

THE CHRISTMAS KLUTZ

Written by

Larry Portzline
&
Debra Portzline

lportzline@comcast.net
717-439-1244

FADE IN

EXT. PENNSVIEW MANOR GROUNDS - DAY

It's snowing, and the pretty PENNSVIEW MANOR retirement community is all dolled up for Christmas with twinkling lights on the buildings, festive wreaths on the windows, colorful reindeer figures on the lawn and more.

Older couples and small groups of seniors stroll the winding paths, chatting happily as they enjoy the winter scenery.

INT. PENNSVIEW - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Activities Director EMMA KLUTZ (late 20s), a plucky little fireball, addresses Pennsview's top staff at a long table.

The others have tablets and neatly organized files in front of them. But overloaded Emma has a haphazard pile of paperwork and brightly colored folders.

And her name badge reads "EMMA N. KLUTZ."

EMMA

(pumps them up)

Also, just a reminder -- Our Christmas concert is a week from Saturday! Our biggest benefit of the year!

Everyone whoops and claps, making Emma grin.

EMMA (CONT'D)

As you know, the concert is crucial to our activities budget. Now more than ever.

Emma and her boss, RAY WICKES (40s, non-binary), the firm but fair Executive Director at the head of the table, exchange glances and nod.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Our major donors will be there -- and let's not forget our potential donors will be there. But we still need volunteer greeters and ushers, so please let me know what you can do. Thanks!

Emma sits and exchanges smiles across the table with TODD CRANDALL (early 30s), a proud jock and the energetic Director of Physical Therapy who always dresses like a football coach.

RAY

Thank you, Emma.

(to everyone)

By the way, I stopped in at yesterday's rehearsal. And I have to say our tireless activities director has once again done a fantastic job with our Pennsview Manor Senior Choir. They sounded terrific.

Everyone applauds and cheers Emma, who jokingly wipes her brow in relief.

RAY (CONT'D)

Finally, I'm sure you're all aware Dr. Palmer is taking an extended leave following his surgery.

This gets some sympathetic nods.

RAY (CONT'D)

But our temporary physician, Dr. Liam Buckley, will be arriving later today to fill in.

Emma writes the name on a pad already chock full of notes.

RAY (CONT'D)

Dr. Buckley comes highly recommended by his mentor Dr. P, so please give him a nice welcome when you see him, Okay? Thank you, everybody!

While everyone else rises and chatters, Emma haphazardly shoves all her things into a giant expanding folder.

INT. PENNSVIEW - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Todd runs to catch up with Emma as she rushes away with a cart overflowing with board games, art supplies and files.

TODD

Emma?

She turns as he comes over and nervously plays with the electronic stopwatch around his neck.

TODD (CONT'D)

Wanna come to my hockey practice tonight?

(MORE)

TODD (CONT'D)

I know it's a little soon to ask for another official date, but I thought afterward --

EMMA

Actually, I can't tonight, Todd. I have the knitting circle at my sister's B&B.

TODD

Sorry, the what?

EMMA

The knitting circle. Every Christmas the auxiliary knits caps for the newborns at the hospital. It's tradition.

TODD

(pretends to remember)
Oh yeah, you mentioned that.

He hesitates, turns serious and nods toward a window.

TODD (CONT'D)

Hey, I don't know if you saw. It's, um -- It's snowing out there.

EMMA

I did. It's beautiful.

TODD

Well -- I realize you're busy and everything, but -- you're gonna be careful, right?

EMMA

What do you mean?

TODD

(a playful reminder)
You know... Snow? Christmas?

His meaning finally sinks in.

EMMA

Oh my gosh -- Todd! You don't think I'm... Really?

He moves closer.

TODD

Em, I have to get back to physical therapy.

(MORE)

TODD (CONT'D)

But listen -- I know how much you
love caroling on Christmas Eve.

He jokingly makes air quotes about himself.

TODD (CONT'D)

And -- "Coach Todd" -- wouldn't
want you to miss it again this year
because of some crazy little-

EMMA

(interrupts with a
chuckle)

Hey --

(air quotes)

"Coach Todd" -- I'm late for
rehearsal, okay?

She turns back to her cart and smiles over her shoulder.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Besides, I'm way too swamped to let
anything happen!

Todd watches her go, concerned, then heads back up the hall.

Emma smiles to herself as she hurries away with her cart.

Then EVAN MENDZIK, a funny old rascal, approaches.

EVAN

Morning, Emma! Are you and

(air quotes)

"Coach Todd" an item now?

She smirks at him.

EMMA

Morning, Evan!

EXT. B&B - FRONT - DAY

A bed and breakfast, operated by Emma's sister and
beautifully decorated for Christmas, with a sign out front
reading "CEDAR RUN B&B."

At the curb, the affable, soft-spoken DR. LIAM BUCKLEY (early
30s) grabs his luggage out of a taxi.

As the taxi pulls away, he takes a look up and down the
quaint little street. Then at his new temporary home. And
sighs in relief.

Smiling now, he starts up the path to the porch.

INT. B&B - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Liam looks around the festive holiday surroundings.

INT. B&B - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

As he wanders in, his eye catches a gorgeous old upright piano in a corner.

Delighted, he goes over and runs his hand over it. Then quietly plays a few notes -- and lets the sound fade.

Emma's steady and warm-hearted sister STACY (30s) comes in.

STACY

Do you play, Dr. Buckley?

LIAM

(a little sadly)

Ahh, I used to, but not anymore.
And it's Liam, please.

He quickly changes the subject.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hey, thanks again for making room
for me on short notice --
especially right before Christmas.

STACY

Oh, it's our pleasure. My sister
Emma actually works at Pennsview
Manor, so you'll meet her. She's
the activities director.

Stacy points to a PHOTO on the wall of the two of them.

STACY (CONT'D)

That's her on the left. My little
sis Em. She lives just up the
street from here.

Liam looks and nods politely.

Stacy shows him an Army portrait of her husband.

STACY (CONT'D)

This is my husband Matthew. He'll
be celebrating Christmas overseas
this year.

LIAM

That's too bad. Is he a captain?

STACY

Major now, actually. Missing some holidays and birthdays comes with the territory. You know, the life of a military wife. But we're all super proud of him. The whole town is.

She moves to an older photo of a young Emma and Stacy with their grandparents.

STACY (CONT'D)

And here's Emma and me with our grandparents. She actually started volunteering at Pennsview when our Nana Bess was a resident, and she's been working there ever since. Our grandfather lives here with me, though. This was our family home, and now it's also our B&B.

LIAM

You grew up here?

STACY

We did. They raised us from an early age -- so we were very lucky. After everything we've been through, Pops still says,
(imitates him)
"Life can push you in the right direction if you get out of your own way!"

She chuckles. Liam nods and takes this in.

And looks at the photo of the sisters again -- Emma, in particular.

INT. PENNSVIEW - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Rehearsing onstage, the talented Senior Choir sings a lively, contemporary version of "Angels We Have Heard on High."

Emma accompanies them on piano, singing along and directing them with head-bobs and facial expressions.

She plays one-handed momentarily, pointing to her grin and calling over the music --

EMMA

Smile, everyone! Happy happy!

The seniors obey and loudly lean into the joy of the song.

But Evan, clowning in the back row, shoots a goofy, exaggerated grin at MARQUES "SPIFF" ROBINSON, a cap-wearing retired baseball player with a cane, and they both crack up.

Emma notices and frowns at them, never missing a note.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Evan and Spiff! What did I tell you?

They wave an apology and get back to business.

When the group reaches the end, Emma gets up from the bench.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Nicely done! Great job, everyone. Ladies, don't be afraid to belt it out, okay? And guys, you kind of fell apart on the "Glorias." Watch me and stay together, please.

EVAN

(to Spiff)

Yeah, try to keep it together, will ya, Spiff?

Spiff snickers breathlessly now, making the others laugh.

EMMA

Do I need to separate you two or do you just need a protein bar?

SPIFF

We're sorry, Emma.

EVAN

We love you, Em!

This gets groans and an "Oh brother!" from the women.

EMMA

(smirks)

I love you, too, boys.

(to everyone)

Okay! Just a week-and-a-half till the concert! Please keep in mind our activities budget for next year really depends on it. So we need to put on a good show.

MARIANA FLORES, the motherly Resident Council President, needles Emma a little.

MARIANA
No pressure, though, right?

EMMA
None whatsoever!

Everyone laughs.

EMMA (CONT'D)
I'll see you all tomorrow.

As the seniors scatter, Mariana comes over to the foot of the stage.

EMMA (CONT'D)
You ladies sounded terrific up there, Mariana!

MARIANA
Aww, thank you, chica.
(hesitates)
Uh -- Emma? Did you see it snowing?

EMMA
I did. It's gorgeous, isn't it?

MARIANA
I just wanted to, um...

EMMA
Wanted to what?

MARIANA
(gently)
To remind you to be careful.

EMMA
Careful?

MARIANA
You know... The snow?... It's nearly Christmas?

It takes a moment, then Emma gasps.

EMMA
Mariana! You too?

EXT. PENNSVIEW - ENTRANCE - DAY

Dressed in scrubs now, Liam comes to the building entrance.

A couple of older women watch, admiring the new doctor, and beam at him as he passes.

He smiles back and goes inside.

Then the women look at each other, wide-eyed and impressed.

INT. MUSIC STORE - DAY

Emma waits by an enormous box on the counter labeled "1,000 ASSORTED JINGLE BELLS" while the store's owner, AUSTIN (50s), finishes ringing her up.

AUSTIN

By the way, Rachel's mother asked if she could switch piano nights after the holidays.

EMMA

Sure, I'll give her a call.

AUSTIN

Any thoughts on doing more lessons?

EMMA

Oh, I don't know, Austin. I'm so overloaded these days.

AUSTIN

(chuckles)
You? I'm not surprised. Hey, are you bringing
(air quotes)
"Coach Todd" to caroling night?

She gasps.

EMMA

Does everyone know we went out last weekend?

Austin shrugs. Then picks up the box and gives it a good shake, producing an impressively loud JINGLE.

AUSTIN

You need a hand with this?

EMMA

No thanks, I'll be fine.

She lifts the heavy box, and can barely see over it as she takes a couple of steps.

Then Austin remembers something, but hesitates.

AUSTIN
Oh! Emma? Be careful, okay? 'Cause
it's -- it's snowing.

She hears the now-familiar reminder and stops in her tracks.

She turns slowly and eyes him suspiciously.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
(gently)
And, ya know -- it's almost
Christmas.

Her jaw drops.

EMMA
Oh, come on! Am I really that
helpless and predictable?! Jeesh!

With that, she spins around and heads for the door, wobbling a little as she goes.

Austin looks like he wants to help, but wouldn't dare.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Emma struggles as she lugs the box up the sidewalk.

She glances at all the festive shop windows with their frosted glass, blinking lights, etc. But instead of enjoying the Christmas spirit, she's a bit overwhelmed.

Then her "O Christmas Tree" ringtone goes off in her pocket.

She groans and stops walking. Then holds the box one-handed, pulls out her cell, glances at it and answers.

EMMA
Hi, Todd.

INTERCUT - INT. PENNSVIEW - PHYSICAL THERAPY - DAY

Todd's on his cell next to a resident on a recumbent bike.

TODD
Hey, Em! Everything good?

EMMA
 Yep, just picking up a few things.

TODD
 Okay, good to know.

She shifts the box and changes her grip.

And spies the overhanging CUPPA LOVE CAFÉ sign ahead.

EMMA
 I just need to make one more stop
 and then I'll be back.

TODD
 Cool. Hey, the new doc just got
 here. Dr. Buckley? He's jumping
 right in, getting to work.

EMMA
 Oh good, I'll stop and say hi.

TODD
 And Em, be careful out there, okay?

EMMA
 (tsks)
 I will! See ya in a bit.

She shakes her head, hangs up and puts her cell away.

Then adjusts the box and heads up the sidewalk.

Now she eyes the café sign with determination.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 (to herself)
 You need cocoa, Emma. A tall, hot
 cocoa. With marshmallows. And
 cinnamon! Mmmmm...

Just then --

she steps on a PATCH OF ICE --

her feet FLY out from under her --

her big box of jingle bells goes AIRBORNE --

and DOWN SHE GOES with a thud.

The box lands next, falling open with a raucous JANGLE as
 1,000 multi-colored holiday bells spill onto the sidewalk.

Lying among them on her side, Emma groans.

Then rolls onto her back, holding her right wrist in pain.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 (near tears)
 Ow. Ow-ow. Not again... Not again!!

And several concerned folks quickly surround her.

INT. PENNSVIEW - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Sitting grumpily in the Pennsview clinic, Emma holds a Santa Claus ice pack on her wrist.

Stacy keeps her company.

A couple of elderly people wait their turn, too.

EMMA
 Thanks for driving me back to work.

STACY
 (teases)
Someone has to look out for you.

EMMA
 Oh stop.

STACY
 Four years in a row, Emma!

Emma holds up her injured limb.

EMMA
 I am painfully aware that it's four years in a row, Stacy.

She drops her arm down hard and winces.

STACY
 What is it with you and Christmas?

EMMA
 Nothing! I'm just a klutz, okay?
 Klutz by name, klutz by profession.

They sit quietly for a moment.

STACY
 You haven't met Dr. Buckley yet?