Designing Christmas

By

April J. Miller
FADE IN

EXT. MIDDLE CLASS SUBURBS - DAY

Spring’s warm touch bathes the atmosphere with promises of things to come, while plants awaken, preparing their buds like guests getting ready for a grand ball.

KATHLEEN MYERS (35) walks out dressed in a chic business suit and briefcase. Once beat down, but now happily divorced. The mother of two.

Climbing into her small sedan, she drives away.

INT. INTERIOR DECORATING AND DESIGN COMPANY - DAY

A sparsely furnished reception area. A large sign reading; "ProDesign - Interior Decorators" arches across the wall behind the RECEPTIONIST’S desk.

Pulse racing, hands sweating, Kathleen gathers her courage and steps forward.

KATHLEEN
Kathleen Myers. I have a job interview with Mr. Parks.

RECEPTIONIST
Please have a seat. I’ll let him know you’re here.

Kathleen sits and picks up a magazine. She thumbs through without seeing, her shaking hands nullifies an attempted air of confidence.

The office door opens and a YOUNG WOMAN steps out followed by MR. PARKS.

PARKS
Thank you for coming. I’ll be in contact in a day or two.

They shake hands and the woman leaves.

RECEPTIONIST
Ms. Myers is here for her appointment.

PARKS
Please come in, Ms. Myers.
Kathleen follows him into his office with all the confidence of a child sent to the principal’s office.

INT. CAR – DAY

Kathleen opens the door and throws her briefcase in. Behind the wheel, she puts head in hands. Failure is a bummer.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL – DAY

The car pulls up to Eastside Elementary, a plain brick building that resembles a prison more than a place of learning.

A GROUP OF CHILDREN, screaming with excitement, stand with a TEACHER.

Kathleen walks around the car just as DANIELLE (6) runs towards her. A hug later, she opens the door and Danielle climbs into her car seat.

INT. MYER’S RESIDENCE – DAY

The foyer looks like a page out of Better Homes and Garden. In fact, the whole house is a testament to Kathleen’s designing talent.

Danielle runs down the hall to her room.

    KATHLEEN
    Put your backpack up and get some play clothes on. Jackson has a game tonight. We have to leave in half an hour.

KITCHEN – SAME

Kathleen makes two sandwiches; one she puts on the table with some milk, the other she starts eating. She yells down the hall:

    KATHLEEN
    There’s a sandwich on the table for you.

Switching on the laptop, she’s checks emails when one causes her hesitate. She clicks on it. Excited, she types rapidly, lost in the moment. Danielle walks in, sits at the table, and starts eating.

(CONTINUED)
DANIELLE
I couldn’t find my other red shoe so I put a blue one on.

KATHLEEN
(still typing)
Okay.

DANIELLE
Do you think Lucy will be at the game?

KATHLEEN
I’m sure she will.

DANIELLE
Good, I’ve got a secret to tell her. When do we leave?

KATHLEEN
I said a half hour.

DANIELLE
But that was a half hour ago.

Kathleen looks at her watch.

KATHLEEN
Oh, my gosh. We have to go.

She jumps up.

KATHLEEN
Are you finished eating?

Danielle looks at her half eaten sandwich. She sighs.

DANIELLE
I guess so.

KATHLEEN
Get your jacket. And get one for Jackson while you’re at it.

DANIELLE
Okay.
FRONT DOOR
They meet. Kathleen helps to put her jacket on and it’s out the door.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON
They walk to the bleachers. It’s a beautiful sunny day, perfect for a baseball game. Cheering PARENTS fill the benches.

    DANIELLE
    There’s Lucy.

She runs ahead.

Kathleen spies her friend MICHELLE BLACK (25). She squeezes by a few people and sits beside her.

    MICHELLE
    You missed the start.

    KATHLEEN
    Sorry. I got an email from my college.

Kathleen finds her son.

EXT. PLAYING FIELD - SAME
JACKSON (12) guarding second base.

BLEACHERS - SAME
She waves.

    KATHLEEN (CONT.)
    They’re having a contest. The winner gets a spot on a new reality series.

    MICHELLE
    What kind of series?

    KATHLEEN
    Whoever wins will be paired with a builder and given an old house to update and then decorate for Christmas. The winner gets cash and a chance to work for Design

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN (cont’d)
Magic: the biggest design company
in America.

MICHELLE
Where will the house be?

PLAYING FIELD - ON JACKSON

The ball is hit right to Jackson. He catches it and throws it to first base.

BLEACHERS - SAME

Kathleen stands, clapping.

KATHLEEN
Whooo, way to go Jackson.
(to Michelle)
I don’t know. It didn’t say.

She returns to her seat.

MICHELLE
But what about the kids? Their schooling?

KATHLEEN
Actually, I was so excited, I didn’t even think about it.

MICHELLE
You already applied?

KATHLEEN
That’s why I was late. I guess if it was really necessary I could home school them. To work for a company like Design Magic would be a dream come true.

WIDE ANGLE - BALL FIELD

The inning is over. The teams switch sides.
MICHELLE
Why are you killing yourself? With your alimony and child support from John, you have plenty without having to work. And it’s not as though he can’t afford it.

KATHLEEN
Because I don’t want to be dependent on him for any longer than I have to. Receiving child support is one thing, he owes them that, but I want to be totally free from him.

MICHELLE
Yea, I can understand that.

KATHLEEN
And being an interior designer is something I always wanted to do.

MICHELLE
And you’re good at it.

KATHLEEN
Thank you.

MICHELLE
I have just one question.

KATHLEEN
What’s that?

MICHELLE
Why does Danielle have one red shoe and one blue shoe?

KATHLEEN
Truthfully, I have no idea.

INT. MYER’S RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Toys scattered about spoil the "showroom" look. On the mantle, pictures of the Kathleen’s and the kids smile down. Those of the ex-husband are glaring by their absence.

Kathleen flops down in a chair.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Okay, you two, jump on your homework. Bedtime is not far away.

JACKSON
Will we be going to dad’s for spring break again?

KATHLEEN
We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.

JACKSON
Mom, it’s only two weeks away.

KATHLEEN
Are you sure?

JACKSON
Uh, yea. Everyone at school is talking about it. Last break before school is out - remember?

KATHLEEN
Okay, I’m sorry. I’ve been concentrating on my school work so much, I lost track of time.

JACKSON
It’s okay. It happens to the best of us.

Kathleen throws a pillow at him.

KATHLEEN
Do you want to go?

DANIELLE
Yeaaaa.

JACKSON
We always go. Dad does really neat stuff with us.

DANIELLE
Yea, last time we went to the beach.

KATHLEEN
Well, I definitely can’t compete with that.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: 8.

JACKSON
So, how did your interview go?

KATHLEEN
Didn’t. The job was already taken.

JACKSON
You’ll nail it next time.

Jackson grabs the pillow. Holding it close he twirls and bumps Danielle.

JACKSON
And he blocks the attempt to get the ball, sets himself for the shot....

He throws it into Kathleen’s lap.

JACKSON
And he scores!

Jumping up and down like Rocky, he runs to his room with Danielle on his heels.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

A BMW sits in the driveway like a prize thoroughbred among draft horses. JOHN MYERS (40), a corporate executive and arrogant SOB who believes his money and position can get him anything, walks to the door. Kathleen opens it. She stands a moment, arms crossed, before moving over and letting him in.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

KATHLEEN
You’re a little early.

JOHN
No, Kath, I’m right on time. You just haven’t entered the world, yet.

Jackson walks into the hallway.

JACKSON
Hey, dad.

Danielle runs down the hall, arms out.

(CONTINUED)
John picks her up and tosses her in the air.

JOHN
You two ready for spring break?

JACKSON
You have no idea.

JOHN
I found the greatest place. You can drive mini cars, it has a three acre miniature golf course, horseback riding...

DANIELLE
I want the horses.

JOHN
Whitewater rafting.

JACKSON
Sounds great.

DANIELLE
Mommy, can’t you come?

Her smile is a bit too cynical.

KATHLEEN
No, honey. This is your time to be with your dad. Mommy’s just get in the way.

JACKSON
Mom.

JOHN
Don’t make the kids feel guilty. You should be glad they have one parent able to provide a good vacation.

KATHLEEN
Actually, I am. I know they’ll have a great time. And, if things go according to plan, I’ll soon be in a position to give them one, myself.
JACKSON
Mom’s been going to night school to
be an interior decorator.

JOHN
Yea, I hear they make a fabulous
income. Well, shall we go?

He puts Danielle down.

JOHN
Go get your stuff.

Danielle runs down the hall. Jackson follows more sedately,
looking behind to his parents.

JOHN
I can’t believe the judge gave you
custody.

KATHLEEN
It was the right thing for the
children.

JOHN
Bull. You may have them now, but
don’t count on it staying this way.

KATHLEEN
You won’t take my children away
from me.

John’s reply is cut off by Danielle running back with her
backpack. She hands it to her father.

DANIELLE
Bye, Mommy.

Kathleen gives her a big kiss.

KATHLEEN
Good-bye, you two. Remember, I
love you bunches.

As the door closes, Kathleen implodes. Her back against the
wall, she wraps her arms around her stomach to keep the fear
from bursting out. Why does he always have to win?
INT. HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY  
Kathleen works on her computer. Intent. It’s now more critical than ever that she make this happen. She sees something and writes it down. As she scrolls, the doorbell rings. Reluctant, she gets up to answer.  

OVER THE SHOULDER - DOOR  
She is met by STEVEN SELBY (30’S) holding a microphone. Behind him LESTER, his camera man, points the camera at her face.  

STEVEN  
Are you Kathleen Myers?  

What the heck?  

KATHLEEN  
Yes.  

EXT. MYER’S RESIDENCE - DOOR - SAME  

STEVEN  
I’m Steven Selby with Upson University.  

KATHLEEN  
That’s the college I’ve been taking my classes with.  

STEVEN  
And do you remember entering a contest a while ago?  

KATHLEEN  
Yes.  

STEVEN  
Well, I’m pleased to announce, you’ve won.  

Deer in headlights.  

STEVEN  
It’s okay, you can breath.  

Kathleen takes deep breaths, fanning herself with her hand.  

(CONTINUED)
STEVEN
Actually, this happens a lot. You mind if we come in?

INT. FOYER - SAME
Kathleen looks around. Is the house in order? Are things picked up? She steps aside.

KATHLEEN
Please.

TRAVELING DOWN THE HALL - SAME
She leads them to the next room, picking up a doll along the way and discretely tossing it behind a chair.

KATHLEEN
We can go into the den.

INT. DEN - SAME
Steven looks around. He whistles low. The camera man pans the room taking in the showroom finished look.

STEVEN
Did you do this room?

KATHLEEN
Yes.

STEVEN
You’re quite talented.

KATHLEEN
Thank you. Please, have a seat.

STEVEN
For camera purposes, we’ll need to sit close. Can we bring these two chairs together?

He indicates two Queen Ann chairs sitting at opposite sides of a fireplace.

KATHLEEN
Of course.

(CONTINUED)
LESTER
The fireplace will make a good background.

KATHLEEN
Would either of you like some refreshments? I have some ice tea, water...?

Steve looks at his crewman who shakes his head.

STEVEN
No, thanks. We’re fine. Now, if you’ll have a seat, we can begin the interview.

Kathleen sits down.

KATHLEEN
Interview?

On camera? Now? She’s fighting to relax. Deep breaths – don’t clench the hands.

STEVEN
Do you remember on the application, it says the contest was for the "chance" to win a spot on a reality show?

KATHLEEN
Yes. I did wonder about that when I read it.

STEVEN
Here is how it works. For the show, itself, there will be only ten teams competing. The show will follow these teams for approximately eight months while they restore and redesign these old houses. We had thousands of applications, of which fifty were chosen.

KATHLEEN
So, it wasn’t just Upson University holding the contest.

STEVEN
No, they were just one of several. The contest was held on a national level.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Wow, I didn’t know. So, how is the final decision made?

STEVEN
Which brings us to why I’m here. In ten minutes or less, you’re going to tell me why you deserve to be the winner.

KATHLEEN
Now?

She looks down. Her clothes are for comfort, not a camera. Oh, God, what does the rest of her look like?

STEVEN
It’s our producer’s dry sense of humor. He doesn’t want to give the winners time to construct a thought-out reason. He wants it fresh and gut-level.

KATHLEEN
Okay, just give me a moment.

She stands up and checks her hair in the mirror over the fireplace. She twirls back down. Not too bad. It will have to do.

STEVEN
What were you thinking when you filled out your application? What is your deepest desire concerning this contest?

Several deep breaths.

STEVEN
Careful, you don’t want to hyper-ventilate.

Close eyes, breath, relax, sigh. Think. Dig deep.

KATHLEEN
My deepest desire is to do something I’ve wanted to do almost my entire life. When I walk into a room, it’s like an art canvas waiting to be painted on. It’s not what I want to do, it’s who I am. I want to make my children proud of me. To give them the nice

(MORE)
KATHLEEN (cont’d)
things they see the other kids have, but I can’t afford. But I also want to know that, I can do this. I married right out of high school and divorced two years ago. Being at home is all I’ve ever done. I love my kids and my home, but I want to know what it’s like to love a career as well.

STEVEN
That was great.

LESTER
And the first time.

Steve stands up to leave.

STEVEN
Most interior designers are perfectionists. They want us to do multiple takes before they are satisfied.

KATHLEEN
Which is rather against the point.

STEVEN
Exactly.

He extends his hand which Kathleen takes.

STEVEN
Thank you for your time. I’m sincere when I say, good luck. You should hear something in three to four weeks.

KATHLEEN
Thank you.

STEVEN
We’ll find ourselves out.

LESTER
Bye.

KATHLEEN
Good bye.

Kathleen jumps up, drops to one knee and gives herself a one arm fist-pump.
INT. HOUSE - DAY

Kathleen works at her desk. She hears the door BURST open seconds before Danielle rushes in.

   DANIELLE
   Mommy, we’re home.

Jackson follows with a teen-age saunter.

   JACKSON
   Hey, mom.

Kathleen hugs Danielle tight. A week without her kids is six days too long.

   KATHLEEN
   Oh, I missed you soooo much.

   DANIELLE
   I got to ride a real horse.

   KATHLEEN
   You did?

She looks up at Jackson. He’s smiling, but something is not quite right. Kathleen hesitates, wondering. Back to Danielle.

   KATHLEEN
   That is so great. Tell you what, I’ll get dinner started while you put your things away then you can tell me all about it.

   DANIELLE
   Okay.

Danielle runs out.

Standing, Kathleen places her hand on Jackson’s head as he passes. She turns it to see a large scratch. Her eyebrows go up.

   JACKSON
   Minor go-cart accident.

   KATHLEEN
   That’s it, you’re not driving until you’re thirty.

Jackson smiles. He turns pensive.

(CONTINUED)
JACKSON  
Dad says he wants to have custody;  
that he can support us better than  
you can.

Here it is. John has brought the kids into it, plowing  
through feelings without a thought for the consequences.

KATHLEEN  
So, he says. And the truth is,  
he’s right. He can provide for you  
better than I can, even if I got a  
job. I just happen to love you  
more.

JACKSON  
Which is why we want to stay  
here. Dad’s cool and all, but even  
when he was with us, he was never,  
you know, with us. We don’t have  
expensive stuff, but at least  
you’re here when we get home.

KATHLEEN  
But if I get a job, that may  
change.

JACKSON  
You’d still be here more than Dad  
ever was. Personally, I think  
you’re a really great mom.

Kathleen gives him a hug.

KATHLEEN  
Thanks, that means more than you  
know.

Jackson grins.

JACKSON  
Which is why we’re ordering pizza  
tonight, right?

KATHLEEN  
Did I just get sideswiped by a  
slick sales pitch?

JACKSON  
What can I say? I’m the best.

He runs down the hall before Kathleen can find something to  
throw.
LIVING ROOM - EVENING

An intimate family moment eating pizza and watching a movie. It shows why you don’t need money and expensive vacations to be close.

KATHLEEN
By the way, did I tell you guys I won a contest?

JACKSON
What kind of contest?

KATHLEEN
One that gives me the chance to be on a reality TV show.

JACKSON
That’s awesome.

DANIELLE
Do I get to be on TV? I can do my ballet.

KATHLEEN
I don’t know. First, I have to win.

JACKSON
Will the film crew come here?

KATHLEEN
No, ten teams will compete to restore and then decorate an old house for Christmas. We would have to go to wherever the house is. The winner gets cash and a prestigious job with a leading interior design company.

JACKSON
It sounds like just what you need. But what about school?

KATHLEEN
I don’t know. I’m trying to take it one step at a time. First I have to win.

DANIELLE
You’ll will, I’m sure of it.
INT. - GROCERY STORE - DAY

Kathleen pushes Danielle down an aisle when her phone rings. She takes it out.

   KATHLEEN
   Hello?

She listens for a moment. Her arms fly up as she starts screaming.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Kathleen packs her suitcase. Danielle runs in.

   DANIELLE
   I found my red shoe.

   KATHLEEN
   That’s great, hon. Do you have the clothes you want to take laid out for me.

   DANIELLE
   Some of them.

   KATHLEEN
   Okay, I’m just about finished. I’ll be in there in a moment.

Danielle runs out. Kathleen glances around the room. Seeing a picture of the children, she takes it on a whim, places it in her suitcase and closes it. She walks out.

DANIELLE’S ROOM

Typical child’s room dominated by horses and ballet. Clothes are strewn everywhere with a big pile on the bed. Kathleen walks in.

   KATHLEEN
   Danielle, what are you doing?

Danielle pops out of the closet.

   DANIELLE
   Now I’ve lost my other blue shoe.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Well, let’s get this mess straightened up and maybe you’ll find it. Come on, we have to hurry.

Kathleen pulls out clothes, places them in a suitcase. She picks up a party dress.

KATHLEEN
You sure you want to take this?

DANIELLE
Uh, huh. Girls have to look good wherever they go.

KATHLEEN
Where in the world did you hear that?

DANIELLE
At school. Kindergarten can be tough, you know.

KATHLEEN
Yea, I remember. There were boys at school who used to pick on me a lot.

DANIELLE
 Know what you mean. Boys are a real pain in the bu..

KATHLEEN
That’s okay.

Kathleen puts the last item in.

KATHLEEN
There, that should do it.

Danielle dives under the bed.

DANIELLE
And here’s my blue shoe.

She throws it on top. Kathleen zips up the case.

KATHLEEN
You’re all set. Can you manage this?

Danielle pulls it off the bed and drops it.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

DANIELLE
Oh, yea.

She drags it out the door. Kathleen looks around, then follows her.

HALLWAY
Kathleen knocks on Jackson’s door. He opens it.

KATHLEEN
All set?

JACKSON
Yea. Just give me a minute.

KATHLEEN
Sure. I’ll be taking things to the car. We need to hurry.

EXT. - HOUSE - DAY
Kathleen carries her suitcase to the car, passing Danielle who still drags hers.

KATHLEEN
Need help?

DANIELLE
No, I got it.

Kathleen opens the trunk and puts her case inside. When Danielle arrives, she adds hers. Jackson appears at the door.

KATHLEEN
Come on, Jackson, we need to go.

Jackson walks up and puts his case in.

JACKSON
What’s the hurry?

KATHLEEN
I want to be gone before your father finds out.

Jackson ducks his head.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
You didn’t?

JACKSON
Sorry. I told him the other night when he called. I didn’t see anything wrong with it.

KATHLEEN
It’s okay. You didn’t know. Maybe if we hurry..

A familiar BMW drives up.

DANIELLE
Daddy.

JACKSON
Too late.

Kathleen sighs, resigned.

KATHLEEN
Take Danielle inside, would you?
(To Danielle)
Honey, would you go inside and take one more look around for me? See if there’s anything I’ve missed?

Danielle runs in. Jackson follows, throwing glances over his shoulder. John walks up. He’s a bull ready to fight.

JOHN
Where are you going and why didn’t you tell me?

KATHLEEN
I’m not really sure where we’re going. It’s someplace in upper New York.

JOHN
You’re leaving and you have no idea where you’re going?

KATHLEEN
The producer doesn’t want the location made public. He’s calling me tomorrow with the exact location.

JOHN
You can’t take them.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
It’s only for a few months.

JOHN
Eight months.

KATHLEEN
Eight months. So? We’ll be back.

JOHN
I don’t like my kids being on a trashy reality show.

KATHLEEN
They’re not the ones who are going to be on it, I am.

JOHN
You’re just going to make a fool of yourself like you always do.

Pause

KATHLEEN
(Out loud)
Kids, we have to go. Say good-bye to your father.

JOHN
This isn’t over. When I get custody, you’ll be lucky to see them on leap-year.

Danielle runs up. John picks her up into a swinging hug. Jackson walks up.

JOHN
(To Jackson)
I want to know where you are and everything that’s happening.

JACKSON
Sure. I’ll call you sometime.

KATHLEEN
In the car, you two.

Kathleen belts Danielle in her car seat with trembling hands. In the driver’s seat, she glances at John then SLAMS the door.

John watches them pull out and leave.
EXT. RURAL ROAD, UPPER NEW YORK - DAY

The sign the car passes says Glenloche. A block long, it looks like a cross between Mayberry and Thomas Kincaid with a little Daniel Boone thrown in.

KATHLEEN
We’re here.

JACKSON
Wow, I feel like we’ve gone back a few centuries.

KATHLEEN
It is rather quaint, isn’t it?

JACKSON
I prefer rustic.

KATHLEEN
Remember, we’re not moving here for good. I hope they have good phone coverage.

JACKSON
I hope they have electricity.

They pull up to The White Stag restaurant.

KATHLEEN
Here is where we are supposed to meet Steven. Is everyone hungry?

DANIELLE
Yeaaa.

JACKSON
Okay, we get the point. She is so dramatic.

KATHLEEN
Unlike others.

JACKSON
At least I don’t sing to my teddy bears.

KATHLEEN
No, you sword fought your desk chair.

(CONTINUED)
That was a long time ago.

Jackson gets out to end the conversation.

(To herself)
And where does the time go?

INT. - RESTAURANT - DAY

A bell RINGS when they enter. The room is decorated with hanging plaids and pictures of golfing and castles. An elk head hangs over a large fireplace.

This is so cute.

Countrified.

Cultured. Come on, grab a seat.

They sit at a scarred wooden table. Kathleen rubs her hand over the wood.

This looks like it was hand made.

MAGGIE, the waitress, puts down two menus. She’s Scots, wearing a tartan pinned at her shoulder. She speaks with a strong accent.

Aye, it’s all hand made. This place is over a hundred years old. And what would you be wanting to drink?

I’ll have sweet tea.

Do you have Dr. Pepper?

That we do.

I’ll take that.
MAGGIE
And how about you, lass?

DANIELLE
I’m not a lass. I’m a girl.

KATHLEEN
That’s what lass means. She’ll have a chocolate milk.

MAGGIE
Coming right up.

Jackson opens his menu. He waits until she leaves.

JACKSON
Rustic.

KATHLEEN
Will you cut it out? It’s a different culture. Enjoy it.

They look at the menus.

JACKSON
What is haggis?

KATHLEEN
I’ll tell you later, just trust me you don’t want it. Danielle, you want a grilled cheese?

DANIELLE
With fries.

JACKSON
So, when is this guy supposed to show up?

Kathleen takes out her phone and presses numbers.

KATHLEEN
He’s already in town. I’m supposed to call when we arrive.
(on phone)
Hello, Steven?.. Yes, we’re at the restaurant. We just ordered lunch... Okay, I’ll see you then.

She cuts the call then puts the phone away.
KATHLEEN
He’ll be here in a few minutes.

Maggie returns with their drinks.

MAGGIE
Now, what can I get you.

JACKSON
I’ll just take a cheeseburger and fries.

KATHLEEN
I’ll have a grilled chicken sandwich with a side salad instead of fries, oil and vinegar dressing. Danielle wants a grilled cheese.

DANIELLE
With fries.

KATHLEEN
I’m bad. With fries.

MAGGIE
Coming right up.

Jackson looks around.

JACKSON
So, what is this?

KATHLEEN
It’s Scottish. The family who owns this place must be from Scotland.

JACKSON
Where’s that.

Kathleen stares at him.

JACKSON
Hey, I’m only twelve, I’m not a geology teacher.

KATHLEEN
Geography. Okay, I’ll give you this one. Scotland is above England.

(CONTINUED)
DANIELLE
What’s that on the wall?

KATHLEEN
It’s an elk.

DANIELLE
Where’s the rest of him? Is he standing behind the wall?

JACKSON
No, silly, he’s dead and they cut...

KATHLEEN
Jackson, don’t.

JACKSON
But, they did.

KATHLEEN
You don’t have to give her all the grisly details.

The bells RINGS and Steven walks in.

KATHLEEN
Saved by the bell.

He sits next to Jackson.

STEVEN
Hey, everyone. I hope you had a good trip.

KATHLEEN
Not too bad...

DANIELLE
Boring.

KATHLEEN
..for some of us.

STEVEN
The house is not far away. It’s a beautiful two story that’s over a hundred years old.

JACKSON
Does it have electricity?
CONTINUED:

STEVEN
Oh, yea. It has been fully renovated.

KATHLEEN
So, it’s in fairly good shape.

STEVEN
Let’s just say your carpenter is going to be very busy for a while. Speaking of which, we were lucky to find one that lives close by.

KATHLEEN
That’s good to know. How many bedrooms does it have?

STEVEN
Three, all upstairs. It has one bathroom down stairs that was added about twenty years ago.

JACKSON
There’s only one bathroom?

KATHLEEN
A hundred years ago, they didn’t have bathrooms.

Maggie brings their food.

MAGGIE
Here ya be. Would the gentleman be wanting something too?

STEVEN
Just some coffee, thanks.

She leaves.

KATHLEEN
I know we talked briefly about the kids on the phone. You said they won’t be a problem.

STEVEN
I don’t see that it will. The cameraman will be there everyday, of course, but he’ll be careful not to film them.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
I appreciate that. What about school in the fall?

STEVEN
School starts here in September. That gives you three months to decide if you want to send them to a local school or have a tutor.

JACKSON
Tutor.

KATHLEEN
I’ll have to think about it. Danielle will only be in first grade so that shouldn’t be a problem. I’ll need to talk to the school about Jackson, though.

Maggie sets down Steven’s coffee.

KATHLEEN
I can’t tell you how grateful and excited I am about this opportunity.

STEVEN
The panel was impressed with your sincerity and your desire to take care of your children. They wanted to give you the opportunity.

KATHLEEN
I hope I live up to their expectations.

JACKSON
You’ll be great, mom.

STEVEN
Just remember, you’re not doing it for the judges.

He points his finger at the kids.

STEVEN
You’re doing it for them.

Kathleen nods.
EXT. - RESTAURANT - DAY

They walk out.

STEVEN
Just follow me.

KATHLEEN
I’ll be right behind you.

EXT. - MC PHEARSON HOUSE - DAY

Two cars drive up. Kathleen can’t help but stare as she gets out. It’s a two-story with three great trees around it. The house looks uncared for, the bushes overgrown.

KATHLEEN
It’s lovely.

JACKSON
It’s old.

KATHLEEN
Quaint.

JACKSON
Antiquated.

DANIELLE
Let me out.

Free at last, Danielle runs towards the house. Kathleen makes a grab for her.

KATHLEEN
No, Danny, stop. You never run into an old house you don’t know. It could have a bad floor.

JACKSON
No problem, it’ll just create a nice shaft for the elevator to the basement.

KATHLEEN
Here, Danielle, take my hand.
INT. - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Age and dirt cover the furniture as though time had come to a standstill. Open wood beams arch above them in the same wood as the paneled floors. A huge fireplace stands at one wall. Old tartans cover the windows.

STEVEN
The house was owned by a guy named Angus McPhearson.

KATHLEEN
Scots.

STEVEN
As it turns out, the whole town is Scottish. Angus died a year ago. The family decided to sell the house rather than let it fall apart.

KATHLEEN
It’s beautiful.

STEVEN
Well, not yet, but it will be by the time you get finished with it.

KATHLEEN
The furniture looks antique.

STEVEN
It’ll look great with new, up-to-date stuff.

They go into the kitchen.

KATHLEEN
The cabinets look in good condition for being so old.

STEVEN
Of course, everything will have to be renovated. You’ll be given a budget for new cabinets, appliances and furniture.

KATHLEEN
I can’t wait to get my hands on it.

STEVEN
Your handyman will be doing the hard labor. He’s allowed to hire

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
What if I want something major changed, like a fireplace mantle?

STEVEN
You’ll discuss it with Jamie, your builder. Renovating is his area and on his budget.

They enter another room.

KATHLEEN
This looks like it might have been a library or office. Look at that beautiful wood paneling.

She points to a large gap where a stone is missing from the fireplace.

KATHLEEN
Look at the size of that hole. It’s big enough for a rat.

DANIELLE
Can I go outside and look around?

KATHLEEN
Sure. The house looks in decent shape.

JACKSON
Define decent.

KATHLEEN
Would you mind going with Danielle and watching her? These old places used to have wells and other things she could get hurt with.

Jackson leaves with Danielle.

STEVEN
We’ve managed to rent a cottage nearby. It’s fully furnished and ready.

(Continued)
KATHLEEN
Great. Is there a store close
where I can pick up some groceries?

STEVEN
You’ll have to go down the road
about ten miles. Keep your
receipts. We’ll reimburse them
each week.

KATHLEEN
Thank you. Let’s go upstairs.

The banister wobbles as they climb up.

STEVEN
You’ll need to be careful with this
until Jamie can get to it.

UPSTAIRS BEDROOM

It’s large with no closet and dominated by a four-poster
bed. At a wall stands a dresser while a rug covers the wood
floor.

KATHLEEN
They would not have had closets
when this house was built. They
used wardrobes. Look at the window
frame and the molding, all hand
carved. It’s beautiful. Let’s
look at the other rooms.

SECOND BEDROOM

Painted murals of animals cover the walls.

KATHLEEN
This must have been a child’s
room. The artist was pretty good.

DOWNSTAIRS

They descend the stairs.

KATHLEEN
When will the film crew and builder
arrive? What’s his name?
CONTINUED:

STEVEN
Jamie McKnight. He should be here tomorrow. You can expect the film crew either tomorrow or the next day. Your official beginning will be Monday.

KATHLEEN
Four days, I can hardly wait.

STEVEN
How about we step outside. I have some papers in the car that I need you to sign: A contract, liability, things like that.

INT. - COTTAGE - DAY

A small two bedroom house, more rustic than modern. The Myers family walk in carrying bags of groceries. They gaze around.

KATHLEEN
Not bad. Could use a bit of cleaning. It’s a little old-fashioned in a charming sort of way.

JACKSON
Backwoods.

KATHLEEN
Character

JACKSON
Countrified

DANIELLE
Can someone help me?

Danielle almost drops a bag. Kathleen puts her bags down and takes one from her.

KATHLEEN
(To Jackson)
I’m going to have to talk to your English teacher about putting your vocabulary to work somewhere.

They walk into the kitchen.
KITCHEN

The groceries are put on the table.

KATHLEEN
How about something easy tonight? I got chicken strips, chips and salad.

DANIELLE
Did you get ketchup.

KATHLEEN
Would I dare serve chicken without it?

DANIELLE
Yeaaa.

KATHLEEN
Why don’t you guys wash up and I’ll get everything ready.

Kathleen places the chicken in the oven and opens the chip bag.

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Kathleen and Danielle share a double bed. Pillows prop up Kathleen, her hands busy sketching on a pad.

DANIELLE
I like sleeping next to you. It reminds me of when I was little.

KATHLEEN
Yes, you’ve grown so big. Where has my little girl gone?

DANIELLE
I’m right here.
(Pause)
Mommy, why doesn’t daddy love you any more?

KATHLEEN
I’m not sure I can explain it. It’s a grown up thing. He just decided he loved someone else instead.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

DANIELLE
I’ve met her. She’s not as nice as you are. And she smells funny, like Jackson’s room.

KATHLEEN
Gross. Stale socks.

DANIELLE
And sweaty shirts.

KATHLEEN
Stinky shoes.

DANIELLE
Left over food, with ants crawling all over it.

KATHLEEN
He’d better not.

DANIELLE
Oh, yea. You should see under his bed.

KATHLEEN
And it’s going to be there for eight months. I’ll kill him.

Danielle giggles and snuggles under the blanket.

DANIELLE
Good-night mommy. I love you.

KATHLEEN
I love you, too, sweetheart.

Kathleen kisses Danielle on her forehead. Her eyes shine with resolve. Whatever it takes, that SOB is not going to get them.

INT. - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kathleen and the kids walk in.

KATHLEEN
Hello?

JAMIE (O.C.)
In the kitchen.
KITCHEN - SAME

JAMIE McKNIGHT (35) is Scots but does not talk with an accent. He is a man used to ignoring the sighs of the women he passes. In a plain shirt, jeans and tool belt, he’s ready for work. Presently, a spot on the ceiling concerns him and he disregards the family that walk in.

KATHLEEN
Good morning. You must be Jamie.

JAMIE
Good morning.

KATHLEEN
I’m Kathleen and this is Jackson and Danielle.

JAMIE
I know. The whole town is cackling about you like a bunch of hens.

Taken back.

KATHLEEN
I’m sorry, did I say something wrong?

Jamie turns around and freezes. Whatever he was expecting, it wasn’t this beauty. He does some fast back-pedaling.

JAMIE
No, it’s not you. I’m sorry. It’s the people in town.

KATHLEEN
What’s wrong?

Jamie shakes his head, the answer is on his tongue but Danielle interrupts.

DANIELLE
Mommy, can I go outside?

KATHLEEN
Yes, but be careful. Jackson will you watch her?

JACKSON
Built in babysitter - no problem. It’ll cost you a pizza, though.
KATHLEEN
We’ll discuss it later.

Jamie watches them leave, a furrow between his perfect, black brows.

JAMIE
You’ll need to be careful they don’t get near the work site. I don’t want to be swinging a board and hit one.

KATHLEEN
I’ll do what I can. Now, can we talk about the project?

JAMIE
I was just looking over the kitchen to see what needed to be done. For as old as it is, this place is still in pretty good shape.

KATHLEEN
I’ll be replacing the cabinets, and I’m still deciding if I want tile instead of wood flooring.

JAMIE
You know all of this is original? It’s been here for over a hundred years.

KATHLEEN
And it looks it. When I searched the web-site of this design company, everything they do is modern and up-to-date. I’m not sure stainless steel appliances will go with this house, but everything else will be modern.

JAMIE
You’re making a mistake.

KATHLEEN
I’ll decide that.

As soon she says them, Kathleen regrets her words. This isn’t John. She can let down her sword and shield.

KATHLEEN (CONT.)
When we were here yesterday, I noticed a sagging in the floor on
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN (CONT.) (cont’d)
the back porch and going into the
mud room.

JAMIE
Yea, I told Angus I’d repair it for
him, but he refused. It’s not a
hard fix.

KATHLEEN
And there is a large hole in the
stone around the fireplace in the
next room.

JAMIE
That’s supposed to be there. It’s
how Nipper gets in.

KATHLEEN
Nipper?

JAMIE
Angus’ ratting ferret. Nipper is
the last in a long line of ferrets
that have lived in this
house. They keep out the mice and
rats.

Oh, no, this is a non-happening event.

KATHLEEN
I don’t care if he scrubs the
floors, I don’t want him coming
in. Please fill in the hole.

Jamie’s jaw clenches. He spits out the words:

JAMIE
Yes, Ma’am.

LIVING ROOM - SAME

The atmosphere has become chilly for this time of
year. Kathleen chides herself, what is wrong with
her? Time to start again. She indicates the red, blue and
green tartans on the window.

KATHLEEN
I admit, the colors are Christmasy,
but I’m afraid I’ll have to get
real curtains.

Jamie takes the offering with a smile.

(CONTINUED)
JAMIE
Actually, Angus never cared about silly things like curtains. It wouldn’t have been a problem except he like walking around the house in the buff.

KATHLEEN
Oh, no.

JAMIE
One night Miss Rose happened to walk by just in time to see him. She said the sight so terrified her that she clutched her chest and screamed.

KATHLEEN
She had a heart attack?

JAMIE
To hear her say. However, Harry at the hardware store told me she bought a pair of binoculars the very next day.

KATHLEEN
(laughing)
Oh, that’s terrible.

JAMIE
When Angus heard about it, he put the tartan up. He said,
(heavy Scots accent)
I’ll not be given that woman any shows lest she pays for them.

They leave the house, Kathleen’s laughter following them.

EXT. - HOUSE - DAY

KATHLEEN
Where will you start?

JAMIE
There are some safety issues that need to be taken care of first. The rails on the stairs for one, and I noticed some wiring.
KATHLEEN
Besides cleaning, my first few weeks will be simply planning things; color schemes, furniture, decorations, basically everything that makes a house a home.

JAMIE
This poor house hasn’t been a home for decades.

KATHLEEN
That’s sad. Everyone needs a family to love.

Jamie looks up at the house.

JAMIE
Not everyone. Some are just as happy being in their own little world.

KATHLEEN
And what happens when that world collapses?

JAMIE
They usually collapse with it.

BACKYARD - SAME

A large shed stands behind the house.

KATHLEEN
Is there anything in the building?

JAMIE
It’s mostly empty.

KATHLEEN
We can use it to store the old furniture and cabinets.

DANIELLE (O.C.)
Hey, mommy, look at this.

Kathleen walks behind the shed where Danielle and Jackson stand beside some bushes.

KATHLEEN
What is it, honey?
DANIELLE

Look.

Jackson pulls back limbs to reveal a hidden enclosure. He slips in.

KATHLEEN

Jackson, wait. You don’t know what’s in there.

Too late. Danielle ducks in behind him. Kathleen carefully scoots through the opening, not noticing that Jamie stays outside.

INT. - GAZEBO - DAY

Inside, like a jungle shrine, is a huge gazebo/greenhouse with an overgrown garden. Dappled light, shining past the outside trees and slashing through the broken ceiling tiles, streak the air and illuminate patches of wild growing roses and flowering shrubs. In the center, a large, dry fountain encircles a statue shaped like a young woman dancing. A lost world, magnificent even in neglect.

JACKSON

Isn’t this awesome?

KATHLEEN

Wow, this was beautiful at one time.

DANIELLE

Look at the flowers.

KATHLEEN

Those are roses. Be careful, they have thorns.

JACKSON

This would make a great fort.

KATHLEEN

Not a good idea. Snakes like these types of places. There’s too many things you can get hurt on.

JACKSON

Come on, we’ll be careful.

Kathleen sighs, it’s hard to tell them no.
KATHLEEN
Tell you what. When the gardener comes, I’ll have him check around and make sure it’s safe. And, I’ll have him trim the entrance so you can get in.

JACKSON
But that’s what makes it a secret fort.

KATHLEEN
Trim entrance or you’re not coming in.

JACKSON
All right.

Kathleen crawls back out.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY
Jamie stands waiting, arms crossed.

KATHLEEN
It’s beautiful. We can have the gardener clean it up for the contest.

JAMIE
No.

KATHLEEN
What do you mean? It will help make the place look lovely. I can put a Christmas tree inside with hanging lights and...

JAMIE
(forceful, angry)
I said, no. That puts an end to it.

Jamie walks away leaving Kathleen speechless.

EXT. - HOUSE - DAY
The start day arrives. Jamie spreads out his power tools under an open tent, stretching out power cords and organizing.

To the side, a small group of LOCALS stand watching. They are angry and upset. But, why? One walks up to Jamie

(CONTINUED)
LOCAL
Och, Jamie, don’t do this.

JAMIE
If I don’t do it, they’ll just send in an outsider. At least this way, I can minimize the change.

The man nods, reluctant.

LOCAL
Aye, there is that.

He returns to his friends.

The film van arrives bringing Steven and Lester. Steven walks over and shakes Jamie’s hand.

STEVEN
Steven, the contact person for the project. Looks like you’re ready to go.

JAMIE
James McKnight, and I’m as ready as I’ll ever be.

STEVEN
I see we’ve stirred up an audience.

JAMIE
Nothing happens around here that doesn’t draw the attention of everyone within a ten mile radius.

STEVEN
As long as they don’t get in the way.

JAMIE
That is highly likely. Kathleen is inside to start the clean up.

STEVEN
Thanks.

INT. - HOUSE - DAY

Kathleen is in close conversation with IONA (50’s), the cleaning help. She is, of course, Scots. Every imaginable cleaning tool they’ll ever need sits around her. She’s come prepared.

(Continued)
Kathleen turns as Steven walks up. Behind him, Lester peers through the camera.

**STEVEN**
What’s your agenda for the first day?

**KATHLEEN**
We have to clean before we do anything else. I’ll need to ask the men to help us move the furniture into the shed out back. Then Iona and I roll up our sleeves and start work.

**STEVEN**
Okay. We’ll be following you around. Just pretend we’re not here. Once in a while I may interrupt and ask you a question if I feel the audience needs clarification on something.

Kathleen nods. The camera stays with Steven as Kathleen walks into the kitchen.

**STEVEN**
Okay, Lester, let’s see how it’s rolling.

**VIEW FROM LESTER’S CAMERA**

The camera wavers then steadies on Steven. He’s looking around, setting up the shot.

**STEVEN**
Is everything looking good? Okay, roll it.

**INT. - HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY**

Jamie and two men; SEAN, Jamie’s helper and DUNCAN, the gardener, get the furniture ready to go outside. After they move a dresser, Sean bends down and picks something up. He hands it to Jamie as they walk by taking the dresser outside.
FOCUS ON

A small portrait of a young woman that looks just like the statue in the gazebo.

CLOSE ON

Jamie tenderly gazes and then softly caresses the face.

RESUME

Taking the dresser out, the men pass Kathleen walking in. At the sight of Jamie, she stops, feeling as though she’s intruding on something special. He looks at her and quickly tucks the picture into his shirt pocket.

    KATHLEEN
    Sorry to interrupt. I was thinking about re-doing something on the downstairs fireplace mantle and wanted your opinion.

Jamie grimly nods and follows.

STUDY ROOM

Kathleen rubs a shine on the last window. The room is now spotless, the hardwood glowing with new life. Picking up her supplies, she turns and squeals, dropping everything.

In the middle of the floor is a small black/gray animal watching her. She eases a large circle around it and then runs out the door.

EXT. - HOUSE - DAY

Placing one end of his measuring tape to a plank of wood, Jamie zips it down and marks off his cut. His attention shifts when an agitated Kathleen literally runs under the tent canopy. She throws one arm towards the house.

    KATHLEEN
    There’s an animal in the study. It looks like the biggest rat I’ve ever seen.

Jamie continues measuring.
JAMIE
That’s just Nipper. He won’t bother you.

One small foot stomps the ground.

KATHLEEN
He needs to leave.

Jamie peers up at the men watching. They’ve heard her, in fact half the county probably heard her. They mumble among themselves. Jamie stands firm.

JAMIE
He can’t leave. He lives here. Just work around him.

KATHLEEN
James McKnight, I am NOT going into that house with that animal roaming loose. You need to get it out.

Kathleen points to the house. NOW. Jamie throws down his pencil. Kathleen follows him wondering about the angry glares thrown her way from the group on the sidelines.

INT. - HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jamie and Kathleen walk in to find Iona holding the ferret, scratching under his chin. She looks up when they enter.

IONA
Look who came to visit? I haven’t seen lil’ Nipper in ages.

KATHLEEN
How can you hold it? It looks like a big rat.

JAMIE
Nipper was born here. His ancestors came over with the first Scots settlers. He’s the last of his line.

KATHLEEN
I don’t care if he’s the last of the Mohicans, I don’t want him in the house while I’m here. What if he bites one of the children.
IONA
He doesn’t bite.

Kathleen sees she’s losing. Frustration, desperation.

KATHLEEN
Then why is he called Nipper?

JAMIE
He was the runt of the litter. Angus took one look at him and said,
(Full Scottish accent)
"You be a tiny lil’ Nipper, aren’t you?"

KATHLEEN
Maybe we can find him a new home.

JAMIE
Kathleen, if you send Nipper away, you’ll make an enemy of everyone living in this community.

Pause. She’s angry now.

KATHLEEN
So be it, but if anything happens, it’s on you. Just keep him away from my children.

She storms out. Iona puts Nipper down.

IONA
I’m sorry.

JAMIE
It’s not your fault. I’ll give her some time and then go and talk to her.

IONA
Aye, and whenever I see the Nipper, I’ll send him outside.

Jamie spies a notebook on the counter. Curious, he picks it up and flips through pages.

JAMIE
Wow, she’s good.

He hands it to Iona.
IONA
She’s very talented. I must say, everyone is a wee bit worried about the house being used as a TV show.

JAMIE
We need to give her a chance. I know I’ve been hard on her, and the town gossip is utterly ruthless.

IONA
Of course. I didn’t like to judge someone before I get to know them.

She puts the notebook back on the counter.

IONA
I’ll just take Nipper outside and...

They look around. Nipper is gone.

EXT. - YARD - DAY

Bushes rustle and part revealing Jackson and Danielle leaving the woods. They spy DUNCAN CONNERS (60’s, Scots) trimming the bushes next to the house.

DANIELLE
Who’s that?

JACKSON
I don’t know. Let’s find out.

Jackson approaches from the side, Danielle one step behind.

JACKSON
Excuse me.

Duncan turns and smiles.

DUNCAN
Good morning. You must be Jackson and Danielle.

JACKSON
Are you the gardener?

DUNCAN
That I am. Me name is Duncan Conners. I’m pleased to meet you.

(CONTINUED)
JACKSON
Mr. Duncan, can you do us a favor?

DUNCAN
It depends on what the favor is?

JACKSON
There’s a place over here we want to play in, but mom says we can’t until you look and say it’s safe.

DUNCAN
I guess I can do that.

Jackson and Danielle lead him to the hidden gazebo. The young boy holds the bushes back for Duncan to crawl through. He takes a deep breath.

DUNCAN
I haven’t been here for years. Are you sure you’re allowed to play here?

JACKSON
That’s what mom said. As long as it’s safe.

DUNCAN
Some things are best left alone.

DANIELLE
But we want to make a fort.

DUNCAN
I’m sure you do, but that doesn’t mean you should. I’ll look around and make sure it’s safe, but you must promise you’ll be very careful and not break anything.

JACKSON
Yes, sir. We promise.

BATHROOM - SAME

Kathleen finishes mopping the floor. She turns and jumps again. Nipper is laying on the hallway floor, watching her. Kathleen looks around for help - no one. She takes the mop and gently pushes him. Nipper jumps up hopping around in a "weasel war dance". Her brows furrow, then she smiles. He’s just playing. She runs the mop in front of him. He attacks it, rolling and tumbling. She laughs.

(CONTINUED)
JAMIE (O.C.)
I always thought he would make a
great dusting rag with all the
crevices he loves getting into.

Kathleen spins around to see Jamie watching her.

KATHLEEN
He’s rather playful. He reminds me
of a kitten.

JAMIE
One thing a ferret does best is
play.

KATHLEEN
I’m sorry I acted foolish. I plead
stress.

JAMIE
It’s okay, You’re in a contest that
may determine your future with a
camera in your face most of the day
- no worries.

Jamie scoops up the bouncing ferret. He holds it before
Kathleen.

JAMIE (CONT.)
Here, pet him.

She reaches out a tentative hand and touches his
head. Nipper sniffs her, but nothing more.

KATHLEEN
He smells.

JAMIE
Yea, ferrets are like that. You’re
supposed to given them a bath now
and then.

He puts Nipper down who scurries down the hall and into
another room.

KATHLEEN
Just like a kid.

JAMIE
Pretty much.
KATHLEEN
Do I owe Iona an apology?

Jamie gives her a devastating smile.

JAMIE
Nah, she’s good. But if you’ll change your mind about Nipper, she’ll be great.

KATHLEEN
Oh, no, Jackson does that very same thing. You’re trying to sideswipe me with a slick sales pitch.

JAMIE
So, is it working?

She tries to make a show of being angry, but it doesn’t work.

KATHLEEN
Yes, he can stay. I just have one request.

JAMIE
What’s that?

KATHLEEN
I know my son. Jackson will run straight for Nipper. When you have a chance, will you show him how to properly handle him?

JAMIE
Consider it done. One word of caution, though.

KATHLEEN
What?

JAMIE
They’re horrible thieves.

EXT. - HOUSE - DAY

Jamie walks out. He pauses and addresses the watching crowd.

JAMIE
Nipper’s staying.
The men nod their heads in happy agreement. Jamie continues to his tent.

INT. - TOWN PUB - EVENING

A country pub like one would find in Scotland. The place is filled with MEN talking and drinking. Smoke from a dozen pipes swirls like fog over their heads.

Jamie walks in and sits at the bar. The owner, CONNOR KERR, greets him from the side.

CONNOR
Hey, Jamie, would you be having the usual?

JAMIE
Sure.

Connor draws a beer and plops it before him.

CONNOR
And how’s the work doing on the house?

JAMIE
Pretty good. Nothing major so far.

CONNOR
Heard she took out the kitchen cabinets and wants to make everything different.

JAMIE
That’s what happens when you renovate a house. You make changes.

DONEGAN, a broad, muscular man and Jamie’s long-time nemesis, walks up beside him and leans facing him on the counter. The self-proclaimed spokesman for the group, he’s nearly in Jamie’s face.

DONEGAN
But some things should be left as they were.

Another MAN pipes in.

MAN
Aye, It’s a Scots that built it and Scots who have lived there all this (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
MAN (cont’d)
time. They have no right to change it.

JAMIE
They purchased it. They have every right.

DONEGAN
Of course you would think that. After all, you’re not really one of us.

Jamie tries hard to keep calm. It’s getting difficult.

JAMIE
Think what you want, Donegan. It makes no matter to me.

Another MAN at the counter joins in.

MAN AT COUNTER
Jamie, lad, you know we mean no harm, but our families have lived here for over a century. We’ve kept to our traditions and that’s the way we like it.

Jamie slams down his mug and turns on the man.

JAMIE
And what do you have, aye McGregor? You have a town that is dying. Tell me, how many children live here?

The man shakes his head.

JAMIE
Exactly, because you’ve chased all the young people away. You’ve kept your traditions at their expense. Soon, there will be no one left but the very old, and then it will all die.

MAN AT COUNTER
But change will mean loosing what we’ve got.

(CONTINUED)
JAMIE
Change will come, whether you like it or not. You can either accept it and direct it or let it take over when you are all gone.

DONEGAN
Told you he wasn’t like us. His mother made sure of that.

JAMIE
Leave her out of this or you won’t be walking out any too soon.

Donegan is spoiling for a fight.

DONEGAN
Ye would like to try, wouldn’t ya? I told Jenny you were no good.

Jamie surges to his feet. Several men quickly grab him from behind. He shrugs them off. Donegan throws a punch which Jamie ducks and then slams him with a right. Donegan staggers back. Several men come forward to hold them apart while Connor comes around and gets between them.

CONNOR
Hold it, both of you. You’ll not be busting up my place just to settle your grudge. Take it outside if you must.

JAMIE
No. No good would come of it. I’ve got to go, anyway.

Jamie walks to the door.

DONEGAN
We’ll settle this later, Jamie.

Jamie ignores him and leaves.

EXT. HOUSE — DAY

SEEN FROM LESTER’S CAMERA

Kathleen stands before the house checking her clothes, brushing the dirt off. She runs her fingers through her hair.

(CONTINUED)
STEVEN (O.C.)
Ready?

Kathleen looks at the camera.

KATHLEEN
How do I look?

STEVEN (O.C.)
Beautiful as always.

KATHLEEN
Okay, ready.

Steven walks into the shot and stands next to her. They turn so that the house shows well behind them.

STEVEN
It’s been a week, now. How is everything going?

KATHLEEN
Pretty good. We’ve finished the cleaning and I’ve figured out how I want each room to look. The kitchen cabinets and appliances should arrive any day and I’ve ordered the wall paints, drapes and some furniture.

STEVEN
Can you give us any details?

KATHLEEN
Only that the kitchen will be totally updated with marble floors, granite counters and new everything. I don’t want to give too much away.

STEVEN
Have you found anything unexpected problems?

KATHLEEN
Other than a some dry rot in one of the back rooms, not really. This house was very well built. And, we found a bonus. There is a gorgeous gazebo in the backyard that I want to bring into the plan.

In the background, Danielle ballets into the shot. She takes a couple of twirls and falls on her rear.

(CONTINUED)
Steven’s attention is drawn past the camera. It seems Lester is telling him something. He turns and watches. Kathleen turns.

KATHLEEN
Oh, no. Jackson!

Jackson runs in and tries to pull a struggling Danielle off. Finally, he picks her up from behind and carries her. Kathleen hangs her head.

KATHLEEN
I am so sorry.

Steven is almost laughing too hard to talk.

STEVEN
Those are your children?

KATHLEEN
Yes. Jackson is twelve and Danielle is six.

STEVEN
I want to mention for our audience that, one of the things about Ms. Myer’s interview that so inspired the judges was her desire to have a way to care for her children.

KATHLEEN
I just want them to be proud of me and to be able to care for them while doing something I love.

STEVEN
That’s great, wrap it Lester.

RESUME NORMAL CAMERA

KATHLEEN
Is the camera off?

LESTER (O.C.)
Yep.

Kathleen follows her children.

KATHLEEN
Danielle, you are in so much trouble.
INT. - JAMIE’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

As most houses in the area, this one is over a hundred years old. Like a well-aged wine, it shows the evidence of great love and care. The antique furniture is tastefully arranged and decorated.

LADY ELISABETH (80’s) sits reading by the fireplace, a tartan thrown over her legs. Once the matriarch of a large family, there is only her and Jamie, now. She is regal and elegant by nature with a touch of proud Scots. Jamie walks up and pecks her on the cheek.

JAMIE
Hello, Nana.

ELISABETH
Och, Jamie, you’ve been gone long today.

JAMIE
Just needed to finish up some things before I quit. It’s easier doing the extra time then to drag the tools back out again.

ELISABETH
I ken see that. So, how’s the house going?

JAMIE
Not bad. We’re on schedule. I must say, that ol’ house has never looked this good in years.

ELISABETH
Aye, it’s a sad thing the way Angus let it fall apart.

Jamie drops his eyes.

JAMIE
I guess, in some ways, I can understand it.

ELISABETH
Nay, Jamie, but the living must go on living. Ya can’t give up just because you’ve lost someone.

JAMIE
Even when the living is barely surviving?

(CONTINUED)
ELISABETH
Aye, even then. She’s gone, Jamie, and you’ve got to let her go. Now, tell me of the lass you’re working with.

Jamie’s eyes go distant. A small smile tugs his lips.

JAMIE
She’s a fair one. She’s spirited, but I sense an uncertainty in her. She seems scared in some ways. She has two bairns; a boy and the sweetest little girl.

A memory draws up laughter.

JAMIE
Kathleen was doing an interview on camera when Danielle started dancing ballet in the background.

ELISABETH
Och, I would have loved to have seen that.

Jamie sobers.

JAMIE
She wants to renovate the greenhouse.

ELISABETH
That’s wonderful. So, what did you tell her?

JAMIE
I told her no. I don’t want it used for some publicity stunt.

ELISABETH
You truly think that is her intention?

JAMIE
It doesn’t matter. I don’t want it put on display like a movie prop.

ELISABETH
It’s your decision, but think, lad, would it be so bad if it helps the lass out?
JAMIE
I’ll think about it.

ELISABETH
Good. Now, why have you not brought her to meet me yet? She sounds lovely.

JAMIE
Did I mention the two children?

ELISABETH
I was bringing up bairn long before you were born, Jamie McKnight. I would love to hear their laughter again. Bring them over. Day after tomorrow – tea.

JAMIE
Yes, Ma’am.

ELISABETH
I’ll have Anne make up a batch of shortbread.

JAMIE
And what about me? I’ve been working hard all day.

ELISABETH
Och, Jamie, you’d think you never got fed. She’s got your supper waiting. A good beef roast with tatties and neeps.

JAMIE
Sound great, I’ll get cleaned up.

He gives her a peck on the top of her head and leaves.

INT. - HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jamie patches the holes left by the cabinets. The room is empty, waiting to be renewed. Kathleen walks in behind him. Her feet on the wood floors echo off the walls.

KATHLEEN
Wow, it looks so big without the cabinets.
JAMIE
They should be coming any day.

KATHLEEN
Don’t you do the floor before the cabinets are installed?

Jamie hangs his head.

JAMIE
I wish you would reconsider. These oak boards were put in about the time of the civil war.

KATHLEEN
I understand, but I can’t. When I look at this company’s work, I don’t see any kitchens with wood flooring, it’s all tile.

JAMIE
You don’t have to do what everyone else does. Be original.

All the fears that Kathleen has been trying to mask suddenly explodes to the surface.

KATHLEEN
You don’t understand. I don’t dare. I’ve got one chance to get this right. If I mess up, I could lose everything.

JAMIE
How’s that?

She’s hesitant. Can she dare trust this man? It’s Jamie’s plunging ahead that breaks the dam that she has held so tight for so long.

JAMIE
Kathleen, I saw the album you’ve created. You do wonderful work. You don’t need a contest to define who you are. What you need is the self-confidence to believe in yourself.

KATHLEEN
Easy for you to say, you didn’t live with someone who never believed you ever did anything right.
JAMIE
I’m sorry, I didn’t know. But that doesn’t change the fact that you’re smart and talented and...

Jamie slows to a halt.

KATHLEEN
I can’t. I’m too afraid of getting it wrong. There’s too much at stake.

Her fear is too strong. He reluctantly gives in.

JAMIE
Very well, I’ll lay it down tomorrow.

KATHLEEN
Thank you.

Kathleen turns to leave, but Jamie stops her.

JAMIE
By the way, my grandmother has instructed me to invite you for tea tomorrow.

KATHLEEN
Instructed?

JAMIE
If you knew her, you’d understand.

KATHLEEN
What about the children?

JAMIE
I was told that they are welcome.

KATHLEEN
Please thank her for me, but I don’t believe they would be able to sit still for that long.

JAMIE
I don’t think you’ll find that a problem with my grandmother.

KATHLEEN
If you’re sure.

(Continued)
CONTINUED:

JAMIE
Absolutely. Our house is down the street, third on the right. Tea is always at 2pm.

KATHLEEN
We’ll be there.

INT. COTTAGE – DANIELLE’S ROOM – DAY
Kathleen gets Danielle ready. They sit on the bed while she brushes her hair, every stroke in love.

DANIELLE
I want to wear my party dress.

KATHLEEN
Are you sure? If you get bored, you won’t be able to go outside.

DANIELLE
I won’t get bored. I’ve had lots of teas with Allison and Mr. Fuzzy.

KATHLEEN
But this will be different. The adults will be doing most of the talking, and you won’t have your dolls to keep you company.

DANIELLE
Can’t I take Allison? I promise she won’t get in the way, and I’ll make sure she stays real quiet.

Kathleen smiles. Keeping a doll quiet - right.

KATHLEEN
Okay, Allison can come, but you must promise you’ll make her behave. You know how silly she can be.

DANIELLE
Oh, I know. Sometimes it’s everything I can do to keep her under control.

KATHLEEN
Party dress it is, then. As you said, one must look her best.
OUTSIDE JACKSON’S DOOR - SAME

Kathleen knocks.

KATHLEEN
Jackson, are you ready?

The door flies open.

JACKSON
Mom, do I have to go? I don’t want to sit with a couple of women, talking.

KATHLEEN
But Jamie will be there.

JACKSON
That’s different. He’s an adult. We have nothing in common. I’ll be bored out of my gourd.

KATHLEEN
Jackson, these past few weeks, you’ve been able to do pretty much what you’ve wanted. All I’m asking is for one hour of your time to be polite. I think your gourd can handle that.

Jackson opens his mouth, but Kathleen stops him.

KATHLEEN
This is a non-negotiable.

JACKSON
If I do this, I want a return.

KATHLEEN
Like...what?

JACKSON
Like full access to the fort. Duncan has already checked it out and said it was safe.

Kathleen sighs, she just got side-swiped. She sticks out her hand.

KATHLEEN
Deal. But, that also means you have to keep an extra eye on Danielle so she doesn’t get hurt.

(CONTINUED)
Jackson grabs her hand.

JACKSON
Deal.

INT. JAMIE’S HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – DAY

Everyone relaxes around a coffee table with a sterling tea set and shortbread cookies. Laughter fills the room like a comfortable blanket.

ELISABETH
...and then his hands slipped and he fell out of the tree just as one of the cows happened to walk by. He landed plop on it’s back and the last we saw, he was riding it down the pasture and out of sight.

More laughter.

ELISABETH
Danielle, your Miss Allison is a well-mannered child. You’ve trained her well.

DANIELLE
Yes, she is, but she can be a handful.

ELISABETH
I can imagine.

Elisabeth looks at Kathleen.

ELISABETH
It’s not easy raising bairns by yourself.

DANIELLE
What’s a bairn?

KATHLEEN
Children. And she’s correct, it’s a lot of work. However, the rewards are far greater than the sacrifice.

ELISABETH
Well said.

Elisabeth raises her hand to cover a large yawn.
ELISABETH
Och, forgive me. It’s almost time for my nap.

Kathleen stands up and places her cup on the table.

KATHLEEN
No, forgive us, we’ve stayed and kept you too long.
(To Danielle and Jackson)
Kids, time to go. Please, thank Lady Elisabeth for her hospitality.

DANIELLE
What’s hospita...what’s that word?

KATHLEEN
It means being nice. Thank her for having us over.

JACKSON
Thank you for the great stories.

DANIELLE
And the cookies. Allison really loved them.

ELISABETH
You are more than welcome.

Jamie stands up.

JAMIE
I’ll see you out.

KATHLEEN
Thank you for a wonderful afternoon. If I can help you in any way, please let me know.

Elisabeth gives her an appraising smile.

ELISABETH
Thank you, my dear. I’ll remember that.

They leave. Jamie returns. He sits directly in front of Lady Elisabeth.

ELISABETH
What?

(CONTINUED)
JAMIE
What’s your game? You’ve never taken a nap in your life.

ELISABETH
I just wanted to talk to you a moment and to tell you that you have my permission to marry her.

His mouth drops.

JAMIE
Marry her? I barely know her.

ELISABETH
You’re the last of our line. When you die, the family dies.

JAMIE
Which is not for a long time to come, I hope.

ELISABETH
But not for me. Jamie, I want to see your bairns before I die.

JAMIE
That’s not fair. You can’t expect me to marry just so you can have grandchildren.

ELISABETH
I saw the way you looked at her.

JAMIE
Aye, she’s a wonderful woman; smart, talented, resourceful, but that doesn’t mean I love her.

ELISABETH
But you are interested.

JAMIE
In a way, yes. But that goes two ways. She’s shown no interested in me whatsoever.

ELISABETH
I disagree.

Jamie can’t help the hope that flares up.
JAMIE
And how’s that?

ELISABETH
Let’s just say, I understand being a woman.

JAMIE
And I say you’re seeing what you want to see. Please let it go. I’m still grieving about Jenny.

ELISABETH
Then you dishonor her memory.

JAMIE
Say again?

ELISABETH
I never knew anyone who loved life as much as your Jenny. She also loved you.

JAMIE
Then why did she leave me?

ELISABETH
If you’ll be truthful to yourself, you’ll remember it was after that fight you had. Didn’t you say everything was off?

She’s touched a still-raw wound.

JAMIE
But I didn’t mean it. If she really loved me, she would not have run to Donegan.

ELISABETH
You hurt her, James. She was too sensitive to handle your rejection. Donegan gave her a shoulder to cry on. And remember, she and Donegan had known each other since childhood.

JAMIE
Which he is more than happy to remind me of every time I see him.

As Jamie remembers, the penned-up grief bubbles to the surface.

(CONTINUED)
JAMIE
I didn’t mean to hurt her.

ELISABETH
You must forgive yourself, or you’ll always be living in the past with no future ahead of you.

JAMIE
Maybe I don’t deserve one.

ELISABETH
Posh! You’d just rather wallow in your pity. I’m telling you truly, Jamie. If I die before you wake up and realize this lass is worth the living, then I swear I’ll come back and haunt you until the day you die.

Jamie can’t help but smile.

JAMIE
(Full Accent)
Och, and just the thought of that would be enough to make al’ Slewfoot, himself, walk straight.

INT. - HOUSE - MUD ROOM - DAY

Iona sweeps the dirt brought in from the outside. Kathleen joins her.

IONA
Hey, how’s it going?

KATHLEEN
Pretty good. I’ve been sanding the stair rails. I hope the paint gets here soon. I’m anxious to get started.

IONA
Well, while you’re waiting, why not come to the Highland Games tomorrow? It’s a grand tradition and lots of fun. Men come from several states to compete. You’ll even get to see some braw ones in their kilts.
KATHLEEN
That is a great idea. It would give Jackson and Danielle a chance to meet the people.

IONA
Grand. It starts at nine at the meadows just down the street. You can’t miss it.

EXT. HIGHLAND GAMES - DAY
The games are in full swing. WOMEN walk about in traditional skirts and tartans while the MEN wear shirts and kilts. In the midst of it all, Kathleen and the children hear the RING of clashing swords. On the side, booths, tables and benches have been set up for food and souvenirs.

Danielle, one hand in Kathleen’s, uses the other to point at a group of Highlanders.

DANIELLE
Look, mommy, those men are wearing skirts.

Kathleen stops in her tracks. She kneels, spins Danielle around, and speaks sternly.

KATHLEEN
No, baby, you can’t call them that. Those aren’t skirts, they’re called kilts. It’s very important that you remember that.

Danielle’s hurt.

DANIELLE
I’m sorry.

Kathleen hugs her.

KATHLEEN
It’s all right. It’s just that you’ll hurt their feelings if you call them skirts.

JACKSON
Yea, last thing we need is a buffed up guy with hurt feelings.
KATHLEEN
I wouldn’t know whether to pat his back or run.

JACKSON
Depends on what he’s got in his hands.

Danielle points to the side.

DANIELLE
Look, horses. Can we go see them?

KATHLEEN
Sure, why not?

JACKSON
Mind if I watch the log throwing?

KATHLEEN
Go ahead, we’ll find you later.

They head in separate directions.

Kathleen and Danielle hear the sound of HOOF BEATS. They look to their left. A horse PLUNGES as he sets his feet. When it’s settled, he turns his head to reveal Jamie mounted on him like an ancient Highland warrior. He’s spectacular in full dress with a broadsword strapped to his back. Kathleen looks shell-shocked.

DANIELLE
Mommy, isn’t he beautiful?

She’s looking straight at Jamie.

KATHLEEN
He certainly is.

Jamie can’t help but smile. It’s devastating.

JAMIE
I think she’s talking about the horse.

KATHLEEN
I’m sure She is. I never thought of you as ... well, you don’t have the accent.

JAMIE
I was raised in Missouri until I was fifteen. Just because I don’t

(CONTINUED)
JAMIE (cont’d)
talk it doesn’t mean I don’t hold
to my heritage.

DANIELLE
Can I ride the horse?

JAMIE
Of course, that is, as long as your
mother doesn’t mind.

KATHLEEN
If I don’t, she’ll give me the
silent treatment for a week.

JAMIE
And where did she learn that?

KATHLEEN
You don’t want to know.

JAMIE
Can you lift her up?

Kathleen picks Danielle up and hands her to Jamie. He sits
her in front of him and gives her a lank of mane.

JAMIE
Grab onto this. Now hold tight.

He kicks the horse into a light canter. Danielle’s happy
screams follow them. Kathleen watches them ride the meadow.

MAN (O.C.)
Hey, lassie, would you be wanting
some company?

Kathleen sees Donegan in full Highland dress and broadsword
walking towards her.

KATHLEEN
Hello. Wow, I can see where the
sight of a Highland warrior would
make an enemy run back home.

He smiles.

MAN
Aye, that it would. My name is
Donegan. And who might you be?

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Kathleen Meyers. I’m the one renovating the old McPhearson place.

Donegan’s smile vanishes.

DONEGAN
Och, I’ve heard of ye.

KATHLEEN
Is that good or bad?

DONEGAN
Not many here about are happy with what your doing.

KATHLEEN
Why not? We’re just fixing the place up.

DONEGAN
Because you’re changing what’s been there for a hundred years and people here don’t like change.

KATHLEEN
But everything changes. It’s the way the world works.

DONEGAN
Aye, but that doesn’t mean they have to like it.

HOOF BEATS signal Jamie’s return. He pulls up the horse so close to Donegan that he has to take a step back.

DONEGAN
Hey, watch yer nag, Jamie.

Jamie hands Danielle to Kathleen and then jumps off landing between Donegan and Kathleen.

JAMIE
I was just making sure you gave Kathleen her space. I know how you tend to crowd the ladies.

DONEGAN
You do it again and it won’t be a lassie I’ll crowd. It’ll be you with me fist.

Jamie smiles.
JAMIE
And then I’d just have to mar that pretty face of yours. Why don’t you run along so I can get back to showing Kathleen around.

Donegan stands a moment, hands in fists.

DANIELLE
Mommy, are they going to fight?

Both men snap back to reality remembering there’s a child with them.

DONEGAN
Nay, lassie, not today. But tomorrow, maybe.

He turns and walks away.

KATHLEEN
Can you please tell me what that was about and what you meant by,"So I can get back to showing her around?"

JAMIE
Sorry, but Donegan and I go back years and not in a good way.

KATHLEEN
That still does not give you the right to barge into our conversation as though we were doing something wrong.

Jamie regroups.

JAMIE
Kath, I... Okay, how about I take this big guy and put him up and then show you around like I said?

KATHLEEN
No fists; no sword fights?

JAMIE
Only in competition. My round starts at two.

KATHLEEN
Really? Fists or swords?
CONTINUED:

JAMIE
Swords. It’s been a hobby of mine for years.

KATHLEEN
That, I would love to see.

JAMIE
Okay.

He leaps on the horse in one movement.

JAMIE
I’ll be right back.

Kathleen can’t take her eyes off him as he rides away.

DANIELLE
Is he coming back?

KATHLEEN
Yes, dear.

DANIELLE
I like him.

KATHLEEN
I think I do, too.

Kathleen and Danielle walk towards the crowds. Jamie runs up from the side and joins them.

MONTAGUE - THROUGH THE DAY

Watching the log throwing contest.

Eating scones while looking at the souvenir booths.

Jackson plays football (soccer) with the men.

Watching the women performing a traditional Scottish dance. Suddenly, Kathleen realizes Danielle is on the stage doing her ballet. She tries to retrieve her, but is pulled into the dancing, instead.

Jamie competing with the broadsword. Kathleen can’t take her eyes off of him. He shakes his competitor’s hand when he loses and leaves with his arm around Kathleen’s shoulders.
RESUME

The day is finished. Jackson has rejoined them. As they walk across the field to the cars, their high spirits is evident in their laughter. Kathleen looks up and stops dead in her tracks. Fear replaces her happiness.

KATHLEEN
Oh, no.

JAMIE
What is it?

KATHLEEN
(Barely a whisper)
John.

JACKSON
Dad’s here?

John steps out of his car. He slams the door and stalks to them.

DANIELLE
Daddy.

She runs to him, but he pushes her to the side. Kathleen extends her arm, and Danielle runs to her, scared and confused.

JOHN
What the hell do you think you’re doing?

KATHLEEN
We were enjoying the day until you showed up.

JOHN
You have my children running around with a bunch of back-woods yokels dressed in skirts?

KATHLEEN
Those are kilts, John. They’re Scottish and extremely nice people.

JOHN
They must be since it looks like you’re taking one home with you.

(CONTINUED)
JAMIE  
(Full accent)  
I still have me wee sword strapped to me back. Wud you like me to do some damage with it?

JOHN  
Don’t threaten me or I’ll have every policeman in this backwater town here.

JAMIE  
Och, that wud be my cousin. Wud you like me to call him for you?

KATHLEEN  
John, why are you here?

JOHN  
I came to get my children.

He pulls out a piece of paper.

JOHN (CONT.)  
I have a court order giving me full custody.

KATHLEEN  
What? You can’t have a court hearing without me.

JOHN  
Can and did. I happen to know a good lawyer who knows a good judge.

KATHLEEN  
You’re not taking my children away.

JOHN  
I’m afraid I am and there’s nothing you can do about it.

KATHLEEN  
No...

She launches herself at John, but Jamie grabs her just in time.

JAMIE  
No, Kath, not now. Not this way.
KATHLEEN
He can’t take my children.

JOHN
Earth to Kathleen, yes I can and I will. You can’t take care of them and the court agreed.

Kathleen folds, tears flowing. Danielle comes and grabs her legs.

DANIELLE
Mommy, what’s wrong?

Kathleen bends down and takes her into her arms.

KATHLEEN
You get to go and stay with daddy for a little while. Remember, I love you bunches and will see you soon.

DANIELLE
But I don’t want to go. I want to stay with you.

KATHLEEN
It’s only for a little while. I’ll come and get you soon.

JOHN
Don’t lie to her, Kathleen. You’re not seeing them again for a long time.

Danielle grabs Kathleen’s neck Kathleen reassures her the best she can.

KATHLEEN
It’s okay, honey.

With a child’s simplicity, Danielle gives one last protest.

DANIELLE
But I left Allison at the house.

KATHLEEN
I promise I’ll take good care of her.

DANIELLE
She really likes the cookies Jamie’s grandmother made.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
I’ll make sure she gets lots of them.

A final hug.

In his usual walk-over-people way, John takes control.

JOHN
Jackson, take Danielle to the car.

But Jackson stands, defiant.

JACKSON
No, dad, I’m not going.

JOHN
You have no say in this.

JACKSON
I don’t care. I’m staying with mom.

Jamie kneels beside Jackson.

JAMIE
Jackson, a wise man picks his battles and his battlegrounds carefully. Your mother will fight this.

JACKSON
No, she won’t. She always gives in to dad.

JAMIE
Because she never had anything as important as you two to fight for. Your job is to take care of Danielle, okay? Be strong for her because she’s going to be very scared.

Jackson looks at his father. In his face, you can see an inner shift has occurred.

JACKSON
All right.

Jackson takes Danielle’s hand. They walk to the cars, looking back as they go.

(Continued)
JAMIE
(To John)
You’ve already lost.

JOHN
How’s that?

JAMIE
You’ve just lost the love and respect of your children.

JOHN
And why would that be a problem?

John follows the children. As they drive away, Kathleen burrows her face in Jamie’s shoulder and cries while he holds her tight.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Kathleen sits on the stairs staring into space, wiping tears from her eyes. Around her are the paints and supplies she had been waiting for, but she doesn’t see them. Steven walks in and sits beside her.

STEVEN
When I first interviewed you, I was moved by the passion you had for your children and your desire to create the best life possible for them. So, what has changed?

KATHLEEN
Everything has changed. He took them.

STEVEN
You know, most fights aren’t won with the first battle.

KATHLEEN
This one was. He had a court order. He’s never seen me as a fit mother.

STEVEN
Is that true? Are you an unfit mother?

KATHLEEN
No. Everything I did was for my children. John always had to be (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN (cont’d)
the best. He could never tolerate someone else beating him. When he left, he saw my obtaining custody of the children as a challenge to get them for himself.

STEVEN
Kathleen, look around.

She does.

KATHLEEN
Okay?

STEVEN
What you’re doing here is going out on national television. Your story is going out on national television. What you need to do is let the world know that you will fight for your children by winning this and landing that job. Then, when you do, you go to the courts and fight to get them back, and I guarantee you this whole country will be behind you. I’ll make sure of it.

Kathleen looks around, a new resolve shining in her eyes.

KATHLEEN
When does the furniture arrive?

STEVEN
That’s my girl.

LIVING ROOM

Kathleen rolls paint on the wall. A noise draws her attention. Nipper is running away with a small paint brush.

KATHLEEN
Hey, get back here.

She puts the roller in the tray and runs after him.
BEDROOM

The room is freshly painted. Kathleen stands on a ladder hanging brightly colored, modern curtains when Jamie walks in.

    JAMIE
    Kath, may I see you for a moment?

Kathleen frowns. He seems so serious.

    KATHLEEN
    Sure.

She finishes putting up the side and steps down from the ladder.

    KATHLEEN
    What do you think?

He looks around. He really doesn’t like it.

    JAMIE
    It’s....nice.

Kathleen’s expectations fall.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Jamie guides her to where the hidden gazebo. Holding back the bushes, he lets Kathleen in and then follows her.

INT. GAZEBO - DAY

Kathleen breaths in the scent of roses.

    KATHLEEN
    Even growing wild, this place is beautiful.

Jamie takes her hand and leads her to the fountain. Kathleen looks up into the statue’s face.

    JAMIE
    Her name was Jenny.

The news shocks her.

    KATHLEEN
    She was a real person?
JAMIE
Yes. This gazebo was built for our wedding. The fountain was to be a surprise, but she never saw it.

KATHLEEN
But, why at this house?

JAMIE
Jenny was Angus’ daughter.

Jamie collects his thoughts and emotions.

JAMIE
Ten days before our wedding, we had a terrible fight. It was so stupid. In the heat of the argument, I told her I was calling it off.

His voice tightens.

JAMIE
I swear, I didn’t mean it. When she left, she went to see Donegan.

KATHLEEN
The man from the games?

JAMIE
Yea, they had grown up together. I think he was in love with her. He convinced Jenny my words were final, and that there was no hope. You must understand, she was an extremely sensitive person. She reminded me of porcelain. And, just like glass, she shattered.

Jamie stops, swallows.

KATHLEEN
What happened?

JAMIE
She tried to drive home in a torrential storm. She missed a curve and put her car into a tree. The ones who got her out said her face was wet and her eyes red and swollen though there was no rain inside the car.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
You blame yourself?

JAMIE
Every day of my life.

KATHLEEN
Let me ask you; was she a kind, considerate and forgiving person?

JAMIE
In every facet of her heart.

KATHLEEN
And, if you stood before her and asked forgiveness, would she give it?

JAMIE
Yes.

KATHLEEN
Then accept it and forgive yourself.

Jamie shakes his head; he still can’t take the step. Kathleen points to the statue.

KATHLEEN
She’s right there. Ask her.

Jamie’s eyebrows furrow. He looks up into Jenny’s face and understanding replaces the confusion. He is so caught up in his memories, he never hears Kathleen leave.

Jamie gazes at his lost love, tears streaming, barely holding it together. He falls to his knees.

JAMIE
Jenny, forgive me. I am so sorry. I didn’t mean it. Please...

Overcome, he can’t continue. He bows his head and sobs.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Jamie finds Kathleen waiting when he comes out from the bushes. He smiles and puts his arm around her waist. They walk to the house together in silence.
EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Snow is falling.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

THROUGH LESTER’S CAMERA

The room has been painted and the curtains hung. The floor, ceiling beams, stairs and rails gleam with new stain and varnish.

Steven holds the mic to Kathleen’s face.

STEVEN
You only have two months to go. Do you feel confident you’ll be finished on schedule.

KATHLEEN
Absolutely. All of the painting is finished. James has been a wonder getting this place into shape. As you can see above us, he was even able to make the beams and ceilings look new.

Camera pans up for a moment.

KATHLEEN
All we have left is to place the furniture and pictures, a few touch ups and then the decorating.

STEVEN
Have you heard anything from your children since they were taken away?

KATHLEEN
No. John must have taken Jackson’s cell phone. When I try the number, it just rings then goes to voice mail. He won’t allow me to talk to them.

STEVEN
So why do you keep doing this?

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
I can’t just do nothing. I’m going to win this and get that job. Then, I’ll go to court and fight to get them back.

STEVEN
Good girl. Let’s hope that happens.

Steven draws his finger across his throat.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Low music envelops the room. The soft glow of the Christmas tree and hanging lights are the only illumination. Kathleen and Jamie snuggle on the couch, his arm around her. Kathleen gazes around taking it all in.

KATHLEEN
I can’t believe we’re done. It went by so fast.

JAMIE
Actually, there’s one other project.

KATHLEEN
What?

Jamie gets up and pulls her with him. He leads her outside.

EXT. GAZEBO - SAME

There’s still enough light for Kathleen to see that the gazebo has been completely cleaned up, the weeds taken out and the bushes trimmed. The music of the water splashing from the fountain fills the air. She’s amazed.

KATHLEEN
It’s more beautiful than I thought it would be. Are you sure you want to do this?

He looks at Kathleen; his words a double meaning.

JAMIE
I’ve never been more sure of anything in my life.

She hears it in his voice. She looks into his face; her expression a question.
Slowly, he kisses her. He raises his head and smiles.

JAMIE
When all of this is over, there are some things we need to talk about.

KATHLEEN
I think we do.

He hugs her close. She slaps him on the chest.

KATHLEEN
Now, I have more work to do.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Kathleen sits on the couch wrapping boxes to look like presents. She has snacks on the table beside her arrangements. A small fire and Christmas music give a festive feel to the room. Steven and Lester walk in.

STEVEN
Are you up to one more interview?

KATHLEEN
Sure.

Steven sits beside her.

LESTER’S CAMERA

LESTER
Only ten days to go. Getting excited?

KATHLEEN
I can hardly sleep at nights. When something is this important every day seems like forever.

LESTER
So, where are you in regards to finishing?

KATHLEEN
Just the touch ups. I’ll wait until the day before to put out the live plants, so I’m staying busy doing the little things.

She holds up a "Christmas present" she just finished.
CONTINUED:

STEVEN
I’ve noticed there’s going to be a bonus for the judges.

KATHLEEN
I am keeping that a secret until they come. Everyone will just have to wait to see it.

STEVEN
Any words for your children?

Kathleen gives a wispy smile.

KATHLEEN
I think of you every day. Love you bunches.

STEVEN
That’s a wrap.

NORMAL CAMERA VIEW

Steven gives a whimsical smile.

STEVEN
I was looking at this as just another job, but what I found was a cause worth fighting for. I mean it when I say, good luck.

LESTER
That goes for me, too.

Kathleen’s eyes mist over.

KATHLEEN
Thank you. Both of you.

LATER

Kathleen kneels under the tree arranging presents. Picking up scraps, she walks through the kitchen to the back door. She switches on the outside light.
EXT. HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

A large trash can sits beside the door. Opening the lid, she throws the paper in and then ducks back inside leaving the door ajar and the light on.

INT. HOUSE - SAME

Jamie walks in to find her looking around, picking up what needs to be thrown away. She flows into his embrace and his kiss.

JAMIE
Nana would like you to come over for dinner.

KATHLEEN
Love to. Let me get my coat.

She puts the papers down and picks up her coat from the couch. Throwing it on, they leave.

EXT. HOUSE - EVENING

The wind is building, whipping the trees. A gust blows the back door partially open.

A small shadow approaches. From the glow of the light, the form of a raccoon emerges. It’s a female followed by three kits. She sniffs the garbage can then the open door. Quietly, she slips in, babies in tow.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME

Walking through the kitchen, they head towards the living room.

LIVING ROOM - SAME

Following her nose, mama quickly finds the munchies on the table. The kits scramble to the presents to play hide-and-seek.
STUDY ROOM - SAME
Nipper emerges from the hole in the fireplace. The sound draws him across the room.

LIVING ROOM - SAME
Nipper’s head peers around the door. His hunting instincts kick in and he heads for the kits.

FOCUS ON
One spies him and chirps danger.

RESUME
Instantly, the three head up the tree. The weight of three half-grown raccoons unbalances the whole thing and it tips, crashing onto the couch and coffee table, destroying the arrangement.

Mother falls from the table right in front of Nipper. She rears up, snarling. He circles, looking for a way past her teeth.

The kits run in all directions. One has found the garland and lights tied to the stair railing. He tries to climb ripping it off as he goes.

Another attempts to climb the curtain and brings it down, destroying a table with a nativity scene.

The third runs to the fireplace where garland flows off the mantle and hangs to the floor. He climbs up to the mantle. Across the top, he pushes everything off as he goes. His footing slips. To keep from falling, he grabs the garland and stockings, taking them with him. Some of the garland falls into the fireplace. Black smoke billows out.

EXT. HOUSE - EVENING
Jamie and Kathleen walk up to the house. A crash inside alerts them to danger. They run for the door.
INT. HOUSE - EVENING

The door opens to reveal a total disaster. SMOKE FILLS their lungs. Jamie swats at the fog as though he can wipe it clean like a chalkboard. Seeing is impossible. Their eyes sting and tears run freely. Jamie gropes his way to the fireplace. Using the small shovel, he pulls out what is left of the melted and steaming garland and takes it outside.

Kathleen shoves opens the windows. She turns around to access the damage. As the smoke clears, pockets of devastation appear.

Jamie staggers in to find Kathleen in shock. His first reaction is to put his arms around her.

A tree limb RUSTLES. A baby raccoon crawls out. Movement in the corner reveals two more kits and the mother. Jamie runs to the kitchen. He returns with a broom and starts herding the mother towards the door. She leaves taking her kits with her.

Kathleen collapses where she stands. She can’t even cry yet. Everything she has worked for and all hope of regaining her children are in ruins. Jamie sits beside her and pulls her into his arms. Another sound draws their attention. A little masked face peeks out from the tree limbs. In that moment, Kathleen surrenders all hope and cries.

INT - HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

In the light of day, the true amount of devastation is revealed. Kathleen, ragged, tired, and wearing the same clothes, walks among the carnage. It mirrors her life.

The door opens and Steven and Lester walk in. They stop, shocked.

STEVEN
How.. What happened?

KATHLEEN
Raccoons. I accidentally left the back door open.

STEVEN
I don’t believe this. Is there anything you can do?

Kathleen shakes her head.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Not with the time left. And, my budget is gone.

LESTER
Oh, this is bad. I am so sorry.

She’s on the verge of crying again. She takes a deep breath.

KATHLEEN
It’s over.

STEVEN
You know we have to document this? The audience needs to know what happened.

Kathleen nods.

STEVEN
You don’t need to be in it. I’ll just narrate what happened.

KATHLEEN
Thank you.

LATER
Jamie walks in to find Kathleen curled up on the sofa. Most things have been picked up, but the damage is still evident. He stands by the door.

JAMIE
Kathleen?

She looks up at him. His heart aches for the despair he sees in her eyes.

JAMIE
I’ve brought someone to see you.

Lady Elisabeth slowly hobbles in, her cane giving small thunks on the hardwood floor. A few feet within the door, she turns.

ELISABETH
Thank you, Jamie. I’ll call when I need you.

Jamie smiles and closes the door on his way out.
Kathleen jumps to her feet. It’s as though the queen has arrived.

KATHLEEN
Lady Elisabeth, you didn’t have to come. It’s not that I’m not happy to see you, but...

ELISABETH
I’ve come because I wanted to see a friend when she’s in need.

KATHLEEN
Thank you. Would you like to sit down?

ELISABETH
Not yet. There’s something I want to show you. Shall we go upstairs?

KATHLEEN
Forgive me, but are you able?

Elisabeth slaps her with her cane.

ELISABETH
I’m old – not decrepit.

Kathleen walks behind her as she slowly navigates the stairs. At the top, she turns right into one of the bedrooms.

BEDROOM – SAME

The bedroom came through untouched, Kathleen’s decorating talent evident in every detail of the room. Elisabeth looks around, sad.

ELISABETH
I was born in this room.

Kathleen’s mouth falls open.

ELISABETH
Angus was my younger brother. My ancestor built this house and it’s never been out of the family until now.

KATHLEEN
I didn’t know.
ELISABETH
How could you? The bed you put in
the shed was built by my
great-grandfather. It’s the bed I
was born in.

She points to a wall.

ELISABETH
Over there was the wardrobe.

KATHLEEN
It’s in the shed, too.

ELISABETH
I thought so. My grandmother loved
blue. That’s why most of the walls
were blue in some way. The
curtains and bedspread were made
from the wool of our own sheep.

Elisabeth leaves followed by Kathleen.

SECOND BEDROOM - SAME

Wallpaper covers most of the walls with matching curtains
for the windows.

KATHLEEN
It used to have small animals
painted on the walls.

Elisabeth nods.

ELISABETH
This was my room. My mother was a
wonderful artist. She painted them
just for me. I remember sitting
and watching. As she painted, she
would make up stories about the
animal.

KATHLEEN
Lady Elisabeth, I’m sorry. I had
no idea.

Elisabeth pats her hand as she passes on her way out the
door.
LIVING ROOM - SAME

Kathleen holds Elisabeth’s arm and steadies her. As she descends the stairs, Elisabeth gazes around the room. Smoke damage mars the wood finish on rafters and floor. What curtains could not be fixed are missing.

ELISABETH
So many memories.

KATHLEEN
Did your grandfather make the furniture as well?

ELISABETH
He certainly did. He was a master craftsman. That’s where Jamie got his talent. You’ve kept this room much the same except the walls were a deep green.

Kathleen giggles.

KATHLEEN
That was my other choice.

They walk into the kitchen.

KITCHEN - SAME

Elisabeth looks at the new cabinets and the floor. Fresh sadness covers her face.

ELISABETH
My happiest times were helping my mother in this kitchen. It wasn’t grand like this, but I could feel the rich history all the way back to the first McPhearson.

KATHLEEN
If I had a way to start again, I would change everything to the way it was. Give this house its history back.

ELISABETH
I was hoping you would say that.

KATHLEEN
What do you mean? There are only eight days left. How can I

(MORE)
KATHLEEN (cont’d)
re-create a house in so short a
time? I can’t do it.

ELISABETH
Och, lass, sure you can because
when you create you don’t do it
from here.

She touches Kathleen’s forehead with the top of her cane.

ELISABETH
You do it from here.

She touches her heart.

ELISABETH
Just believe in yourself.

KATHLEEN
But there’s not enough time, and I
don’t have any budget left. It
can’t be done.

Elisabeth smiles.

ELISABETH
Oh, but there is.

LIVING ROOM
Lady Elisabeth walks to the front door and opens it. She
raps her cane.

ELISABETH
Come, Jamie. Time’s a wasting.

A smiling Jamie walks in followed by Sean, Duncan, Iona and
several MEN and WOMEN.

KATHLEEN
What’s this?

JAMIE
Your work crew.

KATHLEEN
But I don’t have any money for the
paints or decorations.

Jamie puts his arm around her waist.
CONTINUED:

JAMIE
Don’t worry about that. It’s all been taken care of.

ELISABETH
I’ll have Annie drive me home while you get to work. Kathleen, dear, God be with you.

Kathleen hugs Elisabeth.

KATHLEEN
No matter what, I’ll never forget you.

ELISABETH
Oh, posh. You two get to work.

She leaves.

Kathleen takes out her cell phone. She punches in a number.

KATHLEEN
Steven, you need to come to the house - now. Okay.

She hangs up.

BEDROOM - LATER

Steven walks in while Kathleen folds covers, getting the bed ready to be removed.

STEVEN
What’s happening?

KATHLEEN
We’re going for it.

He looks dubious.

STEVEN
Don’t get me wrong, I’d love to see you stay in, but I don’t know if the rules will allow this.

KATHLEEN
Surely the rules don’t take a family of raccoons destroying the house into account.

(CONTINUED)
STEVEN
I don’t think it was ever
considered.

KATHLEEN
And you must admit, these are
complicated circumstances.

STEVEN
You don’t have to convince
me. Tell you what, let me talk to
the committee. I’ll explain the
circumstances and see if we can’t
get you special permission.

KATHLEEN
That’s all I ask. Until then, we
work like crazy.

Steven shakes his head.

STEVEN
You are one gutsy woman.

KATHLEEN
Just don’t tell my ex. I want it
to be a surprise.

LIVING ROOM

Jamie supervises the work. While MEN take the new furniture
out, others bring back the originals. A WOMAN walks up to
him with a pile of cloth in her arms.

WOMAN
I’ve come to see if Miss Kathleen
could use these curtains. They
were my mothers, but they’ve been
in my trunk for ages.

JAMIE
She’ll love them. She’s upstairs
in the bedroom.

She disappears up the stairs.

Donegan enters the room. Jamie walks over and stands, his
arms crossed in front of him.

DONEGAN
Nay, Jamie, I’m not here to fight
you.
JAMIE
Then why are you here?

Donegan suddenly finds his feet very interesting.

DONEGAN
I’ve come to help.

JAMIE
Why?

DONEGAN
Because no matter what I might have thought at the time, no woman deserves to have her children taken away. Plus, I saw her dancing with the lasses. She seems a good woman.

JAMIE
Aye, she is that.

DONEGAN
Good, then that’s settled. I’ll be helping the men to carry the things in.

Donegan spins around and walks away.

KITCHEN - SAME

The new cabinets are coming down. Jamie is in the middle of the work, supervising. He grins when he sees Kathleen come in.

JAMIE
You know, you could have saved us a lot of work if you’d just listened the first time.

KATHLEEN
I wish I had. What are we going to do about the floor?

Jamie pulls her into a corner. He ducks his head.

JAMIE
Well, I kinda cheated.

Kathleen is confused.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

JAMIE
When I put down the cement board to put the tile on... I put it on top of the floor.

KATHLEEN
So the floor is still under there?

JAMIE
Uh, yea. I couldn’t bear the thought of tearing out the hardwood.

KATHLEEN
Does that mean you can take the tile out?

JAMIE
Yes.

Kathleen squeals and throws her arms around his neck and kisses him. In the sudden silence, they turn to see all the men watching. She takes a deep breath, pats his chest and practically skips out.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

The walls are back to their original dark green, the wood on the beams and floor gleam with new polish and wax. The tree stands back in place sans several ornaments.

However, the decorations looks sparse. Kathleen looks it over with a practiced eyes. She shakes her head. Picking a few ornaments from the tree, she tries to arrange them on the table, but it doesn’t work. Iona and another woman polishing the furniture watch her.

IONA
You know, my nana would go into the woods and bring in pine limbs for the mantle and in baskets. Also, any holly she could find.

WOMAN
And mine would tie them together and make a wreath.

KATHLEEN
How would they wrap presents?
They would put them in paper or cloth and tie them with string.

Kathleen’s phone rings. She opens it.

KATHLEEN
Hello? Steven, what did they say?

She slowly closes the phone and puts it away. Suddenly, she raises both hands into the air.

KATHLEEN
YYYEEEEESSSS!!!

EXT. HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Three SUV’s drive up. A small army of JUDGES, STAFF, Steven and Lester get out. They look around for a first impression.

What they see are Highlanders in full battle gear arranged in a line in front of the house. To the side, Duncan plays the bagpipes. They don’t know whether to be entertained or scared. They cautiously enter the house.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

The low lighting dramatizes the glow of the lights on the Christmas tree, mantle and stair railings. Real pine limbs, artfully arranged, hang on the mantle, tables and in baskets around the room. Instead of modern, up-to-date decorations, much has either been taken from nature or borrowed from generations past.

The judges question Kathleen, writing down her responses and their observations while Lester follows them with his camera.

JUDGE 1
It looks like you’ve taken an old-world approach.

KATHLEEN
My first thought was to go modern, but then I met a wonderful woman who was born here. She told me of the rich Scottish history of this house, and I realized this house IS its past; they couldn’t be separated. Everything you see is original and hand-made.
They are looking at every aspect of the room.

JUDGE 2
I’ve never seen curtain cloth quite like this.

KATHLEEN
The cloth for the curtains and the throw rugs were taken from sheep raised here and spun by local residents.

JUDGE 1
Shall we look at the kitchen?

KITCHEN - SAME

The original cabinets are back on the wall, their varnished wood match the hardwood flooring. A judge gives Kathleen a questioning look.

KATHLEEN
Yes, these are the original cabinets built with the house.

JUDGE 3
I must say, this is a bold approach, but I rather like it. Let’s head upstairs.

LIVING ROOM - SAME

The group comes down the stairs.

JUDGE 1
The house is beautiful. I understand you had a bad set-back not too long ago?

KATHLEEN
Yes, a family of raccoons got in and nearly destroyed everything.

The judge coming down the stairs first stops.

JUDGE 1
What is that?

Kathleen looks around him. Nipper watches them a few feet away.
KATHLEEN
That, ladies and gentlemen, is Nipper the ferret. He’s as much a part of the house as its history. His ancestors came over with the first Scottish immigrants that settled here. Watch.

Kathleen takes a small pine cone from the stair railing and tosses it. Nipper immediately jumps up with a weasel war dance and begins playing with it. Everyone laughs.

They continue down the stairs.

JUDGE 2
So, what do you believe you have learned from this experience?

Kathleen barely hesitates.

KATHLEEN
That there are houses that are more than just wood and plumbing. They are homes with a rich history, and to take that away would be a crime against the generations that lived there.

The judges quickly write something down.

JUDGE 1
Well, I think that pretty much does it.

KATHLEEN
If you will indulge me, there is one other thing I would like to show you.

EXT. - GAZEBO - EARLY EVENING

The gazebo is beautiful. White lights drape over the top with light strings trailing inside. At the front stands a huge Christmas tree covered in small white lights with red ornaments. Poinsettias sit everywhere. The water flowing from the fountain adds background to soft Christmas music.

Jamie stands beside the tree in full Highland dress. He bows to the judges.
KATHLEEN
Ladies and gentlemen, may I present James McKnight, the master builder who did the work on the house.

JAMIE
(Full accent)
Good evening. I am pleased to meet you.

JUDGE 2
Mr. McKnight, you did a wonderful job on the house.

JAMIE
Thank you. It was a pleasure to be sure.

Judge three holds out his hand to Kathleen.

JUDGE 3
Thank you, Ms. Myers. Steven will be in touch with you. Our final decision will be telecast live from our New York office with all contestants present. We’ll see you then.

As Jamie escorts the judges to their cars, Steven holds back. He takes Kathleen’s hand.

STEVEN
Congratulations. I doubted that you could do it, but you did. It looks marvelous.

KATHLEEN
Thanks, Steven; for everything.

He smiles warmly and follows the judges.

Kathleen stands in the same spot when Jamie returns. She sighs.

KATHLEEN
It’s over.

JAMIE
So, what are your plans?

KATHLEEN
Not sure. I wait to hear the verdict, then I go and fight for my children.
Jamie takes her hand and leads her to sit next to him at the fountain. He plays with a poinsettia leaf.

JAMIE
Will you be leaving now?

KATHLEEN
I can’t stay here. I have a home that I need to take care of. And, from what I understand, Jackson left a plate of food under his bed that is crawling with ants.

Jamie laughs.

JAMIE
They are fine children. You deserve to have them.
(Pause)
Kath, I don’t want to lose you.

She looks at him sharply.

JAMIE
I lost one person I loved, I don’t think I could handle losing another.

She smiles and lays her forehead against his arm.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Jackson’s backpack sit by the open door. Kathleen comes out of her bedroom, Danielle’s backpack and Miss Allison held tight. She wipes her eyes. At the door, she gazes back one last time, picks everything up and leaves.

INT. MYER’S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Kathleen sits at the kitchen table searching through the help wanted ads. She circles one with a pen. The silence is deafening. Her phone rings

KATHLEEN
Hello? Hey, Steven...
SIMULTANEOUS WITH STEVEN’S CALL

Steven sits at his desk, leaning back, relaxed.

STEVEN
Kathleen, how are you doing?

KATHLEEN
I’m not sure, yet. I’m looking at wanted ads while waiting for the phone call.

STEVEN
Any news on the children?

KATHLEEN
No. John still refuses to allow me to talk to them.

STEVEN
Are you ready to fight for them?

KATHLEEN
With everything I’ve got.

STEVEN
Good, because things are going to heat up pretty quickly. This may be the fight of your life.

KATHLEEN
If it gets my children back, I’m ready.

STEVEN
Good. I have a friend who is an investigative reporter. This is just the kind of thing she loves. We’re going to begin checking out the legalities of what John did.

KATHLEEN
When will I leave for New York?

STEVEN
Next Monday. The tickets are being sent by Fed Ex. along with your itinerary and hotel reservations.

KATHLEEN
I can’t begin to repay you for what you’ve done.

(CONTINUED)
STEVEN
No need. You’ve helped me believe in the human spirit again. Bye.

DANIELLE’S ROOM - DAY
Kathleen puts away a stack of clean and folded clothing. She walks to the door, stops, and turns. Her gaze scans the room, every inch a memory.

A small table stands in a corner with Allison sitting in a tiny chair. Across from her, the other chair is empty, waiting. On the table between them, are two shortbread cookies: one for Allison, one for Danielle. A new resolve shines in Kathleen’s eyes. She silently closes the door.

JACKSON’S ROOM - DAY
She brings in his clean and folded clothes. Placing them on the bed, she bends down and looks under the bed. She comes up chuckling - yep, it was there. She walks out leaving it.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY
A Fed Ex truck driver walks to the front door and rings the doorbell. Kathleen opens it. He hands her a large envelope. When she steps back to close the door, two suitcases can be seen already packed and waiting.

EXT. NEW YORK - DAY
A plane lands at the airport.

INT. MAJOR STUDIO - EVENING
Kathleen walks up to the RECEPTIONIST’S desk.

KATHLEEN
Kathleen Myers with the interior designing contest.

RECEPTIONIST
Yes, Studio One, down the hall on your right.

She hands her a badge.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Thank you.

It’s the longest walk of her life. She fidgets with her purse; checks her hair; checks her dress. At a women’s bathroom she ducks in, unable to help herself.

She comes out smoothing her lip gloss. Now lipstick is on her finger. Pulls out a Kleenex and wipes it off. Reaches the door, breaths deep, and walks in.

INT. STUDIO ONE - EVENING

A typical studio. A long table commands front with three chairs behind it. Ten more chairs face it. On each side are huge video screens.

A guard stops her. She shows her badge and is escorted to her chair. She looks around at the OTHER CONTESTANTS. She catches the eye of one and gives her a smile that is not returned. Oh, well. She sits and fidgets.

The three judges come in and sit down. She feels as though she’s in a courtroom about to be sentenced. Steven walks in holding a mic. At the director’s cue, he begins.

STEVEN
Good evening, everyone. Welcome to the Great Design Challenge. For the last eight months we have been following ten contestants rebuild, design, and decorate old houses for the Christmas holiday to see which one will win the grand prize: ten thousand dollars and the chance to work at Design Magic, America’s largest interior design company.

INT. JAMIE’S HOUSE - EVENING

Jamie and Lady Elisabeth are sitting at the television watching the live telecast.

On screen:

STEVEN (MC)
Tonight, you will be shown each house and hear what our panel of judges have to say.
INT. TOWN PUB - EVENING
The bar is packed. Donegan is at the front cheering Kathleen on.

    STEVEN (MC)
    Our first contestant comes to us from California...

INT. JOHN’S HOUSE, JACKSON’S ROOM - EVENING
Jackson and Danielle are glued to a small set.

    DANIELLE
    I saw her. I saw Mommy.

    JACKSON
    I know. Keep it down, we don’t want dad to hear.

TIME LAPSE

INT. STUDIO ONE - EVENING
A Spanish style house is being shown on the screen.

    STEVEN (MC)
    This contestant was given a Spanish style Hacienda for their remodel...

TIME LAPSE

JUDGE 1
What we saw with this house was that the interior design chosen by the contestant didn’t quite match the style of the house.

INT. TOWN PUB - EVENING

    DONEGAN
    You can see they did it wrong. Ya can’t make a pig into a riding horse.

The other men nod in agreement.
INT. STUDIO ONE - EVENING

Kathleen is tense. She’s picked up a large rubber band from somewhere and is stretching and rolling it between her fingers. Suddenly, it flies across the room.

STEVEN (MC)
Our final contestant was given a house built in the early eighteen hundreds in upper New York.

The McPhearson house is placed on the video screen.

INT. JOHN’S HOUSE, JACKSON’S ROOM - EVENING

DANIELLE
Look, it’s the house we were at.

INT. STUDIO ONE - EVENING

STEVEN (MC)
This house was in fairly good condition and had a resident ferret.

A picture of Little Nipper - LAUGHTER.

STEVEN (MC)
After successfully finishing the house, this contestant had a set-back when a family of raccoons came in and fairly destroyed everything. With only eight days to go, she completely reworked every room to finish on time.

APPLAUSE.

JUDGE 1
This contestant had an excellent grasp of the style of the house.

As he speaks, pictures of her work shown on the screen.

JUDGE 1 (CONT.)
She blended modern with its history in a way that was both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

(CONTINUED)
JUDGE 2
I agree. However, I didn’t see a lot of design; rather she took what was already there and just added a few extra touches.

JUDGE 3
I agree. In fact, I felt in some ways, she cheated a bit by using what’s there instead of recreating...

INT. TOWN PUB - EVENING

DONEGAN
You don’t know what you talking about.

CONNOR
Be quiet, man. We need ta hear it.

INT. - STUDIO ONE - EVENING

JUDGE 3
However, after hearing her explanation, I understood why she did it. And the gazebo was stunning.

STEVEN (MC)
So, are we ready to reveal the winner?

JUDGE 1
Yes, we are.

STEVEN (MC)
And we’ll do it right after this commercial break.

INT. JOHN’S HOUSE, JACKSON’S ROOM - EVENING

JOHN (O.C.)
Kids, time for bed. Lights out.

DANIELLE
No, we won’t get to see mommy win.

(CONTINUED)
JACKSON
Quick, run and jump in your bed and pretend to sleep. When he’s gone, come back here - but be quiet.

Danielle runs out of the room.

DANIELLE’S ROOM - SAME
Danielle rushes in and jumps into bed. She turns out the light and pretends to sleep.

John opens the door and peers in. Satisfied, he leaves, closing the door.

Danielle jumps up. She opens the door and looks out.

HALLWAY - SAME
John walks down the stairs. Danielle slips out and tip-toes to Jackson’s room.

JACKSON’S ROOM - SAME
Jackson turns the TV back on.

INT. STUDIO ONE - EVENING

STEVEN (MC)
Welcome back. We have now seen all the houses and heard the judges impressions. Judges are you ready to give us your final verdict?

JUDGE 1
We are. It has been a hard decision. All of the houses were well crafted and designed. The work done was excellent, but there was one house that stood out above the rest.

JUDGE 2
Everything this contestant did was excellent from the new cabinets, marble flooring and chic design; everything we were looking for.

(CONTINUED)
JUDGE 1
That’s why the winner is...Ms. Jennifer Stone.

STUDIO CAMERA
Jennifer Stone jumps up, hands raised like a boxer that has just won the match. The camera pans the other contestants. It stops at Kathleen. She’s clapping politely while clenching her bottom lip to keep from crying.

INT. JAMIE’S HOUSE – EVENING

JAMIE
No. No. They can’t do that. She worked so hard.

He turns the TV off.

JAMIE
Nana, I have to go to her.

ELISABETH
Of course you do. I’ll be fine.

He kisses her cheek.

JAMIE
I’ll see if I can bring her home with me.

ELISABETH
Only if you plan to marry her.

JAMIE
I’ve been planning that for quite a while, but first I need to ask her.

ELISABETH
Step carefully, Jamie, she’s been through a lot in a short time. And she still has a battle ahead of her.

Jamie nods and leaves.
INT. JOHN’S HOUSE - EVENING

Jackson and Danielle stare at the TV, unbelieving, eyes misty.

DANIELLE
Does this mean we can’t live with mommy anymore? You said if she won, we could go and live with her again.

JACKSON
I don’t know. I’ve got to get my phone back so I can call her. Next time dad leaves, we’ll look for it.

Danielle turns and lies down on the bed, crying.

DANIELLE
I want mommy.

Jackson lies next to her, his arm over her shoulders.

JACKSON
I know. We’ll find a way.

INT. TAXI - EVENING

Kathleen sits in the back seat. She stares out the window, tears streaming freely. The phone rings. She takes it out and looks at the number. Pushing the receive button, she answers, her voice choked.

KATHLEEN
Hello?

INT. JAMIE’S CAR - EVENING

JAMIE
Kath, I’m sorry. It’s my fault. I pressed you to make the changes.

INTERCUT Kathleen and Jamie

KATHLEEN
No, I made the choice.

JAMIE
Are you headed home?

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Tomorrow morning.

JAMIE
I’m going to meet you there.

KATHLEEN
I should say no, but I could really use the support right now.

JAMIE
Which is why I want to be by your side.

KATHLEEN
Thanks. I guess this means John has won.

Kathleen breaks down as the full impact of this hits her.

JAMIE
No, lass. We’ll find a way. We’ll fight him, and we’ll win.

Her throat tight, Kathleen can only nod. Jamie understands the pause.

JAMIE (CONT.)
I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?

She barely whispers -

KATHLEEN
Okay.

JAMIE
Good night, love.

Kathleen hangs up. She wipes her eyes. The lights of the city reflect off the windows, but she doesn’t see them.

INT. JOHN’S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

DANIELLE
Hey, Jackson, they’re talking about mommy on TV.

Jackson runs in from the other room. Danielle sits in front of the television, surrounded by Legos. Jackson bounces onto the couch.

(CONTINUED)
JACKSON
Turn it up.

Danielle does.

NEWS ANCHOR (O.C.)
For Kathleen Myers, her time on a reality TV show became a little too real when she was handed a court paper by her ex husband, John Myers, giving him sole custody of their two children. All of it played out on national TV.

John walks in.

JOHN
What is this?

DANIELLE
It’s mommy.

NEWS ANCHOR (O.C.)
What makes this case stand out, though, is that, when investigated, it appears her children were taken from her with no court hearing and no opportunity for Ms. Myers to refute the charges laid against her.

LAWYER (O.C.)
It’s an open and shut case of insider dealings between Mr. Myers, his lawyer, and the judge. I intend to take this to court and, when proven guilty, someone will be looking at jail time.

John grabs the remote and turns off the TV with a SNAP.

JOHN
Both of you, upstairs.

Jackson and Danielle high-tail it. John pulls out his cell phone.

JOHN
Cummings, what the hell is happening?....What do you mean you don’t know? It’s all over the television. Their talking about jail time....You’d better find

(MORE)
CONTINUED:

...JOHN (cont’d)
out. I’m not paying you to sit around and let things happen.

He slams the phone shut.

INT. LAWYER’S OFFICE – DAY

Kathleen walks to the receptionist’s desk. Behind her is a large plaque reading WILCOX AND FITCH, ATTORNEYS AT LAW. The RECEPTIONIST greets her with a smile.

RECEPTIONIST
Ms. Myers?

KATHLEEN
Yes. I believe I’m expected?

RECEPTIONIST
You are. If you’ll follow me.

She takes Kathleen down a hall and into a typical conference room. BRADLY WILCOX sits at one end, papers placed in neat stacks around him. He looks up when they enter.

RECEPTIONIST
Ms. Myers.

Bradly stands and shakes her hand.

BRADLY
Ms. Myers, please have a seat. Would you like something to drink?

KATHLEEN
Water would be wonderful.

The receptionist leaves to get it.

BRADLY
Reviewing this case, it looks pretty clear that your parental rights were taken away illegally.

The receptionist comes back and quietly places a bottle of water in front of her.

BRADLY
What we’re going to do is, first get your children back and then we’ll do a criminal case against Mr. Myers and his lawyer.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Mr. Wilcox, I’d rather not have John go to jail.

BRADLY
Then, you won’t want any charges brought against him? Ms. Myers, he stole your children.

KATHLEEN
I don’t want my children to go through any more than necessary. Seeing their father go to jail would devastate them. If you can just get them back, that will be enough.

BRADLY
Commendable. I will do everything in my power to do that, but it may have an effect on the custody case.

KATHLEEN
What kind of effect?

BRADLY
Without the criminal charges, the judge will be looking solely on who is the best parent for the children.

KATHLEEN
We’ll cross that when we get there. I do have one question: Who hired you? Because, I certainly don’t have the funds for a court case.

BRADLY
Don’t worry about that. A third party which wants to remain anonymous has been following your case and has hired me to represent you.

Kathleen hesitates, forming her words.

KATHLEEN
I seem to be caught in a difficult decision: on one hand I hate feeling as though I owe something to someone I could never repay, yet without this gift, I could never get my children back.
BRADLY
Then, just accept it as the gift it was meant to be and be thankful.

KATHLEEN
I am, believe me.

BRADLY
Good. I’ve already filed to have this case taken before a family court judge...

INT. MYER’S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kathleen and Jamie sit on the couch his arm around her in a comforting embrace. The conversation continues the one with her attorney.

KATHLEEN
Then, he said that a guardian will be appointed to look at both sides and talk with the children. At the hearing, the guardian will state what he found, and then the attorneys will argue their cases. I just get to sit there looking like a wall flower.

JAMIE
A very beautiful wall flower.

KATHLEEN
Funny. I hope it’s not too long before I can see them.

JAMIE
Even if it is, you’re strong enough, and I’ll be right here with you.

KATHLEEN
Thanks, for the first time, I believe I can face him and win.

JAMIE
I almost feel sorry for John.

KATHLEEN
I don’t.
INT. JUDGE'S OFFICE - DAY

JUDGE RAYMOND BUCHANAN sits behind his desk studying a stack of papers. Before him are Kathleen and John with their LAWYERS. The GUARDIAN, GARNER BROWN, has just finished his findings.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
Thank you, Mr. Brown. Now, I want to hear from the attorney for Mr. Myers.

John’s attorney, GEORGE CUMMINGS, stands and addresses the judge.

CUMMINGS
Your honor, my client is requesting the continuation of sole custody of the children. Since the initial hearing, Mr. Myers has married and is now able to provide a stable home with two parents; whereas Ms. Myers remains single and unemployed.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
It’s interesting that you say, "continuation of sole custody" for, if I remember, I allowed Ms. Myers sole custody. A decision which was reversed by another judge without a legal hearing. And, I also notice he terminated Ms. Myers’ alimony.

CUMMINGS
A decision we deeply regret, your honor.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
I’m sure you do.

CUMMINGS
However, it doesn’t negate the face that Mr. Myers is now in a superior position to take care of the children.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
It will if he ends up in jail.

CUMMINGS
Ms. Myers has graciously decided not to press charges so as not to further distress the children.

(CONTINUED)
JUDGE BUCHANAN
Very commendable, Ms. Myers. I don’t know if I would be so lenient, but it does show me a great deal where your priorities lie.

KATHLEEN
Sir, my children are all that matters.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
Yes, I believe they are.

JOHN
If the kids are all that matter, then I should have them. After all, I’m the one able to support them. She couldn’t even win a job. Without me, they’d be destitute.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
(dripping sarcasm)
Yes, Mr. Myers, we’re aware of your high salary position.

Cummings sees things heading in the wrong direction.

CUMMINGS
Sir, with the addition of a new Mrs. Myers, it’s a clear case which home would create a more stable environment.

Cummings sits down and hisses between clenched teeth for John to shut up.

The judge indicates for Bradly Wilcox to come forward.

WILCOX
Sir, Ms. Myers has done everything she can to create a loving environment for her two children. As the Guardian indicated, when interviewed, the children said that, despite their father having the money, they preferred to live with their mother. She has been the nurturing influence for them from birth.

(CONTINUED)
JOHN
(Forceful whispers)
I’m going to have a talk with those little...

CUMMINGS
(Whispered back)
Shut up.

WILCOX
She’s been taking college classes and has obtained a B.A. in interior design and is presently working on her Masters. The show she was on was an opportunity for her to obtain a good, high-paying job, and, despite unbelievable obstacles, she persevered and finished her project.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
Yes, my wife watched it faithfully. I was greatly impressed, Ms. Myers.

KATHLEEN
Thank you.

WILCOX
Sir, I believe it’s only a matter of time before Ms. Myers finds employment. Her story has gone out nationwide....

CUMMINGS
Sir, that’s a big "if".

KATHLEEN
Sir, may I be allowed to speak?

CUMMINGS
Sir, I protest...

JUDGE BUCHANAN
You can protest all you want, Mr. Cummings, this is still my room.
(To Kathleen)
Yes, Ms. Myers?

Nervous, Kathleen stands. Looks at John who shoots daggers at her, then gathers her courage.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Sir, since our marriage, the only thing I ever heard from John is how incompetent I am, and I believed him. But during this contest, I learned that I can do something on my own. I can succeed. Even when those silly raccoons destroyed my work, I was able to remake it with the help of friends I gained on my own. I’m saying this because I’m afraid of what he’s going to tell the children. Will he tell them they’re stupid? That they can’t do anything right? Will he destroy their self-confidence like he did me?

A growl turns her head. John’s hate glows. She sets her shoulders.

KATHLEEN
He’s taken away the alimony. That’s okay, I can live without it as long as the child support is there to take care of the children. I will do whatever is necessary to give them a home full of love and support.

Judge Buchanan sighs.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
There’s a lot to think through. I’m going to call a twenty minute recess during which time, Mr. Brown, if you could bring the children into my chambers.

JOHN
What’s to think about?

CUMMINGS
(Between clenched teeth)
Mr. Myers, may I see you outside the office? Now!

Cummings heads out. John gets up, throws Kathleen a hated glare, and follows.

At Kathleen’s glance, Wilcox shrugs his shoulders.
INT. OUTSIDE JUDGE’S CHAMBERS - SAME

Jamie waits outside. Kathleen slumps next to him, leaning on his side. They can’t miss John passing by.

    JOHN
    Well, if it isn’t the boy in skirts. Good luck with her.

    KATHLEEN
    I can’t believe I took that for all those years.

Jamie kisses her forehead.

    JAMIE
    Freedom is wonderful. So, what happened?

    KATHLEEN
    The judge is having a break to talk with the children. It all comes down to my income verses John’s wonderful salary and a new wife.

    JAMIE
    No contest.

    KATHLEEN
    Let’s home the judge...

She’s interrupted by Jackson and Danielle running down the hall, Mr. Brown running to catch up.

    DANIELLE
    Mommy!

Jamie is pushed aside by squirming bodies, hugs, and kisses. Their love warms his heart.

    DANIELLE
    We missed you. Please, let us come home with you. Please.

    KATHLEEN
    Darling, it’s not my decision.

    JACKSON
    We’ve already decided, if the judge makes us go home with Dad, we’re going to run away.

Kathleen looks up at Mr. Brown’s raised eyebrows and smile.

(CONTINUED)
KATHLEEN
Honey, you can’t do that.

JACKSON
Yes, we can, and I’m going to tell the judge that, too.

Tears form in Kathleen’s eyes.

KATHLEEN
I love you so much.

MR. BROWN
Come on, kids, the judge is waiting.

Danielle throws a wave.

DANIELLE
Bye, bye, Mommy. Don’t worry, we’ll tell that judge.

Jamie holds her again. She sniffs, wiping her nose with a tissue from her purse.

KATHLEEN
How do I live without my children?

JAMIE
With me.

Kathleen looks into his eyes, a question on her face.

JAMIE
Yes, I am.

She smiles. It’s all he needs.

INT. JUDGE’S OFFICE - DAY

The judge, Cummings and John are already seated. The atmosphere subdued. Cummings gathers his papers together, assured of a win.

Kathleen and Wilcox enter, both smiling. The judge looks up. His brows furrow. When they sit down with no further comments, he proceeds.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
My interview with the children was very enlightening. It vindicates what my thoughts have been telling

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
JUDGE BUCHANAN (cont’d)
me about the situation as a whole, especially their home life. Not to mention, their threat to run away if I did not make the right decision. Therefore, I am upholding my previous decision to award sole custody of the children to Ms. Myers.

JOHN
That’s ridiculous, you’re going to let two children blackmail you? She’s not married.

WILCOX
Actually, sir, it turns out that will soon be remedied. As of a few minutes ago, Ms. Myers has become engaged to Mr. McKnight. I’m sure I can have his financial records on your desk in a few days, but, from what I understand, he is well able to take care of a family.

The judge is obviously relieved.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
Thank you, counselor.

JOHN
This is ridiculous. The man walks around wearing skirts.

KATHLEEN
They’re kilts, John. He’s Scottish.
(To Judge Buchanan)
We were at the Highland Games. Jamie was wearing ancestral clothes.

JOHN
He still looked ridiculous. Is that the type of man you would let my children live with?

JUDGE BUCHANAN
Mr. Myers, do you know where the name Buchanan came from?
JOHN
Why should I care?

JUDGE BUCHANAN
Because it’s Scottish.

Cummings slams his papers closed, mumbling:

CUMMINGS
Of all the stupid, idiotic...

JUDGE BUCHANAN
My verdict is for Ms. Kathleen Myers. The children are to be returned to her immediately.

KATHLEEN
Thank you.

JOHN
You can’t do that.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
Mr. Cummings, will you please tell your client just what I am able to do.

CUMMINGS
John, SHUT UP. He can do whatever he wants, including throw you in jail despite Ms. Myer’s dropped charges.

JOHN
I’m getting another lawyer. I’m not through, yet.

JUDGE BUCHANAN
Mr. Myers, if I see you in my courtroom again, I promise I will bring back the charges and throw you in jail. Ms. Myers, you are released. Have a wonderful day and congratulations on your wedding.

INT. OUTSIDE JUDGE’S CHAMBERS - SAME

Jamie sits, chin resting on clenched hands. He looks up at the door opening. John storms out, fuming. He only glances at him as he passes by, for once keeping his mouth shut. Expectations rising, he watches for Kathleen.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: 129.

She comes out, face radiant. He grins and grabs her in a bear hug. Danielle and Jackson run up to create a group hug.

Jamie pulls Kathleen close and, after a slight pause, kisses her passionately. This morphs into....

INT. - GAZEBO - EARLY EVENING

Jamie and Kathleen stand in front of a clergyman, finishing the kiss after their wedding vows. The gazebo is still decorated in white lights and the Christmas tree. Jackson and Danielle stand to the side.

After the kiss they look out over the audience sitting in lawn chairs around the entrance. Michelle, Lady Elisabeth, and the whole town have shown up.

Duncan reaches into his pocket to pull out a handkerchief. His watch falls. He reaches down to retrieve it just as Nipper runs in and grabs it.

DUNCAN
Hey, get back here.

Duncan PUSHES people aside in his attempt to get out and chase the ferret, creating a wave of LAUGHTER.

INT. HOUSE - EVENING

Even though it’s months past, the house is still decorated for Christmas. All the lights are out except the tree and trim. In different places, candles add their glow.

The McKnight family cuddle together on the couch. Danielle sits in Jamie’s lap, smiling and content. Jackson is next to Kathleen, safe with his mother’s arm around him.

JAMIE
Guys, we have a surprise for you.

KATHLEEN
I didn’t get to spend Christmas with you, so we decided to have it tonight. Are you ready for some presents?

Danielle’s face lights up.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

DANIELLE
I want a pony. Please.

JAMIE
That’s a pretty big present to put under a tree.

Her face drops.

JAMIE
Now, hold on, let’s see what you get.

He places her on the couch and goes to the tree. He has to move a nosey ferret to pick up a present. He comes back, one in each hand.

JAMIE
Here ya’ are.

They rip off the wrapping. Jackon’s box reveals a new smart phone.

JACKSON
Cool. I’ve been wanting one of these. Thanks.

Danielle is confused. She’s holding up a bunch of straps with metal and a buckle.

DANIELLE
What is it?

JAMIE
That’s a halter. It’s what you put on a pony’s head.

Her mouth drops open. She squeals, giving Jamie a neck choke hold.

JACKSON
But she can’t have a pony where we live.

KATHLEEN
That’s another present. How would you two like to live part of the year here?

JAMIE
Instead of getting paid for the show, I asked if I could have the house. It’s ours free and clear.

(CONTINUED)
JACKSON
Leave all my friends and school?

KATHLEEN
No. For the school year, we’ll live in the other house. We can come here for vacations and summer.

JAMIE
Duncan has volunteered to look over the place and keep Danielle’s pony.

JACKSON
Sounds great. Except one thing.

KATHLEEN
What’s that?

JACKSON
It only has one bathroom.

KATHLEEN
Well then, it’s a good thing we have a carpenter in the family, isn’t it?

FADE OUT

THE END