

Thesis Proposal & Project: The Christmas Fiddle

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Author Note

I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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The Artist Statement

Introduction

Entertainment, by large, has taken a dark turn. I, as a Christian creative, endeavor to use entertainment to shine the light into the darkness. Through scripts like *The Christmas Fiddle*, audiences will have an inspiring and uplifting place to go. Many media outlets feel that if something is raw and gritty, audiences will relate to it better. Truthfully, audiences can look outside their window and see how dark the world has become. Why would they need to turn on their TV or waste their choice of streaming content when they can see the depravity in their everyday lives? Yes, darkness exists, but media used to be a place where audiences could go and escape for a little while. Everything from books to movies has seen a shift into moral decay. Sometimes, it is hard to believe such shocking material was filmed. Are directors trying to present a reality that audiences can relate to, or are they merely competing to see who can release the grittiest content? I have asked this when looking at content I thought would be good.

Michael Landon explored many real-world issues in his shows *Little House on the Prairie* and *Highway to Heaven*. However, he did not glorify the sensitive material by showing us every gory detail. For example, there was an episode of *Little House on the Prairie* called Sylvia (1981), which mentions the rape of a young girl named Sylvia by one of her father's farm hands. The episode was presented in two parts, and the audience never saw the actual rape. Audiences have potent imaginations, and can certainly deal with hard things, but they do not need to see every facet of a horrific event to know it happened. Landon also dealt with racism and had several episodes on chemical dependency. I am not, at all, saying to steer clear of sensitive material. However, I am saying that this material must be presented through an uplifting lens. Entertainment has become far too extreme in their presentation of real-world

issues. Where is the balance? I feel it is time to tip the scales and start presenting things like Landon did in his day again. Present the bitter while balancing it out with the sweet. *The Christmas Fiddle* is about faith, redemption, reconciliation, love, and healing. Some problematic issues will be raised throughout the story, but these issues will be sieved through an uplifting lens because we could all use more light, especially in an ever-darkening world.

The Christmas Fiddle Background

Background for *The Christmas Fiddle* must begin with the logline for the script: A war-weary World War II veteran returns to the idyllic town of his birth just in time for Christmas, to find his beloved father at death's door and the girl he loves still waiting. The story came about after I saw another film of like genre on the Hallmark Channel. A movie called *The Lost Valentine* starring Betty White as a WWII widow who returns to the same train station every Valentine's Day in memory of her soldier husband. The soldier in the story never made it back home, but his widow's steadfast love was uplifting and inspiring. The tear-jerker resonated with me because my father is an Army veteran, and my mother was utterly devoted to him just like the elderly widow in *The Lost Valentine*. My mother has since passed, but I will never forget the significant impact that this Hallmark movie had on her. The simple story is full of heart and these kinds of stories have the potential to affect a wide audience.

Of course, *The Lost Valentine* is relatable to military families, but it can also be understood by a wider audience because we have all experienced loss and longing in some way. The stories of soldiers being deployed and coming home after long tours of duty or not returning home are relatable to so many. I wrote *The Christmas Fiddle* to honor those soldiers who selflessly gave their lives to defend their country, were injured in the line of duty, or are still serving their country so bravely. Many soldiers and their families will be able to relate to *the*

Christmas Fiddle because it speaks to the healing that every soldier must go through after they return home from fighting in a gruesome war.

The Christmas Fiddle reminds us that not all wounds are visible from the outside. Our main character, Caleb Garner, returns to his small hometown of Holbrook, North Carolina, carrying many burdens. For one, he must face guilt after his friend Warren Hobbs dies at Iwo Jima, and he survives. Two, he is also left with intense PTSD from the images and sounds that he has endured while at war. Not to mention, his father, Asher Garner, who is also the town's renowned Christmas fiddle maker, is dying of an incurable brain tumor. Third, Caleb is also having to come to grips with his loss of faith that left him and his father estranged for many years after his mother's death.

Fortunately, the bright spot in Caleb's life is Melody Hamilton, the mayor's daughter, and his childhood crush, who has also returned after leaving Holbrook for a spell. Melody is trying to come to grips with the wounds left upon her heart from the racism that she endured in the outside world, but eventually, she and Caleb find love and healing in each other. He also finds restoration of faith as he and his father begin to redeem and reconcile their estranged relationship before Asher closes his eyes for the final time.

Holbrook may read saccharine and idyllic, much like Walnut Grove or Walton's Mountain. However, much like these places that we have grown to love, Holbrook has its own problems, but this community of imperfect people has committed to loving one another in good and bad times. When writing stories that involve dark elements, it is tempting to delve into the darkness and forget to pull the light out of these situations. Still, my heart beats with eternal hope that light can be found even in the darkness. Sometimes, as Christian creatives, our most significant challenge is finding the silver lining through the dark clouds.

The Christmas Fiddle Writing Process

For me, the writing process always comes down to the characters. Mark Boutros has much to say about crafting memorable characters because the plot makes little difference if the characters are not strong. The reader does not care about some brilliant plot; they care about how the characters act within the plot. Inspiration for characters can come from anywhere, anyone, and anything. As Boutros states, "It's our jobs as writers to take the ingredients that are becoming a character in our heads and mold them into the completion of that sentence" (Boutros, 2020).

This is where all my stories begin. I imagine a character in a particular situation and the story springs from there. Caleb and Melody were the first characters I saw when I started writing the project. However, when I conceived the project, Caleb's and Melody's names were different. Caleb was Brent, and Melody was Harmony for a while, but once I began to form them, the names did not fit them anymore. This is the first and only time this has happened in my writing career. As Brent, Caleb's name was not very reflective of his Jewish roots. So, I needed a solid Jewish name that drove his roots deep. Caleb's father is a Messianic Jew who follows the tradition of his father before him as the town's Christmas fiddle maker. The city of Holbrook has a tradition of having a fiddle played at their Christmas service every year, and the men of the Garner family took on the task of designing the fiddle for the town's festivities when the town was founded.

Melody Hamilton is the mayor's daughter. The beautiful black American heroine's name change seemed a bit trivial to me when I first decided to make the change. Melody's name was changed because I did not like how her name sounded when shortened. Caleb calls Melody Mel, and if he had shortened her name to Harmony, it would have been Harmie. I did not like how that sounded, so her name changed. It sounds like a little thing, but it was big for me. However,

Melody's name holds much more significance than I had originally thought. Melody's name can actually be likened to the sweet music of the fiddle, and this is the project's focal point. *The Christmas Fiddle* is what ties the town's Christmas celebration together and Melody is very devoted and dedicated to her community. She is the town's teacher and her commitment to many civic projects around town keeps the community together. Sometimes, the writer can easily miss nuances like I missed with Melody's name, especially when they are pantsers.

I am a pantsers and hate to outline, so nothing was drafted for this project. *The Christmas Fiddle* was written by following the characters' journey out. The process of writing in the pantsers style is very freeing. Nothing is planned, and things happen very organically. I find writing by an outline impossible because the characters have zero freedom to stray from the path. It is an extraordinary journey in how everything falls into place. I do not take any part of the writing process for granted because seeing how the characters grow and develop is such a miracle. They make mistakes, and life beats them up a bit. I find out what will happen to them when they find out. Earlier in my career, I could write all day and from scene to scene.

The Christmas Fiddle was written this way: I would write five scenes at a time. However, I am a more scene-by-scene writer now. I have given myself time to slow down in my writing process and see how things develop rather than quickly pushing the characters into the scenes. There is nothing wrong with writing multiple scenes at a time; it is just that I have grown into another way of writing. Writers tend to grow in their creativity, and I am comfortable where I am now. Nevertheless, one thing will always remain the same: my stories always begin with characters, and then I place these characters into a world and a situation. Caleb's and Melody's story was where *the Christmas Fiddle* started, and I am beyond happy with their journey.

The Christmas Fiddle Vision

As a creative, one must have a vision, which should primarily be true of those who consider themselves Christian creatives. I know many creatives do not like wearing the "Christian" creative label. However, I don't mind being called a Christian creative because it clarifies my aim and purpose. Proverbs 28:19 says, that where there is no vision people perish (ESV Bible). While writing *the Christmas Fiddle*, I often kept this scriptural passage in mind. I have seen inspirational films made by non-Christians, but God was still glorified through their endeavors because they allowed Him to move through the gift, He gave them in the first place. Of course, they do not acknowledge that it was God, but it certainly was not Satan because he is incapable of giving gifts. So, if non-Christians can produce inspirational and uplifting films, how much more willing should Christians be to do so? Writing for fame is a short-term goal because it has no eternal value.

As a Christian creative, I want to make quality films with eternal value. It would be nice if audiences loved them and they were well received, but more than this, I want to make God smile with the way I choose to use my gift. *The Christmas Fiddle* was written with a Kingdom message, but it is not written in such a way that it will alienate non-Christians. Christian entertainment tends to be a bit preachy and heavy-handed with the message. Our goal as Christian creatives should not be to preach to the choir and solely entertain the church. The apostle Paul and Jesus had a way of making the Gospel accessible to people who might have otherwise never heard it. They were all things to all people. Non-Christians and Christians enjoy quality shows like *Little House on the Prairie*, *Highway to Heaven*, *the Waltons*, *Touched by an Angel*, etc., because they have a way of first telling a good story and weaving the Gospel in.

Madeleine L' Engle has some insightful things to say about Christian creatives working in the arts. She believed that when a creative specifies that they are a Christian, this pigeonholes them and alienates them from secular or non-believing readers. "I don't want to be shut in, labeled, the key turned so that I am not able to grow and develop as a Christian, as a writer. I want that freedom which is a large part of the Christian promise" (L' Engle, 2001). While I understand L'Engle's point of view, I can't fully share it. Jesus warned Christians that if the world hated Him, the Christians would not escape the world's hatred (ESV Bible John 15:18-19). So, if a non-believer is determined to hate a story because of the author's beliefs, hiding this factor or refusing to admit it will not gain the author fans.

The Christian creative's creation goal will be vastly different from that of a non-believer. The Christian creative has a mission, and this mission is an eternal one. Jesus did not tell stories under any guise; He made it plain and clear that He came to do the will of His Father. So, the Christian creative's mission for creating art is an eternal one. I want *the Christmas Fiddle* to be a great story with an even greater message woven in. My aim is not even a theater release. I would not begrudge a theater release, but I am more interested in the small cable networks that produce family-friendly fare. UpTV and Hallmark Channel are some of the top networks, and the newest to join is Great American Family. These networks may seem small, but they have a mighty following of fans who still crave family-friendly content. My vision is to spread the Gospel across family-friendly networks and reach as many people as possible because everyone needs to hear the Gospel. After all, this is what the Great Commission is all about. Stories of love and redemption must take center stage because the world desperately needs love and redemption. There is no better time to introduce the world to Caleb's and Melody's story, and I pray that it will be impactful to all who watch.

The Christmas Fiddle Literary Context

In *The Christmas Fiddle*, the historical WWII era is a backdrop for this family-friendly story that centers around the ideologies of faith, redemption, reconciliation, love, and healing. Why the WWII era? This was a time in history when people seemed to have a reverent respect for God, family, and country. People still smiled at each other while walking down the street; they were more willing to extend a helping hand to one another, and they could disagree and remain friends. Of course, like all periods in our history, there were some heinous realities that America is not proud of. However, this is just a harsh fact of living in a fallen world—no place in the world is untouched or untarnished by the effects of sin. Many of Melody's scars come from having to deal with the racism of the period in the world outside of the safe arms of Holbrook. Melody is highly educated, yet she is not even allowed to apply for a professorship at the university she graduated from because of her skin color. So, Melody returns to Holbrook, where she is not judged based on her skin color. Holbrook acts as a kind of multi-cultural alternate universe to the world outside.

The town's founders built this idyllic place on a foundation of unity. Holbrook is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream long before he had it. Much like Walnut Grove or Walton's Mountain, it is a refuge for all who enter it. While *the Christmas Fiddle* does not shy away from or dilute the harsh realities of the WWII era, it deals with them within the context of Holbrook's city limits. Therefore, these realities will be viewed through the ideologies of faith, redemption, reconciliation, love, and healing. As stated, there is no place in the world where these ideologies need not be applied. God is constantly in the redeeming, reconciling, and healing business but it is up to us to extend these ideologies through faith and love. This time in history was more challenging for some than others. Fortunately, as a creative, I can present a counterfactual history

that helps the audience see what a community would look like if all people dared to reach for unity over discord. There is no time better than the present to present a story rooted in the ideology of unity because there is so much strife and division in our world today. *The Christmas Fiddle*'s message could be light in this dark and divisive world and in the entertainment industry.

The Christmas Fiddle Biblical Worldview and Message

Yes, entertainment by large has taken a very dark turn, and it is so easy for us Christians to curse the darkness rather than shine a light. Merely talking about what is wrong will keep the industry the same. Christian creatives must use their gift of writing as they have never used them before. Lip service does little, but acting will make all the difference. There is still room in the market for family-friendly fare, and the many fans of family-friendly networks prove this to be true. Movies like *The Christmas Fiddle* with a solid redemptive message will leave audiences cheering because everyone can relate to a redemption story. Caleb is struggling with his faith after the death of his mother and seeing the harshness of war only increases his doubts. Fortunately, he has a solid and faith-filled community to lean on. One of those citizens of the community happens to be his father, Asher, who is a messianic Jew. As Asher and Caleb begin to mend their estranged relationship while working on the Christmas Fiddle together, Caleb finds his belief again while healing from his mental wounds.

The Christmas Fiddle has a solid biblical worldview through its central themes of faith, redemption, reconciliation, love, and healing. I believe that because God constantly redeems, reconciles, and heals us, we should be more than willing to love one another enough to do the same (ESV Bible 2 Corinthians 5:18). *The Christmas Fiddle* is a story steeped in faith. The sweet harmony of the community of Holbrook will leave the audience longing to live in a place just like it.

How Christian Creatives Can Shine Light into Entertainment

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (ESV Bible Phil. 4:8).

As the culture descends into a spiral of darkness, the entertainment industry is following suit. Violence, debauchery, and immorality in all areas of entertainment has increased substantially. Movies and television no longer act as an escape, but rather a mirror into what is going on in the outside world. Some may argue that the Bible deals with sensitive issues and these individuals would be correct. However, when the Bible covers sensitive issues, it does not glorify the issues in question but rather considers them from God’s perspective. For example, the rape of Dinah is discussed in the book of Genesis, but readers are not treated to the grisly details of this rape (ESV Bible Genesis 34:1-4). Unfortunately, if this tragic scene were left in the hands of some modern directors, they would treat the audience to a step-by-step visual display of Dinah’s assault leaving very little to the imagination. Dinah’s rape by Shechem is horrendous enough but to bombard the audience with these vile images is equally horrendous. Indeed, the rape happened, and this evil act came with weighty consequences as per Genesis 34:25.

Sadly, consequences for evil actions are rarely displayed in today’s entertainment because of morally gray areas. In fact, if this tale was produced by certain modern directors, Dinah’s brothers could have possibly been painted as the heartless savages in the story. Modern entertainment with morally gray characters is all the rage. No one is right, and no one is wrong. Nevertheless, this is where the Bible and modern entertainment differ, because all sensitive issues are sieved through God’s idea of righteousness and not man’s. So, God is the standard for good and good always triumphs over evil in Biblical stories. While most modern entertainment treats good and bad ambiguously, entertainment by Christian creatives acts as an oasis that gives

the viewer hope and offers them concrete examples of good and bad. The only answer to culture's recent spike in darkness is not to saturate audiences in the world's woes, but to shine a light into the darkness and offer hope. Audiences have become hungrier for family-friendly entertainment because they want a means of escape again. According to Ted Baehr, founder of Movieguide, Hollywood is beginning to take notice of the family-friendly genre's importance. He voices, "In short, it has become obvious to the movie studio moguls that it is very profitable to produce wholesome, inspiring, uplifting films. On the other hand, it is much less profitable to make films that offend a large segment of America's potential movie-going audience" (Jasper, 2007). Dr. Baehr's words make it evident that Christian creatives are having a profound effect on massive audiences through the family-friendly genre. So, the Christian creative has a responsibility to use their gifts for Kingdom purposes. The Christian creative should endeavor to shine light into a dark world, create a safe space for families to go for entertainment, and spark thoughtful conversations that families can engage in together about the entertainment viewed.

Christian Creatives Should Shine Light into a Dark World

"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (ESV Bible Matthew 18:6).

Initially, television and film were kept under the microscope of censors. So, all television and film were made safe for every member of the family to watch. However, Hollywood soon began to push against censors and censorship. In fact, the Hollywood crowd considered the presence of censors to be a breach of their first amendment rights. As a result, the supreme court struck down the censors and censorship in 1952. Of course, the censors and the idea of censorship had its flaws because anything controlled by man will never be perfect. For example,

the Motion Picture Production code of 1930 attempted to suppress a wide range of controversial topics in film which at first glance is good, but can be a double-edged sword as well.

Studies by Stephan Vaughn state, the code tried to police the presence of ethnic groups in the process of suppressing controversial issues, which was sad and disappointing (Vaughn, 1990). The problem with suppressing controversial issues like abortion, violence, sexual abuse, etc. is that the light is not being shone into the darkness. So, what movies and television are left with is a faux world of light where darkness does not exist. Jesus did not steer clear of the hard stuff. Instead, He confronted and addressed the hard stuff from a godly perspective. The audience can handle light being shone into dark things but if the dark things are being glorified and magnified with little to no light being shone, this is the issue.

The formation of the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 was understandable at a time of unknowns because films were such a new medium, and the populace were scrambling around to protect their children in the face of this new medium. According to research conducted by Stephen Vaughn, “Fierce debates over the content and control of this new medium arose in the early days of silent film and intensified with the advent of sound technology. Out of these controversies emerged efforts to regulate motion picture entertainment, efforts that culminated in the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, an attempt to bind movies to Judeo-Christian morality” (Vaughn, 1990). However, when individuals feel as if they are being put in chains to a certain set of ideals, this is not going to go over well. Of course, some of the public kicked against it and Hollywood itself kicked did as well, which led to the eventual dissolving of such censorship. While the Motion Picture Production code was not all bad, it was not without its flaws either. As aforementioned, trying to cling to Judeo-Christian values is admirable but placing one racial or ethnic group on a pedestal while forbidding the others is not having a godly

mindset, because God created the various races and all of them have a place in family-friendly entertainment.

The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 might have come crumbling down, but this gave rise to a new way of policing film content. The year 1968 saw the formation of the Motion Picture Association of America and this group was deemed responsible for the rating of films. The MPAA developed and initiated a ratings system that was left mostly unaltered until a string of controversial films saw them change the system in 1984 (Antunes, 2017). The release of movies like *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, *Poltergeist*, and *Gremlins* were a part of the heated debate that led to ratings changes. Many felt that these films were not G or PG material; however, audiences felt that the R rating was too harsh. Therefore, the PG-13 rating was introduced to bridge the gap. Unfortunately, if God's heart and mind are not considered in the ratings discussion there is no way of judging what is appropriate or inappropriate in the discussion of family-friendly content. In fact, there seems to be very little difference between PG-13 and R rated content these days due to what is known as the ratings 'creep'. If the decision of good and bad is left solely up to man, man is going to determine this by their own measuring scale. Filipa Antunes writes, "The cultural weight of this distinction has also been demonstrated recently by a growing preoccupation with the 'ratings creep'. The 'creep' refers to the gradual ways in which the R and PG-13 classifications have supposedly become more lenient and allowed more frequent and more intense adult content to become unrestricted" (Antunes, 2017). Sadly, rated R films are slipping into more NC-17/X rated territory these days.

Plugged in Online reports of the sexual content in the Oscar nominated film *Oppenheimer* and it must leave audiences wondering how it escaped an NC-17 rating. Television content has become just as problematic with the rise of shows like *Bridgerton*, *Queen Charlotte*,

Outlander, and *Game of Thrones*. Some may argue that these films and shows are not meant to be family-friendly viewing; however, parents are sadly mistaken if they believe that their younger children have not had access to this content. Technology is on the rise, and this is no longer a world where content is exclusively available in theaters and on stationary television sets. Content can now be streamed from anywhere and at any time and the content is only going to get worse. Christian creatives have a responsibility, and this is not to condemn and shout into the darkness, but to shine a light into it.

Christian storytellers must avail themselves to weaving the Gospel into quality stories for audiences to consume. There will always be dark content out there, however; no person can wallow in the darkness without light for very long. At some point audiences are going to crave an escape and this is where the Christian creative comes in, not with judgment or shouting, but with the grace-filled, redemptive, loving message of the Gospel. This is what made Jesus so irresistible to the populace. He was willing to surround Himself with people that the Pharisees and Sadducees condemned Him for being around. When asked why He ate with sinners and tax collectors. He told these judgmental “law keepers” that those who are well are in no need of a physician (ESV Bible Luke 5:31). TBN is one of several networks that seek to provide a haven for families to receive quality entertainment. “For over 30 years TBN has been providing quality exclusive programming that appeals to every member of the family. In fact, [their] five networks make TBN the cable industry's only faith-friendly network that effectively reaches every age demographic” (Cable World, 2006). Therefore, Christian creatives must dare to create a safe space for all those who seek it.

Christian Creatives Should Create Safe Spaces for Families

“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” (Matthew 5:40).

Subsequently, it is never easy going against cultural norms, nevertheless, the Christian creative must remember that Jesus angered those in and out of the church by doing just that. Many view family-friendly entertainment as much too saccharine for their more sophisticated tastes. The simplistic nostalgia of the *Andy Griffith Shows* and *Happy Days* of old, leave some audiences believing that the family-friendly genre is far too out of touch to be taken seriously. After all, real life is gritty, raw, and ugly. Sometimes, a dad talk and a malt at Arnold’s will not heal all wounds. Still, audiences keep running back to the haven of family-friendly entertainment when they need a break from the harshness of the outside world. So, the Christian creative must not get offended at the eye rolls of the naysayers, because when the days are darkest, it will be family-friendly entertainment that provides the light that is so desperately needed. For instance, Shirley Temple helped an entire country through the sorrow of the Great Depression era with the sweet songs, uplifting messages, and tap dance numbers in her movies. Family-friendly entertainment is nourishment for the soul.

Unfortunately, the technological boom has presented an overwhelming stream of content, and the networks feel the stress and strain to compete. Sadly, the competition has slowly begun to swallow family-friendly time on many television networks. So, *Happy Days* family style shows get devoured by the more *Sex and the City* style shows. Kevin J. Martin, conducted a study on this trend during the early 2000s and his findings were as follows, “Broadcasters increase the amount of coarse programming and decrease the family friendly programming they provide viewers. This shift is particularly notable during primetime viewing hours, when families

are most likely to gather around the television together” (Martin, 2003). It would seem as if family TV viewing is becoming as obsolete as eating dinner together around the table.

While it is true that there is an overwhelming amount of dark content coming at audiences like a vile wave, family-friendly entertainment has seen quite a bit of growth in recent years and fans cannot get enough of this hopeful content. From the newly created Great American Family network to the more seasoned Hallmark Channel, fans can escape into a world where happily ever after is guaranteed, moral lessons are taught, and good triumphs over evil. No, not all family-friendly content is by Christian creatives; however, Christian creatives can definitely use the family-friendly genre to get uplifting messages across to audiences.

One of the major conduits of family-friendly entertainment has been the Family-Friendly Programming Forum, this group of investors has dared to step out to create a haven for families to gather around the TV set again. The purpose of the Forum is to produce shows like *Little House on the Prairie* or *the Waltons* with a message of strong family values for today’s family that spark important conversations during the viewing. Many of these shows do not have an overt Christian message but they invite the family to sit down together while watching. Since the Forum’s formation in 1998, they have encouraged broadcast networks to air more prime-time programs the entire family can watch. Shows like, *Gilmore Girls*, *8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter*, and *American Dreams* (Mediaweek, 2004). The Forum was also instrumental in the major growth of the Hallmark Channel, with movies like *Love Comes Softly* and *A Time to Remember* which ranked #1 and #2 when they were first broadcast.

The Forum has worked tirelessly in creating relationships with broadcast networks and as result, they have more than delivered on their original agenda to create primetime options for the family to enjoy together. The 2005/06 season was one of the first major milestones for the Forum

in creating family-friendly content, because they managed to secure a family-friendly option every hour during primetime (Adweek, 2006). Family-Friendly entertainment is becoming a quiet roar that refuses to be silenced. While culture grows ever darker and the content follows suit, this uplifting entertainment has a fierce following of people who hunger for the light that only this specific content can provide. However, light shines brightest in the darkness and family-friendly entertainment that carries a message will not shy away from the hard and difficult things of life. The Christian creative should endeavor to create entertainment that addresses the dark moments without glorifying or magnifying them. This feel-good entertainment is in the world to be a beacon that leads the audience home. Family-friendly entertainment will urge families to have thoughtful and deep conversations upon viewing.

Christian Creatives Should Create Entertainment that Stirs Thoughtful Conversations

“He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables” (ESV Bible Mark 4:11).

Furthermore, quality family-friendly entertainment should spark deep conversations within the family unit, especially if the entertainment is spun by a Christian creative. Jesus was the original storyteller because He often gave out secrets of the coming Kingdom in the form of stories. Therefore, Christian creatives should not only create art that speaks to the Christian but to the world at large. Take for example, *the Chronicles of Narnia* series or *the Lord of the Rings* saga, both series are Christian allegories, yet Christian and secular audiences enjoy them equally.

The Christian can enjoy the hidden messages of the Kingdom, while secular audiences enjoy the fantasy elements of these epic stories. Both tales give parents and children the opportunity to discuss what they have learned from the lessons presented. Sometimes, audiences get a misunderstanding about what family-friendly entertainment is all about. As aforementioned, some of the populace assume that family-friendly means animated saccharine

fluff or surreal movies and shows that are out of touch with reality. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, two brothers at the helm of an independent film company called Angel Studios are breaking all these pre-conceived notions. The two self-describe ‘farm boys from Idaho’ are taking Hollywood and family-friendly entertainment by storm with movies like *the Shift* and *Sound of Freedom*. The studio also distributes the mega hit *the Chosen* (the Economist, 2023). They are disproving the idea that family-friendly entertainment cannot be profitable, thought provoking and uplifting while addressing real world issues. Of course, big-time studios cannot help but take notice because the box office does not lie. Mainstream Hollywood has always tried to laugh off family-friendly entertainment and dismiss it as small, but the one thing that they have never been able to deny is the massive showing in movie ticket sells.

Whether mainstream Hollywood likes it or not, family-friendly entertainment is big business. For years the Hollywood executives believed and often voiced the misnomer that ‘sex sells’, well box office numbers seem to be telling a completely different story. William F. Jasper reports that the success of family-friendly entertainment is not a fluke and if Hollywood does not start to take more notice of what the public wants, these Hollywood big wigs will continue to bleed money. “Successful blockbusters like *the Lord of the Rings* and *the Passion of the Christ* are not a fluke. A recent study of the box office statistics of the top 250 movies released by Hollywood shows that moviegoers are not only flocking to G and PG rated movies, but they also want movies with moral messages” (Jasper, 2007).

So, families want to be entertained together by stories with moral messages that they can discuss later. Family-friendly entertainment done right will produce fertile ground for families to start talking to each other again about the things that truly matter. Uplifting entertainment has

never been mindless art that is out of touch, it has always been entertainment with heart. The family-friendly genre is not going anywhere anytime soon, and this could possibly be a place where Christian creatives can be laborers. As Jesus said to His disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few (ESV Bible 9:37-38). The populace is crying out for moral messages and there are many Christian creatives out there that can more than fit the bill.

There is no shortage of places for Christian creatives to release those gifts and talents. Every time the audience turns on their television during the holiday season, they are sure to find another heartfelt story that can stir powerful conversation amongst the family. Hallmark Channel's 'Countdown to Christmas' franchise accounts for 30% of their annual revenue (Poggi, 2013). The harvest is so plentiful and what better way to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ than during the holiday season when hearts are so soft to the message or any other time of the year, because audiences will always receive a quality story? It is time for the Christian creatives to report for duty because deep and meaningful conversations, about well written stories, are just waiting to be had.

Research Topic

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

For my research topic, I have discussed how Christian creatives can be successful in the entertainment industry by highlighting several Christian creatives who have successfully navigated their way through the industry. Christian creatives have an opportunity to create entertainment that shines light into a dark world, creates a safe space for families, and stirs thoughtful conversations, and this is desperately needed now more than ever because the industry is embracing darkness more and more. Fortunately, some Christian creatives are determined to fight against the current dark trend and are making big waves in an industry that is all too ready

to dismiss God altogether. Dr. Ted Baehr, Devon Franklin, and David A.R. White are just a few of these said Christian creatives, and they have some very interesting things to say about the entertainment industry and how Christian creatives can shine light into the dark entertainment industry.

David A.R. White founded the successful streaming service Great American PureFlix and produced mega hits like the *God's Not Dead* series and *Do You Believe?* In his book *Between Heaven and Hollywood*, White gives the Christian creative some practical advice for breaking into the entertainment industry while remaining true to their faith in God. White's book is a must-have because it does not talk down to the Christian creative but gives them hope to drive them toward success. One major piece of sage advice that White gives involves persistence and how this virtue is the foundation for a long-lasting career, but he also makes it clear that persistence without God is sorely lacking.

“I kept telling myself that all I had to do was stick it out, and my turn would come. I needed to take more acting classes, meet more casting directors, sign with better agents, and do more theater. While the idea of perseverance is certainly a wise if not noble concept, success in your God-given dream will usually require more than only a stick-to-it-attitude. There was something missing in my recipe for success, an ingredient that had evaded me for almost a decade. We read in James 1:12, ‘Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.’ In both the New and Old Testaments, the word test means to ‘prove by trial’” (White, 2016).

White believes Christian creatives' perseverance in the entertainment industry can create viable stepping stones toward success. Still, not only this, Christian creatives may also be giving

a testament to God's great power and faithfulness without them even realizing it. So, before the Christian creative makes one wave in the industry, they can shine the light. White further states, "When God tests us, he is looking for us to prove that our faith is of substance. Of course, since God knows all things, He does not need proof of Himself. He is proving to us and to those around us that our faith is strong and that our faith in Him can withstand the storms of adversity and trial" (White, 2016). Therefore, White believes perseverance in the entertainment industry can be the key to success. However, where a Christian creative is concerned, perseverance with God sets them apart from their non-believing counterparts. So, to achieve any lasting success in the industry, Christian creatives must be willing to persevere on the road to their God-given dream of delighting audiences with the message of the kingdom.

Since I finished *The Christmas Fiddle*, I have used it to query agencies for representation and even entered the screenwriting competition. Although *The Christmas Fiddle* has achieved no success yet, I am confident that persisting in my attempts to get the movie seen will pay off, especially if I am continuing my journey with God. The wonderful thing about this journey is knowing that several different eyes have seen the script. So, the message has been read multiple times and only makes it stronger and better for audiences. I will persevere.

Devon Franklin is the former vice president of Columbia Pictures and founded his own production company, Franklin Entertainment, in 2014, where he produced hits like *Miracles of Heaven* and the animated feature called *The Star*. In his book, co-written with Tim Vandehey, *Produced by Faith: Enjoy Real Success Without Losing Your True Self*, Franklin speaks about success in the entertainment industry and how a Christian creative should define success in said industry. Christian creatives should not view success from a perspective of fame or fortune but

rather in terms of eternal value. Earthly fame and fortune will pass away, but the things that are eternal will outlast time. Franklin believes that success can have a plethora of definitions for creatives, but he makes it clear that Christian creatives should look higher to define success.

“Then there’s that word: success. It’s a funny word with a lot of definitions. For some people, success means making a lot of money. Full stop. For others, it means fame.

However, if you’re really a Christian and you have made your faith the centerpiece of your life, the true success is much more than fortune and fame. Success is confidence and contentment in the person God has made you to be. Success is living a good, just, and honorable life, becoming the kind of person who inspires others to follow God. Success is also discovering and living in your purpose” (Franklin, Vandehey, 2011).

Franklin’s words here echo those of the Apostle Paul. Paul counted everything as loss compared to the greatness of knowing Jesus Christ (ESV Bible, Philippians 3:8-9). Fame and fortune in and of itself is not ungodly; however, if the Christian creative abandons their faith in God to achieve success than it becomes ungodly. For the Christian creative, the greatness of knowing Jesus Christ and a passion to spread His message must become their definition of success, because this will keep them from losing themselves. What profit is there for a Christian creative who gains success in the entertainment industry but loses their soul in the process? There is no real success for a Christian creative unless they define success by God’s standards. Franklin further advises the Christian creative, “If you crave true success in your career, then God’s purpose must take the place of your own. Faith is your insurance. Even if you are laughed out of the conference room because of what you believe, your faith will reconcile what you lose and more than make up the difference in what you will gain” (Franklin, Vandehey, 2011).

I appreciate Franklin's words about success because I felt that it was vitally imperative to define success for myself when I first began to write scripts. Of course, fame and fortune seem like lofty goals to the world; however, I found these ambitions to be empty and temporal. Fame and fortune are only as good as the individual willing to keep up with trends, and some of these current trends in movies and television are not in agreement with a Christian creative's faith. So, decisions must be made. Do I write the stories that will make me famous? Stories that are gritty, raw, and edgy often leave audiences in the dark, or do I choose to write stories that will shine light into a dark world? I choose to write stories like *The Christmas Fiddle* that will shine light into a dark world, and that is how I define success.

Ted Baehr is an American media critic and chairman of the Christian Film and Television Commission. He is also the founder of *Movieguide* magazine, an informative bi-weekly magazine that shares all the happenings around Hollywood that pertain to the Christian creative. In his book, *How to Succeed in Hollywood: Without Losing Your Soul*, Baehr gives the Christian creative an in-depth examination of the Hollywood scene from God's perspective. Baehr offers the Christian creative the voice of experience from years of being heavily involved in the industry and encourages the Christian creative on the road toward success. For example, Baehr features an in-depth conversation with *Braveheart* writer Randall Wallace in the book.

“Randall encourages people to remember that God has a plan for everyone. ‘The things that drive you—even things like ego and pride—God can use. He’ll use all the good, and he’ll burn away all the bad. Many people say, ‘If you will lift me up, God, I’ll draw all people to you. It’s a bargain we try to make with God. But, Jesus said, ‘If I be lifted up, I’ll draw all men unto me.’ It’s not about lifting yourself up. It’s bad enough to try to

make a deal with a Hollywood movie studio, but don't try to negotiate with God" (Baehr, 2011).

I only found out that Wallace was a believer once I started to dive deeper into Baehr's book, and I found out that Wallace used the life of Jesus as inspiration to build the character William Wallace. *Braveheart* is based on a true story, but Wallace's account of true events is mostly a fictionalized account of the real man that was William Wallace. So, Wallace had to fill in the blanks of William Wallace's life the best way he knew how, and he leaned on his faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ to do so. I also learned that family-friendly can mean something other than *Old Yeller* or *Swiss Family Robinson*. Sometimes, Family-friendly can look like *Redeeming Love* and *The Passion of the Christ* because mature members of the family can discuss the problematic aspects of these more mature dramas. If the Christian creative chooses to tell more mature stories, it is always crucial to submit to God's plan in the process, and when this is done, light will always outweigh darkness. Baehr notes, "A lesson Randall is constantly relearning and sharing with his sons and loved ones is that you must be true to your heart. 'Your heart has to be healthy and whole, no matter the cost. You're not profited if you gain the whole world and lose your soul'" (Baehr, 2011).

Through this research, I have learned what it truly takes to thrive as a Christian creative in Hollywood. One must be willing to persevere with God, define success through God's standards, and submit to God's plan in everything that is done. In other words, I must decrease so that God can increase through the creative gift that He has given me because, as Randall has so eloquently stated, Christian creatives do not profit if they gain the whole world and lose their soul.

Comparable Project(s)

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

When I think of *The Christmas Fiddle*, Hallmark Hall of Fame always comes to my mind because Hallmark Hall of Fame was the perfect example of family-friendly drama. Sadly, Hallmark has gone to a more rom-com style platform, and they do not focus on too many of the Hallmark Hall of Fame movies, which held a lot of substance and opportunity for the Christian creative to shine light into real-life stories. To be more specific, *The Christmas Fiddle* is closely reminiscent to an old Hallmark Hall of Fame movie called *The Valley of Light* (2006). Like *The Christmas Fiddle*, *The Valley of Light* takes place in the WWII era and centers around a soldier returning home from war. The main character, Noah, is struggling to reacclimate himself to civilian life while dealing with PTSD, much like Caleb in *The Christmas Fiddle*.

Caleb and Noah find hope and healing in small-town settings where the people are loving, friendly, and kind. There is even a bit of romance for Noah when he meets a grieving war widow from whom he rents a small guest house. In the same way that Melody helps nurse Caleb’s mental wounds, the war widow named Eleanor helps Noah. The real-life themes in *The Christmas Fiddle* and *The Valley of Light* show the audience how hope can grow from hopelessness and how light can brighten the darkest night.

The Christmas Fiddle and *The Valley of Light* have many similarities, but I would also like to highlight another movie that could be likened to *The Christmas Fiddle*. *Journey Back to Christmas*, starring Candace Cameron-Bure and Oliver Hudson, presents elements similar to *The Christmas Fiddle*, and *Journey Back to Christmas* embraces the Christmas theme like *The Christmas Fiddle* does. It uses the WWII era as a backdrop to convey its central message of finding the light in a dark situation. *Journey Back to Christmas* takes place in a small town in

New England in 1945. Nurse Hanna Norris, played to perfection by Bure, has just lost her husband in the war and tearfully makes her way out into the snowy night after hearing the heartbreaking news. Hanna hits a snowbank while driving through a torrential winter storm and is stranded near an old barn. She decides to take shelter in the barn to wait for the storm to pass, but the barn is struck by lightning, rendering Hanna unconscious. When she wakes, she finds herself in the year 2016. She ventures out into her new surroundings, confused and disoriented. Fortunately, she is picked up by a handsome, small-town police officer named Jake Stanton, played by Oliver Hudson. As Hanna and Jake try to unravel her time-traveling mystery, hoping they can get her back to 1945 just in time for Christmas, they discover the true meaning of the season and the importance of family ties. *The Christmas Fiddle*, *The Valley of Light*, and *Journey Back to Christmas* all have a critical message in common: that people can always bring hope to hopeless situations and shine light into the darkness.

Conclusion

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (ESV Bible 2 Corinthians 5:16-20).

Finally, there are many definitions of family-friendly entertainment. So, where does a Christian creative fit into the plethora of definitions? As a Christian creative, the goal goes far deeper than just mere entertainment because as a Christian creative, the individual is fully aware of Who their gifts and talents come from. The Christian creative is not only aware of it, but this awareness gives them a different type of mission than just that of entertainment. The Christian creative has a ministry of reconciliation, and this should come through in every facet of their art. The Christian creative is no longer just working for man, but they are working for God. As per Colossians 3:23-24, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (ESV Bible). The Christian creative’s service to God is going to make their art ultimately different than other family-friendly projects.

Jesus never once detached Himself from His Father to win lost souls and neither should the Christian creative. Whenever a Christian creative says, “I don’t want to be known as a Christian artist”, it seems as if they are completely missing the mission of their work. It is hard to fathom Jesus walking around with this kind of mindset, because His ultimate goal on this Earth was to reconcile every man to God and the Christian creative’s art should point to Him in some way, because they are now witnesses of the cross. The art does not have to be a clanging gong

and it does not have to be overt. There are many allegorical authors that pointed and are still pointing to Christ without having to use His name.

Millions of children worldwide fell and are still falling in love with the untamed Lion, Aslan and Lewis never even mentioned Jesus's name. However, for those children that grew up in Christian homes, this was the perfect opportunity for parents to point their children in the direction of Christ and for those children that did not grow up in Christian homes, this prompted them to dig deeper to find out more about the mysterious Lion. No, the Christian creative does not have to avoid sinners or make films that solely preach to the church, because most of the harvesting is going to take place outside the church and among those that need the message most. To deny harvesting is to deny the true mission of Jesus Christ, because He came for those that were sick. As per, Mark 2:17, "And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners'" (ESV Bible).

Madeleine L'Engle has a different perspective when it comes to being called a Christian artist and there is some truth in it, "The world wants to shove us into what it considers the appropriate pigeonhole. I do not like to be labelled as a 'Christian children's writer' because I fear that this will shove me even further into the pigeonhole which began to be prepared for me when *A Wrinkle in Time* won the Newbery medal" (L' Engle, 2001). This is understandable for Christian creatives to choose to leave their faith ambiguous; however, the way Jesus carried out His life, should be the Christian creative's example and He never went through any lengths to cloak who He was and what He came to do. Sure, it alienated some, but it drew others to Him. Should the Christian creative leave themselves a blank slate to draw those that are not even interested in Christ, or should they be open and draw those that are hungry for Him? As

aforementioned, the mission and goal of the Christian creative should be very different from those in the secular world, because the Christian creative's aim is toward eternal things.

The Christian creative will never fully belong in the world because they have decided to follow a mission that puts them on an entirely different road. As per Matthew 7:14, "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (ESV Bible). While gifts and callings are without repentance, which is why secular art has the potential of being just as beautiful as art from Christian creatives (ESV Bible Romans 11:29), if an individual does not want to receive the message of the cross, they will reject it. However, if the Christian creative has created a quality piece of art it will be enjoyed on this premise even if the Christian has voiced that they are so. *Tuck Everlasting* is a beautiful piece of writing that can point to Christian virtues, but it is not pinned by a Christian creative. Nevertheless, this does not stop Christians from viewing it through the lens of Christ.

Those in the secular realm have no problem telling the world exactly who they are. Therefore, Christians should feel free to be as loud as possible in whatever career that they choose to honor God in. The bottom line is, if a quality story is being told, people will be attracted to the quality of that story. Not all that were drawn to Jesus ended up making a confession to believe, there were some who listened to His message and went their own way. Paul almost convinced King Agrippa but not quite (ESV Bible Acts 26:28-29). Susan Gallagher and Roger Lundin have insightful words for the Christian creative approaching their responsibility. We have a responsibility to serve God, and this would suggest that this entails a lot more than just waiting to go to heaven. The Christian secures their salvation and continues pursuing a comfortable way of life on Earth. However, scripture says that the Christian has a

responsibility to God to establish a world that pleases and praises their Creator. When the Christian does this, they are showing love to their neighbor. (Gallagher, Lundin, 1989)

Of course, Gallagher and Lundin are not suggesting that the Christian force their faith onto others, however, the Christian should make every attempt to encourage others in faith through how they live out their everyday life. Therefore, Christian creatives express this through how they present their art. “It may seem initially strange to say so, but reading literature is one way that we can attempt to carry out these responsibilities. The ability to write and read literature is a gift from God” (Gallagher, Lundin, 1989). So, from this perspective when the Christian creative chooses to point to Christ in their art, they are showing love to their neighbor. Creating family-friendly entertainment that honors God is also a labor of love.

THE CHRISTMAS FIDDLE

Written by

Tamara N. Canty

INT. TRAIN - DAY

CALEB GARNER, 30s, blue eyed, blond haired Captain America type both in looks and character is asleep on a train.

NIGHTMARE - IWO JIMA - NIGHT (1945)

A lone soldier stands barefooted in complete shadow and silence, on the moonlit shore of Iwo Jima, as the waves roll in.

He puts his hands into his pockets, but his solace shatters as the sun begins to rise and the once pure ocean turns blood red in the sunlight.

All of a sudden, the beach is flooded with tanks and other heavy artillery. Still, not one soldier other than himself appears, but he can hear the phantom SOUNDS OF WAR pierce his eardrums.

He closes his eyes tightly against the battle cries of the soldiers, but when he begins to sink into the wet sand, his eyes fly open quickly as he tries to fight against the invisible force pulling him deeper and deeper into the blood stained sand...

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - INT. TRAIN - DAY

The train is depleted of all passengers. The conductor tries to rouse Caleb awake.

SAM WESTON, a TRAIN CONDUCTOR, late 50s, round dark-skinned Black American man with salt and pepper hair. His mustache is mostly white.

Sam steps back as Caleb rouses with fight in his eyes.

SAM

Son, are you plannin' on gettin' off? If not I'm gonna have to charge you for another ticket.

Sam chuckles tentatively.

CALEB

Sorry.

Caleb stands to his feet and puts his coat on, when he bends down to pick up his scarf from his seat, all the movement causes his dog tags, along with his star of David necklace, to fly out from inside his layered sweater and t-shirt.

Sam becomes solemn, all cheeriness drains from his face at the sight of Caleb's dog tags.

Caleb shoves the dog tags back inside his sweater and t-shirt.

SAM

My wife Bev and I lost our boy at Iwo Jima.

There is silence between the two men for a long time.

Caleb purses his lips together tightly, as the SOUNDS OF WAR begin to pierce his ears again. His breathing becomes labored as the train walls begin to close in all around him.

Sam speaks again, and Caleb opens his eyes, as the man places a gentle hand on Caleb's strong shoulder.

SAM

Thank-you for your service, son.

There are tears in Sam's eyes.

Caleb winces at Sam's gratitude.

CALEB

Thank-you for your sacrifice, sir.

Caleb quickly zips up his coat, and walks fast toward the train's exit without looking back.

EXT. TRAIN STATION -

When Caleb gets outside into the winter chill, he breathes the crisp air into his lungs and then blows it out into a puff of white smoke.

He shuts his eyes as the SOUNDS OF WAR grow louder in his ears again.

He looks around for something to focus on and sets his sights on town sign, which reads, Welcome to Holbrook North Carolina established 1868, and just under the warm welcome it says in beautiful cursive letters Home of the Christmas Fiddler, population 500. Caleb tears up a little, and smiles.

As he begins to take in all the Norman Rockwell goodness of his small mountain town. He closes his eyes again, as he lets the tranquility of Holbrook at Christmastime wash over him. It's as timeless as the world of a snow globe.

CALEB

(whispers)

I'm home.

Caleb grimaces at the sight of the Welcome Home Captain Caleb Garner sign that hangs over the train station doors.

He looks around frantically to see if anyone notices him. No one does. He puts his toboggan on quickly and moves toward the inside of the train station to collect his duffle.

INT. THE WOODS - DAY

Caleb takes in the beautiful scenery of the snow-covered woods, with his duffle thrown across his shoulder, he smiles.

But all good things must come to an end as he runs out of woods to trek through.

EXT. HOLBROOK COMMUNITY CHURCH - DAY

He stops and stares at the familiar black Plymouth Deluxe that is parked in front of the church.

The church stands pretty much by itself, on miles and miles of farm land just perfect for after church picnics in the summer. It is the heart of the town of Holbrook.

He starts toward the church when he hears the sweet sound of a familiar voice.

INT. HOLBROOK COMMUNITY CHURCH - DAY

When he gets inside, he smiles at the sight of one of his oldest friends decorating the church for Christmas as she sings God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.

MELODY HAMILTON, 30s, brown-eyed dark haired black American woman. She is strong as nails, no nonsense, wise, charitable, everyone's best-friend.

Caleb sets his duffle on one of the pews, and inconspicuously stands behind her.

CALEB

Still the best singer in town, Mel.

Melody drops the piece of garland that she was just starting to staple to the bottom of one of the church's window sills.

MELODY

Caleb Garner! What are you doing here?

She wraps her arms around his shoulders and pulls him in for a hug. He envelopes her and savors the embrace.

She puts arms' length distance between them, as she looks up at him. His smile disappears and disappointment creeps into his eyes as they part.

MELODY

We weren't expecting you until next week.

CALEB

Yeah, that's what I told everyone.

MELODY

When your dad got word that you had been found, and were only wounded --

There is a long silence between them.

MELODY

He was such a mess when Western Union came with that telegram.

Melody touches his cheek softly, but he backs away from her touch.

CALEB

Well, here I am.

Caleb puts his hands in his pockets.

MELODY

Does your father --

CALEB

I needed to clear my head before I see him.

Caleb doesn't look at her.

MELODY

He's so proud of you. The whole town --

Caleb starts shifting uncomfortably, then his face twists with pain.

CALEB

That's exactly why I wrote dad that I was coming next week.

MELODY

I don't understand. We just want to give you the hero's welcome that you deserve.

Caleb rolls his eyes as he smiles a snarky smile.

Melody looks hurt by his change in attitude.

CALEB

(jaded)

I'm no hero.

MELODY

I can't believe that you are actually being this selfish right now.

Melody narrows her eyes at him, as he grits his teeth in response to her words.

They stand looking at each other with challenging glares, until Melody breaks the silence between them.

Melody approaches him closing in the space between them.

MELODY

Well, to the people of Holbrook you are a hero. So, you'll turn on the hero charm for their benefit, or your former enemies will look like a Sunday picnic compared to me.

Melody stares him down without fear, and he can't help but break into laughter as he takes her in his embrace with a grin.

CALEB

That sounds an awful lot like a threat.

Melody puts some space between them fidgeting uncomfortably at their closeness.

CALEB

(chuckles)

Same old Melody.

MELODY

And you know that I don't make idle threats, only promises that you can bet on.

CALEB

Man, I missed you.

The words are meant to be light, but the husky tone of his voice makes them a lot more weighty.

Melody avoids looking at him.

Caleb closes in the space between them, and looks down at her.

MELODY

So, can I give you a ride home?

Melody looks up at him and tries to lighten the moment.

Caleb's countenance becomes troubled again.

CALEB

Can we stay and talk for awhile? Maybe catch up.

Melody nods and Caleb's expression lightens.

They sit down on the front pew, neither of them speaks for awhile.

CALEB

You ever wonder why He allows it all?

Caleb's gaze is fixed on the cross that sits at the center of the church at the back of the pulpit.

Melody takes his hand in hers.

Caleb looks at her.

MELODY

All the time.

Caleb's expression is full of surprise.

MELODY

And the only conclusion that my human mind can draw is that the world as a whole can be very cruel, but that doesn't stop God from being God.

Caleb lets his eyes travel back to the cross, while his thumb circles the back of her hand.

CALEB

(smiles)

You were always good at making me feel better.

MELODY

I'm so sorry about Warren.

CALEB

(winces)

He was the real hero. I'm just a survivor.

Caleb's voice is husky with emotion.

Melody draws closer to him, and puts her head on his strong shoulder.

Caleb takes his hand from her, so he can put his arm around her drawing her even closer.

CALEB

He was the brother that I never had.

MELODY

(whispers)

I know.

CALEB

How am I supposed to face his folks?

MELODY

Mr. and Mrs. Hobbs love you like their own son, Cal. They organized prayer vigils here at the church.

(beat)

They were here non-stop until it was announced that you were safe. They don't blame you for Warren's death.

CALEB

If I just could've gotten to him. We were both fighting the same war. Why segregate us?

Caleb's lament is cut short when he notices Melody's smirk.

CALEB

I'm glad that my pain amuses you.

MELODY

I'm sorry, but you do realize that you're Monday morning quarterbacking right now, don't you?

CALEB

(grins)

Yeah, I guess I am.

Caleb looks at her deeply then, and his look changes from a friendly stare to one of desire.

Melody takes her eyes away from his quickly.

MELODY

Okay, Mr. Brave Marine. I think it's time I got you home.

Melody quickly gets up from sitting beside him.

Caleb rolls his eyes and sighs in exasperation.

CALEB

Yeah, you're probably right.

EXT. GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE- DAY

The quaint shoppe is homey and warm. If the shoemaker from the Elves and the Shoemaker was real, this would definitely be his workshop.

Smoke comes from the chimney adding to the warm ambiance of the place.

He looks out the window of Melody's car, but he makes no moves to get out as they sit. They don't speak, as the car idles. He just gazes in wistful wonder at the place.

Melody breaks the silence as Caleb continues to stare at the shoppe wistfully.

MELODY

Cal, it's time to go home.

Caleb turns to face her and nods, but he still makes no moves to leave the car as he looks at the shoppe again.

CALEB

Does a soldier really ever come home from war?

Caleb's question is more rhetorical as he closes his eyes in anguish. The SOUNDS OF WAR invade his mind once again.

They are immediately silenced when Melody touches his arm softly.

Caleb looks at her, and her eyes feel with tears as she sees the brokenness in his eyes.

Melody cups his face in her hands.

MELODY

Listen to me, Caleb Garner. You are home, you are safe and you are surrounded by love here. Come back to us, we've been waiting for you.

Caleb closes his eyes and savors her touch with a mischievous grin.

CALEB

So everyone loves me, huh? Even you?

Melody lowers her hands from his face as his question takes her completely off guard.

MELODY

Everyone in town loves you.

CALEB

I wasn't asking about everyone in town.

Melody looks straight ahead.

CALEB

(exasperated)

Why do you always do that?

MELODY

I don't know what you mean.

Melody still doesn't look at him.

Caleb touches her hand softly, and she turns to face him again.

CALEB

Avoid us.

Caleb entangles his fingers in hers, and she doesn't pull away.

MELODY

Cal, we've always been good friends. Best friends.

CALEB

(dubious)

Just friends?

Melody looks straight ahead again.

MELODY

Cal, now's not the time to talk about this. Your father is waiting.

Caleb clenches his jaw, and lets go of her hand.

Melody purses her lips in pain at his action.

Caleb opens the door, but before he exits, he sighs and all of his anger toward her seems to evaporate with the sigh.

CALEB

You're right. I wasn't being fair.

Caleb takes her hand in his again, and she looks at him then.

CALEB

But we're going to definitely talk. Real soon. I'm not letting you go this time.

Melody doesn't say anything, but he smiles at her anyway and he gives her hand a final squeeze before getting out of the car.

Caleb opens the back car door to get his duffle from the back seat. He closes the back door, and bends down into the open front door to talk to her.

CALEB

Thanks for the ride, Mel.

MELODY

You're welcome.

CALEB

So when can I see you again?

MELODY

(smiles)

Caleb Garner, how do you know that I don't already have a beau waiting for me somewhere?

He hunches with a charming and confident smile.

CALEB

Do you?

MELODY

No.

Melody admits and both of them laugh.

MELODY

But that's not the point. It's rude to assume that a lady is without a suitor. You didn't even ask.

CALEB

Pardon my lack of manners, my lady. I assumed that we were best friends, and were not bound by such pretentious rules.

MELODY

I would love to stay here all day and exchange playful banter with you, but I do have lesson plans to finish.

CALEB

Sorry, Ms. Hamilton. Just tell me when I can see you again, and I'll gladly leave you to your work.

MELODY

Come by the Bloomfield House tomorrow. I want you to see what I've done with the place.

CALEB

I'll be there.

MELODY

Give your dad a big hug for me.

Caleb nods.

CALEB

See you tomorrow.

Melody smiles, and as soon as he closes the door she pulls off.

Caleb stares after the car until he can no longer see it.

EXT. GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE- CONTINUOUS

Caleb touches the door knob to the shoppe, to go inside, at the same time that someone is turning the knob to come out.

DR. FRANCIS BERNSTEIN, is a tall slight man with thick black curls that have a touch of distinguished gray at the temples, this is where his aging stops.

Francis smiles and extends his hand to him, and Caleb accepts the handshake.

FRANCIS

Caleb.

There are tears in Francis's eyes.

CALEB

It's good to see you, Doc.

FRANCIS

Welcome home, young man. Your heroism --

Caleb takes his hand away and puts it in his pocket, as he looks away from the emotional doctor.

CALEB

So, how's the Old Man?

FRANCIS

Stubborn as a mule.

Francis chuckles while Caleb grins.

CALEB

Did you give him something for that?

FRANCIS

And what would you propose that I give him? You know how he is.

CALEB

He's alright isn't he?

Francis clears his throat, and shifts his eyes from Caleb's quickly.

Caleb's eyebrows furrow.

CALEB

Doc?

FRANCIS

Your father has been tired lately, and having some fainting spells, but other than that he's pretty much the same.

Caleb opens his mouth to speak again, but Francis cuts Caleb's words short.

FRANCIS

Your father will be overjoyed to see you.

Caleb nods.

Francis pats Caleb on the shoulder as Francis walks toward his parked car dejectedly.

Caleb watches as Francis drives away before going into the fiddle shoppe.

INT. GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE-

Caleb steps inside the warm and inviting fiddle shoppe, and the ringing of a bell announces his entrance. There are beautiful fiddles on display of every color, and exquisite bows to accompany them.

ASHER (O.S.)
 (warm, cheerful)
 Welcome! I'll be right there.

Caleb closes the door and steps into a stream of sunlight. He draws in a deep breath and closes his eyes, as sounds of the past fill his ears.

FLASHBACK - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - DAY (1924)

ASHER GARNER, 30s, is an olive-skinned man, tall in stature and burly in build. He has kind dark eyes, thick dark hair and strong steady hands.

Asher sits at his work bench with two small boys looking on as he crafts a fiddle. He explains every step to the boys in his thick Yiddish accent.

WARREN HOBBS, 10, is a black American boy with caramel skin and dark eyes, while he wears an angelic smile on his lips there is a defiant fire in his eyes.

Warren seems far more engrossed in the fiddle making process than his best friend, CALEB GARNER, 10, the blue-eyed blond haired mischief maker seems more interested in adventurous pursuits than crafting fiddles.

ASHER
 You see, boys, the Christmas fiddle must be special. So, this is why I use the cherry wood.

Asher runs his fingers across the wood and Warren copies his action, as Caleb stands back rolling his eyes and bouncing up and down, impatiently.

WARREN
 (excited)
 That's why the Christmas fiddle is magic, right Mr. Garner.

ASHER
 (smiles)
 That's right Warren, my boy. The cherry wood makes much sweeter music than any other kind of wood.

WARREN

I knew it!

CALEB

Warren, are we gonna play some ball or what?

WARREN

Yeah, yeah, I'm coming.

Caleb blows out an exasperated breath.

CALEB

The guys are at the field.

WARREN

Alright, let's go. I'll be back, Mr. Garner.

ASHER

I'll be here.

SUSAN GARNER, 30s, is a vivacious and spirited woman with blonde hair and blue eyes. She is a striking beauty.

She bursts into the shoppe with her apron on and her hands on her hips.

SUSAN

You aren't going anywhere, young man until you march yourself up those stairs and make that bed.

CALEB

But, mom, the guys --

SUSAN

Can wait.

Susan points toward the stairs and Caleb stomps toward them while muttering under his breath.

Susan smiles at Warren.

SUSAN

Will you be joining us for dinner tonight, Warren?

WARREN

Yes ma'am! It's brisket night. I love your brisket. It's a lot better than my mom's, but don't tell her I said that.

Susan motions as if she is zipping her lips and she raises her hand.

Warren laughs and she smiles down at him.

Caleb comes barreling through the shoppe at break neck speed.

SUSAN

(stern)

Young man you better have made that bed properly.

Caleb gives Susan an angelic smile as he opens the door and shoves Warren out of it.

CALEB

Love you, Mom.

Caleb slams the shoppe's door as he exits, before Susan can ask any more questions.

Asher smiles.

SUSAN

Caleb Garner --

BACK TO PRESENT DAY - INT. GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - DAY

Caleb smiles at the memory, but his smile fades when Asher comes from his office in the back of the shoppe. Asher has a clipboard in his hand as if he has been taking inventory.

ASHER GARNER, 50s, his olive skin is slightly wrinkled, but he still maintains his tall stature and burly build and his thick black hair now bears gray flecks of wisdom. His dark and kind eyes don't leave his clipboard.

ASHER

(smiles)

Sorry to keep you waiting. How may I --

Asher looks up and his smile fades as his eyes fill with tears. He sats his clipboard down on the counter, and comes from behind it to approach Caleb.

CALEB

Hey, Pop.

ASHER

You weren't expected until next week, my boy.

CALEB

I decided to come early. I hope that's alright.

Asher takes Caleb into a firm embrace, Caleb closes his eyes savoring Asher's fatherly embrace before fully committing to the hug.

ASHER

(whispers)

Welcome home, my son. Praise Adonai for your safe return.

CALEB

It's good to be home, Pop.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - UPSTAIRS APARTMENT - NIGHT

Asher and Caleb are in the kitchen at the sink. Asher is washing dishes as Caleb helps him dry.

ASHER

Thanks for your help with inventory today. I really needed to start on the Christmas fiddle for this year's bazaar.

CALEB

Christmas is like tomorrow, Pop. You should already be practicing your solo by now.

Asher waves off Caleb's comment.

ASHER

Ah, I always find my inspiration in the nick of time. You know that.

Asher gets a wistful look in his eyes, and Caleb chuckles.

CALEB

Well, I'm here now and I don't mind helping with the fiddle.

ASHER

(smiles)

Just like old times, eh?

CALEB

Yeah, I guess so.

Asher hands Caleb another plate, and Caleb begins to dry it.

CALEB

So, Pop, I ran into Dr. Bernstein on the way into the shoppe and I kind of get the sense that he was keeping something from me. What's going on?

ASHER

Oh, Francis is just being overly dramatic. I feel fine.

CALEB

But what did the Doc say, Pop?

ASHER

He had me take a few tests, because I've been having some fainting spells lately.

CALEB

And --

ASHER

He sent them off to a hospital in Raleigh to be sure. They came back today. In fact, he was just delivering the news before you came in.

Caleb stops drying and takes a long, worried look at Asher.

ASHER

It's okay, my boy.

CALEB

How bad is it, Pop?

ASHER

Oh, they think that I have a brain tumor.

Caleb looks as if someone just punched a hole through his chest.

CALEB

Pop, what's the Doc's plan?

ASHER

There's nothing Francis can do.

Caleb runs his fingers through his golden hair.

CALEB

So, you're telling me that you're dying?

ASHER

No, my boy, I'm leaving this world, but I'm not dying. Yeshua --

CALEB

Pop, I deal in facts now, not faerie tales and the fact is that you're going to die, just like Warren and Mom end of story.

Asher stays silent for a long time. Caleb almost breaks the silence, but Asher beats him to it.

ASHER

(softly)

I know that things have not been easy for you, my son. Your mother's passing and then the war. Both, such awful tragedies.

(beat)

So much death, but there has also been life. Yes?

Caleb sighs deeply as his eyes get wistful and sad, there is a long silence between Caleb and Asher.

Asher clears his throat, bringing Caleb back to the moment.

They look at each other and smile.

CALEB

You win, Pop.

Asher turns Caleb to face him and rests his hands on Caleb's shoulders.

ASHER

When I am gone, I want you to promise me that you will find the blessing in everyday and if you can't find the blessing; I want you to be the blessing. Will you promise me that, my son?

CALEB

I'll try, Pop.

Asher taps Caleb's cheek softly.

ASHER

Good. Now dry.

Asher hands Caleb a clean dish and Caleb starts drying again.

EXT. - WINDING MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Caleb rides his Triumph Bonneville T-120 matte black motorcycle along a winding mountain road. His black bomber jacket and sun shades give him a wild and carefree look.

And his black helmet in no way diminishes any of his cool. He smiles a little, but only for a moment. The SOUNDS OF WAR, in his head, wipe the smile right off of his face. Caleb accelerates as they intensify.

EXT. - THE BLOOMFIELD SCHOOL - DAY

Caleb slows down as he reaches his destination, the Bloomfield House, which has been renamed the Bloomfield School. The SOUNDS OF WAR dull to a hum and then they die completely.

Instead, he focuses on the sounds of gleeful children playing somewhere on the property. He turns into the walkway and rides the bike up close to the porch.

He pushes the kill switch then turns the key to cut the roaring engine of the bike. He pushes the kick stand out, and stands up straight.

He takes off his helmet, and takes in a deep breath of fresh mountain air. He brings his leg around from straddling the bike, and takes a look around. He smiles.

Caleb takes off his sun shades and starts to walk up the stairs, holding his helmet under his arm. When suddenly, he is hit in the back with a flying football.

He turns around to see who the culprit is and there are three children staring up at him, all looking with their mouths wide open.

GEORGE “GEORGIE” PRIDGEN, 10, is a black American boy with dark brown skin and coal black eyes. He’s obviously the ring leader of the mischief.

JACOB LOGAN, 10, is a Caucasian boy with fiery red hair and green eyes. He’s a bit small for his age.

DORIYA “FIGGY” WATSON, 10, is a Caucasian girl with long blonde pigtails and blue eyes. She’s a tomboy.

GEORGE

(awe)

Cap!

Caleb smiles and opens his mouth to say something, but before he can say anything; Melody comes running from behind the house.

MELODY

(stern)

George Pridgen, Jacob Logan and Doriya Watson! How many times do I have to tell you to play where I can see you?

None of the children say anything as she approaches. Melody waves to Caleb and he grins at her.

MELODY

So, what do you think?

CALEB

(jokes)

Only you would waste a perfectly good house by turning it into a school.

MELODY

What can I say it’s the teacher in me. I couldn’t help myself.

Melody stands beside Caleb, as they both turn their attention to the children.

MELODY

So, did my energetic students introduce themselves?

CALEB

No, we haven’t been formerly introduced yet.

MELODY

Close your mouths children.

They all close their mouths, but their awe struck eyes never leave Caleb. He grins down at them.

MELODY

And what have I told you about staring, it's very impolite?

None of the children can bring themselves to stop staring.

GEORGE

But it's Cap, Ms. Hamilton.

George stutters in disbelief with his eyes glued to Caleb.

MELODY

(smiles)

Yes, this is Captain Caleb Garner. The war hero that we will be celebrating in a few days for his heroism in Iwo Jima.

GEORGE

(rolls his eyes)

No, no, no.

George unzips his heavy winter coat, and pulls out a Captain America comic book. He hands it to Melody and she smiles as she looks at it.

MELODY

Oh, I see, the resemblance is quite uncanny.

She looks at Caleb with a giggle.

CALEB

(grins)

Come on, what's funny?

Melody hands the comic book to Caleb for him to look at, and he flips through it. He bursts out in uproarious laughter, and Melody joins him.

MELODY

It would seem that George believes you to be this Captain America fella.

The kids are unmoved by Caleb's and Melody's laughter, their awe struck gazes remain unaltered.

Caleb kneels down to their level and looks at each of them with a smile.

CALEB

Hey kids, I'm Captain Caleb Garner.

Caleb extends his hand to them and they all take turns shaking it, while keeping their awed expressions.

Melody makes the introductions, because none of the children do.

MELODY

Captain Garner, I would like you to meet George “Georgie” Pridgen, Jacob Logan and Doriya “Figgy” Watson.

CALEB

It’s nice to meet y’all.

GEORGE

(smiles)

Wow, it’s nice to meet you too, Cap.

George finally finds his words.

Caleb hands George back his comic book.

CALEB

Here you go, Georgie. I believe that this is yours. Will you make a deal with me, ace?

George takes the comic from Caleb with wide eyes.

GEORGE

Sure, anything for you, Cap.

Caleb looks up at Melody.

CALEB

Will you promise not to read it during Ms. Hamilton’s class?

GEORGE

Cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.

George puts his hand to his heart.

CALEB

Good man.

Caleb shifts his gaze to Doriya, and she fidgets a little under his close inspection.

CALEB

(smiles)

And how did a doll like you get the nickname, Figgy?

DORIYA

(stammers)

I can eat six Fig Newtons in a minute.

CALEB

Whoa, Figgy, now that's impressive I'd really like to see that sometime.

Figgy shifts her eyes from his and giggles.

Caleb chuckles as he focuses his attention on Jacob, and under Caleb's close inspection, Jacob pokes out his chest and stands as straight as he can.

CALEB

You're Jacob, right?

JACOB

That's right, Cap.

CALEB

You're not scared of me are you, Jacob?

JACOB

Nope.

CALEB

Ah, so you believe that you can take, Captain America then?

JACOB

I can give it a shot.

Jacob tries to look lethal as he narrows his eyes.

Caleb bursts out laughing as he stands up tall and the kids are in awe again, as the winter sun surrounds him in its ethereal glow.

Jacob swallows hard at the sight of him.

CALEB

(smiles)

I think I'm scared of you, Jacob.

Jacob folds his arms across his chest.

JACOB

Yeah, you should be.

Jacob sticks out his tongue, and runs away.

George and Doriya run after him.

MELODY

Don't go too far, kids. I'm about to ring the bell. Recess is just about over, Mrs. Rossi will be expecting you for elocution class.

They run back around the house without answering Melody.

Melody walks across the yard toward the high bell stand, and Caleb follows behind her. She goes to grab the rope to ring the bell, which signals the end of recess.

Caleb takes her hand in his, before she can grab the rope to ring the bell.

Melody turns to face him.

CALEB

So, do you teach a class after recess, Ms. Hamilton?

MELODY

No, that's when I take my lunch.

CALEB

(grins)

Care to spend it with me?

Melody rolls her eyes and smiles, as she slips her hand out of his and pulls the rope to ring the bell.

MELODY

We'll see.

A deluge of children run from behind the house.

MELODY

Single file children.

ALL

Yes, Ms. Hamilton.

All the children line up single file, as they walk up the steps and pour into the mansion.

Melody walks up the stairs to join them.

Caleb follows close behind.

When all of the children are in the house, Melody looks up at Caleb.

CALEB

You didn't answer my question, Ms. Hamilton? About lunch.

MELODY

Okay. I did promise to show you around.

CALEB

Perfect.

They gaze at each other for a long moment, until Melody breaks the gaze with an uncomfortable laugh.

MELODY

Well, come on in. My lunch hour won't last forever.

Melody walks inside first, and Caleb grins as he follows behind her.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - CONTINUOUS

Asher is sitting at his work station, cutting out a pattern from cherry wood, for the town's Christmas fiddle. He ignores Francis Bernstein as he speaks to him.

FRANCIS

Be fair to him Asher. You could at least pursue the treatment options that I have suggested.

Asher looks up from his work, on the fiddle, for a moment.

ASHER

(smiles)

I'm touched, Francis, I didn't know that you cared so much.

Francis breaks into laughter, in response to Asher's smile, completely destroying the seriousness of the moment.

FRANCIS

I'm serious, Asher. Your son deserves to have his father around a bit longer. The science has come such a --

Asher holds up his hand to Francis, and Francis purses his lips together in a hard line.

ASHER

Can you guarantee me that any of these treatment options will spare my life, Francis?

Asher looks at him for a long time.

Francis sighs and shakes his head.

ASHER

Then let me live my days out as best I can. I can't bear to breathe my last in a hospital. I'd rather be surrounded by those that I love.

FRANCIS

Asher, with how quickly the tumor is growing, you won't see the new year.

Asher puts his focus back on designing the Christmas fiddle.

ASHER

Then I will make my last Christmas the merriest one yet.

Asher looks at Francis again and winks.

Francis shakes his head and smiles.

FRANCIS

Stubborn as a mule.

Asher begins cutting out the design for the fiddle.

ASHER

You've known me for many years, Francis. Surely, you didn't think that I was going to start changing now.

FRANCIS

I should've known better.

They both laugh.

INT. - THE BLOOMFIELD SCHOOL - LIBRARY - DAY

Caleb and Melody enter the library. Caleb stops in front of a beautiful painted portrait of Melody's grandparents that is hung on the wall.

NORVILLE HAMILTON, 40s, a distinguished caramel-skinned black American man wearing a light colored Great Gatsby era suit stands smiling as he hovers over a smiling woman.

BRIDGETTE BLOOMFIELD-HAMILTON, 40s, a striking Caucasian woman with green eyes and ebony hair smiles as she sits wearing a pastel green evening dress and matching hat that coordinates with her husband's light colored suit.

At the bottom of the portrait is the date April 30, 1925.

CALEB

(wistfully)

I miss them.

MELODY

(resentful)

Why, because they helped build a delusion?

CALEB

That's not how I would describe this place.

MELODY

Oh and how would you describe a world that teaches its inhabitants nothing about reality?

CALEB

Holbrook is hope in action, Mel. The Founders set their minds on unity after the civil war. This place is a gift.

MELODY

The Bloomfield, Hamilton, Garner and Hobbs families meant well, and their hearts were truly in the right place. But --

Melody hunches and smiles, but Caleb won't let her drop the conversation.

CALEB

But what, Mel?

Melody studies the picture of her grandparents.

MELODY

Some days I'm so sure that this is the best place on Earth, but others --

(beat)

Well, Holbrook is a release from the brutal outside world, at least.

Melody forces a smile, but Caleb sees right through its inauthenticity.

Caleb takes her in his arms, and they gaze at each other for a long time.

Melody smiles as she inconspicuously squirms out of his embrace.

Caleb clears his throat at the space that Melody has created between them.

CALEB

I love you, Melody.

MELODY

(smiles uncomfortably)

I love you too, Cal.

CALEB

(rolls his eyes)

You know that's not how I meant it. I've tried to get you out of my head. Nothing works. I love you, Mel and not just as a friend.

MELODY

Caleb, we can't --

CALEB

My heart tells me something different.

MELODY

Come on, I'll show you around. We've gotten so many new books --

CALEB

I'm not letting you change the subject this time. You always change the subject when we start talking about us.

MELODY

Of all the things we could talk about and catch up on, why do we always have to end up here at these same old words?

Caleb shakes his head and wraps his arms around her again.

CALEB

Because I'm irredeemably in love with you, Melody and I know that you love me too.

MELODY

(snarky)

I especially love your modesty.

CALEB

Ah, so, she's deflecting with sarcasm. What deep truths are you hiding under all that snark, Ms. Hamilton?

Melody rolls her eyes with a smile as she squirms out of his embrace again.

MELODY

I don't have time for this. Do you want to see the library or not?

CALEB

For now, but this conversation isn't over, Ms. Hamilton?

Melody walks away with Caleb in tow. They stroll down an aisle of books, and Melody stops in front of a row of books. She smiles.

MELODY

Oh, this is my favorite section. We just got an all new collection of Austen novels a couple of months ago.

Melody let's her fingers linger on a copy of Jane Austen's Persuasion, and Caleb places his fingers gently over hers.

CALEB

(whispers)

I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant.

They gaze at each other for a few moments.

Caleb brings his lips close to hers, Melody lowers her gaze quickly and takes her hand from underneath his.

MELODY

(smiles)

So, you think that you can steal lines from Captain Wentworth to explain why you never answered my letters?

CALEB

Okay, you got me dead to rights. You ripped my heart out when you turned down my proposal all those years ago. I was allowed brooding time.

Melody giggles and Caleb grins.

MELODY

Fair enough.

Caleb's eyes get sad all of a sudden.

MELODY

What's wrong?

CALEB

My dad's dying. Did you know that?

Melody cups his face in her hands.

MELODY

I'm so sorry. I know that he hasn't been well, but I never expected that things had gotten this bad.

CALEB

Brain tumor.

MELODY

What can I do?

CALEB

There's nothing that anyone can do. Pop, seems to have made his peace with it.

Caleb looks into her eyes and smiles, as he rests his forehead to hers.

CALEB

You're so good in crisis, Mel. Marry me.

MELODY

You are one relentless man.

CALEB

Especially when I've set my sights on something I want.

(beat)

Marry me.

Caleb pulls her closer as she drapes her arms about his shoulders. He almost kisses her, when the bell rings.

CALEB

Ugh, saved by the bell, Ms. Hamilton.

MELODY

(dreamily)

Time for literature class.

Caleb kisses her softly on her forehead, and she creates space between them and starts to walk away. He grabs her hand gently and she turns to face him.

CALEB

Will you meet me at the Sweetheart tree later?

MELODY

(smiles)

Aren't we a little old --

Caleb pulls her back to him.

CALEB

Please, don't tell me that you've lost your sense of adventure, Ms. Hamilton.

MELODY

Never. I'll be there Captain Garner, but only because you challenged me.

CALEB

Serves you right. You're always challenging me.

MELODY

(smiles)

Alright Captain Garner, it's time for you to go. I have a literature class to teach.

Melody pulls Caleb along, with her hand clasped in his, and he grins.

EXT. - THE HOBBS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Caleb opens the gate of a white picket fence, and walks up the walkway to a two story pale yellow house. He stands at the doorway and attempts to grab the knocker several times.

The SOUNDS OF WAR invade his mind. He shuts his eyes trying to dull the noises, but they refuse to dull. He turns to walk away from the door, but when he does the door flies open.

ETHEL HOBBS, 50s, stunning dark brown-skinned black American woman with a thousand watt smile is standing on the other side.

Ethel steps out of the door to greet Caleb, and the SOUNDS OF WAR immediately disappear.

ETHEL

Caleb Garner, you better get over here and give me a squeeze, boy. What's wrong with you, trying to escape?

Caleb grins as he walks toward Ethel to receive her warm hug.

CALEB

Nice to see you, Mrs. Hobbs.

They look at each other for a long moment. Mrs. Hobbs has tears in her eyes.

ETHEL

You hungry?

CALEB

(sniffs the air)

Is that fried chicken I smell?

ETHEL

But of course.

CALEB

Then yes.

ETHEL

Do I know my boy, or do I know my boy? Never were able to turn down my fried chicken. Get on in here, lunch'll be ready in a jiff.

INT. - THE HOBBS HOUSE - FOYER

Ethel leads Caleb into, the small, yet elegant foyer.

ETHEL

Let me take your coat and helmet.

Ethel opens a small coat closet.

Caleb gives her the motorcycle helmet that he is holding, and she puts it on the shelf. He takes off his jacket and she hangs it up in the coat closet. She closes the door and smiles with a wink.

ETHEL

Now let's go see if we can find, Lester.

INT.- THE HOBBS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Ethel leads Caleb into the quaint living room, where LESTER HOBBS, 50s, a tall, thin dark skinned black American man is putting together a model ship.

Lester's glasses are sliding down his nose as he meticulously puts the ship together piece by piece.

ETHEL

Les, put that stuff away, we have company.

Lester pushes his glasses up on his nose, as he takes his focus away from his ship to see who has come to visit. His face brightens when he sees Caleb.

ETHEL

Doesn't our boy look good, Les?

Lester is taken aback and becomes slightly overwhelmed with emotion.

LESTER

Real good. We weren't expecting you 'till next week, boy.

CALEB

I decided to come back early, sir.

Lester stands up, with a bright smile, and walks over to Caleb extending his hand.

Caleb takes it for a handshake.

Lester has tears in his eyes as he pulls Caleb in for a hug.

LESTER

(whispers)

I can see the guilt all on your face, boy. Let it go. There was nothing you could do to prevent my boy's death.

Caleb chokes up as he hugs Lester tightly.

CALEB

If I could've saved him --

LESTER

I know. No use goin' over what could have beens.
You have to let it go, boy or it'll eat you up.

Lester looks at Caleb and smiles, then he turns his attention to Ethel.

LESTER

Ethel, I hope Caleb is joining us for lunch.

ETHEL

Already discussed. I'll go set the table.

Ethel dashes away to the kitchen.

Lester walks back over to his chair to sit down.

LESTER

Come on over, boy and take a load off.

Caleb plops down on the couch that sits bedside Lester's chair.

Caleb looks at all the old pictures of him and Warren, that crowd the Hobbs's mantle. He looks away quickly before he gets teary eyed.

LESTER

So, are you home for good?

CALEB

Yes sir. I think the soldier's life lost a great deal of its allure for me. Holbrook is definitely a one-of-a-kind place.

LESTER

The adventurer has tired of his adventures.

They both laugh.

CALEB

(hunches)

For a while anyway.

LESTER

Holbrook is quite the place. Imagine, my granddaddy coming from being a slave to helping establish an entire town. This place really is something special.

CALEB

This place is proof that peace and unity are possible.

They smile at each other.

Ethel comes in.

ETHEL

Alright boys, lunch is on the table.

LESTER

What'd you fix me, Honey Dip?

ETHEL

Just some fried chicken, corn bread, collard greens black-eyed peas and rice and sweet tea to wash it all down.

Lester stands up and rubs his hands together.

LESTER

Well, you don't have to ask me twice.

ETHEL

Oh, and sweet potato pie for dessert.

LESTER

Mmmm-mmm, my baby sure can burn.

Lester kisses Ethel on the cheek and heads toward the dining room.

Caleb smiles at the interaction between Lester and Ethel.

ETHEL

(shouts)

Guests first, Les.

LESTER (O.S.)

You better tell that boy to come on or I'm gonna eat it all.

Caleb stands up with a grin and walks toward Ethel.

CALEB

I'm gonna visit the latrine. Can't come to the table with dirty hands.

ETHEL

You remember where it is, sweetheart.

Caleb heads down the hall to the bathroom, as Ethel walks toward the dining room.

ETHEL

(shouts)

Les, you're awfully quiet in there. You better not be eating anything yet.

Caleb softly chuckles.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - LATER

Caleb walks into the shoppe, and places his helmet on the store's windowsill, as he holds a plate covered with aluminum foil.

Asher is completely engrossed in crafting the Christmas fiddle, so much so, that he doesn't look up when the bell above the door rings.

Caleb smiles as he approaches Asher's workstation.

CALEB

You started without me, Pop.

Caleb sets the plate on the table out of the way of Asher's work.

Asher finally looks up from the, nearly completed, fiddle. From the scroll to the chin rest, everything is intricately crafted.

Even the delicately drawn Christmas tree is precisely carved into the fiddle's body on the opposite side of the chin rest.

CALEB

It's beautiful. What's left for me to do?

Asher gets up from his chair and stretches out.

ASHER

There's still varnishing and stringing to be done, my son. And then there's sanding yet. Plenty to do, the fiddle is far from complete.

Asher walks over to the store's window to change the sign from open to closed, then he locks the door and cuts out the store lights, leaving only the lamp over his workstation on.

Caleb takes off his coat and places it over the back of the chair that Asher was just sitting in and sits down.

Caleb picks up a bottle of varnish as his father rushes back over to him.

ASHER

What are you doing?

Asher reaches for the varnish.

CALEB

(grins)

Pop, you asked me to help.

Caleb keeps it just out of Asher's reach and laughs.

CALEB

Come on. I know what I'm doing. You trained me well.

ASHER

But --

CALEB

No, buts. You need to eat. Mrs. Hobbs sent you a plate.

Caleb motions his head toward the direction of the plate.

ASHER

(smiles)

Bless that woman and her kosher fried chicken. She certainly didn't have to go out of her way for me.

(beat)

But I'm so glad that she did, because I really didn't feel like cooking anything tonight.

Asher picks up the plate and unwraps it slightly and inhales the contents with a deep sigh of pleasure.

ASHER

So, you went to go see them then?

Caleb sighs deeply and nods.

ASHER

And how are they?

CALEB

(grins)

Same old Mr. and Mrs. Hobbs.

ASHER

Did you expect them to be different?

CALEB

(hunches)

We all handle death and grief in our own ways I guess.

ASHER

You expected their love for you to be altered.

Caleb looks at Asher with astonishment in his eyes.

CALEB

Geez, how do you do that, Pop?

ASHER

You are my son, and I know you very well.

CALEB

I didn't expect them to be so --

ASHER

Kind?

Caleb shakes his head and looks away from Asher.

Asher places the plate back on his workstation, and puts his hand gently but firmly on Caleb's shoulder.

ASHER

Your travels have made you forget the heart of Holbrook, I see. We weep, rejoice, celebrate and mourn together. You belong to the Hobbs's just as much as you belong to me.

Caleb looks back at Asher and there are tears in Asher's eyes.

ASHER

Warren was my son too. I feel his loss just as much as the Hobbs's do.

Tears come into Caleb's eyes then.

ASHER

Grieve your brother's loss, my son, but don't let the grief consume you.

Caleb turns from Asher to wipe the tears from his eyes, and when he has collected himself he looks back at Asher.

CALEB

(grins)

Thanks, Pop.

Asher slaps Caleb's cheek softly.

ASHER

You are most welcome, my son.

(beat)

Now, to a brighter subject. I hear that you paid Ms. Melody Hamilton a visit at the Bloomfield School today.

CALEB

(chuckles)

I forgot how small this place is. Yeah, I paid her a visit.

Asher smiles a goofy meddling smile.

ASHER

And --

CALEB

And we talked.

ASHER

So, that's all you're going to give me?

CALEB

(frustrated)

That's all there is. Ms. Hamilton is being her usual stubborn self.

Caleb smiles at the thought of Melody.

Asher folds his arms across his chest and nods.

ASHER

You must handle Melody delicately, my son. Life has not been easy for her. Much of the world is not like Holbrook. Disunity, hatred and segregation abound. She is fearful.

CALEB

I don't know how to make things okay for her, Pop. Life was so much easier when all we knew was Holbrook.

ASHER

Speak to her heart, let her know that there is nothing to fear. If you love her, fight for her.

Asher picks up his plate.

Caleb nods his head and smiles.

CALEB

Thanks, Pop.

ASHER

All in a day's work. Now, to eat.

Asher grins and walks toward the stairs to the apartment.

CALEB

Wait, are you actually passing the mantle?

ASHER

(winks)

I do believe that it is time. I have trained you well.

Caleb smiles and picks up the varnish.

Asher stays and watches Caleb put the first coat of varnish on half the fiddle, he nods proudly and then disappears up the stairs.

EXT. - THE SWEETHEART TREE- NIGHT

Caleb stands propped up, nonchalantly, against the Sweetheart tree. The tree's lush leaves have been replaced with beautiful icicles. He smiles when he sees Melody coming toward him.

Melody smiles back nervously as she walks through a light snow shower.

CALEB

I was beginning to think that you were gonna stand me up.

MELODY

I almost did.

Caleb stands up straight as Melody approaches him closely.

MELODY

(rolls her eyes)

My mom made me come. She said that it would be rude if I didn't show. Of course, dad took her side. I guess they still like you better than me.

Caleb smiles a charming smile, as his eyes get intense. They stand gazing at each other, while starlight and moon glow, sit upon them.

Melody moves her gaze toward the tree to avoid Caleb's passionate stare.

MELODY

So, I'm here, Caleb what is it that you wanted to talk about?

Caleb gently grabs Melody's gloved hand in his, the look in her eyes gives away the spark that she is feeling, as she looks back at him.

CALEB

Come with me, I want to show you something.

Caleb leads Melody around the tree's massive trunk, and when he gets to the spot where he carved their initials, he stops.

When Melody notices, she takes her hand from Caleb's and touches the initials that Caleb engraved inside a heart shape.

MELODY

Caleb why --

CALEB

(smiles)

Because I was too chicken to do it when we were in school. I always wanted to.

Melody turns to face Caleb, and he closes in the space between them.

CALEB

(whispers)

Yes, I've loved you that long.

MELODY

Cal, we're all grown up now. Love isn't our initials on a tree or faerie tale games, it's real life.

Caleb wraps Melody up in his arms.

CALEB

I've seen enough reality for two lifetimes. I know what love and sacrifice mean, and I'm right here in this moment ready to commit myself to you, Mel. I've always been here.

Melody speaks no words as she looks into his eyes, trying to process the weight of the words that he's just spoken.

Caleb places his forehead to Melody's.

CALEB

I love you, Mel.

Tears fill Melody's eyes.

MELODY

No, Caleb what you're feeling isn't real, it's all smoke and mirrors. I will admit that the magic of Holbrook is hypnotic, but the world outside is reality --

CALEB

(rolls his eyes)

I don't care about the world outside, Mel. When I look at you, I see my entire world and its so beautiful.

Caleb and Melody stare at each other for a long moment, and as the snow begins to fall harder, Caleb softly kisses her and Melody doesn't protest.

When the kiss has spent Caleb looks into Melody's eyes, and sees the love that she refuses to acknowledge. She bursts into tears.

MELODY

(pain)

I'm sorry, Cal. I have to go.

Caleb releases her from his embrace, the pain in his eyes, mirrors hers.

They look at each other from a distance.

CALEB

I know you felt it too.

Melody wraps her arms around herself as tears spill down her face.

MELODY

Good night, Caleb.

Caleb puts his hands in his pockets and shakes his head, as his eyes turn from happiness to sadness.

CALEB

I'm not going anywhere, Mel. Not this time.

Melody turns and walks away from him without saying anything else.

Caleb looks completely gutted as he watches Melody walk away.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - DAY

Asher and Caleb sit beside each other at the workstation. Caleb is sullen and withdrawn, as Asher tries to draw plans for another fiddle project but he can't focus, because he keeps taking peeks at Caleb.

Asher throws his pencil on his half traced fiddle, and sits back in his chair with a sigh of frustration.

ASHER

Okay, all week you have been quiet and moody. Am I supposed to guess what is bothering you?

Caleb's face twists with annoyance.

CALEB

(terse)

It's nothing, Pop.

ASHER

(shakes his head)

There it is again, the clipped answers and sour face. Something's going on. And you still have yet to deliver the finished fiddle to Mayor Hamilton's house for approval.

(beat)

Time is ticking, my son. Christmas is only a heartbeat away.

CALEB

Nothing's bothering me, Pop. I just haven't had time to go by the mayor's house.

ASHER

(knowing grin)

Something tells me that this is a Melody problem.

Caleb's face darkens at the sound of Melody's name.

ASHER

Ah, I'm right.

CALEB

It's not a problem. She's just driving me bonkers.

Asher crosses his arms about his chest and smiles.

CALEB
 (rolls his eyes)
 What's with the smug look?

ASHER
 (shakes his head)
 I have no smug look.

CALEB
 Look, I met her at the Sweetheart tree and like an idiot, I declared my undying love. I even carved our initials into the thing.
 (beat)
 We kissed and she still left me in the dust. I think my woo is busted.

Asher throws his head back in uproarious laughter.

ASHER
 I knew it! There's only one remedy for this problem.

Caleb looks at Asher hanging on his every word.

ASHER
 Take the fiddle to Mayor Hamilton's house, and I'm sure you'll find your answers there.

Caleb puts his head in his hands.

CALEB
 Whatever you're thinking won't work, Pop. She's avoiding me.

ASHER
 Well, if that's the case, she won't be able to avoid you now. Will she?

CALEB
 I've tried, Pop. It's really awkward now.

Asher stands and walks into his office, he emerges with the finished Christmas fiddle inside a beautiful black case and sets it down in front of Caleb.

Caleb looks at Asher with confused eyes.

ASHER
 Humor your ailing father and take the fiddle to the mayor's house.

Caleb shakes his head and smiles as he stands up from sitting.

CALEB

Ailing my foot. The tumor certainly hasn't messed with your meddling tendencies one bit.

Asher hunches and grins.

Caleb picks up the fiddle from his workstation and his helmet from the shoppe's windowsill on his way out, and turns to face Asher as Caleb opens the door.

CALEB

Thanks, Pop.

Asher nods and Caleb exits the shoppe closing the door behind him.

INT. - THE HAMILTON HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Melody is in the kitchen with her mother, LILLIAN HAMILTON, 50s, beautiful olive-skinned black American woman of medium build and tall stature with brown eyes and sandy hair.

They are baking way more gingerbread men than they can possibly eat. Lillian is lively and chatty, while Melody stands quiet in her own world.

Lillian takes a batch of gingerbread men from the oven to cool, and after she sets the pan down on the counter and takes off her oven mitts. She approaches Melody and stands at her side.

LILLIAN

(smiles)

Penny for your thoughts, darlin'?

Melody doesn't acknowledge Lillian at first.

Lillian hunches Melody out of her reverie.

MELODY

I'm sorry what did you say, Momma?

LILLIAN

Where have you been all week, darlin'?

MELODY

(smirks)

Running around like a chicken with my head cut off. Christmas is like tomorrow, and I don't feel like we've gotten anything done where the Christmas Bazaar is concerned.

(beat)

Not to mention, I have book reports to finish grading before the kids go on break, and the Cocoa and Cookie Gala is tonight --

LILLIAN

(giggles)

Melody Denise, I know that you're busy. I'm on the town council myself, I've seen you running around. I wasn't asking where you've been physically, darlin'.

(beat)

I'm asking where your mind has been?

Lillian bats her eyes at Melody as if she knows exactly where her mind has been.

MELODY

(faux astonishment)

I don't have the slightest idea about what you are implying, Momma.

LILLIAN

(rolls her eyes)

Uh-huh, if I didn't know any better, I would say that your mind has been on a certain handsome blue-eyed marine.

Melody and Lillian break out into giggles.

MELODY

Momma!

LILLIAN

What, darlin'? The truth is the truth.

Melody shakes her head with a smile.

LILLIAN

Tell me I'm wrong. I see the way you two have been with each other this past week. He sat on one side of the church and you sat on the other, and at the Town Hall meeting you barely spoke two words to each other.

MELODY

Momma, you have a wild imagination.

LILLIAN

Uh-huh, and Mr. Garner has told us that Caleb was supposed to deliver the Christmas fiddle for your father's approval. He has yet to do this.

(beat)

I think that he's been avoiding someone.

Lillian hunches Melody, but Melody just looks at Lillian with innocent eyes.

MELODY

Caleb and I are just friends.

LILLIAN

Uh-huh, but the best romances begin with friendships, darlin'. That's how your father and I started.

Melody's eyes get sad as she starts to decorate a gingerbread man.

Lillian takes the decorating bag from her, and puts it on the counter, when she notices the sadness in her eyes.

LILLIAN

Darlin' what is it?

Melody hugs Lillian and starts to cry.

Lillian puts some space between them so that she can look into Melody's eyes.

MELODY

I love him, Momma.

Lillian giggles and hugs her daughter close.

LILLIAN

Oh, so you're finally admitting that beautiful fact to yourself?

(beat)

I'm your momma, girl, I know that you've always been in love with that boy.

Melody melts deeper into Lillian, and Lillian smiles.

LILLIAN

You need to let Caleb love you, darlin'.

Melody puts some space between her and her mother, and starts to wipe her eyes, as she tries to dismiss Lillian's sage words along with her feelings for Caleb.

MELODY

(laughs)

Look at me, I'm a complete mess.

Melody picks up the pastry bag and attempts to continue decorating, but Lillian takes the bag from her again.

LILLIAN

Did you hear what I just said, Melody Denise?

Lillian turns Melody to face her, but Melody refuses to meet Lillian's gaze.

LILLIAN

You need to let that man love you.

MELODY

Momma, every place isn't like Holbrook. You don't understand how ugly the world outside can be. I couldn't bear to put his heart at risk or mine. I just can't.

Lillian draws Melody back into her.

LILLIAN

I wasn't born in Holbrook, darlin'. I've known the world outside, but I had to risk putting my heart on the line if I wanted to be loved. Love is risky.

(beat)

But it's worth it.

Melody looks at her mother with newfound respect and awe.

MELODY

I love you, Momma.

LILLIAN

(smiles)

You see how easy that was. Now, say those same words to Caleb. Free your heart, darlin'. You'll feel much better.

Melody doesn't speak, she only nods in agreement.

Lillian hands Melody back the pastry bag, and she and Melody decorate gingerbread men in silence.

EXT. - THE HAMILTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Caleb knocks on the door, of the white colonial house with black shutters, holding the cased fiddle. He has left his helmet hanging off of one of the handle bars of his motorcycle.

He forces a smile as MAYOR WILLET HAMILTON, 50s, handsome, tall man of mixed race with kind hazel eyes answers the door.

Willet immediately greets Caleb with a smile, and extends his hand to him.

Caleb returns his smile and shakes Willet's hand.

WILLET

Caleb, I've been waiting for you, young man. Your father told me that y'all finished the Christmas fiddle for the grand finale of the bazaar.

CALEB

Yes, sir.

Caleb holds up the black case.

WILLET

This must be it.

CALEB

Yes, sir.

Caleb holds it in both hands as Willet opens the case.

Willet admires the instrument with delighted eyes, then he caresses it gently with his fingertips.

WILLET

Your father always does such awe-inspiring work, but this has got to be his best work yet.

(beat)

You may tell him that it meets with my approval.

Willet closes the case and locks it.

Caleb holds the case with one hand again.

CALEB

Thank-you, Mayor. Pop'll be stoked to hear that you approve. Have a good day.

Caleb starts to walk away when Willet calls him back.

WILLET

(smiles)

Wait, won't you come in for awhile? The girls are in the kitchen baking up a storm for tonight's gala. Perhaps, the guest of honor would like to have a sample or two.

CALEB

(hesitates)

Um, I really should get back to the shoppe. Pop'll --

WILLET

(winks)

Son, come in.

INT.- THE HAMILTON HOUSE - FOYER

Caleb walks into the Hamilton's elegant foyer.

WILLET

Take your coat?

Caleb takes off his coat, and gives it to Willet, who hangs it up in the coat closet. He also takes the fiddle from Caleb and puts it on the shelf.

WILLET

Now, let's go sample some cookies.

INT.- THE HAMILTON HOUSE - KITCHEN

Melody decorates as Lillian takes another batch of gingerbread men out of the oven.

Willet and Caleb enter.

Lillian notices Caleb before Melody does.

LILLIAN

Oh my goodness gracious, Caleb Garner?!

Melody gasps and her decorating becomes erratic.

Lillian runs over to Caleb.

LILLIAN

How are you, sweetheart?

Caleb is looking at Melody who continues to decorate cookies, badly, because she is not focused on the task at hand.

LILLIAN

(smiles)

Caleb?

Caleb focuses his attention on Lillian and smiles.

CALEB

I'm fine, Mrs. Hamilton and you?

LILLIAN

Just peachy. I wanted to talk to you this past week, but couldn't catch you.

Caleb's focus returns to Melody, who still refuses to look at him.

Lillian smiles at Willet, and they both start laughing. Lillian goes over and stands beside Willet.

LILLIAN

Caleb, I think that I'm spent with cookie decorating just now. How about you take my place, and help Melody decorate.

(beat)

And I'll go handle some other odds and ends for the gala tonight. Look forward to seeing you.

Caleb looks at both Willet's and Lillian's devious faces, and grins.

CALEB

Yes ma'am.

Lillian starts pushing Willet out of the kitchen, and Willet protests.

WILLET (O.S.)

Wait, can't I get a cookie first?

LILLIAN (O.S.)

Not one, Willet. You'll wait until tonight.

Caleb walks over to Melody, who has messed up several cookies by now, while trying to focus on decorating.

CALEB

(softly)

Hi, Mel.

Melody puts down the pastry bag, and meets his eyes slowly, she tries to lighten the mood to distract herself from the intense look in Caleb's eyes.

MELODY

(smiles)

It seems as if my meddling parents insist on tossing us together.

CALEB

(laughs)

Yeah, Pop won't mind his own business either.

Caleb moves closer to her, and Melody doesn't move an inch.

MELODY

How's your father?

Melody looks into Caleb's eyes, the spark in his, reflects the spark in her own.

CALEB

You know Pop, he's been practicing his solo night and day. It's gonna be really beautiful.

Caleb lingers on the word beautiful, and it's obvious that he's no longer talking about the Christmas fiddle solo.

Melody looks away from his eyes to catch her breath.

MELODY

How have you been?

CALEB

(whispers)

Missing you.

Melody backs away from Caleb a little, but he closes in the space immediately.

CALEB

And how have you been, Mel?

Melody looks back into his eyes then.

MELODY

(smiles)

Caleb, you're not being fair.

Caleb wraps his arms around her with chuckle.

CALEB

All's fair in love and war, doll.

Melody drapes her arms about his shoulders.

MELODY

Cal, I'm sorry that I keep hurting you. How do you put up with me?

CALEB

Simple, I love you Melody Hamilton, and I'm willing to fight to prove it.

Melody rests her forehead to his.

MELODY

I wish that I never left Holbrook.

CALEB

We had to leave, Mel. We had to see just how bad things are out there, so that we can figure out how to change them.

(beat)

And the only remedy for the divisive hatred out there is powerful love right here.

MELODY

I do so love you, Caleb Garner.

Caleb hunches with a confident smile.

Melody rolls her eyes.

CALEB

I know.

MELODY

(smiles)

Oh, just shush right up.

Caleb chuckles and kisses her softly, and Melody fully commits to the kiss.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - ASHER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Asher is sitting at his desk as Francis puts his blood pressure cuff back in his medical bag, and pulls out a couple of packets of morphine.

Francis solemnly puts the packets on the desk in front of Asher.

Asher looks at the packets with a mixture of relief and sadness in his eyes.

FRANCIS

(warning)

Asher, you have a brain tumor. Morphine will only dull the pain for so long, but it won't make the tumor any smaller.

ASHER

(resolved)

I understand, Francis.

Asher does not meet Francis's eyes.

FRANCIS

If you would just --

Asher holds up his hand to cut Francis's words off.

ASHER

I'm dying, Francis. Please, old friend, will you make my passing as comfortable as possible?

Asher looks at Francis.

Francis turns away from Asher with rage in his eyes.

FRANCIS

It doesn't have to be this way, Asher. If you would only listen to reason. I could help you.

Asher stands up and walks over to Francis, and Asher puts his hand on Francis's shoulder.

Francis turns to face him.

ASHER

But you are helping me, old friend.

FRANCIS

No, I'm putting a band-aid over a deep wound. There is a difference, Asher.

ASHER

You are honoring my wishes, there can be no better help than this.

Francis sighs and smiles.

FRANCIS
 (shakes his head)
 I will certainly miss you, old friend.

Asher waves off Francis's comment.

ASHER
 Ah, I'll save a place for you. We'll pick up right where we left off.

Francis extends his hand to Asher, Asher shakes it with a smile.

FRANCIS
 I'm holding you to that.

EXT. - THE HAMILTON HOUSE - NIGHT

Caleb walks up to the door, wearing his Officer's Blue Dress A uniform, but before he has the chance to knock, Willet opens it with a bright smile, wearing a vibrant emerald suit.

Caleb holds back a chuckle.

WILLET
 Come on in, Captain Garner, your date should be down momentarily.

CALEB
 Good evening, sir.

Willet shuts the door when Caleb gets inside, and they shake hands. No sooner than they are finish with their handshake, Melody appears atop the staircase.

Caleb is speechless as Melody starts descending, wearing a flow-y royal blue silk chiffon goddess gown. Her curly queued hair is kept in place by royal blue butterfly hair pins.

Lillian stands at the top of the stairs, wearing her flow-y emerald silk chiffon goddess gown, and her curly queued hair is kept in place by emerald hair pins. She smiles a goofy, mother-type smile.

LILLIAN
 Doesn't she look beautiful, Caleb?

Melody stops in the middle of the staircase and shoots her mother a scowl.

MELODY
 Mother, please.

CALEB
 (chuckles)

Good evening, Mrs. Hamilton. I think she's --
 (beat)
 Stunning.

Melody turns back to look at Caleb, when he smiles at her; she smiles back and continues walking toward him.

When Melody stands before him, she rolls her eyes.

MELODY
 (smiles)
 Sorry about that, my mother can be completely embarrassing sometimes.

CALEB
 Well, she isn't wrong. You look wild.

Melody's smile widens at the look in Caleb's eyes.

Lillian descends the stairs and stands next to Willet.

LILLIAN
 I hear that your father won't be joining us tonight, Caleb.

Caleb turns his attention to Lillian.

CALEB
 No ma'am, he's not feeling too well. I promised to tell him all about it when I get home though.

LILLIAN
 Do, take him some treats as well.

CALEB
 I will.

Caleb looks at Melody again.

WILLET
 I think that the kids want to get going, Lillian.

CALEB
 Yeah, we really should.

WILLET
 Y'all go ahead. We'll meet you there.

Caleb's focus doesn't leave Melody as he answers Willet.

CALEB

Yes, sir.

Caleb opens the door and escorts Melody out.

Lillian runs toward them, with Melody's white shawl in hand, before Caleb closes the door. She hands it to him.

LILLIAN

Don't forget your shawl darlin'. You wouldn't want to catch a chill from this crisp mountain air.

Melody rolls her eyes with a smile.

MELODY

We'll see you at the hall, mother.

Caleb nods his head with a smile and closes the door. He chuckles as he puts the shawl over Melody's shoulders.

CALEB

You heard your mother, wouldn't want you to catch a chill.

Melody gently jabs Caleb in the ribs with her elbow.

CALEB

(grins)

Ouch, don't get mad at me. I'm just following orders.

Caleb wraps his arm around her and kisses her on the cheek, as he leads her to his father's tan Ford truck. He goes over to the passenger's side and opens the door for her.

CALEB

Pop, insisted that I bring the truck. He figured that you'd be far too elegant to hop on the back of my bike.

(beat)

He was definitely right.

Caleb's gaze holds hers for a moment, until she breaks it with a laugh and slides into the truck. He closes the door with a grin.

Caleb goes to the driver's side and hops in beside Melody and closes the door, after he puts the keys into the ignition he looks at her.

CALEB

(chuckles)

All the vibrant colors. What exactly is the theme for this year's gala anyway?

MELODY

Well, the town council decided on a Lights of Christmas theme for the gala this year.

CALEB

(shakes his head)

Wait, don't tell me, everyone is going to be dressed in Christmas tree light colors, right?

MELODY

Bingo.

CALEB

Living Christmas tree lights.

(beat)

And I thought I was gonna be out of place in my dress blues. This I gotta see.

Caleb turns the key and starts the truck. He gives Melody one last glance and chuckles.

Melody hunches him with a smile.

MELODY

Don't make fun.

CALEB

Babe, come on, living Christmas tree lights?

They both laugh at the thought of it.

Melody stops laughing and rolls her eyes.

MELODY

Let's just get going, Captain America.

CALEB

(grins)

Yes, ma'am.

INT. - HOLBROOK TOWN HALL - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Caleb and Melody walk into the Town Hall's lobby and are immediately greeted, by the pearly white grin of ADHAY CHAVOS, 20s, a tall, lanky young man of Native American descent with caramel brown eyes.

Adhay shakes Caleb's hand, and Melody hands Adhay her shawl.

MELODY

(smiles)

Dad has you working as host tonight, huh?

ADHAY

(hunches)

Yeah, me and the other interns drew straws. Guess who lost?

Adhay takes her shawl and puts it in one of the rooms that is acting as a coat closet, then he hands her a red dance card.

ADHAY

Here's your dance card, Ms. Melody.

MELODY

(smiles)

Thank-you, Adhay. Try not to have too much fun.

ADHAY

(grins)

I'll try to contain myself.

INT. - HOLBROOK TOWN HALL - HALL

Melody wraps her arms around Caleb's bicep, and they walk past all the unique Christmas fiddles of the past, that sit in glass display cases, dating all the way back to 1910.

They enter the hall, which has been cleared out and decorated like a Christmas Wonderland.

The multi-colored outfits of the townspeople dazzle just like Christmas tree lights normally would, but all the trees in the hall are decorated with pure white lights only. So that the living Christmas tree lights can shine brightest.

There is a multi-colored banner that reads, Welcome to the Cocoa and Cookie Gala Honoring War Hero Captain Caleb Garner. Joyous sounds of big band Christmas music, friendly conversations and uproarious laughter fill the room.

The cookie buffet is filled with every kind of cookie, and sweet treat imaginable, and there is cocoa on tap from several machines that have been set up near the buffet table.

Caleb looks at the colorful outfits of the townspeople, and chuckles.

CALEB

(whispers)

Holy mackerel! It's like Christmastime in Oz.

Melody gives him a no nonsense look while trying to suppress a smile.

CALEB

(grins)

You know it's true.

George, Doriya and Jacob run up to Caleb.

GEORGE

(excited)

Cap!

Caleb looks at the children and smiles.

CALEB

Hiya, guys, what you been up to?

GEORGE

Oh, nothin' much.

CALEB

I'll bet y'all can't wait to go on Christmas break.

George stares daggers at Melody.

GEORGE

It'll be like I'm still in school.

(beat)

Ms. Hamilton had a talk with my momma. She told her I didn't write my book report. So, now I gotta write it over break.

Caleb stifles a smirk as he looks at Melody, and she does the same.

CALEB

Ah, that's too bad, ace. What book is it?

GEORGE

(sour face)

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

CALEB

That's a pretty good book.

George shoots Caleb a dubious look.

GEORGE

You funnin' me, Cap?

CALEB

(chuckles)

I fun you not.

Doriya hunches George with a giggle.

DORIYA

I told ya it was a good book.

George rolls his eyes.

DORIYA

I got an A+, Cap.

CALEB

(winks)

Good job, Figgy. You know, gents like smart dames best.

Doriya blushes and looks away from Caleb shyly.

Caleb focuses his attention on Jacob then.

CALEB

And what did you think of Huck Finn, Jacob?

Jacob folds his arms about his chest.

JACOB

I kinda liked Tom Sawyer better. I only read half of Huck Finn. I got a C+.

CALEB

Come on, gents, you gotta put something in your heads. It's the only way to catch dishy dolls like, Figgy.

George and Jacob look at Doriya with sour faces.

GEORGE

Ewww, Figgy ain't no doll. She's our pal.

Caleb glances at Melody with loving eyes.

CALEB

Give it time, gents, give it time.

(beat)

And give Huck Finn a chance, it's full of wild adventure and you might even learn something.

GEORGE

(hunches)

I guess I'll give it a try.

(beat)

For you, Cap.

CALEB

Good man.

George's attention is stolen away by two ladies in town, as they set more treats out on the table. He smiles and rubs his hands together and returns his glance, momentarily, to Caleb.

GEORGE

Later, Cap.

George holds out his hand and Caleb slides his hand across it.

CALEB

Later, Georgie.

George heads over to the cookie buffet.

Doriya waves and smiles at Caleb and Jacob nods his good-bye, as they follow George.

Caleb looks at Melody with a grin.

CALEB

Remind me not to get on your bad side, Teach.

Melody smiles a flirty smile.

MELODY

Oh, you're already on my list for that Oz wisecrack a few minutes ago.

CALEB

(rolls his eyes)

And how does one get off the teacher's bad boy list, Ms. Hamilton?

MELODY

Well, a good boogie on the dance floor might just do it.

Caleb twirls her out from him, and then twirls her back.

CALEB

(whispers)

Deal.

They get on the dance floor with the other couples that are dancing. The song is slow, and they sway to the slow rhythm.

Caleb eyes the stag line, and notices some of the guys eyeing Melody, he grins.

CALEB

I do believe that you have some admirers, that wouldn't mind filling your dance card, Ms. Hamilton.

MELODY

They can admire all they want. My dance card is already filled.

Melody drapes her arms about Caleb's shoulders, as she looks around at all the ladies admiring Caleb.

MELODY

Besides, Mr. Handsome Marine, you have just as many admirers.

CALEB

Well, they can admire all they want. I'm holding all the dame I need.

Caleb rests his forehead to Melody's and they smile at each other.

INT. - HOLBROOK TOWN HALL - HALL - CONTINUOUS

The music has quieted, and the townspeople have taken their seats at circular tables that have been decorated like fresh fallen snow.

Mayor Willet Hamilton is standing, on stage, behind a microphone and he has the attention of the entire room as he prepares to address them.

WILLET

(smiles)

Y'all having a good time?

The room explodes in applause, until the mayor waves his hand across the crowd and they quiet.

WILLET

Does my heart good to see y'all enjoying yourselves. I just want to say Merry Christmas one and all.

(beat)

Now, before we get to the main event of the evening, the oldest living resident of Holbrook, Mrs. Eugenia Hobbs-Barrett will say a few words, as is tradition.

Willet motions for Ms. Eugenia to come forward.

Lester Hobbs escorts, his aunt who raised him, EUGENIA HOBBS-BARRETT, 80s, a radiant light-colored black American woman who is short in stature but giant in spirit, toward the stage.

Eugenia holds tightly to Lester's arm, as she uses the support of a cane in her other hand to ascend the stage safely.

Once she has ascended the steps, Willet helps her to the microphone and steps back so that she can speak.

EUGENIA

(smiles)

Merry Christmas citizens of Holbrook.

ALL

Merry Christmas.

EUGENIA

I just want to say how beautiful it is to stare out at all of your lovely faces, because this is the dream of the Founders of Holbrook.

(beat)

My father, Stanley Hobbs, a slave who made his fortune after the civil war, had a vision, a vision of a place where people of every race could dwell together in unity. So, he decided to approach some of his closest friends, with an idea --

Eugenia has to stop for a few moments, because her voice is choking up as she becomes teary eyed.

EUGENIA

And that vision was Holbrook. The Founders would be so proud to see that we have made the choice, from year to year to continue opening our hearts to one another.

Caleb places his hand on top of Melody's, as her hand sits on the table, and he entwines his fingers with hers.

Melody looks at him and smiles, and he smiles back.

EUGENIA

As we step into a new year, it is my prayer that we will continue to open our hearts to each other.

(beat)

Thank-you all for making Holbrook such a loving place to live. I love you all, enjoy the rest of your evening.

Every sitting citizen in the hall stands up to applaud Eugenia's words, as Lester helps her descend the steps of the stage.

Willet steps back up to the microphone, as the community takes their seats again.

Adhay walks onto the stage and hands Willet a plaque.

WILLET

(grins)

Thank-you, Mr. Chavos.

Willet takes the plaque from Adhay. Adhay nods with a smile and exits the stage.

WILLET

And thank-you, Ms. Eugenia, for your beautiful words of hope. And now we are ready to move to the main event.

(beat)

Tonight, we honor, a young man that has served both his country and this community valiantly, and for that we thank him, though our thanks can never be nearly enough.

Caleb starts to hear the SOUNDS OF WAR in his ears.

Melody moves closer to Caleb, when she notices that he has tensed up.

Caleb relaxes from her closeness, and smiles down at her.

WILLET

Captain Caleb Garner would you do me the honor and pleasure of sharing this stage with me, son?

Caleb glances at Melody nervously, and she smiles encouragingly at him as he gets up and heads toward the stage.

The entire hall erupts in applause again.

Caleb takes the stage and Willet immediately shakes his hand, as he gives him his plaque.

Willet motions toward the microphone for Caleb to say a few words.

Caleb, nervously, steps up to the microphone holding his plaque, he finds Melody in the crowd and relaxes.

CALEB

Thank y'all for the warm welcome home, and the beautiful plaque.

(beat)

I share this honor with my brother, Warren Hobbs, the real hero who can't be here tonight to enjoy the company of family.

Caleb chokes up a bit.

CALEB

(looks up)

Love you, buddy.

There isn't a dry eye in the hall, as thunderous applause erupt once again.

Caleb exits the stage, swiftly.

Lester and Ethel approach him, along with Eugenia. Ethel brings him toward her for a hug, Lester has tears in his eyes as he shakes Caleb's hand.

Eugenia pulls Caleb down to her level, so that she can meet his eyes.

EUGENIA

(whispers)

Chin up, boy. My great nephew couldn't have asked for a better brother.

(beat)

It is your heart that will keep this place going. Never lose heart.

CALEB

(smiles)

Yes ma'am.

Eugenia releases Caleb to stand up straight.

Then she gives Caleb a strong nod, and holds her head up high, as she walks away with the aid of her cane. Lester and Ethel follow her.

Caleb goes to stand beside Melody, and she wraps her arms around his bicep and rests her head on his shoulder. He closes his eyes and smiles, relishing her closeness, and sighs as the hall continues to applaud him.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - UPSTAIRS APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Asher sits in the quaint living room, reading his Bible by dull lamp light, when Caleb comes in holding his plaque and hat in hand, as well as, a plate full of Christmas goodies.

Caleb places all of his items on an end table and plops down on the couch beside his father's chair.

CALEB

(chuckles)

You waitin' up for me, Pop?

Asher smiles and closes his Bible, and places it on the small table beside his chair, he puts his reading glasses on top of the closed Bible.

ASHER

You're a big boy, my son. I trust that you know your way home by now.

(beat)

I finished up some orders in the shoppe, practiced my solo a bit and decided to do my nightly reading. Did you have a nice time?

CALEB

Yeah, the town gave me a really nice plaque. Mrs. Bernstein's cocoa was extra chocolatey, and I ate enough cookies to give me a stomach ache for a week.

ASHER

I wasn't asking you about all the trivial details, my son. Did you dance the night away with, Ms. Hamilton or not?

Caleb shakes his head and rolls his eyes.

CALEB

Pop, I thought that you were supposed to be resting.

Asher waves off Caleb's comment as if it is inconsequential.

ASHER

Ah, if I sit still for too long, I get antsy. And you avoided my question.

Asher grins and Caleb shakes his head with a smile.

CALEB

Yeah, Melody and I had a great time. Are you satisfied?

ASHER

A great time? That sounds promising.

Caleb stands up from the couch.

CALEB

(grins)

I'm going to bed, Pop.

ASHER

Good night, my son.

Caleb looks at the end table and remembers the cookies.

CALEB

Oh, I brought you some food from the gala, Mrs. Hamilton insisted.

(beat)

And if you don't have anything for me to do around here for the next couple of days, I'll be helping with the bazaar.

Asher grins a goofy grin.

ASHER

I trust that Ms. Melody will be helping as well?

CALEB

(grins)

'Night, Pop.

Caleb starts toward his room.

ASHER

(smirks)

Good night.

(beat)

I am so glad to see that you are healing, my boy.

Caleb turns to face Asher and smiles.

CALEB

This town is very healing, Pop.

Caleb exits to his room, and Asher smiles.

EXT. - CHRISTMAS BAZAAR - NIGHT

On the church grounds of, Holbrook Community Church, there are booths of every kind and the night is lit up like a Christmas tree, because of all the Christmas lights that hang about.

There is a station to take photos with Santa Claus, a carousel and games to play to win prizes, along with booths that sell popcorn, cotton candy, hot cocoa, baked goods, Christmas quilts, snow globes and more. All the booths are Christmas themed.

Caleb holds a medium-sized stuffed animal as he watches Melody, talk to some of her friends, from afar.

CHRISTA LOGAN, 30s, a stunning Caucasian woman with red hair and green eyes. She is tall in stature and athletic in build.

MALLORY PRIDGEN, 30s, a beautiful black-American woman with ebony hair and brown eyes. She is of medium height and curvy build.

TRINITY WATSON, 30s, a beautiful blonde haired blue-eyed Caucasian woman. She is short and waifish.

Caleb grins, every time they glance his way and giggle.

Melody and her friends, give their tickets to ERNIE BAYLOR, 40s, a short and husky Caucasian man who has a white beard like Santa Claus.

ALL
Thank-you, Mr. Ernie.

Melody and her friends get on the carousel. And giggle just like little girls as it moves round and round. Caleb is mesmerized by Melody's smile.

WILLET
She's something special isn't she?

Caleb doesn't notice Willet's approach and jumps at his question.

Willet chuckles as Caleb puts his hand to his chest close to his heart.

CALEB
Yes, sir. Unbelievably special.

Caleb looks at Melody again.

WILLET
I know that you two have been dealing with some tension lately.

CALEB
Yeah, but we're working through it, I think.

(beat)
I really do love her.

WILLET
(smiles)
I don't doubt that, son. I see it every time you look at her.

CALEB
If only I could make her see how much.

WILLET
Don't give up on her, son.
(beat)
Going out in the world broke her a little. She accomplished so much. Double major as an undergraduate, PhD in education from Harvard, but it was meaningless out there.

Willet's eyes get sad.

WILLET
Out there, all people could see was a colored woman.

Caleb continues to stare at Melody with love in his eyes.

CALEB
(smiles)
She's magic to me.

Willet laughs out loud and hunches Caleb.

WILLET
Keep showing her, son, and you'll win her heart.

The carousel stops and Melody runs toward Caleb, as her friends go to meet up with their families.

Willet smiles and walks away as Melody approaches.

Melody takes her stuffed animal from Caleb, and grins.

CALEB
I think you and the girls had a little too much fun.

Melody locks her arm around his, and they start walking through the bazaar.

MELODY
Well, I'm the only unmarried and childless gal left in the group. It's kinda up to me to show them a good time. Keeps them young.

CALEB
(whispers)

It doesn't have to be that way, you know.
 (beat)
 The whole unmarried, childless thing, I mean.

Melody stops and looks at him and his eyes are hypnotic.

CALEB
 (smiles)
 You could marry me. Give me a house full of strong sons. Wouldn't that be something?

Caleb pulls her into his arms.

Melody rests her head on his shoulder.

MELODY
 That certainly would be something.

CALEB
 Think on it, Mel. I'll wait.

MELODY
 (whispers)
 Will you?

CALEB
 I've been waiting.

MELODY
 I love you, Caleb Garner.

CALEB
 (chortles)
 Then marry me already.

MELODY
 Would you settle for someday?

CALEB
 For now.

Caleb sways her back and forth in his embrace.

MONTAGE - THE WEEK OF THE BAZAAR

-- Melody, stands at the center of the pulpit, as she practices at the church with a small choir of about six children. Caleb watches her in awe. Asher Garner practices his fiddle solo RABBI AHARON RUBIN, who is also a cantor, stands by his side.

- Caleb wins Melody a bunch of stuffed animals playing the high striker game. He even gathers a small crowd as he hits the mallet again and again.
- Caleb and Melody are at the Sweetheart Tree, as Caleb smilingly steals a kiss. He and Melody look into each other's eyes.
- Caleb and Melody ride the carousel on side by side horses.
- Caleb and Melody walk arm and arm through the bazaar, as Melody rests her head on his shoulder eating cotton candy.
- Caleb and Melody ride through town on his motorcycle.
- Caleb laughs and plays with George, Jacob and Figgy, as Melody talks with their mothers, Christa, Mallory and Trinity. He and Melody share a few passionate glances.
- Caleb sits on the porch with Willet Hamilton at the Hamilton house shooting the breeze.
- Caleb watches as Asher practices his solo in the middle of their living room.
- Francis visits Asher in his office at the fiddle shoppe, both of them look sad as Francis packs up his medical bag and leaves.
- Caleb is in the middle of the woods preparing the town's greenhouse for a very special evening. He stands back and admires his work with a smile.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. - ASHER'S FORD TRUCK - NIGHT

Caleb steers the car with one hand, his other rests in Melody's with their fingers entwined.

MELODY

(smiles)

So, where are we going, Cal?

CALEB

(chortles)

Melody Hamilton you never could handle surprises.

MELODY

I loathe them.

CALEB

(grins)

Because you can't control them.

(beat)

When you were a little girl you used to sneak and open all your Christmas presents on Christmas Eve --

MELODY

(giggles)

And re-wrap them so my parents wouldn't find out.

(beat)

My father told you that?

Caleb nods with a smile.

MELODY

I had no idea that he and mom knew.

CALEB

Oh, they knew.

(beat)

But this is one surprise that you won't spoil, Ms. Hamilton. You'll just have to wait and see.

Melody snuggles up to him and puts her head on his shoulder, he wraps his arm around her and pulls her closer.

MELODY

(whispers)

Not even one little clue.

CALEB

(firm)

Not one. All I'm gonna say is, prepare to be dazzled, Ms. Hamilton.

MELODY

You know the Christmas Eve candlelight service starts at seven, right? And it's the finale of the bazaar. So, we can't be late.

CALEB

(chuckles)

I'm aware, Ms. Hamilton and we'll be there on time with bells on.

He kisses her forehead with a smile.

CALEB

(whispers)

Nice try though.

MELODY

(rolls her eyes)

Caleb Garner --

Melody stops short of what she is going to say, because seeing the greenhouse all lit up with white Christmas tree lights is dazzling with the moon and stars adding their light. It is almost ethereal.

Caleb parks the truck a couple of feet away from the greenhouse, and takes in the expression on Melody's face.

CALEB

So, what do you think?

Melody tears her eyes away from the exquisite sight to look into Caleb's delighted eyes.

MELODY

(giddy)

Caleb Garner, what'd you do?

Caleb hunches and Melody looks back at the greenhouse.

MELODY

Cal, it's so beautiful.

Caleb caresses Melody's cheek softly.

CALEB

I thought a little Christmas Eve picnic before the service would be perfect.

They look at each other for a moment.

MELODY

So perfect.

CALEB

(grins)

Well, then, let's picnic, Ms. Hamilton.

Melody giggles and nods.

Caleb hops out of the truck, and goes over to the passenger side door to open it for Melody.

Melody hops out and Caleb closes the door. She immediately wraps her arms around his bicep and puts her head on his shoulder, as they walk toward the greenhouse.

INT. - THE HOLBROOK GREENHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Caleb leads Melody into the greenhouse, and she gasps because the beauty inside far exceeds the outside.

There is a small white table set up with a bouquet of Christmas roses, inside a crystal vase, in the middle of the table, the white wicker chairs add extra elegance to the scene.

There are two crystal plates set, as well as, two crystal flutes and two of her mother's fancy white napkins. The Coca-Cola is chilling on ice and a huge picnic basket sits beside the table.

Caleb grins at her wide eyed expression.

CALEB

(whispers)

Take your coat?

Melody unbuttons her coat, and slips it off, she hands it to him with her scarf and winter hat.

Caleb takes off his coat and hat, then hangs their winter garments up on the coat hanger near the door.

Melody stands frozen in place.

Caleb smiles and takes Melody's hand in his.

CALEB

Come on, Ms. Hamilton, time's ticking.

Caleb leads her to the table, and pulls out her chair for her, once they get there.

Melody sits down, then Caleb walks over to his chair and sits down across from her.

Melody inspects the crystal more closely, and looks at Caleb with questioning eyes, as she recognizes the set.

MELODY

This looks exactly like my mother's crystal.

CALEB

(nods)

It is. She insisted that I use it for tonight.

Caleb stands up and goes into the bucket and pulls out one of the Coca Colas from the ice. He smiles as he opens the bottle with a bottle opener that sits on the table.

MELODY

Y'all set me up.

Caleb chortles as he pours half the soda into her flute and the other half into his. He sits back down.

CALEB

You are correct, ma'am.

(beat)

But don't judge your parents too harshly. I was the mastermind behind the entire diabolical plan.

Caleb looks at her and lifts one of his eyebrows, and Melody bursts out laughing despite not wanting to. He grins boyishly.

Melody narrows her eyes at Caleb with a smile.

MELODY
You're all on my list.

Caleb hunches as he takes a sip of soda.

CALEB
Totally worth it.

Caleb looks at the basket that is close to his feet.

CALEB
Hungry?

MELODY
Famished. What's on the menu?

CALEB
It could be your favorite.

Melody's eyes sparkle as she smiles.

MELODY
Caleb Garner, you didn't.

Caleb bends down and opens the basket, and pulls out a burger wrapped in a foil wrapper.

CALEB
Perhaps, I did.

MELODY
(excited)
A Fizzy's Everything burger?

Caleb nods as he hands it to Melody.

Melody sets it on her plate, and gives him a loving gaze.

MELODY
I could kiss you right now.

Caleb pulls his burger out of the picnic basket, and sets it on his plate.

CALEB
Which is why I told Frankie to hold the onion.

Melody reaches across the table to grab Caleb's hand. He reaches across the table, and entwines his fingers in hers.

MELODY

You've just thought of everything haven't you?

(beat)

Everything, but the --

Caleb takes his hand from Melody, reaches into the basket and produces a carton of fries, which he hands to her.

CALEB

You were saying?

Melody takes it from him.

MELODY

All this and Fizzy's Southern Seasoned fries too?

Melody pours the fries from the carton, and looks at Caleb as he pours his fries onto his plate.

MELODY

I love you.

CALEB

(hunches)

I know.

Melody rolls her eyes and opens her burger.

Caleb chuckles and does the same.

INT. - THE HOLBROOK GREENHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Caleb stares at Melody as she takes the final sip of her Coca Cola. She smiles as she wipes her mouth with one of her mother's fancy napkins.

Melody places the napkin back on the table, and shakes her head at Caleb.

MELODY

What, did I leave something on my face? All the staring is making me self-conscious.

CALEB

(earnest)

Oh, Mel, you're so beautiful.

(beat)

Marry me?

MELODY

(smiles)

Mr. Garner, I do believe that you have a one-track mind.

CALEB

(chuckles)

You can't blame a man for knowing what he wants, darlin'?

Melody opens her mouth to protest.

MELODY

Cal --

Caleb gets up from his seat and walks over to Melody. He stands right beside her, and holds out his hand for hers.

CALEB

Dance with me?

MELODY

There's no music, Cal.

CALEB

You're the only rhythm I need to keep time. The music is in your name, darlin'.

Melody puts her hand in Caleb's, and when she rises, he locks her in his embrace immediately.

Melody tries with all her might, to fight Caleb's quiet charm, but as he sways her in his arms, she relaxes against him and puts her head on his shoulder.

CALEB

(whispers)

It would be so easy, Mel. Dancing through our life together. Marry me?

MELODY

(pleads)

Just give me --

CALEB

(sighs)

Time?

(beat)

Time enough for my heart to change, right?

Melody looks into Caleb's eyes then, but she doesn't speak.

Caleb caresses her cheek softly.

CALEB

All the time in the world could pass, Mel.

(beat)

And my heart's still gonna be yours. I love you.

Melody shifts her gaze from Caleb.

CALEB

(whispers)

I love you, and I know you love me. Marry me?

Melody looks at Caleb again.

MELODY

Cal, what if --

Caleb places his forehead to Melody's with a chuckle.

CALEB

What if the world stops turning, all the stars fall from the sky or the sun burns out?

(beat)

All of these scenarios could be coming for us right now, and my question would still be the same --

Caleb gets down on one knee before Melody.

Melody's eyes fill with tears, as she watches him go into his pocket, and produce a ring.

CALEB

Melody Denise Hamilton, I am crazy in love with you. Marry me?

Melody looks into Caleb's eyes and sees unwavering love there, and she nods her head with a smile as tears fall down her face.

CALEB

(grins)

Yes?!

MELODY

Yes, Caleb Garner, I will marry you.

Caleb slips his mother's silver rose shaped ring on Melody's finger, the small diamond in the center holds great love.

Melody recognizes it instantly, she starts to wipe her tears away and does a closer inspection of the special ring.

MELODY

This was your mother's. Is your father okay with this?

Caleb gets up from kneeling, and takes Melody in his embrace again.

CALEB

Pop, was the one who suggested it.

MELODY

So, Captain Garner you rallied a contingent of soldiers to capture my heart?

CALEB

(grins)

Honey, a soldier's gotta do, what a soldier's gotta do.

Caleb lowers his lips to Melody's for a kiss.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - UPSTAIRS APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Asher sits in his chair, staring out into space, the dull lamp light beside him paints his face in melancholy.

Caleb comes into the room with a bright smile, which disappears when he sees the mood that his father is in.

CALEB

Pop?

Asher doesn't answer Caleb. He continues to stare out into space.

Caleb goes over and kneels before Asher.

CALEB

Pop?

Asher smiles as if his brain has just awakened from sleep.

CALEB

(tight smile)

Pop, you ready? It's almost show time.

Asher looks confused.

CALEB

It's the Christmas Eve Candlelight service tonight, Pop. You've been practicing your solo all week. Remember?

Asher takes a long moment to respond.

ASHER

(smiles)

Yes, yes I remember.

CALEB

(worried)

You alright, Pop?

Asher's smile fades, there are sudden tears in his them.

ASHER

I cannot remember the notes, my boy.

CALEB

It's okay, Pop. It's just jitters, you'll do fine.

Asher touches Caleb's cheek with tears streaming down his face.

ASHER

I cannot remember the notes, my boy.

(beat)

You must play for me.

Caleb opens his mouth to protest, but he hardens himself against his own feelings, as he places his hand over Asher's.

CALEB

(smiles)

You got it, Pop.

Asher's smile brightens his face.

ASHER

Thank-you, my boy.

Caleb looks at Asher with sad eyes and forces a smile.

CALEB

Don't mention it, Pop.

INT. - HOLBROOK COMMUNITY CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

All of Holbrook turns out for the Christmas Eve Candlelight service. The church is full of lively conversation, laughter and plenty of hugs.

Everyone mills around greeting one another, no one has settled upon a seat to sit in yet. Caleb enters the church, guiding Asher.

Asher and Caleb greet people as they walk through, as if everything is okay. Caleb places Asher in a seat near the front of the church.

CALEB

I'll see you in a minute, Pop.

Asher nods with a smile, as Caleb heads to the choir holding room at the back of the church, carrying the fiddle.

INT. - CHOIR HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

When Caleb enters the room, RABBI AHARON RUBIN, the cantor, 50s a tall round man is warming his voice up, and Melody is going over the song with the six children that will act as her back up choir.

Caleb nods at the Rabbi in greeting, and the Rabbi smiles as he approaches Caleb.

AHARON

(bubbly)

Good evening, my boy.

CALEB

(antsy)

Evening, Rabbi Rubin.

AHARON

So, is your father ready for the big solo, it's sure to be spectacular.

Caleb's stare settles on Melody, as he drowns out Rabbi Rubin's cheery voice.

CALEB

Excuse me, Rabbi, I've gotta talk with Melody.

Caleb starts to walk away from the Rabbi toward Melody, so as to avoid the questions that lay hidden within his stare.

AHARON

Sure, sure.

The Rabbi stares after Caleb a bit longer, with interrogating eyes, before he begins to warm up his voice again.

Melody smiles when she sees Caleb toward her, but her smile fades when she notices the worry in his eyes.

CALEB

(anxious)

Can I talk to you?

MELODY

Sure.

(to children)

Continue rehearsing, you guys. I'll be back. You sound wonderful.

All of the kids smile, and continue singing as Melody walks out of the holding room with Caleb.

INT.- HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Melody cups Caleb's face in her hands. He relaxes a little when she does this.

CALEB

Pop, can't remember his solo, babe.

Melody takes her hands from Caleb's face and paces as she tries to think.

MELODY

Okay, we can fix this.

(beat)

Cal, you've heard your father play the solo over and over again. You know it as well as he does. You can definitely play it for him.

Caleb rolls his eyes with a snarky smile.

CALEB

Right, that's gonna turn out really well.

(beat)

The last time I picked up a fiddle, I was about as young as those kids in your children's choir, and I wasn't even all that good then. Warren --

Caleb's words trail off, and his eyes become sad.

Melody drapes her arms around Caleb's shoulders.

MELODY

Caleb, I know that you can do this.

(beat)

Warren, played the fiddle beautifully, but you have fiddle playing in your veins.

Caleb smiles as he rests his forehead against Melody's.

MELODY

(whispers)

Play the notes, and let the rhythm of your heart help you keep time.

CALEB

As long as you're with me. I'll be alright.

MELODY

(smiles)

There's no getting rid of me now, Captain Garner.

Caleb and Melody gaze at each other.

INT. - HOLBROOK COMMUNITY CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

The entire church is quiet, and the only light in the sanctuary is the light that comes from the Christmas tree and the garland, around the windows, that have white lights embedded in it.

Melody stands in the middle of the pulpit, wearing a beautiful red gown. She starts singing the carol, 'Silent Night', as the children's choir makes their way down the aisle, singing along with her, holding lighted candles.

When the children make it to the pulpit, they split into threes, three stand on one side of her and three on the other.

Melody and the children's choir continue singing together, until they come to the second, "sleep in Heavenly peace" in the first chorus, and then Aharon comes out, and stands on the steps of the pulpit.

Aharon begins singing the carol, entirely in Hebrew, until he gets to the second, "sleep in Heavenly peace" of the first chorus. The church goes completely quiet, because Caleb has missed his cue.

Melody looks at Asher, and Asher looks antsy and worried. Chatter begins to rumble throughout the church, and all are becoming restless. Until the sweet sounds of the Christmas fiddle are heard playing, 'Silent Night'.

Caleb comes from the back of the church, and stands next to Melody and plays his heart out on the fiddle. Melody looks at Asher, who has tears streaming down his face, as he listens.

By the time Caleb gets to the second, "sleep in Heavenly peace" of the first chorus there isn't a dry eye in the house. When Caleb is finished he looks at Melody and smiles.

Melody and the children's choir start the second chorus, the cantor and Caleb join her in a mosaic of beautiful sound.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - UPSTAIRS APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Asher and Caleb sit in the kitchen, while talking over coffee.

ASHER

No father could be prouder of his son tonight, my boy.

(beat)

I witnessed a Christmas miracle in that church.

Asher bursts out laughing.

CALEB

(rolls his eyes)

Funny, Pop, funny.

Asher gains control of his laughter, and looks at Caleb with a bright smile.

ASHER

Warren was always more interested in the fiddle lessons, my boy. I never thought that any of the notes actually stuck in that head of yours.

Caleb gets a loving look in his eye.

CALEB

(smiles)

It wasn't a head thing, Pop, it was more a heart thing.

Asher looks at Caleb and chuckles.

ASHER

So, Ms. Hamilton is who I should thank for your inspired playing then.

(beat)

I might have known that she had something to do with such brilliance.

CALEB

(chortles)

I still had to play the notes, Pop.

ASHER

And play the notes you certainly did.

Caleb sips his coffee.

ASHER

I'm glad to know that you'll have such a bright light in your life when I'm gone.

CALEB

Pop, she encourages me like no one else.

(beat)

She's the best part of me.

Asher nods his head and takes a sip of his coffee.

ASHER

Yes, I felt the same about your mother. She's the piece of my heart that I have been missing all these years. I will be seeing her soon.

Caleb is taken aback by Asher's nonchalant attitude about death.

CALEB

How can you just talk about dying like that, Pop?

ASHER

(hunches)

For me, it begins a new life. As I told you before, I am leaving this Earth, Caleb, but I am not dying.

CALEB

(smiles)

You wanna know something, Pop?

(beat)

If I am even half the man you are, I think I'll be doing pretty good.

Asher grins and waves off Caleb's comment.

ASHER

You'll get there. You still have many years of life ahead of you yet.

CALEB

I love you, Pop.

Asher raises his coffee cup to Caleb.

ASHER

I think you're pretty okay too.

Caleb and Asher laugh.

INT. - CALEB'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Caleb is in his room sleeping, when he hears Asher call for him.

ASHER (O.S.)

(in pain)

Caleb, son.

Caleb runs across the hall to Asher's room.

INT. - ASHER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Asher's eyes are wide with pain. Caleb pours some water into a glass from a pitcher on the night stand.

CALEB

Pop, where's your medicine that Doc gave you?

Caleb is frantically searching around the night stand.

ASHER

It won't help now, my boy.

CALEB

Pop, I'll go get Doc.

Caleb starts to run out of the room, when Asher catches hold of his arm, and pulls him down to kneel at his bedside.

ASHER

No, my son, listen to me. There's not much time left.

(beat)

Promise me, promise me that you'll always play the music of the fiddle. It is the rhythm of Christmas in Holbrook.

CALEB

(teary eyed)

Pop, I gotta go get you help.

ASHER

(raises his voice)

Promise me, my son.

(beat)

The artistry of the fiddle lies in your hands, the music lies in your heart. Promise me that you won't abandon it. Promise me!

CALEB

(stutters)

I promise, Pop.

Asher settles down and smiles weakly.

ASHER

Sing me a Hanukkah prayer, my son.

CALEB

(hoarse with tears)

Pop, Hanukkah's just about over.

(beat)

And I don't remember any of the prayers.

Caleb starts crying.

Asher looks Caleb in his eyes with a stern face.

ASHER

Caleb Israel Garner, your heart remembers the prayers.

(beat)

Sing.

Caleb looks at Asher and starts singing through his tears.

CALEB

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu
l'hadlik ner shel Hanukkah.*

When Caleb is finished Asher touches Caleb's cheek.

ASHER

Well done, my son.

Asher smiles and his hand slips from Caleb's cheek. Life has left him. Caleb closes Asher's eyes and lies his head on Asher's chest and cries.

EXT. - THE SWEETHEART TREE - DAY

Caleb stands next to the Sweetheart Tree, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes closed.

Caleb smiles when he hears Asher's words, flood through him, as if the words are floating on the breeze.

ASHER (V.O.)

Be the blessing, my son, be the blessing.

Melody walks up to Caleb and drapes her arms around his shoulders.

Caleb opens his eyes, and looks directly into Melody's as he takes his hands out of his pockets, so that he can wrap her up in his embrace.

Caleb places his forehead to Melody's.

MELODY

I spent some time at the shoppe, sitting shiva with the rest of the town.

(beat)

I've stopped by for a few days, now, actually. Your father was so dearly loved.

CALEB

(whispers, nods)

I know.

MELODY

I thought I'd give you some time alone, but I had to see you today.

(beat)

Rabbi Rubin told me where you were. I hope it's alright.

CALEB

Oh, darlin', it's more than alright. It's just what I needed.

(beat)

Taking care of all the funeral arrangements and stuff, completely took my mind off of giving you your Christmas present.

Melody rests her head on Caleb's shoulder.

MELODY

That has been the furthest thing from my mind, Cal. I just wanted to see whether or not there was anything that I could do for you.

CALEB

Still, I wanted you to know that I was thinking about you.

Melody lifts her head from Caleb's shoulder and looks directly into his eyes.

MELODY

Future Husband of Mine, you gave me the most heartfelt proposal on Christmas Eve.

(beat)

I can't think of a more beautiful Christmas present than that.

CALEB

Understood, but I wanted to show my baby just how much I love her.

(beat)

So, I wrote a little something called, Melody's Heart. The sheet music is back at the shoppe.

MELODY

(smiles)

Cal, you wrote a fiddle song for me?

CALEB

(nods, grins)

For all the music you put in my heart. How could I not, sweet darlin'?

MELODY

Cal, it's perfect. You will play it for me sometime, won't you?

CALEB

Every single day of our lives, if that's what makes your heart content.

(beat)

Gosh, I wish spring was tomorrow. I can't wait to make you my wife.

The intense fire in Caleb's eyes makes Melody giggle.

MELODY

Patience lover.

Caleb wraps Melody tighter into him.

CALEB

You've gotta bear with me, honey, because I've never gotten the love of my life for Christmas before. So, if I act like an impatient school boy, I am.

Melody puts her head back on Caleb's shoulder.

MELODY

(whispers)

You are forgiven.

Caleb smiles.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - NIGHT

Caleb is at his workstation tracing a potential idea for the new Christmas fiddle. There are rolled up balls of paper all over his workstation, and some on the floor.

Caleb's eyebrows furrow, as he balls his newly traced idea up, and runs his fingers through his blond mane in frustration. He gets up and walks to the window and looks out.

A round bellied Melody comes downstairs with a plate in her hand, there is a thinly sliced piece of brisket on it. She places the plate down on his workstation, and unfolds the piece of paper that Caleb has just balled up.

Melody rests her hand on her belly as she looks at the drawing.

MELODY

(smiles in awe)

Oh, this is really good, Cal.

Caleb turns around and looks at her with a small smile.

CALEB

Good, but not special.

Caleb walks over to Melody, she drapes her arms about his shoulders immediately.

Caleb relaxes and places his forehead to Melody's, as he wraps his arms about her.

CALEB

Babe, my father was so good at this stuff. I haven't the foggiest idea of --

Melody starts giggling.

Caleb smiles despite the situation.

CALEB

I'm glad that my impending colossal failure amuses you.

MELODY

(whispers)

You sound just like him, you know.

Caleb rolls his eyes and chuckles.

CALEB

Touché, dear bride.

MELODY

Inspiration wouldn't hit your father until weeks before the Christmas Eve Candlelight service.

(beat)

You have to relax, lover or you'll make yourself sick from worry.

CALEB

(sighs)

You're right, you're right.

Melody smiles and puts space between them.

CALEB

Hey, where are you going? I was just starting to relax.

MELODY

I didn't come down here for cuddles and kisses --

Melody picks up the plate from the desk and presents it to him.

MELODY

I came down here for you to taste.

CALEB

(cautious smile)

Brisket?

Caleb pushes the meat around on the plate with his index finger.

MELODY

(rolls eyes)

Oh, for goodness sake, Cal, you're worse than my school children.

(beat)

Do I have to tell you not to play with your food too?

Caleb chuckles, picks up the piece of meat and puts it in his mouth.

Melody watches as his face turns from careful to euphoric, and she smiles with pleasure.

MELODY

(giddy)

Good?

Caleb looks at her with a grin and pumps his eyebrows seductively.

CALEB

Woman, if I wasn't already married to you, that brisket would lead to another proposal.

Melody rolls her eyes with a smile.

MELODY

Okay, Romeo.

Melody starts toward the stairs with the empty plate in her hand.

Caleb pulls her back toward him.

CALEB

What magic spice did you put on that meat?

MELODY

(hunches)

It's your mother's recipe.

CALEB

(dubious)

That is not my mother's recipe.

MELODY

Well, more or less.

CALEB

So, you're speaking in riddles now?

(beat)

I ate my mother's brisket for years. Sure, it was good, but what I just tasted was a miracle. What did you do to it?

Melody kisses Caleb's lips softly.

MELODY

Old family secret.

CALEB

And I don't suppose that you're gonna share that secret with me.

Melody shakes her head.

Caleb takes the plate from Melody and puts it down on the workstation desk. He wraps his arms around her again, while staring deep in her eyes.

MELODY

(giggles)

Cal, you're not being fair.

CALEB

(whispers)

Oh, like it's so fair for you to withhold your magical cooking secrets from me.

MELODY

It's nothing really, just a tad of this and a tad more of that.

(beat)

Why do you want to know anyway?

CALEB

Well, if I'm going to be seduced out of my mind, by way of food, I need to know what power I'm under.

Caleb gives her a charming smile.

MELODY

(winks)

A woman never reveals her cooking secrets.

Melody drapes her arms around Caleb's shoulders, and a mischievous spark kindles in his eyes.

Caleb rests both of his hands on Melody's bulging belly, and gives her the most vulnerable look that he can muster.

CALEB

I love you, Mel. You've given me so much to be grateful for. My heart is so full I could explode.

(beat)

Thank-you.

Melody puts her head on his shoulder.

MELODY

(smiles)

You're so very welcome, Prince Charming, but I'm still not telling you what I put on my brisket.

Melody picks her head up off of Caleb's shoulder with a laugh, and he rolls his eyes with a grin.

CALEB

Ha, ha. I didn't have you fooled for one minute, did I?

MELODY

Not one, Captain Garner.

Melody gives him a quick kiss, puts some space between them and picks up the plate from the desk.

Caleb plops back down on his workstation chair and stares at her with a smile.

Melody makes her way to the stairs and turns around before walking up.

MELODY

Dinner won't be ready for about thirty more minutes. Why don't you stay here for awhile, and see if inspiration strikes?

(beat)

I'll call you when it's done.

Caleb looks at her with loving eyes.

CALEB

I really do love you, you know.

The look in Melody's eyes mirrors his.

MELODY

I know.

(beat)

Now work.

CALEB

(grins)

Yes ma'am.

Caleb turns around to his workstation desk, and starts drawing another potential Christmas fiddle sketch.

Melody lingers for a moment, smiles and walks upstairs.

INT. - GARNER'S FIDDLE SHOPPE - UPSTAIRS APARTMENT

Melody sits on the couch with her legs propped up on Caleb's lap, and he massages her tired feet.

CALEB

(smiles)

Dinner was out of this world, darlin’.

MELODY

Thank-you, sweetheart. I’m glad you enjoyed it.

CALEB

I talked to, Bill today. The house is coming along beautifully.

MELODY

(excited)

Have you been out there recently?

CALEB

Yeah, I’m out there every chance I get. I want my blood, sweat and tears to go into our house.

(beat)

Something to tell our grandchildren one day.

Caleb stops massaging Melody’s feet for a moment, and caresses her belly softly.

MELODY

(giggles)

Patience, Captain Garner, this little one hasn’t even made their appearance into the world yet and you’re already talking about grandchildren.

CALEB

(hunches)

You promised me a houseful of boys, remember?

Melody raises one of her eyebrows seductively.

MELODY

Oh, I haven’t forgotten, lover.

Caleb grins and kisses Melody softly.

MELODY

OOO --

CALEB

My kisses have been known to have that effect.

Melody rolls her eyes and places Caleb’s hand to her belly.

MELODY

The baby just kicked you silly man.

Caleb moves his hand away when the baby kicks again.

CALEB

Wow, I think that we have a quarterback on our hands.

Melody cups Caleb's face in her hands.

MELODY

Or perhaps, a fiddler.

Caleb smiles and kisses her softly.

THE END

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