brock puts on his coat.

BROCK (CONT'D)
Cole will send you the minimum figure we can live with. Raise the sum, and, if the town agrees, we'll build its section of the road -- ahead of schedule and on budget, as always.

NATE
Pop...

Brock briefly rests a hand on Nate's shoulder.

BROCK
Merry Christmas, son.

With that, he exits, leaving Nate standing, astonished.

INT. MINER DINER -- DAY

Sloane comes up to Kelsey at the counter.

KELSEY
Morning.

SLOANE
Hi. I need to do some quick shopping, and I require the advice of an expert piemaker.

KELSEY
About?

SLOANE
Ever made Key lime pie?

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- DAY

Preparations are underway for Caribou Christmas, with TOWNSPEOPLE pitching in. A firepit is readied to one side of the lodge; on the other side, a tent is erected for the "CARIBOU CHRISTMAS COMMUNITY CHILI COOK-OFF."

At an adjacent tent, a sign reads, Preserve Woodland Caribou! Next to it is the fake caribou from the lobby, ready for pictures. A VOLUNTEER sets out a big jar on the table in the tent, behind a sign that reads "DONATIONS: NO AMOUNT TOO SMALL (OR TOO LARGE)."

EXT. BARN -- DAY

Just outside the barn, the PARISHIONERS of St. Bernard's are busy setting up the stable and lights for the LIVING NATIVITY (the sign says it's sponsored by the church). Father Ricardo ties a set of donkey ears on a patient Gus. Billy, tied nearby, endures having to wear a sheepskin blanket.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE KITCHEN -- DAY

Sloane walks in on Tack, who's stirring a large pot of soup. She has something behind her back. He looks up then looks back down.

SLOANE
Thanks for the cake yesterday. Meant a lot to the Ski Patrollers. Mom could never make enough.

He keeps stirring, so Sloane keeps talking.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
She should've sold it. It's like a proto-energy bar. She was ahead of her time. But she always said it was the least she could do for the guys who kept the skiers safe.

Tack picks up a bowl of carrots and dumps them in the soup.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Going to make more for tonight?

Tack points to a sideboard, where there is more ski cake.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Oh, good.

Sloane fidgets, then pulls out a bag from behind her back and sets it on the counter next to Tack.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
I didn't have time to wrap it. Took me a while to hunt it down.

Tack gives her a long look then opens the bag, pulling out a silver instrument that looks like a thin cheese grater.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
It's a microplane citrus zester, for the Key lime pie. To make zest from the peel, for the pie.

Tack examines the zester, looks up at Sloane, puts a hand on his chest and bows briefly.

TACK
Thank you, very much.

He polishes the zester with a towel, puts it carefully into a drawer and returns to his soup. Sloane waits another minute, then takes the hint and exits.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE, KITCHEN DOOR -- DAY

Just outside the kitchen door, Sloane's phone boops. She sees a text from Nate: Good news on the Gather front.

INT. MAYOR CASEY'S OFFICE, GENERAL STORE -- DAY

Sloane sticks her head in to see Casey working at her desk. Casey looks up and smiles.

SLOANE
I have a Hail Mary plan to save the lodge, but I'd like your blessing. It involves Caribou Christmas.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH CHURCHYARD CEMETERY -- DAY

Sloane stands in front of her mother's grave, where the headstone is carved with a Celtic cross. It stands next to a nearly identical monument to Aidan. Kneeling next to her mother's headstone, Sloane runs her fingers over the inscription: "Beloved wife and mother. 'Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free! I follow the plan God laid for me.'"

A tear runs down her face.

SLOANE
I'm sorry I didn't come back last year, but without you here... I got Casey's blessing, but I'd really like yours.

Her voice breaks. Then a breeze lifts her hair, and flakes of snow drift down. She looks up, wipes her eyes and smiles faintly.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Thanks, Mom. You always understand.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI CAFE -- NIGHT

A banner over the cafe reads, "Merry Caribou Christmas!"

Sloane is back in the open cafe, with a pile of cake squares and cups of cocoa in front of her. TOWNSPEOPLE mill about.

A torchlight ski procession snakes down the hill. Sloane watches, transfixed. As the SKIERS arrive, Sloane sees Nate. He sticks his torch in the snow (they're all being stuck in the snow, in a circle) and comes over. Smiling, she hands him cake, which he happily stuffs into his mouth. He puts out his hand for her to come with him. Sloane looks back to Joe, who nods.

EXT. MINER'S NOTCH SKI HILL -- NIGHT

Sloane and Nate join the group, as the skiers and townspeople begin to sing "Silent Night." During the song, Nate slips his arm around her and she leans into him, returning the embrace. After the caroling breaks up, Nate turns to her.

NATE
Have you told Joe?

SLOANE
No. Don't want to get his hopes up.

Sloane looks around at the torchlight parade, which is just starting to wind its way toward the lodge. Nate entwines his fingers with hers. They meet eyes.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Maybe we'll get a Christmas miracle.

NATE
Thought you were too much of an urban sophisticate for that.

SLOANE
Maybe not.

They share a long look. Then the last skier in the parade goes by, motioning him to follow.

NATE
See you there?

SLOANE
With bells on.

Nate steps back into his skis, gives her a quick kiss on the cheek, grabs his torch and heads off. She watches, smiling, touching a hand to where he kissed her.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Caribou Christmas is well underway, all lights and celebration. The torchlight parade arrives, and the skiers and crowd circle the tree, singing "O Tannenbaum." The song dies down as Mayor Casey steps to a mike on a small stage.

MAYOR CASEY
Welcome one and all to Caribou Christmas.
(MORE)

MAYOR CASEY (CONT'D)
Each year, our goal has been to put a joyous capper on your holiday, raise funds to support caribou conservation and to, one day, we hope and pray, return caribou to Idaho. But first...

From the podium, she picks up two ends of an electrical cord and then leads the crowd -- a mix of TOWNSPEOPLE, GUESTS and TOURISTS -- in a loud 10-second countdown. When they hit one, she plugs the tree in. It blazes to life, to cheers.

Mayor Casey motions for the crowd to be quiet. When it doesn't immediately respond, she lets out a two-finger whistle, which gets its attention.

MAYOR CASEY (CONT'D)
But this year is a little different. You locals know that Caribou Lodge stands in danger of being demolished to make way for an access road for the new resort. We have found a way to prevent that, but only if we raise enough money to fund construction of an alternate, and equally ecologically sound, route. So, in consultation with the town council...

She gives a hard look down to Rusty, who stands with Doug in the crowd. Doug glares at Rusty, who looks at his shoes.

MAYOR CASEY (CONT'D)
We have decided to dedicate this year's proceeds to saving Caribou Lodge. We accept cash, checks and credit cards. The future of this place, and Caribou Christmas, now rests in your generosity.

She pulls jingle bells out of her pocket.

MAYOR CASEY (CONT'D)
Let the festivities begin!

She rings the bells loudly into the microphone. Then, people throughout the crowd ring their bells in succession, in a kind of wave, leading to the front of the lodge. Joe emerges, dressed as Santa Claus. At the bottom of the steps, Georgia appears from the side, dressed as Mrs. Claus, leading a jingle-belled Vixen. Seeing her, the crowd goes nuts. Joe looks up and finds Sloane. Glancing at Georgia, he looks at his daughter again. Sloane smiles broadly and gives him a thumbs-up.

Georgia hands Vixen's rope to Joe, and together they walk over to the living Nativity. Joe bends his knee in front of the manger and crosses himself. As he's rising, to everyone's surprise, Vixen also appears to bow her head -- causing another huge cheer from the crowd.

Joe comes forward, leading Vixen. He reaches a chair set up beneath the tree. Handing Vixen to Georgia, Joe invites a line of KIDS to come sit on his knee.

EXT: CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

MONTAGE: Mayor Casey works the chili-contest booth; Doug weaves through the crowd, handing out baked goods. Kelsey passes out pie. Money and checks are stuffed in the jar.

At the Living Nativity, Father Ricardo, dressed as Joseph, kneels next to the manger (with a doll dressed as Baby Jesus). Gus, wearing donkey ears, starts licking him.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Sloane and Nate work the crowd. It's flurrying, and he pauses to brush snow from her hair, letting his hand trail down the side of her face. For a moment, they forget the task at hand. She leans in, tipping her chin up and beginning to close her eyes -- when he's distracted.

SLOANE
What?

NATE
Stay right here.

Leaving Sloane confused, he makes a beeline to the pie booth, where Cole is chatting up Kelsey. He taps his shoulder, and Cole turns.

NATE (CONT'D)
Thanks for the help with the road.

COLE
It was Pop's idea. Now, if you'll buzz off, brother, I'm trying to buy some pie.

Nate glances at Kelsey and whispers back.

NATE
She's a friend.

COLE
Noted.

With a wink at Kelsey, Nate backs off. He returns to Sloane, who watched the whole exchange, and is smiling.

SLOANE
Looks like she found a new exit.

NATE
Huh?

SLOANE
Never mind.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

In the midst of collecting donations, Sloane and Nate see Rusty and Mayor Casey having what looks like an intense, heated conversation. At the end, Rusty throws up his hands and walks off. Sloane and Nate exchange looks. The look lingers, and he's leaning in, when Casey appears.

MAYOR CASEY
Ahem.

They turn.

MAYOR CASEY (CONT'D)
(to Sloane)
Do you sue people?

SLOANE
I'm not a litigator.

MAYOR CASEY
Know some?

SLOANE
Sure.

MAYOR CASEY
Good, then I didn't lie to Rusty.

Casey winks and walks off. Sloane looks at Nate, who shrugs.

NATE
Back to work?

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Sloane and Nate keep working the crowd. Taking a break from playing Santa, Joe sees what Sloane is doing and walks up.

JOE
Running for office?

SLOANE
Santa, you've got kids waiting.

Joe squeezes Sloane's hand and heads back.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Passing the pie counter, Nate sees Kelsey alone and walks up.

NATE
Be careful with my brother.

KELSEY
I'm a big girl. You're the one who should be careful. Suzie Cavanaugh? Really?

NATE
Uh...

KELSEY
She's just passing through, Nate.

Another customer walks up, so Kelsey turns away. Nate turns, and Doug appears.

DOUG
I've just done the latest tally.

NATE
And?

Doug gives him a despairing look.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Nate finds Sloane in the crowd.

NATE
We're gonna fall short.

SLOANE
Even with Cole's lowball estimate?

Nate shakes his head.

NATE
Not even the Gather Group could build a road for what we've raised.

SLOANE
(choking up)
We've come so close.

Nate gives her a sympathetic hug and kisses the top of her head They're sharing a long look when Brian -- head bandaged and his arm in a sling -- walks up, with Deborah.

NATE
Hey, you're up and about already.

BRIAN
Thanks to you. Deborah, this is the guy who pulled me off the mountain.

Deborah hugs Nate.

DEBORAH
God bless you.

NATE
It was a community effort.

Brian looks at Sloane.

BRIAN
Have we met?

SLOANE
Yeah. Outside the diner.

DEBORAH
Brian, this is the girl who got us a suite at this wonderful lodge.
(to Sloane)
He has a concussion. Anyway, honey, you wanted to tell them something?

BRIAN
Yes, yes. We hear you need money to save the lodge from demolition.

SLOANE
Yeah, and we're coming up short.

BRIAN
How short?

With a sigh, Nate holds out his phone. Brian looks, raises his eyebrows and then looks at Deborah. She nods.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Everyone here has been so kind. I don’t know if I would have made it, if you hadn’t found me. If you’ll take an American Express black card, it would be my pleasure to make up the difference.

Nate and Sloane are gobsmacked. Sloane leaps in to hug Brian, who winces, causing her to jump back.

SLOANE
Sorry. Forgot.

Brian waves her off and there are smiles all around.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Casey steps up to the microphone and looks out at the crowd. Sloane grabs Joe from his Santa perch and walks him to the front, where Nate, Brian and Deborah are waiting.

MAYOR CASEY
Can I have everyone’s attention please?

The festivities continue. Casey makes a face, then puts two fingers in her mouth and lets out another ear-splitting whistle. Everybody stops immediately and turns to look at her.

MAYOR CASEY (CONT'D)
I’m happy to report that alternate road project is now fully funded.

Then she smiles down at Brian, who beams back at her.

MAYOR CASEY (CONT'D)
So, join us next year, same night, same place, for the best Caribou Christmas ever!

A general cheer goes up from the crowd. Sloane hugs a stunned Joe. Georgia appears, Vixen in tow, and plants a kiss on Joe. Several startled faces look in Joe’s direction. He shrugs and grabs Georgia for another kiss.

Then Vixen shakes her jingle bells and gives Sloane a shove, which knocks her into Nate’s arms.

Before they can kiss, Georgia pulls her away for a hug. Then, Cole appears, grabs Nate and pulls him to one side.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Cole brings Nate behind the chili tent, where a black SUV is parked. The door opens, and Brock emerges.

BROCK
So, you did it?

NATE
We all did it.

Cole shakes Nate’s hand.

COLE
Well done. If you’ll excuse me, I need to go get some baking tips.

With a smile, he exits.

BROCK
What’s that all about?

NATE
He’s suddenly become a big pie fan.

BROCK
Thought he was gluten-free.

Nate shrugs. Brock gives his son a long look, which makes him uncomfortable. At maximum squirm, he speaks.

BROCK (CONT'D)
Your mother would be proud. So am I.

Suddenly choked up, Nate can’t figure out what to say.

BROCK (CONT'D)
Come up to the site and have breakfast with Cole and me tomorrow. We need to talk.

NATE
Pop, since the lodge is saved, I’m not coming back to my old job.

BROCK
Who says I want you to?

There’s an awkward pause.

BROCK (CONT'D)
This whole affair has gotten me thinking about how we, however unconsciously, contributed to the dissolution of communities. I'd like Peregrine Peak to be a new paradigm, a resort that doesn't supplant the community, but enhances it. And I'd like you to be a part of that.

NATE
How?

BROCK
I have fifty people in the company who could do the job of Director of Resort Operations for Peregrine Peak. You know that. They all used to report to you.

Nate smiles.

BROCK (CONT'D)
But not one of them knows this town like you do. I know you have concerns about work/life balance and so forth. I'm more than open to discussing these, if you're willing to entertain the idea. It wouldn't be the same salary as before...

NATE
I can manage.

BROCK
And it is a demotion.

NATE
Not to me. I'd insist on autonomy here, though, and not to report directly to Cole.

BROCK
Doable. We'll talk about the details tomorrow.

With a smile, Brock gets back into the SUV, and it pulls away, leaving Nate stunned and amazed.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Sloane is accepting congrats from the crowd when she encounters Mayor Casey.

MAYOR CASEY
Shame about the water park.

SLOANE
What about it?

MAYOR CASEY
The new route bypasses Rusty's land entirely.

SLOANE
Just move the park.

MAYOR CASEY
Rusty's desperate to save his son's restaurant in Spokane. He cut the water-park company a deal on the land and expedited the permit. Guaranteed they'll bail now.

SLOANE
Oh.

MAYOR CASEY
Don't get me wrong; I'm on your side. But it would have been great for summer tourism.

She glances in Nate's direction.

MAYOR CASEY (CONT'D)
I hear from Kelsey you may have an in with the developer. Can you do something?

SLOANE
Why should Rusty get what he wants?

MAYOR CASEY
This was never about Rusty, or Joe. It was always about the town. Just think on it.

She leaves. Sloane stands, conflicted.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Sloane is working her way through the crowd, looking for Nate, when Rusty appears beside her.

RUSTY
Must be feelin' pretty pleased with yourself, missy.

SLOANE
I am.

Rusty snorts and starts to walk off. Reluctantly, Sloane reaches out and puts a hand on his arm.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
If the road could still pass by your land, would the water park be a go?

RUSTY
No way Gadrian would fork over more for some kind of detour.

SLOANE
What if they did?

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Sloane finds Cole, still hanging around the pie stand. With a nod to Kelsey, she pulls him aside.

SLOANE
Wanted to thank you again for your help with the road.

COLE
Sure. It was good business.

SLOANE
Now I have another favor to ask, that I hope you think is good business, too.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Cole and Sloane stand together, with him on the phone. Cole is listening, nodding.

COLE
OK. I will... Yeah. I understand... OK, Pop. Thanks.

He hangs up and looks at Sloane.

COLE (CONT'D)
For a minority stake in the water park project, and a commensurate share of the profits, we'd be willing to take on the cost of a detour, and include promotion for the park at Peregrine Peak. Can you speak for Rusty Baird?

SLOANE
I have his proxy. I can draw up the contract right after Christmas.

COLE
Pop said you were good.

SLOANE
He's very kind.

COLE
But, it may take a couple of days for me to get someone from Legal in New York to review the contract.

SLOANE
Of course.

Cole eyes her.

COLE
We'd like to get someone in place here to handle these things, but as you might guess, we don't have candidates lining up to transfer.

Sloane keeps her face composed.

SLOANE
The resort would have its own in-house counsel?

COLE
That's our usual policy. So, if you happen to know anyone who might be interested, be glad for any recommendation.

Sloane affects an airy indifference.

SLOANE
I'll give it some thought.

COLE
Good, good. We'll be in touch.

They shake hands, but as he starts to walk away, he pauses and turns.

COLE (CONT'D)
Oh, and since my parents met on the job, we don't have a policy barring employee fraternization. Just FYI.

Sloane manages a confused smile.

SLOANE
Good to know.

He leaves Sloane standing, pensive and perplexed.

INT. SLOANE'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Sloane, in a slip and tall black boots, ponders two velvet dresses laid out on the bed -- one dark green and one red -- with a velvet party purse next to them. She takes a picture of them, types "Which for" then a church emoji, and sends it. Almost immediately, Ariana texts back, "Is there a man involved?"

Sloane pauses, takes a breath and texts back, "Yes & you've seen him before."

Ariana texts, "RED. Got ur tall boots? & you WILL call me 1st thing a.m.!!!!"

Sloane smiles and sends, back, "I do & OK" and a wink emoji.

The answer is, "Alarm set!" with a string of emojis, including a clock, heart and a Christmas tree. With a chuckle, Sloane tucks the phone into the purse and grabs the red dress.

INT. CARIBOU LODGE, JOE'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Sloane walks into Joe's office, where he's drawing the new route on his map, still wearing his Santa pants.

SLOANE
You wearing that to church?

Joe looks down and laughs.

JOE
Hardly. I’m supposed to be on my worldwide rounds, not sitting in a pew. Shouldn’t confuse the kids.

He eyes her outfit.

JOE (CONT'D)
Coming to St. Bernard’s for Midnight Mass, right?

SLOANE
Obviously.

Joe beams. Sloane starts to leave but hesitates.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
I felt Mom... and, you and Georgia... I think she approves.

Joe walks to her and wraps his arms around her.

JOE
Aidan was there, too. And he was saying, “Look at my little sister. She’s my hero.” Mine, too.

Her eyes fill up, but Sloane smiles through the tears.

SLOANE
Wasn’t just me, you know.

JOE
I know. But it began with you.

The hug, then Joe steps back.

JOE (CONT'D)
Time for church!

INT. ST. BERNARD'S CHURCH -- NIGHT

Nate enters the crowded church and looks around. In a pew, Joe looks around and spots him, waving to get his attention and gesturing toward the pew. Nate walks up. Sloane, Joe and Georgia shift to make room. As he removes his coat to sit, revealing a red sweater, he sees Sloane’s red dress and staggers back, pretending to be stunned at the sight of her. She gives him a confident smile in return. He sits, holding out his elbow to compare the shade of red to hers, getting her to smile. Then he keeps the elbow there, until she slips her hand through it. Sloane looks over at Joe and Georgia, who make a great show of not noticing the happy couple.

EXT. ST. BERNARD'S CHURCH -- NIGHT

Outside, light streams through the church windows, and the sounds of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” as a light snow begins to fall.

INT. BARN -- NIGHT

In the dark barn, Big Billy is asleep in his stall. Suddenly there’s a bright light and the sound of jingle bells, which wakes Billy up. He looks up and sees Vixen’s antlers moving around above the wall of the stall. He bleats loudly and gets a snort from the adjoining stall in reply. Then there’s another peal of bells, and the lights go out. As if with a shrug, Billy puts his head back down to go back to sleep.

INT. ST. BERNARD’S CHURCH -- NIGHT

As the choir sings “Silent Night,” Father Ricardo steps up to the ambo (pulpit) and raises his hands for quiet.

FATHER RICARDO
Before we all go and return to our Christmas celebrations, I’d like to leave you with one last thought. The Divine Child came humbly into the world, protected by the love of His family. Love -- true, sacrificial love -- is our greatest strength. Let us all pray to find that love within and among ourselves, not just on Christmas Day but every day. Amen.

PARISHIONERS
Amen.

Nate leans in close to Sloane.

NATE
You believe in that kind of love?

SLOANE
I do now.

Father Ricardo gestures for everyone to stand, and the choir and parishioners all begin singing “Joy to the World.” Nate, Joe and Georgia all join in with gusto, but Sloane holds back, a bit embarrassed. Nate notices and elbows her with a smile.

After a beat, she relents and joins in, putting his arm around her and nodding to Joe, who does the same, then puts his other arm around Georgia, who hugs him back. All four joyously sing.

EXT. CARIBOU LODGE -- NIGHT

Nate drives Sloane up to the lodge in his Jeep. He hops out and runs around to open Sloane's door, offering his hand.

NATE
Madame.

SLOANE
Why, thank you, sir.

She hops out. She looks around at the now-deserted Caribou Christmas site.

NATE
Quite a night. Lovely service.

SLOANE
Not service. Mass. Midnight Mass.

Nate raises an eyebrow.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Sheesh. I'm turning into my mother.

NATE
From what I hear, that's a good thing.

Sloane smiles awkwardly and changes the subject.

SLOANE
Will you say yes to your father's job offer?

NATE
If the terms are right. And do you know anybody interested in being Peregrine Peak's corporate counsel?

SLOANE
I just might. Maybe, just maybe, New York vs. Miner's Notch is not solely an either/or proposition.

NATE
Could be.

Smiling, Nate reaches out and gathers Sloane into his arms. They lock eyes. He reached up and puts a finger under her chin.

NATE (CONT'D)
Been waiting a while to do this.
May I?

SLOANE
I wish you would.

Silhouetted against the Christmas tree, they are about to kiss when Sloane's phone buzzes in her pocket. With an apologetic look to Nate, she pulls it out to reveal a shot of Ariana and Donnie, with a filter that gives them red noses and antlers, kissing under mistletoe, as Ariana displays a big engagement ring. She shows it to Nate, who gives her a half-smile.

Then there's a text, with the alarm clock, a sun and a Christmas tree.

NATE
What's that about?

SLOANE
Nothing. Where were we?

Reaching into his pocket, he pulls out jingle bells and holds them over their heads, then gives them a shake. She looks up.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
That's not mistletoe.

NATE
Close enough.

At long last, they kiss.

INT. MANHATTAN HIGH-RISE -- DAY

Legend reads: MANHATTAN, ONE YEAR LATER

In high heels and a slick suit, Sloane stands at the windows of an office tower, watching the snow swirl among the towers of the Manhattan skyline. Her phone buzzes, and she pulls it out to reveal a text from Georgia. It reads, "How about Gus as the ringbearer? Everyone loves the idea."

Sloane sighs, shakes her head and types back, "Sure, why not?"

Nate, in a suit, comes up behind her, slips his arms around her and kisses her neck.

NATE
Meetings done. You?

Sloane nods.

SLOANE
By the way, Gus is now the ringbearer.

NATE
What, not Vixen?

SLOANE
Don’t give them ideas.

NATE
We could have had a double wedding with Ariana and Donnie at City Hall, you know.

SLOANE
Not a chance. St. Bernard’s or bust.

She turns around to face him.

NATE
Ready to go home?

SLOANE
With bells on.

They kiss.

THE END.

Along with closing credits, fun shots and clips (social style) of locals, Ariana and Donnie, the Gathers, and Vixen and Gus, at Sloane and Nate’s wedding and the reception afterward at the lodge.