

WITH LOVE, FROM ROMANCE

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FADE IN

A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE CHICAGO SKYLINE - EXT. DAY

As LAKE MICHIGAN glistens in the background, we close in on the tower of THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE. As we are drawn into a window and into a...

CHAOTIC NEWSROOM - DAY.

REPORTERS wrangling phones, frantically entering their stories into computers. STAFF scurrying about. CLOSE on one particular reporter, 30s pretty, self-assured, this is AVERY ADAMS, talking to herself, focused, as she enters text into her own computer, seemingly unaffected by the beehive of activity around her.

AVERY
(Speaking as she types)

The City Council has apparently decided that transportation modes within the city take precedence over the concerns for the safety of its citizens...

She is interrupted from across the desk by a FELLOW REPORTER, her friend and co-worker, JULIE BARTON, also 30s, business like, trendy glasses, she looks over them as she speaks.

JULIE
So, how's the City Council beat going?

AVERY
Earth shattering excitement as usual. The latest is a spat over the purchase of cyber-capable buses and whether they will shorten the commute time by anticipating traffic snarls...or more likely, causing them. Oh, along with an equally compelling debate on what to do about increasing dog waste along the Lake front.

Avery drifts off for a moment into a..

FLASHBACK:

Avery hustling to corner an important looking MIDDLE AGED MAN, a city politician type.

EVERY (CONT'D)

Excuse me, excuse me, Mr. Councilman. Do you have any comment on the proposal to post signs and litter receptacles for people's dog...

OOPS! She seems to have just stepped in the "subject matter". Avery looks down in disgust as the politician keeps walking, waving to her acknowledge her but never looking back. She sighs in defeat as she looks down at her soiled shoe.

Avery returns to the present.

JULIE

(shaking her head)
Well, you wanted to report the "hard hitting news".

EVERY

And I still do. I guess you could call it paying my dues.

JULIE

At least that story has bonus points.

Avery is puzzled.

EVERY

Bonus points?

JULIE

Yes. A working knowledge of dog waste is certainly going to come in handy if you get promoted to the D.C. office.

This brings a chuckle and an eye roll from both of them as Avery sticks her tongue out playfully at her friend.

EVERY

Right. Well I am hoping that doing a stellar job with less than stellar material will catch the editor's eye.

JULIE

You never know what's going to be his flavor of the day.

He's promoted reporters that I thought would never amount to anything and overlooked some that I thought were stars in the making.

EVERY

So where do you think I fit in that scenario?

JULIE

Definitely leaning toward the stellar end, especially after that last piece you did on corruption in the City Treasurer's office.

EVERY

Well, investigative reporting is what I thrive on. I got lucky with that one. I just had a gut feeling that something was wrong when I interviewed the office staff about accounting practices and missing funds.

JULIE

Well, it certainly got your name in the news as the reporter that broke the story. That's one that rates an asterisk on your resume.

Avery smiles and looks dreamily into the distance.

EVERY

I certainly hope so. That's what I've been working for, for years.

Avery's phone buzzes with a TEXT ALERT. She is drawn back to the present and looks down to read it.

EVERY (CONT'D)

Oh my gosh!

JULIE

What? What is it?

EVERY

It's Mr. Palmer, he's asking to meet with me after lunch.

JULIE

Well, there you go. I told you that corruption piece was going to get you somewhere.

EVERY

Do you think it's possible? I mean, I'm afraid to hope....but I want that D.C. assignment so badly. It would be my dream job and my entry into real political scene reporting - dog waste not withstanding.

Julie smiles at her friend.

JULIE

I think anything is possible, if you work at it hard enough, and you've certainly paid your dues the past couple years with the City Council beat. You've proven yourself, Avery. Over and over again. Good luck with Mr. Palmer.

Avery smiles back, grateful for the boost from her friend.

OUTSIDE THE EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY -

A SHORT WHILE LATER

Avery sits in a waiting area outside a closed door that reads: MARLIN PALMER, EXECUTIVE EDITOR. She fidgets with her jewelry, straightens her sweater, rearranges her hair.

The door opens and she is greeted by PALMER, a rather harried looking man in his late 50s. He gives the appearance of someone who has spent a career as an "inky wretch". He knows the newspaper business from the bottom up.

PALMER

Ms. Adams. Come in. Come in. I'm sorry I'm running a little behind. I don't like that - in myself or anyone else.

Avery smiles uncertainly, glancing at her watch, wondering if he is insinuating she is also tardy to their appointment. He motions for her to take a seat in a chair opposite his desk.

PALMER (CONT'D)

I suppose you're wondering why I summoned you to my office today.

AVERY

Well, yes sir. I am. I'm hoping that you're finding my reporting on the City Council activities satisfactory.

PALMER

Oh yes, yes, very satisfactory. The Treasurer's office scandal made big news of course. We have you to thank for uncovering that with the Tribune as the lead.

AVERY

Yes sir. I put in a great deal of research on that. I wanted to make sure that what I was uncovering was indeed what was occurring.

PALMER

You did a fine job. And that is why it put you in mind for a project I find myself needing immediate help with.

Avery's eyes widen in anticipation. Is this the moment she's been waiting for?

PALMER (CONT'D)

Ms. Adams, are you familiar with Olivia Stern?

Avery thinks for a moment.

AVERY

Ummm....yes, I believe so. She's the editor of the "Lifestyle" section, isn't she? I'm sure we've met at some point.

PALMER

Yes, that's right. Been with the Tribune more than twenty years. One of the finest writers on the staff.

Avery isn't sure where this conversation is going.

PALMER (CONT'D)

Her Lifestyle Section garners a much larger percentage of readership than many of our other features combined. Particularly, her special Sunday editions.

Apparently the general public is much more inclined to read feel good stories and society gossip than hard news, as difficult as it is for a hardened newsman like me to believe.

Avery's face is showing certain concern now.

EVERY

I'm sorry Mr. Palmer, but what does the Lifestyle Section have to do with me. I'm a political news reporter.

Palmer removes his glasses and leans across the desk to speak.

PALMER

I just received a call this morning. Ms. Stern has been on vacation in Colorado. Learning to ski, I'm told. It seems she has taken a bad fall and is currently hospitalized awaiting surgery for a broken hip.

EVERY

What? Oh my gosh! Is she okay?

PALMER

We're hoping so. I just got the initial report from her husband who's with her. He's understandably upset. He also says that she will need to spend several days in the hospital after the surgery and then physical therapy and recuperation of approximately six weeks. She will of course be away from work during that time.

EVERY

I'm so very sorry to hear that, but I'm not sure how I can help.

PALMER

That's why I summoned you Ms. Adams. I have a definite idea of how you can be of great help.

Avery is now extremely puzzled....and wary.

AVERY

And that would be?

PALMER

Ms. Stern had an idea to write a piece for Valentine's Day. You know, romantic drivel and such. Having said that, romantic drivel sells. If you've watched any number of romantic comedies and holiday feel-good movies, I'm sure you are aware of that fact. Do you get where I'm going with this, Ms. Adams?

AVERY

I'm not exactly sure...where would you be going with this?

PALMER

I need someone to take over and write that piece. Let me rephrase that. The Tribune needs someone to write that piece. Ms. Stern has hinted in some of her previous columns that she would be writing a "special" for Valentine's Day and the online response has been overwhelmingly positive and anticipatory. We don't want to disappoint our readers, Ms. Adams.

AVERY

You want me to write it? Why me? I have no knowledge base of writing editorials - especially about candy hearts and romance.

Avery's face shows concern as she once again drifts away to a momentary...

FLASHBACK

Avery and a handsome YOUNG MAN, obviously having been in a spat of some sort. Both yelling back and forth (silently in her head). A box of Valentine's candy sits prominently on the countertop between them along side a bouquet of roses. She bursts into tears as the young man stomps out and slams the door. The rose bouquet then smashing the closed door behind him.

PALMER

Now, Ms. Adams, surely a young, successful woman as yourself would have some personal takes on romance that would garner the approval of our readers.

Avery returns to the present conversation.

AVERY

(wryly)

Nothing that would sell newspapers. Trust me.

Avery once again drifts into a...

FLASHBACK - A FEW MINUTES AFTER THE PREVIOUS

Avery sitting on her sofa, tissue box nearby, candy box on her lap, shoving chocolates in her mouth between sobs.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

PALMER

I have trouble believing that, Ms. Adams. Nonetheless, if you have nothing to personally enliven the piece, your superior creative writing ability will suffice. I have faith in you.

AVERY

But Mr. Palmer, I have been working on serious news and political stories, I have no idea what makes me a candidate for this...this...assignment.

PALMER

Then are you declining my request, Ms. Adams?

AVERY

Well....no, no sir. Not exactly declining...just...I misunderstood the reason I was called to your office.

PALMER

And what reason did you have in mind?

EVERY

I don't know. I thought maybe it was related to the opening in the D. C. Bureau...I had hoped anyway.

PALMER

And you have interest in that position?

EVERY

Yes, of course. It is my dream job.

PALMER

You are still a junior reporter, Ms. Adams. How long have you been here now? A couple years? Do you know how many senior reporters have their eye on that position?

EVERY

I would venture to guess it would be a considerable number.

Avery is now somewhat subdued, her hopes apparently crushed.

PALMER

Yes. Considerable.

He considers Avery for a moment.

PALMER (CONT'D)

What would a chance at that position be worth to you, Ms. Adams?

Avery looks up suddenly, unsure of his intent.

EVERY

Well I.....

PALMER

Would a compelling Valentine's Day column be within what you consider fair?

Avery's hope rises.

EVERY

Are you saying that if I agree to do the column, you will consider me for the D. C. position?

PALMER
If I did, would that persuade you?

AVERY
Well, yes.....yes, I think it
certainly would.

PALMER
Good. Then we have a deal. A trade
off as it were.

He rises and extends his hand. Avery also arises and extends hers as well.

PALMER (CONT'D)
Three weeks from today, Ms. Adams.
Here on my desk.

He pecks his index finger on the desktop

AVERY
Yes sir. Three weeks. We have a
deal.

OUTSIDE THE EDITOR'S OFFICE - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Avery closes the door behind her and leans against it.

AVERY
(to herself)
What have I done?

BACK AT AVERY'S DESK - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Julie is filled with excitement as Avery plops into her chair.

JULIE
Well, well, what? What did he
want? Was it about the D. C.
assignment?

Avery looks like she's just been pummeled.

AVERY
No. Not exactly.

JULIE
Well what then?

AVERY

It's a new assignment alright.
Just not anything I could have
imagined in a million years.

JULIE

What are you talking about? What
assignment. Spill already! You're
killing me!

AVERY

(sighing)

It seems I have been assigned to
write a column for the Lifestyle
Section.

JULIE

What? About what? A society profile
of the Deputy-Mayor?

She's teasing.

AVERY

Very funny. But no.

JULIE

Well, what in the world are you
going to provide for the Lifestyle
Section? And where's Olivia Stern?
She's the diva of Lifestyle?

AVERY

She was injured in a skiing
accident. Off for at least six
weeks.

JULIE

Yeah, the office grape vine has
been buzzing about that. So where
do you come in?

AVERY

They need someone to write a
Valentine's Day special.

JULIE

And they picked you? What were
they thinking?

She stops abruptly when she sees the look on Avery's face.

AVERY

And what does that mean?

JULIE

Ummm....nothing. I didn't mean it like that. It's just that, well, you've had a rough go in the romance department lately. Do they think you have an angle that is going to give them insight on true love?

AVERY

You know, Julie, you give credence to that saying: "With friends like you, who needs enemies?"

JULIE

Oh Avery, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean that the way it sounded. But I've just been through several breakups with you over the past year or two...not to mention the last one. Remember what you swore?

Avery drifts into another...

FLASHBACK:

Avery sitting at a coffee shop table, laptop in front of her, engrossed in entering a hot news item. Yet another HANDSOME YOUNG MAN, sits across from her. At first he watches her, then tries pulling her attention away and back to him, she looks up, nods and then immediately returns her attention to her typing. He stares at her for another moment, ignored. He then rises, throws his napkin down and leaves. Avery, still in her own world doesn't notice for a few more moments until she smiles, finished, pleased with herself, closes the laptop and looks up...only to find herself alone.

Avery returns to the present and sighs.

AVERY

You're right. I said I would never get involved with another man as long as I lived.

JULIE

So you agreed to this?

AVERY

Grudgingly. I guess you can say I made a deal with the devil.

JULIE

And how so?

EVERY

Mr. Palmer agreed that if I wrote a "compelling" Valentine's Day piece, he would consider me for the D. C. position.

JULIE

So quid pro quo?

Avery shrugs.

EVERY

Quid pro quo. I'm desperate for that position, Jules. I mean, how bad can it be? I'll write some "fluff" piece, draw some hearts on it, turn it in and be done with it.

Julie narrows her eyes at her friend.

JULIE

And what are you going to write this "fluff" piece about?

EVERY

(bluntly)

I have absolutely no idea. Like you said, I certainly don't have many personal romantic ventures to draw from.

Julie thinks for a moment and then brightens with a revelation.

JULIE

I've got an amazing idea!

EVERY

You do? What?

JULIE

Just a second.

She opens a desk drawer and begins rummaging. Finally she finds and produces a red envelope.

JULIE (CONT'D)

This!

EVERY

An envelope? What's in it?

JULIE
It's not what's IN it. It's what's
ON it.

Avery is perplexed. She reaches for the envelope that Julie offers.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Look at the postmark.

Avery turns the envelope over and from her POV we see the postmark as she runs her finger over it lightly.

AVERY
"With Love From Romance".

She's confused.

AVERY (CONT'D)
So what does this mean?

JULIE
Remember last year when I was
dating Stuart?

AVERY
Yeah, so?

JULIE
Well, he sent me this Valentine's
Card. He said he mailed it to the
post office in this little town
called "Romance" to have a special
postmark stamped on it. Well, as
you know, I ditched Stuart, but I
kept the card, because, well, it
was really kind of cool, don't you
think?

Avery is still studying the card.

AVERY
There's actually a town somewhere
named "Romance"?

JULIE

Yes! Stuart said it's a small town, down South, only a couple hundred people, but the post office receives thousands of letters from all over the world every year before Valentine's Day with the request for their postmark - it's gone on for years. Isn't that a cool story?

AVERY

Yeah, I guess it is. Is that it?

JULIE

Stuart mentioned some sort of legend of something, he seemed really intrigued by it.

AVERY

A legend? About what?

JULIE

I'm not sure, Stuart was pretty intrigued about it. He was always a sappy romantic though. Always flowers and cards and stuff.

AVERY

Maybe you should have kept him around.

JULIE

Stuart had other issues. He needed to go.

They both laugh.

AVERY

So, how do I connect with this story for the article?

JULIE

You go there, silly.

AVERY

Go there? To a town called Romance in the middle of.....nowhere? Where is this place anyway?

JULIE

Arkansas.

AVERY
Arkansas? Are you serious?

 JULIE
Yes! Avery, it's perfect. I didn't know why I actually kept that card, but now I do. It's the core Valentine story that you need to produce to get your dream job. It's like....like....serendipity, don't you think?

 AVERY
Serendipity? I don't know about that.

 JULIE
Just think about it. I'm mean, what else do you have? And when is this due?

 AVERY
 (sighing)
Three weeks.

 JULIE
Well then think fast. Here's your answer.

She takes the envelope back and holds it up

 JULIE (CONT'D)

It's as easy as getting on a plane, finding this place, getting the story written and voila! D.C., here you come. Happy editor, happy Avery. Come on friend, go for it. I have faith that this is the answer.

Avery sighs in submission. Julie is right.

INT. AVERY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Avery sitting on the couch, browsing her laptop. She picks up a glass of wine sitting on the side table, takes a sip without looking away from the screen. From Avery's POV the screen glows as she types "ROMANCE, ARKANSAS".

Avery mumbles through the first few words, then...

 AVERY
 (reading aloud)

"Love is always in the air in Romance, making it one of the most charming small towns in the USA."

Avery shrugs and rolls her eyes.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Maybe.

Avery scans and mumbles over a few more words and then resumes.

AVERY (CONT'D)

"Legend has it that the name came from a school teacher who lost her true love, a soldier in World War One, found the bluffs on the eastern side of town very romantic. And once you glance these "romantic" cliffs, you'll see why."

Avery mumbles again through the next few words.

AVERY (CONT'D)

...thousands of cards and letters are mailed to the post office each year prior to Valentine's Day with the request to forward with their postmark "With Love, From Romance."

Avery looks up in thought.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Hmm, Stuart may be right. Not a bad little story here.

Avery scans through and then mumbles a few more lines.

AVERY (CONT'D)

(back to reading aloud)
...Blah, blah, blah...a school teacher...a ring...

She scans a couple more lines and then...

AVERY (CONT'D)

...the burial site of the soldier's dog.

Avery looks up confused.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 What does that have to do with
 romance and true love? What kind of
 crackpot story is this?

Avery is pensive, obviously regretting her snap decision to
 make the journey.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 Oh well, it's too late now. The
 airline ticket is already booked
 and I've got absolutely no other
 story. So much for "great ideas",
 Julie.

She air quotes "great ideas" and rolls her eyes. She closes
 the laptop and picks the glass of wine back up.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 Okay, so let's take inventory here.
 A little backwoods town, an old-
 maid school teacher, a lost ring
 and "bonus points"...a dead dog.
 Who wouldn't want to read a
 Valentine's story about that?

Avery lets out a defeated sigh and raises the glass in a mock
 toast.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 So long, D.C. assignment.

She then downs the rest of the wine in one gulp.

FADE OUT.

INT. AIRLINER - DAY

Julie looking out the window at the clouds, lost in thought.

CUT TO:

A CAR RENTAL COUNTER - AIRPORT - DAY - A LITTLE LATER

The ATTENDANT, male, 70s, hunched shoulders, is in no hurry
 dealing with the line of people awaiting a vehicle. Finally
 Avery has her turn.

AVERY

Yes, I have a reservation for a small compact. It should be under Avery Adams, Chicago Tribune.

ATTENDANT

Is that under "A" for Adams or "C" for Chicago?

AVERY

I really wouldn't know. Do you see it either place?

ATTENDANT

Nope, got nothing for either of those.

AVERY

What? You have to have the reservation. It was made by our transportation department.

ATTENDANT

Hang on there, miss, hang on there, I found it here - it's under "T" for Tribune. You should have known that. It's a wonder I ever found it.

Avery sighs. The first complication of many she's sure.

AVERY

I'm sorry. Can I just get my car now, please.

ATTENDANT

Where you headed?

AVERY

A town called Romance. Have you ever heard of it?

ATTENDANT

Romance? Yeah, I've heard of it. Couple hours from here. That's up in White County, up there in the hills close to the river.

He pauses for a moment, in thought.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Forget that subcompact, I'm gonna put you in a four wheel drive.

A ROADSIDE SIGN: "ROMANCE - 12 MILES"

AVERY
 (to herself)
 Not bad. Kind of nice actually.
 Peaceful.

She looks momentarily into her rearview mirror and a look of concern comes over her.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 What? What did I do?

We see from her POV, the rearview mirror, showing BLUE LIGHTS flashing and FOUR WHEEL DRIVE PATROL CRUISER following her. She pulls the Toyota to the side of the highway as the cruiser pulls behind her. She rolls down her window and again from her POV we see a stern-faced UNIFORMED OFFICER. This is BRYCE CONNOR, 30s, handsome, military level fit, the County Sheriff (with the requisite cowboy hat) and apparently serious about traffic offenders.

BRYCE
 (tipping his hat)
 Good afternoon Ma'am. May I see your license and registration?

AVERY
 Did I do something wrong, officer?

BRYCE
 You seem to be in quite a hurry to get wherever you're going, Ma'am. License and registration, please.

AVERY
 I'm so sorry, I didn't realize I was speeding. I'm from out of town and this is a rental, I'm not used to driving it, I'm sorry.

BRYCE
 Yes ma'am. License and registration, please.

Avery fumbles in the console but does not produce a registration. She pulls her license from her wallet along with the rental papers.

AVERY
 I'm sorry, I have no idea about the registration, but here are my rental documents and my driver's license.

Bryce studies the license.

BRYCE
Chicago? We don't get many people
down this way from Chicago.

AVERY
I'm here on business. I'm a
reporter.

BRYCE
What kind of reporting are you
looking to do in Romance?

AVERY
I'd like to speak with the post
office about all the cards that
come in every year for their
postmark for Valentine's Day.

BRYCE
So why are you in such a hurry?
Valentine's Day isn't for a couple
weeks.

AVERY
I didn't realize I was speeding,
I've already told you that.

BRYCE
Yes ma'am, you've already mentioned
it.

She's getting a little aggravated.

AVERY
Seriously? Speeding? I've never
gotten a speeding ticket in my
life. I obey the traffic laws and
I'm a very careful driver.

BRYCE
Yes ma'am. I don't know about
Chicago, but speeding is speeding
here.

He pulls out his pad and begins writing a ticket.

AVERY
You're writing me a ticket?

BRYCE
Yes ma'am.

AVERY

Look, I'm a guest coming to your town. I'm not here to cause any trouble. You might even get a little positive recognition from this story. Could you please just let it slide...please?

BRYCE

(still writing)

No ma'am. The law's the law.

AVERY

Would you please stop calling me "Ma'am"!

Bryce pulls the ticket off the pad and hands it to Avery.

BRYCE

No ma'am. I believe in being respectful.

AVERY

And giving me a ticket is being respectful?

BRYCE

I'm sorry ma'am. Just doing my job. If you feel you were ticketed unfairly you can take it up with the County Judge in town.

Avery is seething now.

AVERY

The County Judge?

BRYCE

Yes ma'am. He's a very fair man. I'm sure he will be more than willing to give you the opportunity to plead your case.

He tips his hat again.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

Have a good day, Ma'am.

He walks back to his car as Avery closes her window.

AVERY

(mockingly)

"Have a good day, Ma'am". Ugh!

She sticks her tongue out in disgust.

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Bryce watches as the Toyota pulls away. He smiles good-naturedly.

BRYCE
See you in town, Miss Chicago.

EXT. HIGHWAY - SAME DAY - AWHILE LATER

We see the blue Toyota back on the highway, passing scenery. Ahead we see...

ANOTHER ROAD SIGN that reads: "ROMANCE". Above the name is a smaller sign with an ARROW pointing RIGHT toward another road. The Toyota slows as Avery reads the sign.

She looks toward the smaller, but still paved road and then back to the main highway.

AVERY
(speaking to herself)
Well, that's odd.

She looks back and forth a couple times and then back to the sign. She shrugs and turns the Toyota onto the smaller road.

GPS VOICE
(VO)

"Make a legal U-turn. Make a legal U-turn".

AVERY
Oh shut up. Can't you read the sign?

EXT. SAME ROAD - DAY

We follow the Toyota on the roadway. Suddenly the pavement ends and we are now on a dirt road. The Toyota again comes to a stop. Avery pulls out her phone and attempts to bring up her GPS.

AVERY
(speaking to herself)
Great. No signal.

And then directed to the GPS in the Toyota.

 AVERY (CONT'D)
What about you, smarty pants?
You're awfully quiet. A big help
you are.

BACK TO - EXT. DIRT ROAD

The Toyota continues on as the road becomes more bumpy and more remote. Suddenly a tire slips in the mud and the vehicle slides to a stop, stuck in a ditch. The wheels spin as Avery tries desperately to free the vehicle.

INT. - TOYOTA

Avery is at her wits end. She attempts putting the vehicle in 4 wheel drive, which seems to work for a moment, only to have the vehicle slide further into the ditch.

 AVERY
 (speaking to herself)
Now what?

She sighs and looks toward her phone on the console. She knows it's useless, but picks it up anyway. She brightens.

 AVERY (CONT'D)
Oh my gosh! One bar. I've got
service.

She dials "911" and we listen in on the speaker.

 911 OPERATOR (O.C.)
911. What is your emergency?

 AVERY
Yes! I was on my way into town and
my vehicle got stuck in a ditch.

 911 OPERATOR (O.C.)
What is your location, Ma'am?

 AVERY
Uh, I don't really know. I was on
the highway into town and then
there was an arrow to turn right a
few miles back and now I'm on this
dirt road...

911 OPERATOR (O.C.)
Ma'am there are no dirt roads on
the way into Romance.

AVERY
But the sign had an arrow...

911 OPERATOR
Wait, are you talking about a sign
about ten miles outside town on
Highway Fifty One?

AVERY
Yes. Yes, that's it.

911 OPERATOR (O.C.)
(chuckling)
Alright ma'am, I think I know where
you are. I'll send the tow truck
to assist you.

AVERY
I'm not sure this is funny, but I
would appreciate any help you can
send.

911 OPERATOR (O.C.)
Sit tight ma'am, someone should be
there within a half hour or so.

Avery rolls her eyes and sighs - this is her fate.

AVERY
Ok, well it's not like I'm going
anywhere.

She hangs up the phone. She paces back and forth beside the
vehicle. Looks at her watch. Repeats.

EXT. TOYOTA - ABOUT A HALF HOUR LATER

The same Sheriff's vehicle pulls up to the scene. Bryce
exits the vehicle and can't hide a smile.

AVERY
What are you doing here? They were
supposed to send a tow truck.

BRYCE

Yeah, I know. But Bo Burroughs has the only truck in town and he was tied up over at the Pelton farm trying to get a cow out of the creek.

Avery looks at him in disbelief - what? She holds up her hand.

AVERY

Please, spare me the details.

BRYCE

Looks like you've got a little trouble there.

AVERY

It would appear so.

Just the sight of him aggravates her.

BRYCE

What are you doing up here? I thought you were coming straight into town.

AVERY

I was! I was on the highway and then there was that sign with an arrow pointing to take this road.

BRYCE

Sign?

AVERY

Yes, it was right on the highway, it said "Romance" and the arrow pointed down this road.

Bryce considers this for a moment and suddenly it dawns on him and he begins to chuckle.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Why is this so funny to everyone?

BRYCE

Sorry, I think I know what happened. You took the wrong road.

AVERY

Obviously. Are you going to help me get my vehicle out or not?

BRYCE
 Yes ma'am, let me get my tow chain
 out of the back.

He turns and proceeds to the back of the vehicle.

Avery looks at the Toyota with disdain.

AVERY
 (to the vehicle)
 And you and your four wheel drive.
 Thanks for nothing.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The Toyota is out of the ditch and Bryce is loosening the tow chain on the front bumper. He turns to Avery who is watching.

BRYCE
 Ok, all set. Maybe you'd better
 follow me back into town to make
 sure you make it this time.

AVERY
 (rolling her eyes)
 Fine. Whatever.

BRYCE
 There's a place to turn around just
 up the way a little bit. Just
 follow me.

They both get into their respective vehicles. The sheriff's cruiser pulls away with the Toyota following.

EXT. SAME ROAD - BACK TO THE HIGHWAY INTERSECTION - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Bryce slows his vehicle and gets out. He motions for Avery to wait. He walks to the sign with the right-pointing arrow. He pivots the sign back into it's original position with the arrow pointing straight ahead. He looks back to Avery smiles and shrugs.

AVERY
 (calling out her vehicle
 window)
 You knew about that?

BRYCE
 Uh...yeah, happens quite a bit.

AVERY
And no one fixes it permanently?

 BRYCE
No need really, everyone around
here knows the way into town.

 AVERY
Right.

She's more perturbed than ever.

 BRYCE
Alright, I have another stop to
make. Can you make it on into town
okay? Just follow the highway.
Don't get off it. About ten
minutes and you're there.

 AVERY
And there are no more "fake" signs
on the way?

 BRYCE
No ma'am. Clear sailing all the
way to town.

Avery considers him for a moment but doesn't return his
smile.

 AVERY
Fine.

Avery begins to pull away.

Avery grits her teeth and grips the steering wheel and drives
off with Bryce waving behind her.

 BRYCE
 (callling after her)
Watch your speed, Miss Chicago.

As the Toyota drives away we overhear..

 GPS VOICE (O.C.)
"Proceed on current route".

 AVERY (O.C.)
Oh shut up.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

The Toyota makes its way through town. CLOSE ON Avery peering back and forth. She's looking for something.

AVERY

Is there seriously not a hotel in this town? No wonder they left me on my own to find a place.

The Toyota continues on and finally pulls into a quick-stop type gas station. Avery exits the vehicle, walks inside and approaches the CLERK, a kindly, rotund lady, 60s, at the desk.

CLERK

Can I help you?

AVERY

Yes, I'm just getting into town. Is there a hotel nearby?

CLERK

Hotel? No. A small town like Romance doesn't have much need for a big hotel.

AVERY

Well, where do visitors stay?

CLERK

Well, Thelma Wilson runs a boarding house down the street.

AVERY

A boarding house?

CLERK

Yeah, or I guess folks nowadays call it a bed and breakfast.

AVERY

Oh yes - great. A bed and breakfast. Where can I find it.

CLERK

Turn right out of the lot here and keep going straight - about four blocks down. Big white house on the right. Can't miss it. Got a sign out front that says "Miss Thelma's".

AVERY

Thank you, thank you so much.

She turns to leave.

CLERK

Just made a batch of fried Oreos,
everybody's favorite. You hungry?

Avery is a little perplexed, trying to picture what a fried Oreo might be.

AVERY

Uh....no. I'll pass...but thanks.

She turns again with a little wave, exits the store and returns to the Toyota.

BACK TO - EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

The Toyota slows as we see a large older white house with the predicted sign out front "MISS THELMA'S". The vehicle pulls in the drive. Avery exits and walks up the steps, admiring the stately home. She knocks on the door. A pleasant woman, 60s, answers the door, this is MISS THELMA.

THELMA

Hello there. Can I help you?

AVERY

Yes, I just got into town and I was hoping to rent a room for a few days.

THELMA

Well of course dear, come on in.

She smiles warmly at Avery as they enter the spacious entryway of the home.

AVERY

You have a beautiful place here.

THELMA

Well thank you. It belonged to my great grandfather. Passed down in the family. It was way too big for just me and my kitties.

She motions to TWO CATS laid out in the sun filtering through the window.

THELMA (CONT'D)

So I decided a few years back to open up a place for folks to stay while they were in town. What brings you to Romance?

AVERY

I'm a reporter. From Chicago.

THELMA

Chicago? Big city. Long way from here.

AVERY

Yes ma'am. I just flew in today and made the drive up. I'm here to do a story on the town.

THELMA

A story? How exciting. Let me guess. About the post office?

AVERY

Why yes, how did you know?

THELMA

(chuckling)

Well hon, there's not much else to write about here and our post office is about our only claim to fame.

AVERY

Well, from what I've read, it is pretty special. I even have a friend with a Valentine's card that was sent from here...all the way to Chicago. I'm here to write a Valentine editorial for my newspaper. The Chicago Tribune...maybe you've heard of it?

THELMA

(chuckling good naturedly)

Yes hon, I know about the Chicago Tribune. This is a small town but we aren't completely isolated you know. We have the internet and television just like everybody else.

AVERY

Oh, of course you do. I didn't mean to sound condescending...

THELMA

I know you didn't hon. Now how about I show you a room and see what you think?

AVERY

Oh yes, yes, I'd like that. Thank you.

Thelma leads the way up a wide staircase, and then opens the door to a guest room. From Avery's POV we see a lovely room with feminine appointments, light and airy.

THELMA

I call this the "Lady Claire" room. It belonged to my grandmother when she was a girl.

AVERY

It's beautiful.

THELMA

Do you think it will do for your stay with us?

AVERY

Oh yes. It's more than I could have hoped for. I'll take it.

THELMA

And how long do you plan to stay with us?

AVERY

No more than a few days. That should give me time to have the story I'm after.

THELMA

Alright then, a few days would be fine.

She pauses.

THELMA (CONT'D)

You haven't asked about the price...that's most people's first question.

AVERY

Oh, no worries, I have my company card. They pay my expenses.

THELMA

Well, I'm sure their accountant will be pleased. I don't believe in overcharging folks - even city folks from Chicago.

She smiles good-naturedly and pats Avery on the arm. Avery nods and returns her smile.

AVERY

Thank you Miss Thelma, I'm going to love staying here.

THELMA

I'll send Tom - he's my handyman, and occasional bell boy - around to help with your bags.

AVERY

Oh, thank you. They're in the blue Toyota out front - it's unlocked.

Thelma starts to exit the room but then calls back.

THELMA

Oh and breakfast is served at seven thirty. Every morning. On the dot. Be sure to come hungry. I'm making my special cinnamon blueberry muffins in the morning.

AVERY

That sounds wonderful. I'll be there.

Thelma begins to leave again but Avery stops her.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Oh wait, could you tell me where the County Judge's office is?

THELMA

The Judge? Is there trouble of some sort?

AVERY

Well, kind of. I was apparently driving a little over the speed limit coming into town and I got pulled over. The Sheriff wrote me a ticket and I need to take care of it.

THELMA

Bryce wrote you a ticket?

AVERY

Bryce?

THELMA

Yes, the sheriff. Well shame on him. That's no way to treat a visitor to town.

AVERY

Well, I tried to tell him that, but he was not going to budge on that ticket. So I'd like to at least go over and make my objection to the County Judge...he said that was an option.

Thelma chuckles knowingly.

THELMA

He told you to go see the County Judge?

AVERY

Yes. So that's what I plan to do. I don't really want a speeding ticket on my record.

THELMA

Well, yes, then you need to go plead your case. I'm sure he will be fair with you. He's the best county judge we've had in years.

AVERY

Well, that's good to know. I hope he's fair with a stranger from out of town, as well as more welcoming than that Sheriff character.

THELMA

Well the Courthouse is back up the street. You actually passed it to get here. Little brick building on the corner. There's a sign out front. You can't miss it.

AVERY

Ok, thanks so much. I'll let you know how it turns out.

EXT. TOWN OF ROMANCE - MAIN STREET - DAY - A LITTLE LATER

The Toyota makes its way slowly down Main Street. Avery looks from side to side - searching.

Suddenly she spies something. From Avery's POV we see a small building with a sign that reads COUNTY COURTHOUSE. The vehicle pulls into a parking space in front of the building. Avery gets out and looks around. And then enters the front door of the building.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

A RECEPTIONIST, a pleasant lady, 50s, sits at a desk speaking on the phone. When Avery walks in, she ends the call and addresses her.

RECEPTIONIST

Good afternoon, can I help you?

AVERY

Yes, I'm here to speak with the County Judge if that's possible.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes ma'am. Do you have an appointment?

AVERY

Uh....no. It's concerning an incident that just happened on my way into town.

RECEPTIONIST

I see. Well yes, he should be available shortly, if you don't mind waiting for a few minutes.

AVERY

Not at all.

RECEPTIONIST

Fine. Just have a seat.

The Receptionist leaves her desk and disappears through a doorway closing the door behind her.

Avery settles into a seat and takes her phone from her purse and begins browsing. The door opens and in walks the Sheriff - Bryce.

BRYCE

Well, good afternoon again, Ms.....

EVERY

Adams. You have a short memory,
Sheriff.

BRYCE

I've been accused of worse. I see
you made it a priority to come see
the judge about your traffic
violation.

EVERY

Yes I did. Is that a problem?

BRYCE

Oh no. No ma'am. I'm sure he'll
be interested in all the reasons
why you were speeding to get here
before Valentine's Day.

EVERY

I wasn't trying to get here for
Valentine's Day. I was coming to
town to do an editorial on what
makes this town so famous. I
believe I told you that earlier.

BRYCE

Oh right. Right. An editorial.
Well, you might mention that to the
judge too. I'm sure he will be
properly impressed.

He smiles at her, which irks her even more.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

Well, I've got to get back to work.
Best of luck, Ms....Adams.

Bryce exits through a door leading to another part of the
building while Avery seethes.

A PHONE RINGS at the reception desk. And the Receptionist re-
enters to answer it.

RECEPTIONIST

(speaking into the phone)
Yes sir? Alright. There's someone
here to see you...yes sir... yes
sir. I'll send her in.

She hangs up the phone and speaks to Avery.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

The Judge will see you now.
Through this door, second office on
the right.

Avery stands.

AVERY

Thank you so much.

She pats her clothes and peeking in a mirror on the wall, quickly checks her hair and face. The receptionist smiles and nods. Avery disappears through the door and walks a short distance down the hallway to the second door as instructed. She KNOCKS.

A MALE VOICE (O.C.)

Yes, come in.

Avery opens the door and walks through. From her POV, we see the judge seated at a desk outfitted with a small sign that reads "County Judge". His chair is turned toward a window he peers out. He turns as she enters. To her amazement, it is...Bryce.

AVERY

You've got to be kidding me.

Bryce chuckles at her predicament.

BRYCE

I wouldn't kid you Ms. Adams. I am not only the Sheriff, but the County Judge as well. Small town. We all multi-task.

Avery is speechless....then...

AVERY

Where have I landed? Mayberry?

BRYCE

Would that be so bad? Pretty idyllic small town, if memory serves.

AVERY

Whatever. So let me get this straight. You issue a ticket and if someone wants to have their objections heard, they have to come to you to do so?

BRYCE

Yeah, pretty much. That doesn't mean I can't be fair. Object away.

AVERY

I intend to. As I said, I am driving a rental vehicle and I was on a strange road that, as I remember, had no speed limit signs. I was simply enjoying the views and next thing I know, your blue lights were flashing in my rearview mirror.

BRYCE

I see. I agree, it's a scenic drive coming up this way. However, it is much easier to take in the view at a reasonable speed, Ms. Adams.

AVERY

And that's another thing. You never even told me what the speed limit was or how fast I was driving. Isn't that a law or something? Don't you have to tell the "criminal" exactly what it is they are being accused of?

BRYCE

Are you a lawyer as well as a reporter, Ms. Adams?

AVERY

No. I am not a lawyer. But I do believe in the concept of innocent until proven guilty.

Bryce is trying not to smile at her attempts to clear herself.

BRYCE

Actually, Ms. Adams, you are correct. I failed to give you all the information you were entitled to have when being issued a speeding violation. And that is the law.

AVERY

Exactly. So are you going to waive the speeding ticket?

Bryce considers her for a moment.

BRYCE

I can waive the ticket, Ms. Adams, but that doesn't mean you were not breaking the law and that is still an issue. Public safety was put at risk.

AVERY

Seriously? I was in the middle of nowhere. There was no "public" for miles.

A beat.

BRYCE

So is that the entirety of your case before the court, Ms. Adams?

AVERY

Yes it is. And I think it's a very good case - being as you can produce no evidence, since you did not document it.

BRYCE

Very well. The court takes that under advisement and issues the following verdict: The speeding ticket is hereby voided. You owe no fine to the County.

Avery sits up in her seat and smiles, victorious.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

However....

Avery's smile fades somewhat - what is he up to?

BRYCE (CONT'D)

The court does still find that a violation was committed and hereby sentences you to one week of community service.

AVERY

What? What does that mean? What type of community service?

BRYCE

Oh, I don't know...why don't we say something like writing a compelling editorial on the town's world famous post office.

Avery narrows her eyes at him, but can't help but give up a wary smile.

EVERY

Very clever, "Your Honor".

BRYCE

So we have an agreement then? You plead guilty to a traffic violation, and I sentence you to one week in the service of our town of Romance.

EVERY

Very well. We have an agreement. But I don't want that violation on my driving record.

BRYCE

That will be determined at the end of your term of community service, Ms. Adams. Complimentary article will equal expulsion of the violation. Deal?

Avery considers him for a moment

EVERY

Deal.

Avery stands to leave.

BRYCE

Thank you for your prompt appearance, Ms. Adams.

EVERY

I just wanted my day in court, Sheriff...Your Honor....

BRYCE

It's Bryce. Bryce Connor.

EVERY

Well, whatever, it's used up an hour of my time.

I was hoping to get to the post office before they closed today.

BRYCE
That shouldn't be a problem. It's just around the corner.

He glances at his watch.

BRYCE (CONT'D)
I'd say you have plenty of time to get there.

AVERY
Good. I'll be going then.

An uncomfortable beat.

Avery then opens the door and exits. Bryce chuckles.

BRYCE
(to himself)
See you again soon, Miss Chicago.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY- CONTINUOUS

Avery exits the Courthouse and walks to the street at the corner of the building. There we see a sign "POST OFFICE" pointing down the side street. It is obvious that the Post Office is actually a part of the same building she just exited with its entrance on the opposite side of the building. Avery walks the few steps to the door and stops to read the metal sign posted outside "U. S. POST OFFICE, ROMANCE, ARKANSAS". She pauses for a moment then enters through the glass doorway. There is someone inside purchasing stamps at an automated machine, there is no one behind the counter.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

AVERY
(to the postal customer)
Is anyone here? Are they still open?

CUSTOMER
Oh yes, someone's here in the back. Just ring the bell there on the counter.

Avery spies the DESKTOP BELL and gives it a sharp "DING DING".

A beat as she waits.

The door to the back room opens and in walks.....Bryce.

Avery is dumbfounded.

EVERY

You have seriously GOT to be kidding me.

BRYCE

Kidding you? About what?

EVERY

Tell me you are not the local postmaster in addition to all your other "duties".

She makes "air quotes" as she says the "duties".

BRYCE

Okay, I'll tell you. I'm not the postmaster.

A beat

EVERY

Well, then who is the postmaster?

BRYCE

That would be my Aunt Sue.

EVERY

Your Aunt Sue?

BRYCE

Yes.

EVERY

Well, is she here?

BRYCE

No, she's at a town council meeting. I'm just watching the counter for her over here while she's gone.

EVERY

She's also on the town council?

BRYCE

Yes, she's the Mayor.

Avery rolls her eyes.

AVERY
 (dryly)
Of course she is.

 BRYCE
And the justice of the peace.

 AVERY
 (even more dryly)
Really.

 BRYCE
Yes. It comes in handy actually.
Not only do people send letters to
be posted, we've had several that
came to be married here.

 AVERY
You're kidding. Why would they come
all the way here to be married?

 BRYCE
What better place to say "I do"
than in a place called Romance?

Avery is thoughtful for a moment. It's like a light comes on
for her suddenly.

 AVERY
Right. What better place?
Interesting.

 BRYCE
Well, you need to talk to Aunt Sue,
she can tell you much more about it
than I can. I don't get too
involved in the "romantic" aspect
of the town. I just try to stick
to maintaining law and order.

 AVERY
 (a little sarcastically)
Of course you do. I've seen that
first hand.

A beat

 AVERY (CONT'D)
Well, when will your Aunt be back?

 BRYCE
Not until tomorrow. Those meetings
tend to run a little long and it's
almost five o'clock now.

AVERY
Oh right. Well, so much for my
first day in town. Maybe I can get
an early start tomorrow.

 BRYCE
I'm sure you can.

Avery turns to leave, then turns back.

 AVERY
Is there a good restaurant around?
I just realized that I haven't
eaten since I left Chicago this
morning.

 BRYCE
Sure is - Evelyn's Diner. It's the
best in town. Well, actually it's
the only place in town...but the
food is good. It's just down the
way a little.

 AVERY
I'm sure I can find it.

 BRYCE
It'll be the place with the lot
full of cars.

 AVERY
Right.

A beat as they consider each other again.

Avery turns to leave.

 BRYCE
Ms. Adams...I've got the cruiser
right outside. I'd be happy to give
you a ride to the diner...you know,
so you don't get lost on the way.

 AVERY
I doubt I could get lost on Main
Street here...Sheriff. Unless of
course there are more deceptive
street signs.

 BRYCE
Please, it's Bryce. And I didn't
mean that...I just...well, would
you care to join me for dinner
there?

I haven't eaten since this morning either and...well...it just doesn't seem hospitable to let a visitor dine alone...not knowing anyone and all.

He's rambling a bit.

EVERY

You're inviting me to dinner?

BRYCE

Well, yeah, I guess I am. As a representative of the friendly town of Romance.

EVERY

Would that be the same friendly town representative that issues traffic tickets to its visitors?

BRYCE

It would.

Avery considers this for a moment. She narrows her eyes at him.

EVERY

Alright then Sheriff, I accept your offer - as a peace offering on your part.

BRYCE

Thank you Ms. Adams, and again, my name is Bryce.

EVERY

Very well "Bryce", and mine is Avery.

He opens the door for her to exit the building.

BRYCE

After you Ms. Adams...Avery

She tries not to smile at him as they exit the building.

EXT. EVELYN'S DINER - DAY - QUICK SHOT

INT. EVELYN'S DINER - EARLY EVENING

Bryce and Avery walk through the door. They are noticed immediately by a pleasant looking MIDDLE AGE WOMAN in an apron. This is EVELYN the owner and waitress.

EVELYN

Ya'll take a seat anywhere you can find.

BRYCE

Ok Evelyn. Thank you.

They make their way to a corner booth through tables crowded with LOCALS who all make a point to notice the two together and whisper behind their backs. Who is that with Bryce?

BRYCE (CONT'D)

(to Avery)

Is this ok?

He motions to a corner booth.

AVERY

Sure, looks fine.

They seat themselves and the waitress/Evelyn approaches.

EVELYN

I haven't seen you in awhile, Bryce. How've you been, hon?

BRYCE

I'm fine, Miss Evelyn. Just been busy.

AVERY

(under her breath)

To say the least.

The waitress (Evelyn) ignores her and continues with Bryce.

EVELYN

How's your Momma?

BRYCE

She's doing fine. She and Dad are enjoying their RV retirement dream. I never know where they'll be next.

Evelyn smiles warmly at him.

EVELYN

Well, tell her I asked about her.
Now...What are ya'll having this
evening?

BRYCE

I think I'll have the special, the
fried chicken dinner.

EVELYN

Well you can't go wrong with that.

And then looking to Avery for the first time.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

And you, miss?

AVERY

Oh, I don't really want anything
heavy, I'll just have a green salad
and a glass of your house
Chardonnay.

Evelyn raises an eyebrow and looks questioningly at Bryce. A
strained silence as Avery looks to Bryce.

AVERY (CONT'D)

What?

BRYCE

Uh....this is a dry county.

AVERY

A what?

BRYCE

A dry county. We don't sell or
serve alcohol.

AVERY

Are you serious?

BRYCE

I'm afraid so. So....a Gingerale?

AVERY

Umm...sure.

EVELYN

Alright then, so two fried chicken
specials and....a Gingerale.

She raises her eyebrows at Avery.

AVERY
 (defeated)
Sounds great.

 EVELYN
 (muttering as she walks
 away)
Ain't no salad gonna fill nobody up
like my good fried chicken.

INT. DINER - LATER

Avery and Bryce have finished their meal.

 BRYCE
So, what did you think about the
fried chicken special?

 AVERY
Honestly? It was the best food
I've ever tasted. And the gingerale
- excellent bouquet - obviously
vintage. French I think.

They smile at each other.

 AVERY (CONT'D)
So, tell me what you know about the
history of this town.

 BRYCE
How far back you want to go?

 AVERY
Well, let's start with how it got
its name.

 BRYCE
Which one?

He smiles, he's teasing her a little.

 AVERY
Which one? Well, Romance. Did it
have another name?

 BRYCE
Yeah, folks called it
Kentuckyville.

 AVERY
Kentuckyville? Seriously? And why
would anyone want to call it that?

This isn't Kentucky. And why did they want to change it?

BRYCE

Didn't want to. Had to. Back in the 1800s settlers from Kentucky named it for their old home. A little over a hundred years ago the post service discovered that there were actually two towns in the State named Kentuckyville. One of them had to go...to avoid confusion.

AVERY

I see. Amazing that two towns had chosen such an unusual name. So where did the name Romance come in?

BRYCE

Well, that's the better story. Back in the early 1900s during World War One they were taking suggestions from the town folk for a new name for the community. There was a young teacher at the school whose fiancée was away at war. The story is that he used to take her up on the ridge looking out over the river for picnics and such. She said she thought it was the most romantic place she had ever seen...that view. Turns out her fiancée never made it back. And she never married. She suggested the name in memory of her lost love and the rest of the town agreed. So for more than a hundred years now, the town has been called "Romance".

AVERY

I see. Interesting. Anything else?

BRYCE

Those are the facts, but then there's the legend.

Avery leans in. She's listening.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

There's a legend that he had hidden his mother's ring that he planned to give to her when he came home from the War and proposed. He wrote her letters about it. But the ring was never found. The legend says that whoever finds the ring will find their one true love.

AVERY

Wow. That's interesting. You seem to know quite a bit about this legend. I'm particularly intrigued about the lost ring. I'm feeling my story already starting to center around that maybe.

BRYCE

Yeah, mainly what I've heard from living here my entire life, but you'll have to ask my Aunt Sue about it. She's the local expert. The teacher was her great aunt. A sister to her grandmother. She still has some of Miss Emma's things I think. Handed down through the family over the years.

Avery is enamored with this.

AVERY

Wow again. Do you think she would mind telling me some more of the story?

BRYCE

Mind? You may be sorry you ever asked. She's been obsessed with that legend for as long as I can remember.

AVERY

I'd love to hear her story. I'd also like to take a look at that view if you can tell me how to find it.

BRYCE

I can do better than that. I can take you there.

Avery glances down, she's not sure what he has in mind. Bryce gets the gesture.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

I mean, just a ride up there. It's kind of remote - easier to take you than to tell you how to get there.

Avery ponders this for a moment.

AVERY

Sure. That would be great. I'd appreciate it.

BRYCE

Alright, you're on. How about Saturday afternoon?

AVERY

Saturday. Ok, great. That will give me a little time to talk with your Aunt and get a little more of the story. I'll go by tomorrow and get started.

BRYCE

She'll like that. I think she's dreamed of that story her whole life. She can explain it like no one else.

AVERY

Well, sounds like she's a romantic at heart.

Bryce can't help but smile at her. He lifts his glass of gingerale for a toast.

BRYCE

To romance then.

Avery nods and follows suit as their glasses clink.

AVERY

To romance.

A beat as they realize what was said.

BRYCE

(sheepishly)
I mean the town. The town of Romance.

AVERY
Yes, yes of course, that's what I
meant too. The town of Romance.

And they both down the remainder of their drinks, carefully avoiding eye contact and attempting to remain nonchalant.

EXT. DAY - OUTSIDE THE POST OFFICE

Avery exits the parked Toyota and approaches the door to the post office where a grouping of DANGLING RED HEARTS have been added to the window. After admiring them with a smile, Avery enters the building.

INT. DAY - POST OFFICE

SUE, 60s, a pleasant lady, is helping a customer with several packages to mail. She finishes up and then spies Avery.

SUE
Good morning. Can I help you?

AVERY
Yes, my name is Avery Adams and...

Sue interrupts.

SUE
So you're the new reporter in town?

AVERY
Word travels fast.

SUE
It's a small town. Strangers are a hot topic.

AVERY
Yeah, I get that.

SUE
How was your dinner last night with Bryce?

AVERY
Ummmm...it was....fine.

A beat as Avery considers what else this woman may know about her. Her eyes are then drawn to a large bin overflowing with envelopes. Sue follows her gaze.

SUE
That's just today's mail.

AVERY
Are all those.....?

SUE
Yep. It'll be like that most days
right up until Valentine's Day.
Thousands of them. That's what you
came to write your article about
wasn't it?

AVERY
Well....um yes. It is.
But...actually I have another
question.

Sue looks at her quizzically.

SUE
Alright then, I hope I have a good
answer.

AVERY
Bryce tells me that you know quite
a bit about the town...and the
legend that goes with it.

SUE
Well yes, I guess I am the
authority on that. The woman that
named the town was actually my
grandmother's sister, my great
aunt, Emma.

AVERY
Yes, Bryce mentioned that. Is
there a time we could talk about
it, you know, the legend and why
people send their Valentine Cards
here from well...everywhere.

SUE
No time like the present. Not much
doing around here today.

She holds a finger up in a sign to wait.

SUE (CONT'D)
Hang on, I'll be right back

And she disappears into a back room. A few moments pass as Avery studies OLD PHOTOS displayed on the walls. Sue returns carrying a box that she sits down on the counter.

SUE (CONT'D)

Here you go. The town history all in a box.

AVERY

Seriously?

SUE

Yes, my Aunt Emma saved all her memories and when she passed, she left them to my grandmother.

Avery considers the box and then looks inside, among other mementos she pulls out an old photo-type album. She opens it.

The first photo is of a YOUNG MAN, 20s, in World War One military attire. His handsome face smiles in the photo.

AVERY

Who's this?

SUE

That's Patrick. Patrick Dugan. He was Aunt Emma's fiancée. The love of her life.

Avery turns the photo over we see script written in PATRICK'S handwriting "With Love, From my heart to yours".

SUE (CONT'D)

He never came home from the war.

AVERY

Really? How sad.

SUE

Yes, Aunt Emma never got over it. She never married.

Avery continues to turn pages filled with photos. She stops on a close up of the two of them. A beat as she considers it.

AVERY

They were a beautiful couple.

SUE

Yes, yes they were.

Avery continues on for a moment flipping through photos, when suddenly she stops on the image of an IRISH SETTER DOG.

AVERY
And who's this?

SUE
Oh, that was Patrick's dog, Cory.
She's the only one he may have
loved as much as he loved Emma.

A beat as they both consider the photo.

SUE (CONT'D)
When Patrick didn't return, Emma
took Cory in and kept her. Of
course that was long before my
time, but my grandmother used to
talk about it. Cory's grave is up
on the ridge above the river. Aunt
Emma planted daffodils there after
she died. They were Emma's
favorite. My mother said Patrick
used to bring her bouquets of them -
they're the first bloom of Spring,
you know. And so I guess she chose
to plant them for Cory too. Kind of
a tribute to her memory. They
still bloom every Spring after all
these years.

AVERY
She was beautiful too.

Avery runs her finger over the photo of the dog and then
continues through the album. She stops and looks to Sue.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Bryce said your Aunt Emma was the
one who suggested the name Romance.
He said you knew the story best.

As Sue nods in agreement and begins to speak we...

FADE TO:

EXT. DAY - 1915 - THE RIDGE ABOVE THE RIVER

The young man Patrick and Emma, dressed in period clothes a
Model T Ford vehicle in the background, walk up the hill to
the ridge. Patrick holds a picnic basket and Cory gaily
trots along ahead. And then, Patrick on one knee presenting a
bouquet of Daffodils to Emma. They laugh and kiss.

SUE

Well, that has to do with that ridge up above the river too. Emma used to go up there and sit and look out over the river. She and Patrick used to take a picnic lunch up there on Sundays...with Cory of course. She said it was the most romantic view she had ever seen. So several years later when the town was needing a new name, it was Emma that suggested "Romance". It was their place. Her best memories of their love.

Avery pulls a couple other items from the box. Then from underneath, she feels something else. A look of questioning comes over her face and she pulls it out. It is LEATHER DOG COLLAR, worn with age.

Avery looks questioningly to Sue.

SUE (CONT'D)

That was Cory's. Emma kept it after the dog passed. And of course it was with her things that my grandmother inherited. Just another memento that's been in that box for years.

Avery turns the collar over in her hands, it still has a tarnished tag attached.

Sue looks up at the clock which reads 5:00 p.m.

SUE (CONT'D)

Well, look at the time. Time to close this place up.

She considers the wistful look on Avery's face.

SUE (CONT'D)

I'll tell you what. Why don't you take that box with you - for this evening anyway. That way you can look over everything to your heart's content.

AVERY

Seriously? You wouldn't mind?

SUE

Not at all. It's just been sitting
all these years gathering dust.
Besides, I know where to find you.

She smiles warmly at Avery.

AVERY

Thank you so much. I won't damage
anything. I'll bring it all back
in good shape. I promise.

SUE

I know you will, dear.

A beat

SUE (CONT'D)

Oh wait! There's one more thing of
Aunt Emma's. I don't keep it in
that box though.

She places her hand to her neck and holds up the necklace she
wears - a delicate gold chain holding a sparkling sapphire.
This was hers. Another precious heirloom left to family. My
mother wore it until the day she passed. I've worn it every
day since.

Avery marvels at the piece.

AVERY

That's absolutely gorgeous.
Sapphire is my birthstone. I've
always loved it.

SUE

It's mine too! And Emma's.

AVERY

Well, what are the odds of that?
Then here's to September girls.

Avery smiles at Sue. Sue nods and smiles as they continue to
close the box and she shows Avery to the door. She watches
from inside as Avery places the box in the Toyota and turns
to wave goodbye. Sue reaches up again to touch the necklace.

SUE

(to herself)

This young lady is going to tell
your story to the world, Aunt Emma.
After all this time. I think you'd
like her.

INT. AVERY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Avery sorts through the letters, perusing each one. CLOSE on one that catches her eye. Avery begins to read the words aloud..

AVERY

(reading from the letter)

"I dream of the day I can return to your arms...

As we FADE into Patrick Dugan's Irish brogued voice...

PATRICK (V.O.)

And we can sit up on our ridge in our favorite place and plan our lives as the river passes below us. I dream of our family and our life together, my dearest Emma. And I dream of the day I will place my mother's wedding ring on the finger of my own beloved...until that day comes it is in safe keeping, kept near to my heart.

As we FADE back to the present.

AVERY

Wow. What must it feel like to have a love like that?

She sighs, replaces the letter and continues rummaging through the contents of the box. Again, she comes upon the collar, she turns it over in her hands and examines the tag attached. A perplexed look crosses her face as she examines it closer.

AVERY (CONT'D)

What? This isn't a dog tag...it's a....a locket!

She looks more closely at the tarnished piece. She tries rubbing it with no effect. She looks around and spies a wet cloth on the sink. She rises applies a little soap to it and rubs the locket again. Slowly we see the word "CHROI" revealed through the tarnish.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Chroi?

She pronounces it the way she sees it spelled, without knowing the meaning.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 Not "Cory" but "Chroi"? What does
 that mean?

She reaches for her phone. From Avery's POV she searches the word "Chroi"....and then she finds it. She reads aloud what her search has produced.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 Chroi: Irish noun meaning "Heart".
 What?? How do you say the word?

She enters more into the phone and it produces an AUDIBLE PRONUNCIATION.

PHONE RESPONSE
 Cor-ee.

She presses the sound again.

PHONE RESPONSE (CONT'D)
 Cor-ee

She attempts to pry the locket apart without success, then sits in silence as she turns it over and over again in her hand.

FADE TO:

INT. AVERY'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Avery lying in bed in the darkened room with only a bedside lamp for illumination. She still holds the collar with the locket attached in her hand, looking at it dreamily.

AVERY
 Cor-ee. My heart. Her name was
 pronounced Cor-ee.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY - THE NEXT DAY

Avery rushes through the door of the Courthouse. The same receptionist is sitting in attendance.

RECEPTIONIST
 Good morning ma'am.

She eyes Avery good-naturedly.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
 Not another ticket I hope.

She raises her eyebrows, but then smiles. She's joking.

EVERY

Very funny, but no. Is the Sheriff in?

RECEPTIONIST

No, he's out on patrol this morning. Can I help you with something.

EVERY

I don't know, maybe. I was going to ask him if there was a jeweler in town.

RECEPTIONIST

Well yes, there's a shop in the back of the hardware store. They may have a few items. Were you looking for something in particular?

She looks a little perplexed.

EVERY

No, I just have an item that needs....repair.

RECEPTIONIST

Well, you'll find Hampton Hardware just down the street.

EVERY

Okay. Thanks for your help.

She exits in the same rush. The receptionist looks after her, shrugs and returns to her work.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Avery makes her way down the street and stops in front of storefront. A window sign announces "HAMPTON HARDWARE". She enters the door which jangles with "ENTRY BELLS".

A MALE VOICE calls from the back of the store.

MR. HAMPTON (O.C.)

Good morning! Can I help you.

Avery tries to locate the misplaced voice.

EVERY

Um, yes. I'm looking for the jeweler.

MR. HAMPTON, 60s, dressed in overalls, finally pops up from below a shelf in the rear of the store. As he comes forward he drops a BOX and hundreds of SCREWS hit the floor.

MR. HAMPTON (CONT'D)
Well, I ain't no jeweler, but I have a repair shop in back. I fix watches and the like in my spare time.

He considers the mess he's just created.

MR. HAMPTON (CONT'D)
When I have any. What can I help you with?

Avery side-steps the screws scattered over the floor and pulls the collar and locket from her purse.

AVERY
I was wondering if you might have a tool that would open an old locket.

Mr. Hampton extends his hand and Avery hands over the collar as he examines it. He looks back to Avery.

MR. HAMPTON
You that new reporter in town?

AVERY
Uh, yes I am.

MR. HAMPTON
Yeah, I heard about you. Got a ticket coming into town, did ya?

AVERY
Yes, yes. That was definitely me.

She's no longer surprised that someone she's never met knows the details about her.

Hampton returns to studying the collar.

MR. HAMPTON
What's a locket doing on an old dog collar?

AVERY
Well, I'm not sure, that's why I'd like to open it if possible.

MR. HAMPTON
 (Scratching his head)
 Well yeah, I reckon I've got
 something back there. Not much
 different than opening the back of
 a watch I suppose.

INT. HARDWARE STORE - A DARKENED BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A LIGHT switches on as Mr. Hampton and Avery enter the room. Hammond switches on ANOTHER LIGHT on top the counter and then bends down rummaging through a drawer. Finally he holds up a small instrument.

MR. HAMPTON
 Yeah, here we go. This ought to do
 it.

Avery hands him the collar. He fingers around the edges of the locket and then attempts to insert the tiny instrument. After several failed tries, the locket opens slightly - enough that he can pry it the rest of the way.

ANGLE on Avery's face as she sees from her POV what is revealed. Her eyes widen in amazement - as do Hampton's.

AVERY
 (whispered)
 A ring?

MR. HAMPTON
 Appears so.

CLOSE IN now on the RING. A gold band accented with a small but beautifully cut diamond.

AVERY
 Oh my God! It's the ring!

MR. HAMPTON
 Why would anyone put a ring like
 that on a dog collar?

AVERY
 Mr. Hampton, have you heard the
 story about the missing wedding
 ring that belonged to Patrick Dugan
 but has never been found?

MR. HAMPTON
 Oh sure, everybody in town has
 heard that old rumor.

But no one every really believed it....until now maybe. You're not pulling my leg are you?

AVERY

It's part of the legend and it looks like it's true.

Avery continues to stare at the ring and whispers to herself.

AVERY (CONT'D)

....near to my heart. My Chroi.....of course, no one would have ever thought...

She is still staring in amazement. She reaches carefully for the ring and examines it more closely.

AVERY (CONT'D)

He kept the ring near to his "heart".

Mr. Hampton is a bit befuddled by Avery's fascination. We hear the ENTRY BELLS (OC) again.

MR. HAMPTON

Well, I've got another customer.

AVERY

Yes please, you go ahead and take care of your customers... and thank you so much for your help. You have no idea.

Mr. Hampton eyes her, still somewhat perplexed.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Oh! What do I owe you?

MR. HAMPTON

No charge, ma'am. Wasn't really anything to it. But glad you found what you were looking for...legend or not.

And he's gone to tend to his customer, leaving Avery still staring in awe at the ring.

OUTSIDE HAMPTON'S HARDWARE - DAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Avery bursts out of the hardware store, still looking down at the locket when she literally bumps directly into Bryce.

AVERY

Oh! I'm sorry I wasn't looking.

BRYCE

Obviously. What's so enthralling there?

AVERY

I just found out the most incredible information.

BRYCE

(chuckling)

Oh really? Care to let me in on the secret?

AVERY

I'm serious. It may be the clue I've been looking for...I found the lost ring.

Bryce now sobers considerably.

BRYCE

Seriously? Where?

AVERY

It's a long story. Do you have time for coffee maybe?

Bryce checks his watch.

BRYCE

Uh, sure. I don't have anywhere to be for an hour or so. Evelyn's?

AVERY

Where else?

She smiles at him as they head toward the diner.

INTERIOR - EVELYN'S DINER - DAY

Bryce and Avery sitting at a table, coffee cups steaming in front of them. Bryce is examining the ring and then picks up the locket and turns it about looking it over closely. Evelyn approaches.

EVELYN

I've still got breakfast on if you're hungry.

BRYCE
None for me, Evelyn but thank you.

Then turning to Avery.

BRYCE (CONT'D)
Anything for you, Miss?

AVERY
No, I'm fine with the coffee.

And then a catty afterthought.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Unless of course you serve Mimosas.

Evelyn considers her for a moment, and not to be outdone...

EVELYN
No fancy Mimosas, Miss. But maybe
I can get you a little more sugar
for your coffee? Seems like you
might could use a little
sweetenin'up.

Avery squints at her but then can't help but smile - Evelyn isn't really that bad.

AVERY
I'm fine. The coffee is very good
just the way you served it.

Evelyn turns and "hmmphs" her way back to the kitchen, also slightly amused by the encounter. She stops, turns and makes eye contact with Avery and gives her a wink and a nod.

EVELYN
(to herself)
You better believe it's fine the
way I serve it. Best coffee in
town.

She turns and heads again to the kitchen, finishing her though.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
Mimosas. The very idea. Hmmph.

Back to the table, Avery's eyes still on Evelyn.

BRYCE
Are you two done with your little
stand off?

Avery smiles. She and Evelyn have bonded.

 AVERY
 Yes, I think we are.

And then another thought crosses her mind.

 AVERY (CONT'D)
 I wonder what the special is
 tonight?

Bryce chuckles and shakes his head. He's now back to examining the locket on the collar.

 BRYCE
 I can't believe he put a valuable
 ring like this in a dog tag.

 AVERY
 It's not a dog tag. It's a locket.

 BRYCE
 Whatever, it was attached to a dog
 collar.

 AVERY
 For over a hundred years. Don't you
 find that amazing?

Bryce nods in agreement and turns the locket over again and runs his finger across the engraved name as he spells it out.

 BRYCE
 C-H-R-O-I. Chroi? Not Cory?

 AVERY
 That's just it. It's pronounced
 "Cor-ee". I think people just
 misunderstood when they called her
 "Cory".

 BRYCE
 So what is "Cor-ee"?

 AVERY
 That's the clue. It's Gaelic -
 Irish. It means "heart".

Bryce looks puzzled.

 BRYCE
 Heart?

EVERY

Yes! Don't you see? That's the answer to the puzzle. He kept the ring close to his "heart". His "Chroi".

BRYCE

Wow! That's pretty deep stuff. No wonder no one ever found the ring. Who would have thought....?

BRYCE (CONT'D)

How did you figure this out?

EVERY

Just luck I guess. I was sitting and going through all the mementos that your Aunt Sue had and I just happened to notice the tag....that it wasn't just a tag...it was something more.

Bryce smiles at her.

BRYCE

So this is where the legend ends. More than a hundred years of intrigue and you've been here two days and...mystery solved. Impressive. And, if the legend is correct, you are the holder of the ring and the ring will lead you to...

Avery's eyes become dreamy as she finished the thought.

EVERY (CONT'D)

(wistfully)

My one true love. Yeah, I don't know about that part, but maybe...

She snaps back to reality and brushes off his comment.

EVERY (CONT'D)

If you believe that kind of stuff.

BRYCE

So do you? Believe that kind of stuff?

Their eyes meet.

EVERY

I don't know....

She shakes off the spell and comes back to reality.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Um, look, I've got to get back to my room and work on this article. I found what I came for and now it's time to tell the story. At least I have a good angle now. See you Saturday?

BRYCE

Of course. It's a date.

Avery lowers her eyes.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

Oh...not a "date", just Saturday, I'll pick you up like we planned. We'll go up on the ridge and look around. That's all I meant.

A beat as Avery considers him.

AVERY

Sure. See you then.

Avery rises from the table, gives Bryce a smile and leaves the diner.

BRYCE

(mocking himself)

"It's a date". Connor, you're an idiot.

He places a few dollar bills on the table as he rises and then exits out the door.

STREET VIEW OF MISS THELMA'S BED & BREAKFAST - DAY - A COUPLE DAYS LATER

Bryce's Cruiser pulls up the street and stops in front. Avery waves from the porch. And comes down the steps as Bryce exits the vehicle.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

Ready to go?

AVERY

Yes! You're right on time and I'm so excited to get up there and see Miss Emma's "romantic view".

BRYCE
I'm happy I can be the one to show
it to you.

A beat as they look at each other.

BRYCE (CONT'D)
Uh, there's been a little change of
plans though.

He barely finishes speaking when the vehicle door opens and
out jumps a young boy, HARLEY (8).

HARLEY
Uncle Bryce, let's go!

Avery looks perplexed, but not displeased.

AVERY
Uncle Bryce? And who is this?

She smiles at Harley.

BRYCE
This is my nephew, Harley. He
wanted to come along for the
adventure.

Harley smiles a somewhat toothless grin at both of them.

HARLEY
You were right, Uncle Bryce. She
sure is pretty.

Bryce is taken aback and looks sheepishly at Avery, who can't
help but smile.

BRYCE
Well, I might have mentioned you to
him. And well, you are...you
know...pretty.

They are interrupted by a FEMALE VOICE from inside the
cruiser, as a hand waves out the window. We know the voice as
Sue, whom we now refer to as "AUNT SUE".

AUNT SUE (O.C.)
Yoo hoo!

The door opens again and out steps Aunt Sue.

She notes that Bryce and Avery are still lingering in their
gaze at each other.

AUNT SUE (CONT'D)

I hope you don't mind if Harley and I tag along...unless we would be intruding.

BRYCE

(to Avery)

Would you mind? Aunt Sue is babysitting Harley today. I thought it might be fun if we all made the trip.

AUNT SUE

(hopefully)

I brought a picnic lunch for us...

She holds up a wicker basket.

AVERY

Of course I wouldn't mind. I'd love your company. And who wouldn't like a picnic on a beautiful day like this?

AUNT SUE

Well, it's all settled then.

BRYCE

Alright everyone, pack in a buckle up.

The four of them load into the cruiser, the engine starts and the vehicle starts away down the street.

HIGHWAY OUT OF TOWN - DAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The cruiser heads down the highway, as it approaches a road we recognize from earlier, it slows. From inside the vehicle we hear:

BRYCE (O.C.)

Shall we turn here, Miss Chicago?

He's teasing Avery.

AVERY (O.C.)

Very funny, but no.

HARLEY (O.C.)

Uncle Bryce, that's a dead end road.

BRYCE
Miss Avery knows all about it,
Harley. She took a tour on her way
into town.

HARLEY (O.C.)
Were you lost, Miss Avery?

AVERY (O.C.)
No....no, I was just...exploring.

BRYCE (O.C.)
And your Uncle Bryce came to her
rescue.

HARLEY (O.C.)
Is that the day you gave her the
ticket?

Avery's reply is a mix of sarcasm and humor.

AVERY (O.C.)
Yes, Harley. That's when your
Uncle Bryce gave a pretty girl a
speeding ticket.

HARLEY (O.C.)
That was pretty dumb, Uncle Bryce.

AVERY (O.C.)
Harley, I knew you and I were going
to be friends.

And the cruiser continues on out of sight.

RIDGE OVERLOOKING THE RIVER - DAY

The cruiser pulls to a stop at a site marked "OVERLOOK". The
four get out of the vehicle. Avery takes in the scene:

A PANORAMIC VIEW OVERLOOKING THE RIVER VALLEY BELOW.

She's a little taken aback at the sight.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Whoa. I didn't know what to expect
but this is really beautiful. I see
why Emma fell in love with it.

AUNT SUE
Oh yes, and quite a few other young
lovers. It seems to cast quite the
spell on them - that view.

Avery looks to Bryce who is also taking in panorama.

 AVERY
 A spell...I like the sound of
 that...

She trails off as Bryce now looks to her.

 BRYCE
 Sounds like the beginning of a
 great article about "Romance" for
 Valentine's Day.

 AVERY
 Just what I was thinking.

They are interrupted by Harley whooping in the background.

 HARLEY
 Uncle Bryce! Come here and look at
 this.

Bryce, Avery and Aunt Sue follow the sound of his voice to...

A SMALL MOUND ABLAZE WITH YELLOW DAFFODILS - CONTINUOUS

 HARLEY (CONT'D)
 Look at all these flowers! What do
 you think they're doing growing way
 up here.

Avery is at once fascinated.

 AUNT SUE
 That's a grave, Harley. Be
 respectful of it.

 HARLEY
 Who's buried way up here?

 AVERY
 (gently to Harley)
 Your Aunt Sue told me the story.
 This grave belongs to a very
 special dog. Her name was Chroi.
 She belonged to a lady named Emma
 who was your Aunt Sue's great aunt.
 It was a very long time ago.

Harley takes all this in.

 HARLEY
 Why'd she plant all these flowers.

EVERY

Oh, I don't know. Maybe so one day
we could come admire them and
remember her story.

HARLEY

I guess that's pretty cool.

Harley's attention is quickly pulled away by a large
BUTTERFLY flitting by and he's off on another adventure, the
flowers completely forgotten, Aunt Sue in pursuit.

AUNT SUE

(her voice trailing
behind)

Harley, for heaven's sake, you're
wearing your Aunt Sue out...

As Aunt Sue and Harley disappear over the hill, Avery and
Bryce are left alone over the grave. Avery reaches down and
gently places her finger on one of the blooms.

EVERY

They really are beautiful. How do
they bloom in February?

BRYCE

Aunt Sue says they are the first
flowers that promise Spring.

Avery nods.

EVERY

Right. No wonder Patrick chose them
for Emma. Now they're here over
Chroi - in memory of all of them.

Her eyes mist over.

EVERY (CONT'D)

It really is a beautiful story,
isn't it?

She straightens up to find Bryce gazing directly into her
eyes. He's serious now.

BRYCE

Yes. Really...beautiful.

He slowly lowers his head to hers for a kiss, when they are
suddenly interrupted by..

HARLEY (O.C.)
 Uncle Bryce! Miss Avery! Come see
 what we found!

Harley is atop the ridge within sight, waving his arms. Bryce waves in acknowledgement.

AVERY
 What do you think he's found now?

BRYCE
 I'm pretty sure I know. Let's go
 take a look.

Bryce and Avery start up the hill toward Harley, as they reach the site... CLOSE ON AVERY.

AVERY
 Oh wow!

From Avery's POV we see a large flat rock, overlooking the river, covered with graffiti-like colorful painted hearts, flowers and names of lovers - "Jim loves Katie", "David-N-Peg", etc. who have come to etch their presence at the site.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 Amazing. So many names, so many
 lovers, so much...romance. This is
 really cool.

BRYCE
 Well cool, but illegal now. This is
 private property. The owners
 didn't want people defacing more of
 the natural scenery.

AVERY
 So then, I can't add my name?

She looks questioningly to him.

BRYCE
 Only if you want another citation.

He reaches in his pocket to pull out his ticket pad.

AVERY
 Very amusing. Do you take that
 with you everywhere you go?

BRYCE
 You never know when you might run
 across someone breaking the law.

He smiles at Avery as they return to admiring the painted rock. Harley is off again back down the hill with Aunt Sue at his heels. Avery and Bryce continue to admire the rock for a few moments until...

HARLEY (O.C.)
Uncle Bryce! Uncle Bryce! Look, I
caught the butterfly!

Harley and Aunt Sue have already made their way back down the hill toward the Daffodils as Bryce and Avery start toward them. As they approach, Harley holds cupped hands, then gently opens them to reveal the butterfly to Bryce.

HARLEY (CONT'D)
Isn't she a beauty?

AVERY
I want to see too.

She cups her hands under his to peek at the fluttering creature.

AVERY (CONT'D)
So pretty.

HARLEY
Can I keep it, Uncle Bryce?

BRYCE
I don't think so. Why don't you
free her so she can fly over these
beautiful flowers again?

Harley considers this.

HARLEY
Yeah, ok. I guess that's better.

He opens his hands and the butterfly departs immediately only to land on one of the Daffodils.

Harley smiles up at Avery and Bryce.

HARLEY (CONT'D)
You're right, Uncle Bryce. They're
prettier when they're free.

Aunt Sue, bent over now, still huffing and puffing.

AUNT SUE
Alright young man, Aunt Sue's had
all the running she's doing for one
day.

What say we get out that picnic lunch and lay it out over there under that tree?

HARLEY

Yes! I'm starving! Let's eat!

And Harley is off at full tilt again back to the waiting cruiser, with Aunt Sue trailing behind once again.

BRYCE

Ready for the picnic?

AVERY

Why yes, I believe I am.

BRYCE

Thanks for letting them tag along. This means a lot to Aunt Sue. You know she wasn't going to let us come up here without a picnic.

AVERY

Yeah...just like Patrick and Emma.

BRYCE.

Just like Patrick and Emma.

A beat.

AVERY

Thank you for making this day so special. I have to be honest with you, I was not at all taken with this assignment.

BRYCE

Really? I couldn't tell by your initial happy demeanor.

He's teasing her. She shrugs and rolls her eyes.

AVERY

Yeah, I know I was a pill at first. But now, I don't know...it's like something that was meant to be is falling into place somehow. I can't believe I was the one chosen to tell this story...their story, after all these years.

BRYCE

You're not starting to believe in all that "stuff" you didn't believe in before are you?

AVERY

I don't know. Maybe I am.

Aunt Sue is motioning for them to come eat.

AUNT SUE

Picnic's ready! Come on now before this boy eats it all.

Bryce offers his arm to Avery.

BRYCE

Shall we?

Avery smiles warmly at him and takes his arm.

AVERY

Lets.

CUT THROUGH IMAGES OF THE PICNIC, LAUGHTER, SELFIES, THE DRIVE HOME. DROPPING AVERY OFF AT MISS THELMA'S.

FADE OUT.

MAIN STREET. IN FRONT OF THE COURTHOUSE - DAY.

The Toyota approaches and pulls into the parking lot. Bryce exits the building and waves to Avery. She exits the vehicle.

AVERY

I just wanted to stop by before I left and thank you. This whole experience has been more than I could have ever hoped for.

Bryce smiles at her.

BRYCE

It's been my pleasure - I mean our pleasure - the town. We'll look forward to the article in the paper. I guess I'll have to subscribe to see it.

AVERY

One complimentary subscription is the least I can do for you.

A lingering beat - neither knows what comes next. They both speak at once.

 AVERY/BRYCE
I'll miss you.

 BRYCE
I mean I'll miss seeing you here in town.

 AVERY
I'll miss it too.

Bryce tries to lighten the mood.

 BRYCE
No telling what specials you'll be missing at Evelyn's.

Avery laughs.

 AVERY
I know right?

A beat.

 BRYCE
Seriously. Would you consider coming back sometime? To visit? Who knows, maybe we could dig up another legend or something.

 AVERY
Of course. I'd love it.

Another beat.

 AVERY (CONT'D)
Have you ever been to Chicago?

 BRYCE
Yeah, I used to be a big Sox fan. My Dad took me to a game when I graduated from high school.

 AVERY
A Sox fan! You happen to be looking at a girl who has season tickets.

 BRYCE
You're kidding.

AVERY

Nope. Perks of the job. Box seats.
First base line. Maybe you'd like
to come up for a game sometime?

Bryce melts a little.

BRYCE

First base line? How could a man
say no to that? I'd love to. Just
say when.

AVERY

I'll be in touch.

BRYCE

I'll count on it.

An awkward beat.

AVERY

Well, I have to be going. I don't
want to miss my flight.

BRYCE

Yeah. Hey, and no speeding to get
there.

He's joking.

AVERY

No speeding. Word of honor.

She raises her hand for the oath.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Speaking of which...what about that
ticket?

BRYCE

Ticket? What ticket?

He holds up his hands and shrugs. He's teasing again.

AVERY

Well, I did do the community
service as ordered.

Bryce smiles.

BRYCE

Giving you that ticket may have
been the best decision I ever made.

AVERY
If you hadn't I may have never
gotten the story that I did.

She lowers her eyes.

 AVERY (CONT'D)
And maybe we would have never met.

 BRYCE
Like I said, most valuable ticket
I've ever written.

A beat as they look at each other.

 BRYCE (CONT'D)
Safe travels, Avery.

 AVERY
Thanks.

A beat - they're both waiting for something.

Bryce reaches out first to hug her and places a kiss on her
cheek. She smiles warmly at him.

 AVERY (CONT'D)
Sox game. You're committed.

 BRYCE.
Yeah, I'm totally committed.

A lingering beat - they both know his meaning. Avery nods,
gives his hand one last squeeze and gets back in the Toyota,
starts the engine and drives away.

From Avery's POV through the REARVIEW MIRROR we see Bryce
waving a goodbye.

FADE OUT.

**A MONTAGE OF IMAGES - ONE YEAR PASSING. IMAGES FLOAT INTO
PLACE OF... AVERY'S ARTICLE POSTED PROMINENTLY IN THE
TRIBUNE. CUT THROUGH WITH IMAGES OF BRYCE VISITING HER IN
CHICAGO, AT A WHITE SOX GAME, AVERY AND BRYCE IN FRONT OF A
CHRISTMAS TREE, A KISS AT SUNSET ALONG THE LAKEFRONT, AMONG
OTHERS... A GROWING ROMANCE. FINALLY, IMAGES OF CO-WORKERS
SAYING GOODBYE TO AVERY AS SHE LEAVES THE TRIBUNE EN ROUTE
TO....**

THE RIDGE ABOVE THE RIVER - DAY

A beautiful cloudless day.

SUPER:

"ONE YEAR LATER - VALENTINE'S DAY"

We pan down to see a group of people gathering, greeting each other. Miss Thelma, Evelyn and Avery's friend, Julie among them. White folding chairs set out, flanked by flower arrangements. Nearby a white tent is set up. A Wedding.

INT. - BRIDE'S TENT - DAY

Aunt Sue is preparing THE BRIDE who sits with her back to the camera. She puts the finishing touches on her hair and then stands back.

AUNT SUE

Now! Turn around and let's see.

The bride turns. It is Avery.

AUNT SUE (CONT'D)

Just beautiful.

Avery beams with joy. She stands and looks into a full length mirror nearby, considering her reflection.

AVERY

I thought this day would never come.

AUNT SUE

But it did, didn't it?

Avery smiles.

AVERY

It's been hard having a long distance relationship over the past year.

AUNT SUE

I know dear, but maybe it helped you realize that being apart wasn't what you wanted. I know it isn't what Bryce wanted.

EVERY

It wasn't I wanted either. And surprisingly I have no regrets about leaving Chicago behind. Even turning down my dream job in D.C.

AUNT SUE

None at all?

EVERY

None at all. Turns out my dream job is here with Bryce...and all of you. Besides, it's the twenty first century. I can write stories from anywhere. And where better than a place called "Romance" - with the love of my life.

AUNT SUE

Your happy ending.

EVERY

Yes, and I only have your Aunt Emma to thank...and you of course.

Aunt Sue places her hand lovingly on Avery's cheek.

AUNT SUE

And we have you to thank. You are the end of her story...and also the beginning. I know she's here today, she and Patrick. I can feel it.

EVERY

I hope so.

A beat and then Aunt Sue brightens with a new thought.

AUNT SUE

Oh, we can't forget your bridal bouquet!

EVERY

What? You brought a bouquet?

AUNT SUE

Of course. Every bride has to carry a bouquet.

She disappears briefly behind a partition and returns with a bouquet of YELLOW DAFFODILS.

AVERY
Daffodils?

 AUNT SUE
Of course. What else would you
carry?

Avery smiles and reaches for the bouquet.

 AVERY
Yes. They are perfect...and
beautiful. You are so kind. You
really thought of everything.

A thought occurs to Avery.

 AVERY (CONT'D)
Aunt Sue, where did you get these?

Aunt Sue smiles warmly.

 AUNT SUE
Let's just say they are a gift from
Emma and Patrick...and Chroi of
course.

Avery looks down at the bright yellow bouquet as we..

FLASHBACK:

A QUICK SHOT of the Daffodils blooming on Chroi's grave and
Emma tending them.

BACK TO THE PRESENT.

Avery's eyes are misty when she looks back to Aunt Sue.

 AVERY
 (almost whispered)
I don't know how to thank you.

Aunt Sue smiles. A voice interrupts.

 VOICE
 (OC)
Five minutes!

The spell is broken.

 AUNT SUE
Oh my! It's almost time. Is
everything ready? Did we forget
anything?

EVERY

Wait! What's that old saying?
Something old, something new...I'm
wearing my grandmother's wedding
dress, that's the old... and new
shoes - so that's covered. What's
the rest of it?

Aunt Sue is thoughtful.

AUNT SUE

Something borrowed and something
blue.

Avery looks concerned.

EVERY

Really? I forgot that part.

She frets.

EVERY (CONT'D)

I'm not going to have good luck
without the rest of it!

Aunt Sue smiles. She reaches around her neck and removes the
sapphire necklace.

AUNT SUE

You will have all the luck you ever
need. I want you to wear this
today. Something
borrowed...something blue.

Avery tears up momentarily.

EVERY

Oh, Aunt Sue. I can't take your
necklace.

AUNT SUE

Oh no, honey, you're only borrowing
it. Otherwise it wouldn't fit the
requirement. You have to give it
back.

Avery laughs as they hug.

EVERY

Of course! Of course! I am so
honored to wear it for my wedding.

She turns and lifts her hair as Aunt Sue slips the necklace
into place.

EXT. WEDDING SITE - DAY

A single VIOLIN plays. The PASTOR, 50s, a kind looking fellow, takes his place at the front of the group. Everyone begins taking their seats. Bryce approaches the Pastor and shakes his hand. The music stops abruptly for a lingering beat and then takes up the strains of THE WEDDING MARCH. Everyone turns as the bride, Avery makes her appearance and starts slowly down to where Bryce and the Pastor are waiting. Aunt Sue takes her seat and nods approvingly to Bryce. The look on Bryce's face is pure love as he gazes at his bride coming toward him. When she reaches him they join hands and turn toward the Pastor.

CONTINUE THROUGH - A MONTAGE OF WEDDING VOWS

The Pastor then turns to Avery.

PASTOR

And do you Avery Adams, take Bryce Connor to be your lawfully wedded husband, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others as long as you both shall live?

A beat as Avery gazes into Bryce's eyes.

AVERY

I do.

PASTOR

Does the groom have a ring to present?

BRYCE

Yes sir, I do have a ring.

He starts to feel for the inside of his pocket. Then the other pocket. Then another. No ring.

Avery's eyes widen with alarm.

A beat.

Bryce smiles at her and then turns to look down the aisle.

Harley comes forward, holding an IRISH SETTER PUPPY. He grins from ear to ear as he approaches.

Avery's mouth drops open as Bryce takes the puppy in his arms. He lifts the collar around the puppy's neck. Still attached is... the locket. He presses it and it now opens easily to reveal...the ring. Emma's long-lost ring.

BRYCE (CONT'D)
 Will you take this ring as our
 pledge of love? Chroi and I that
 is.

He looks at the puppy and smiles.

Avery is speechless for a beat.

AVERY
 Chroi? Her name is Chroi?

BRYCE
 Of course. What else could I name
 her. I didn't want to have to buy
 a new locket.

He smiles at her. Avery smiles now and pets the puppy
 lovingly as she wipes away a tear. Bryce slips the ring onto
 her finger.

PASTOR
 Very well. By the power vested in
 me, I now pronounce you man and
 wife...and uh...

He can't hide a smile as he looks toward the puppy.

PASTOR (CONT'D)
 Puppy.

Bryce leans forward to kiss Avery but the puppy intercepts
 him and licks his face. There is laughter and applause from
 the onlookers.

PASTOR (CONT'D)
 Ummm, I will take the dog - for the
 moment.

Bryce hands the puppy to the Pastor and takes Avery in his
 arms as they seal their wedding vows with the traditional
 kiss. The crowd breaks into applause again as we...

ZOOM OUT:

OVERLOOKING THE CROWD, AND THEN DRIFTING TO AN OVERHEAD OF
 THE PAINTED ROCK HIGH ABOVE THE RIVER. AS THE PANORAMA MORPHS
 TO A "HEART SHAPE"

ZOOM TO:

TWO NEWLY PAINTED NAMES: "BRYCE & AVERY".

THE END