

CHRISTMAS ACROSS THE HALL

by  
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ACT 1

EXT. BOSTON - MORNING

Shots of Boston's landmarks, including Boston University.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - MORNING

A three-story apartment building sits nestled in a row of similar housing. Six double windows look out towards the street below, one set for each apartment.

INT. BREE'S KITCHEN - MORNING

BREE (29) hurries into the kitchen in a sweater and jeans, an artsy tote bag over one shoulder. There is an easy self-assurance to how she moves.

The wall hangings and furniture are all very FEMININE.

Sliding her bag onto the counter beside two huge platters of chocolate chip cookies, she pours herself a cup of black coffee. She tosses in a few mini marshmallows.

BREE

(calling loudly)

Heidi! If you don't get your butt out here soon, I won't be here to keep reminding you!

As Bree lifts the mug to her lips, a bundle of broom bristles WHACK against the nearest window, making her jump.

Setting down the mug, she hurries to open the window.

EXT. SIDE OF APARTMENT BUILDING - MORNING

EDEN (60-65) leans out of the window directly below, her broom clutched warily over her head. Her frame is slightly hunched, but more from disposition than age.

Bree leans out her own window, peering down.

BREE

You called?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDEN

(gruffly)

What's taking her so long? Doesn't she know I can tell when she's late?!

BREE

(sighing)

Can't imagine how.

INT. BREE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Bree pulls back inside and closes the window. Abandoning the coffee beside the mountain of cookies, she grabs her bag and walks to the apartment's front hallway.

The walls and trim of the hall are completely PINK.

BREE

You know, I really don't think 'cookie-insomnia' is going to work as an excuse this time, Heidi.

HEIDI (O.S.)

(calling)

If it ain't broke -

Halfway down the hall toward Bree's bedroom, a massive HOLE gapes between her apartment and the neighboring one. Bits and pieces of mutilated wall hang haphazardly from its edges.

HEIDI (30) ducks through the hole into Bree's apartment. Hair frazzled, her colorful jacket is half pulled over a frilly, white apron.

As Heidi enters, she bangs her head on the top of the hole, letting out a pained SQUEEK.

Bree cringes.

BREE

You know, when we finally agreed to room together, I thought that would involve an *actual* opening between our apartments - not just... a hole.

Heidi rubs her head. She glances from the hole to Bree.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HEIDI

*I already did the smashy part. You just need to find time to... 'pretty' it.*

Grinning, Bree shakes her head. She steps back and opens the front door, ushering Heidi forward with an exaggerated flourish.

BREE

*You get store managers to stop micromanaging my window elves, and these hands are *all yours*.*

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

As the two women exit the front door of the building, Eden pokes her head and shoulders out of the bottom right apartment window. She points gleefully to her watch.

EDEN

*Thirty more seconds, and I'm docking your pay!*

HEIDI

*(panting)  
I'm not late yet!*

Heidi races across the frosty street, yanking a set of keys out of her pocket. Huffing and puffing, she jams them into the door of a bakery on the other side.

Looking down at her watch, Eden GRUNTS in disappointment. Shaking her head, she pulls her window shut with a THUD.

Standing in the doorway to the apartment building, Bree rummages through her purse. Glancing back into the building, she quickly catches the door before it closes.

BREE

*Good morning, Mr. Lawrence.*

JACK LAWRENCE (65-70) speed-walks the last few steps to the door. His wrinkled face is carved with smile lines.

JACK LAWRENCE

*Good morning, Bree. Off to spread some Christmas cheer this morning?*

BREE

*You know how it is. No busier time for a window dresser than before the holidays.*

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CONTINUED:

Mr. Lawrence exits and pauses next to Bree. His neck is invisible behind a thick, wooly scarf.

JACK LAWRENCE

I noticed your work at the bakery.  
I don't suppose you might have  
time to come by my flower shop?

Bree glances across the street to where Heidi is hurriedly flipping the lights on in the bakery.

Its windows are covered in frosted snow art.

BREE

Of course! Though... you really  
should come *inside* the bakery  
sometime. I'm sure Miss Eden would  
give you a discount.

JACK LAWRENCE

(chuckling)  
Too dangerous for my blood sugar,  
I'm afraid. The smells are  
tempting enough.

Before Bree can respond, a loud HONK makes both of them turn.

A lone moving truck slows in front of the building.

BREE

You finally find a renter for the  
other apartment?

JACK LAWRENCE

I did, as a matter of fact! An old  
friend from my professor days.

Bree smiles.

BREE

Well, we'll try not to scare him  
away *too fast*.

JACK LAWRENCE

(chuckling)  
I'm counting on it.

While Mr. Lawrence crosses the street, Bree hurries to a bright red truck parked by the curb. As Bree drives away, Mr. Lawrence unlocks the door to a small flower shop only two doors down from the bakery.

The moving truck comes to a stop right between the two.

INT. OFFICE MEETING ROOM - DAY

A man in a suit SLAMS a stack of papers on the desk in front of him. Beside his hand, a name plate reads: "K. Rank - Literary Agent."

KEITH RANK

It's no good, Dylan.

DYLAN WRENTER (31) sits across from him, dressed in a collared shirt and khakis. Unsure, he takes the papers.

DYLAN

What do you mean... 'no good'?

KEITH RANK

Exactly what I said. Sure it's not *bad*, but its exactly like your others: little boy protagonist, out-of-this-world adventure with astronauts or cowboys. It's just so... you.

Dylan flips through the papers, revealing concept sketches for a children's picture book matching Keith's description. Blinking, Dylan glances up.

DYLAN

I'll try not to take that personally.

KEITH RANK

You shouldn't! It's great! But I already *have* a shelf of *those* Dylan Wreuter books. It's time you branched out - expand your image.

Dylan drops the papers on the desk, his brow furrowed.

DYLAN

Expand *how*?

KEITH RANK

(intense)  
*What if...* you tried a book for girls?

Dylan rocks back in his chair, hands raised.

DYLAN

Here we go...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KEITH RANK

Hear me out - You've already got the little boy market cornered. I know it's scary, but you'll never grow beyond what you are now if you don't try something new!

DYLAN

Come on, Keith. I don't know anything about little girls.

Keith stares, incredulous.

KEITH RANK

What do you mean you don't know anything about little girls? You *have* a little girl.

A quick KNOCK taps on the door.

Both men turn just as it swings open, revealing CASEY (9). Her thin frame sports jeans with holes worn through the knees, a backwards baseball cap, and one of Dylan's too-big flannel shirts draped over her own.

Raising an eyebrow, she holds up a phone with one hand.

CASEY

The movers say that if we aren't there in twenty minutes, they're gonna start dropping things.

Dylan cringes.

DYLAN

*Great...*

Keith waves a hand.

KEITH RANK

(sighing)

Go on. We've already put off this conversation *this* many times.

As Dylan hurries towards the door, Casey stares at the "K. Rank" nameplate on the desk.

CASEY

(harshly)

*Crank.*

Keith looks from her to the name plate, ruffled.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KEITH RANK

Why would you say it like *that*?

Casey shrugs.

CASEY

That's how dad always says it

Dylan laughs nervously, grabbing Casey's shoulder.

DYLAN

Kids... names... humor...

Keith raises an eyebrow. Dylan coughs. He quickly ushers himself and Casey towards the door.

DYLAN

Right - little girls. I'm on it.  
So on it, you'll have the first  
draft before you know it.

KEITH RANK

(calling after them)  
By Christmas!

DYLAN

Yes sir!

The door SWINGS shut.

EXT. STREETS OF BOSTON - DAY

Dylan's car drives through the city, weaving along pedestrian-lined streets.

DYLAN (O.S.)

I thought we agreed you weren't  
going to repeat any more of my  
sleep-deprived jokes in public.

CASEY (O.S.)

Doesn't he *pay* you to write funny  
stuff?

DYLAN (O.S.)

Not *that* kind of funny.

INT. DYLAN AND CASEY'S APARTMENT - DAY

The white-walled apartment overflows with moving boxes, each filled to the brim with dishes, decorations, and sports equipment.

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CONTINUED:

Dylan works to unpack a box of paints while Casey pulls a crumpled flyer out of a box of notebooks.

CASEY

I almost forgot about this...

Dylan turns toward her.

DYLAN

What is it?

CASEY

Bring-Your-Grandparents-to-School-Day. It's the day of the school's Christmas program. What am I gonna tell people when it's just you?

Dylan shrugs.

DYLAN

Make something up. Tell them... your grandparents are busy lion-taming in deepest, darkest Africa.

Casey puts her hands on her hips.

CASEY

No self-respecting 4th grader is gonna buy that.

Dylan chuckles. A KNOCK sounds.

BREE (O.S.)

Knock knock?

Dylan and Casey turn to see Bree standing in the apartment's open door. Dylan straightens quickly.

DYLAN

Oh. Hello.

BREE

Hi! Are you helping the new renter move in?

DYLAN

Close... we *are* the new renters.

Bree blinks. Then she laughs. Dylan smiles uncertainly.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Is that... funny?

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CONTINUED: (2)

BREE

No, I'm sorry. It's just - when Mr. Lawrence mentioned an old friend from his professor days, I was expecting someone... *old*.

DYLAN

Eh - I may not be an old professor, but I *was* a college drop-out, which is almost as bad.

Bree smiles.

BREE

Well, at least you made an impression. I'm Bree, by the way. From right upstairs.

Dylan shakes her hand.

DYLAN

Dylan Wreuter. And this is my daughter, Casey.

Casey waves.

BREE

Well, Dylan and Casey, welcome to the Pinewood Apartments. Need any help unpacking?

DYLAN

Oh - we aren't unpacking.

Bree glances around at all the boxes, one eyebrow raised.

BREE

That's... a choice.

Dylan chuckles.

DYLAN

We aren't actually moving in. We're currently looking for our own house to buy, and Mr. Lawrence offered to let us stay here until we find what we're looking for. Plus, it's near my agent's office.

BREE

Gotcha... you're an actor?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DYLAN

Children's book illustrator. And author.

Bree's eyes widen.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Well... sort of author. There aren't that many words in those kinds of books. And Casey's...

He turns to look at Casey, searching.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

... nine.

CASEY

(pointedly)  
And a half.

Bree grins.

BREE

Well, I *was* going to wait and ask your dad's permission first, but seeing as you're nine and a *half*.

As Bree turns back towards the stairway, Casey glances at her feet. Bree wears fuzzy, PINK reindeer slippers that match her pink snowflake sweater.

Casey raises an eyebrow at Dylan. He stifles a smile.

Bree turns back around, a giant platter of chocolate chip cookies in her arms.

BREE

A... 'welcome until you buy a new house and move out' gift.

DYLAN

Oh wow -

Dylan reaches out and takes the mountain of cookies. He looks around for somewhere to set them. Her eyes widening, Casey quickly takes them from him.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Thank you! But - you really didn't have to make us anything. Especially so many...

Bree laughs.

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CONTINUED: (4)

BREE

Oh, I didn't. My friend Heidi climbed through the hole in my wall and baked them at two in the morning last night, so you're doing *me* a favor.

(lowering her voice)

I would have brought you some of her eggnog too... but I'd hate to kill you.

Dylan opens his mouth to respond, but MOVEMENT in the stairwell cuts him short.

Four college-aged, Ukranian guys make their way down the flight of stairs towards, talking amongst themselves. Each carries a book bag.

BREE (CONT'D)

Wait! I have something for you -

Dylan and Casey watch Bree pull four ziplocks full of cookies out of her tote bag, one at a time. She checks the name on each as she hands them off.

BREE (CONT'D)

One for you Orest... Nikita, Maxim, and... Danylo.

Each nods in thanks as they make their way down the rest of the stairs.

Bree turns back around to face Dylan. He stares at her.

BREE (CONT'D)

Ukrainian students. Third floor. Very nice guys when they're not cramming for business exams.

DYLAN

And you made goody bags for... *all* of them?

Bree leans closer, lowering her voice conspiratorially.

BREE

We take apartment living very seriously around here.

Heidi, covered in flour, pokes her head around the turn in the staircase above Bree. She waves frantically.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

HEIDI

Bree! Hurry! Mr. Darcy is about to tell Elizabeth he loves her!

Bree laughs, waving her away.

BREE

*Shocker.*

Letting out an exasperated huff, Heidi races away.

Bree sighs and turns back to look at them.

BREE

Well, that's my cue. I'll see you later, Casey.

Half a cookie already in her mouth, Casey waves.

CASEY

(through full mouth)  
Thanks for the cookies!

BREE

Of course! Come by sometime, and I'll teach you the recipe.

Casey takes another giant bite. She gives a thumb's up.

Bree winks to Dylan and turns, hurrying back up the stairs. Dylan takes a few steps after her and peeks up the stairs at her apartment door.

As she enters, her PINK entryway flashes into view.

Dylan reenters the apartment and closes the door.

He sighs.

DYLAN

See Casey, if you were just more like those two, I wouldn't have a problem writing for girls.

Attacking a second cookie, Casey scrunches up her face.

CASEY

*Gross!*

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

One by one, each of the apartment lights go off.

INT. CASEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Except for the bedding and a few stuffed animals, the rest of Casey's things remain in moving boxes across the floor. Casey climbs into bed, pulling up the blankets.

CASEY

Can we still go ice skating tomorrow, dad?

Sighing, Dylan sits down on the edge of the bed.

DYLAN

Not... tomorrow, kiddo.

CASEY

But you said that *last* Saturday.

DYLAN

I know, I know. But if I'm gonna be free during your Christmas break, I really need to get a handle on this new project.

Casey hesitates. She meets Dylan's gaze.

CASEY

Is this because I said Mr. Ranks's name wrong?

Dylan chuckles and shakes his head. He grabs another blanket from the foot of her bed and begins unfolding it.

DYLAN

Nah, if you hadn't come in, he probably would have sicced his pet dragon on me by now.

Casey smiles slightly. Dylan lays the blanket out over her comforter.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

How about this: I'll stay up late to brainstorm the plot tonight, and, if I get enough done, I'll let you have first pick for a movie tomorrow night?

Casey nods.

CASEY

(quietly)  
Okay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dylan kisses her on the forehead. He turns out the light.

INT. DYLAN AND CASEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dylan tips a box of art supplies out on a desk and arranges them across it, finding a place for everything.

Determined, he grabs a piece of lined paper and labels the top: "Girl Book Outline."

The tip of his pencil descends onto the first line.

CUT TO:

INT. DYLAN AND CASEY'S APARTMENT- MORNING

Dylan sits exhausted at the same desk, head propped in one hand. Crumpled papers cover the desk and floor.

Casey walks out behind him, wearing her PJs.

CASEY

What's for breakfast, dad?

DYLAN

What's in the fridge?

Casey disappears into the kitchen. The fridge OPENS audibly.

CASEY (O.S.)

Mayonnaise packets and... pickles.

Dylan lets his head fall onto the desk with a THUD.

INT. DYLAN AND CASEY'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Dylan stands by the door, pulling on his coat.

DYLAN

Alright, I put my number and Mr. Lawrence's on the fridge. Don't burn the building down, don't open the door to strangers, and *don't* make yourself sick on cookies.

Casey, still in her PJs, sits on the edge of the kitchen table. She pops one of Bree's cookies in her mouth.

CASEY

Got it.

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CONTINUED:

Dylan smiles and hugs her, kissing the top of her head.

DYLAN

I won't be long.

Dylan turns towards the door and pauses. He turns back and locks eyes with Casey.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

You sure you'll be okay?

Casey grins. She motions to the fridge.

CASEY

Not with mayo for breakfast.

Dylan smiles back. He opens the door and steps through.

DYLAN

(calling back)

I'll be right back!

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BOSTON STREETS - DAY

Dylan sits in his car in the middle of the road. The street is entirely backed up with traffic. He sighs.

INT. DYLAN AND CASEY'S APARTMENT - DAY

A card house, model plane, and the remains of several cookies sit on the dining room table.

Casey sits on the couch in front of the TV, rolling a rubber band ball back and forth across her leg.

From outside, a CRASH sounds.

Curious, Casey turns off the TV. She walks to the window.

Bree and Heidi, both in festive pink sweaters and overalls, hurry around outside. Together, they drag a giant coil of cable toward the apartment from the back of Bree's truck. Behind them, two of the Ukrainian students follow, carrying a huge metal pulley between them.

Heidi almost trips. The two girls burst into laughter.

Casey shakes her head.

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CONTINUED:

CASEY  
(superiorly)  
Girls.

Hesitating, Casey glances over at Dylan's desk across the sea of boxes. An empty page sits in the center of it.

A determined gleam flashes in Casey's eyes.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

Bree and Heidi exit the door of Bree's apartment, laughing as they climb the stairs up to the third floor.

HEIDI  
Eden's gonna *kill* you when she  
finds out.

BREE  
Which is why we're installing it  
while she's not here.

The two disappear around the stairs' bend. Immediately, Casey, dressed entirely in black, tiptoes up the stairs from the first floor and quietly sneaks into Bree's apartment. She closes the door behind her with a CLICK.

INT. BREE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Casey glances around, her back pressed against the inside of Bree's front door. All is quiet. Tiptoeing forward, she looks around the pink entryway.

Seeing the huge hole in the wall, she stops, blinking. Her eyes wide, she pulls out a plastic Polaroid and takes a picture. The camera FLASHES.

Pictures:

1. The hole in the wall.
2. The pink trim.
3. A giant teddy bear on the couch.

Casey makes her way through the living room, camera still in hand. Reaching a small table by one of the front windows, she slows.

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CONTINUED:

The table is covered in framed photos. Starting from Casey's age, they show Bree, Heidi, and a boy growing up through college. In the most recent photos, the boy is not with them.

Picking up a photo of them as kids, Casey bends close.

Beat.

The sole of a boot BANGS against the outside of the window beside Casey's head. Casey jumps.

She turns just in time to see Bree swing out of view, hanging by a cable tied to a harness over her sweater.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Bree swings around across the front of the building, laughing as she repels over the brick surface.

Up above, the rope connects to the metal pulley from earlier, which now is anchored inside the Ukrainian students' apartment window. Orest, Danylo, and Heidi cheer from the open window next to it, laughing too.

Bree steadies herself against the side of the building and looks up towards the three of them.

BREE

Alright Orest, lower me down!

Orest ducks back inside and reappears next to the pulley, grabbing a lever on its side. From the other window, Heidi squints at him.

HEIDI

You sure someone doesn't have to hold the rope while you do that?

OREST

Of course not.

Orest pulls the lever.

Bree lets out a startled CRY and Casey flinches from her spot in the window. A muffled THUD fills the air.

Casey leans forward, peeking downwards.

BREE (O.S.)

(weakly)

I'm okay!

INT. DYLAN AND CASEY'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Dylan enters the kitchen, balancing two armfuls of grocery bags. He makes his way over to the table and leans forward to set them down gently on its top.

Blocked from view by the groceries, Casey BANGS a notebook on the table. Dylan jumps, dropping the bags.

CASEY

(intense)

Girls are crazier than we thought.

DYLAN

(breathless)

You're telling me.

Before Dylan can prop the bags back up, Casey pushes them to the side. She pulls the stack of Polaroid photos out of her pocket and SLAPS them onto the table.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

What's this?

CASEY

*Intel.*

Dylan picks up the photos and starts to flip through them. He stops on a close-up of a bunny figurine in a ballet outfit.

DYLAN

Where did you get these?

CASEY

(satisfied)

That woman Bree's apartment. Really careless to leave her door unlocked. Especially when their new neighbor is doing research on all things *girly*.

Dylan looks up at her, his eyes widening.

DYLAN

You were spying!

CASEY

And you need info.

DYLAN

Casey, does the term 'stranger danger' mean *nothing* to you?

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CONTINUED:

Casey picks up a photo and holds it out, showing a family of rubber ducks nested in Bree's bathroom soap dish. She raises an eyebrow.

CASEY

Really dangerous...

Dylan pushes the photo aside, his expression serious.

DYLAN

Not the point.

CASEY

I know, I know. But just hear me out. You need to know about girls for your book, right?

DYLAN

Right...

CASEY

And the two of them are two of the girliest girls ever, right?

DYLAN

Casey...

CASEY

So - all I need to do is go *undercover*. If I approach them like a normal girl and try to hang out with them, I could find out enough about what girls like for you to write your book!

DYLAN

(incredulous)

How desperate do you think I am?!

Casey glances at a whiteboard propped up against the side of Dylan's desk. The only thing written on it is: "Unicorns?" He quickly reaches and tips it face down.

CASEY

Listen, I've already talked to Mr. Lawrence, and he *promised* they aren't serial killers. All I'd have to do is infiltrate their daily activities and report back. And I'd barely even charge!

Dylan runs a hand through his hair. He shakes his head.

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CONTINUED: (2)

DYLAN

No! No way - I am *not* going to pay my nine-year-old daughter to spy on some random, pink-wearing, giggling thirty-year-olds!

Casey glances down. When she responds, her voice is quieter.

CASEY

I just thought... maybe if we worked together... you could finish the book before my break starts.

Dylan hesitates. He glances at the writing desk. Then, looking back at her, he crosses his arms.

DYLAN

What kind of payment we talking?

CASEY

A new pair of binoculars for future spy endeavors. And I want a *family* Christmas this year. None of your weird writer friends.

DYLAN

What's wrong with my writer friends?

CASEY

They're nerds.

Dylan laughs in spite of himself. For a long moment, he considers. Then, meeting Casey's gaze, his eyes twinkle.

DYLAN

What's your plan?

**END OF ACT 1**