

THE SECRET CHRISTMAS PRINCE

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**EPISODE 1**

EXT. CHÂTEAU ÉLAN - DAY

Snow over vineyards. Holiday lights crown the stone château.

TV SCREEN - BREAKING NEWS

**PRINCE NICHOLAS EVERHART OF KORINTHIA - MISSING!**

Pics of prince NICK (20's): from royal dinners to beach play.

ROYAL WATCH ANCHOR (V.O.)

Prince Nicholas of Korinthia has  
vanished after ending his  
engagement to Duchess Minka. The  
Queen vows to bring her son home -  
and proceed with the wedding.

Pics of icy MINKA (23) and stern QUEEN EVERHART (60).

CLICK - the screen cuts off.

INT. CHÂTEAU BAR - DAY

Nick sets down the remote, turning off the TV above the bar.

Nick, wearing "Clark Kent" eyeglasses, lines up champagne  
flutes with precision - a prince hiding in plain sight.

NICK

(softly to himself)

Sorry, Mother. This prince isn't  
marrying Minka - or anyone you  
pick. Period.

A SHOUT erupts from the lobby:

MAXWELL (O.S.)

WHERE IS SHE?!

INT. CHÂTEAU LOBBY - DAY

Holiday chaos in the hotel lobby. MAXWELL (40s) paces while  
photographer ALAN (20s) eats Christmas cookies.

MAXWELL

That heiress I booked should have  
gotten here hours ago!

Maxwell testily wipes cookie crumbs off Alan's shirt.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)

If people think the heiress is staying here, bookings skyrocket. Otherwise - we're toast.

Maxwell's phone RINGS. He snatches it.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)

Yes? She WHAT? But she can't cancel! I promised - Hello?

Nick enters with a tray of filled champagne flutes.

NICK

The champagne is ready for the heiress's arrival, Mr. Maxwell.

ALAN

Bad news - heiress is a no-show.

He reaches for a glass of champagne. Maxwell swats him away.

MAXWELL

Nobody moves until I come back with an heiress. My plan has to work!

Maxwell bolts. Alan glances outside. A Bentley approaches.

ALAN

Well, well... Who do we have here?

EXT. CHÂTEAU FRONT DRIVE - DAY

A sleek BENTLEY stops. Alan slips outside, camera ready.

EMMA (20s), beautiful yet unsure, steps out in a gorgeous bridesmaid dress. She happily calls back to the driver:

EMMA

Thanks for the ride, Mr. Lane! Your daughter's wedding was perfect.

The car pulls away. Emma's smile collapses into panic.

EMMA (V.O.)

First day as a maid and my car dies. And I'm stuck in this dress!

She rushes into the chateau. Alan snaps photos, enchanted.

ALAN  
So that's the heiress? Stunning!

INT. CHÂTEAU LOBBY - DAY

Emma rushes into the lobby and barrels right into Nick -  
CHAMPAGNE EXPLODES, GLASS SHATTERS - Nick catches her.

Time freezes - instant chemistry. Love at first sight?

CLICK CLICK! Alan takes a photo. Breaking the love spell.

NICK  
Don't take a photo of me!

Emma looks down at her champagne-soaked dress, mortified.

EMMA  
Mr. Maxwell can't see me like this!

She bolts. Nick watches her go, still a bit smitten.

Alan uploads the romantic collision shot with the caption:

**THE CHRISTMAS HEIRESS knows how to make an entrance!**

As he hits "post," the likes roll instantly. Alan is elated.

JOSEPHINE (O.S.)  
What kind of mess is this?

JOSEPHINE (50s), elegant, arrives with CHESTER (30s),  
predatory. They both sneer at the broken champagne flutes.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)  
Maxwell promised me an heiress -  
not chaos.

CHESTER  
Neither Maxwell or anyone else can  
help you save the chateau,  
Josephine. Now is the time to sell!

Maxwell hurries back, breathless, tries to compose.

MAXWELL  
Josephine! About the heiress -

ALAN  
She's here - and trending!

He shows the photo: Emma + Nick in champagne halo → 10K → 12K → 15K likes. Maxwell blanches - he could throw up.

MAXWELL

Wait. You took a photo of her?!

Emma returns, now in a maid's uniform, arms full of linens.

CHESTER

(laughs)

That maid is your heiress?

All eyes on Maxwell. His career flashes before his eyes. He forces a grin. Decides to make the gamble of his life.

MAXWELL

Yes! We're doing a Cinderella motif for our next photo shoot.

Emma blinks - huh?

EMMA

Photos? But I have to make beds -

MAXWELL

(laughing too loud)

She loves getting into character!  
Nick - champagne for our heiress.  
To drink this time, not wear.

He shoves Nick and Emma away. Josephine eyes Emma, intrigued.

JOSEPHINE

She looks nothing like the heiress you showed me in the photos.  
(beat, smiles)

She's even more beautiful. Keep her happy and she may just save us!

Josephine exits. Chester gets into Maxwell's face. Snarls.

CHESTER

Nice try. Nothing will stop me from turning this place into condos.

He marches off. Maxwell whimpers. Alan snickers at his phone and shows Maxwell one of the comments the photo is getting.

**"Is that Prince Nicholas Everhart? In GEORGIA?!"**

ALAN

Someone thinks our bartender is the missing prince. Isn't that funny?

MAXWELL

I have bigger things to worry about than Nick being a royal look-alike.

Across the lobby, Emma politely refuses Nick's champagne – overwhelmed. She skitters back over to Maxwell, flustered.

EMMA

Mr. Maxwell! Why does everyone think I'm some kind of heiress?

MAXWELL

(conspiratorially)

I'm gonna make you a deal you can't refuse. My office, please?

She follows, glancing back at Nick – whose expression makes it clear he wants to get to know her better.

## EPISODE 2

INT. MAXWELL'S OFFICE – DAY

Emma slips inside. Maxwell shuts the door, frantic.

MAXWELL

The real heiress I hired for PR cancelled. Alan took your photo and now everyone thinks you're her.

EMMA

I'm anything but an heiress! I have no family. No money!

MAXWELL

But you look like an heiress!

EMMA

Looks can deceive. I won't lie.

MAXWELL

But I did. If anyone finds out, I'm fired and the chateau gets sold.

EMMA

I'm sorry, Mr. Maxwell, but... No.

She opens the door. He closes it, desperate.

MAXWELL

I'll pay you \$100,000.

EMMA  
\$100,000? To lie?

MAXWELL  
To play pretend! One week only. The  
lie that saves Christmas – and us.

A beat. She considers it: this windfall could be a godsend.

EMMA  
Half up front. Wired today.

MAXWELL  
Great! What's your bank account –

EMMA  
Not me. To Merry Pines Foster Home.

MAXWELL  
(blinks, stunned)  
Why a foster home?

EMMA  
I grew up there. The foster home is  
out of funding. If this game saves  
those kids, I'll be your heiress.

MAXWELL  
(softly, but strict)  
Half now, half later. But I have  
rules: No romancing the staff.  
Daily posts. Three investor events.  
Never break character. Clear?

He offers his hand. She pauses. Then nods. Shakes.

EMMA  
Deal.

MAXWELL  
You're Lady Emmeline from now on.  
(looks at uniform)  
And you'll need to change. Meet me  
in the bridal suite.

Still a bit hesitant, Emma nods. Hurries out of the office.

INT. SERVICE HALLWAY – DAY

She rushes out – nearly collides with Nick. They both blush.

EMMA  
Pardon me, I have to go –

NICK

Wait. I brought you something.

He offers a rose. She reaches for it. He pulls away, teasing.

NICK (CONT'D)

First – who are you really?

Emma swallows nervously. Is she ready to begin the lie?

### EPISODE 3

Maxwell bursts out of his office like a festive tornado.

MAXWELL (O.S.)

Nick! Back to work.

(to Emma, politely strict)

Lady Emmeline – bridal suite. Now.

Emma shoots one last look at Nick as Maxwell whisks her away.

INT. BRIDAL SUITE – DAY

Maxwell ushers Emma inside a suite full of gowns, mirrors, glitter. A STYLIST waits with a brush like a runway assassin.

Emma stops, wide-eyed.

EMMA

What is all this?

MAXWELL

Heiress Boot Camp.

(rearranges her body)

Lesson one – posture.

He places a nutcracker on her head. Emma attempts regal grace – but bumps into a tiny Christmas tree. Ornaments rain down.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)

We'll finesse. Smile like you own  
three islands.

She painfully smiles while the Stylist pins on a tiara.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)

You'll also need a crash course on  
compliments, small talk, dining  
etiquette, and most importantly...

(lifts her hand)

How to hold champagne. Wine lesson  
at five o'clock with Nick.

EMMA

Is he that cute bartender I met?

MAXWELL

(leans in, warning)

Remember: No. Romancing. The staff.

Emma bites her lip – oops. Maxwell motions to a gown.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)

Change and meet me downstairs.

Maxwell heads for the door. Emma CLEARS her throat loudly, beckoning him back. She hands him a piece of paper.

EMMA

Info on the Merry Pines Foster Home. For the wire payment?

Maxwell eyes the paper and pockets it. Smiles big.

MAXWELL

Consider it handled.

He's gone. Emma exhales. Practices her smile. A tiny curtsy. She laughs at herself – a kid playing princess again.

A faint shadow moves near the cracked door.

EMMA

Playing princess was my favorite game at the foster home. Now here I am again, only now it's for real!

A SHADOW flickers at the suite's cracked door. Emma turns.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Hello? Maxwell? Anyone there?

No one answers. Emma shrugs and lets the Stylist primp her.

EXT. HALL - DAY

Outside, Chester lurks behind the corner.

CHESTER

She's no heiress! And she's not going to stop this sale.

He smirks and heads down the hall, already plotting.

**EPISODE 4**

INT. CHÂTEAU BAR - DAY

Nick lines up glasses. Emma enters - made-over. He gawks.

NICK

Wow.

(recovering)

I mean. Shall we begin the lesson?

EMMA

Maxwell said you'd show me what  
you're good at.

(beat - embarrassed)

With wine, I mean!

Nick hides a smile, amused.

NICK

I'll get your homework ready.

As he turns, Emma opens her phone case: a photo of the Merry Pines Foster Home at Christmas. Her heart aches for them.

EMMA (V.O.)

If a little lie helps these kids  
have a home, it's worth it.

She tucks it away. Nick rolls up his sleeves.

NICK

Lesson one: how to hold the glass.

Nick places a glass in her hand, adjusting her fingers.

NICK (CONT'D)

Only the stem. Too tight warms the  
wine. Too loose, you wear it.

He angles her wrist slightly - they're closer than expected.

NICK (CONT'D)

Perfect. You're a quick study.

Emma is entranced by him. He lifts an open bottle.

NICK (CONT'D)

Wine's shy. You coax it out.

EMMA

Like flirting?

He pours - watches her instead of the glass. It overflows. They scramble to clean it up; hands collide.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
Did I just fail my first lesson?

NICK  
Actually, you get an A+.

They linger, not moving – their mutual attraction undeniable.

INT. MAXWELL'S OFFICE – DAY

Maxwell stands while taking a call – tense but hopeful.

MAXWELL  
Transfer confirmed. Fifty thousand  
wired to Merry Pines Foster Home.

He ends the call. Then jumps back! Chester is in the doorway.

CHESTER  
Aren't we supposed to be making  
money? Not giving it away.

MAXWELL  
It's for the heiress's charity.  
Part of her appearance fee.

Chester frowns. Not buying it. Maxwell shrugs and slips out.

Chester lingers, scanning the desk. A document:

**EMMA RIVERS – MAID APPLICATION.**

CHESTER  
Lady Emmeline? Emma Rivers? That's  
awfully close. Perhaps too close...

He pockets the application. Slips out. Hungry for answers.

**EPISODE 5**

INT. CHÂTEAU BAR – DAY

Soft holiday music plays. Nick offers Emma his hand.

NICK  
Next lesson: dancing.

EMMA  
Is that on Maxwell's agenda?

NICK  
No. I want you to teach me.  
(off her hesitation)  
Can't all heiresses dance?

She hesitates, then takes his hand. He's surprisingly smooth.

EMMA  
You lead well.

NICK  
My grandmother was a ballroom  
dancer. What about yours?

Emma looks away, unexpected sorrow dampening her mood.

EMMA  
I don't have a grandmother. Or any  
family. They're all gone.

NICK  
(softens, moved)  
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have -

EMMA  
It's okay. I'm used to being alone.

NICK  
I thought I just wanted to be  
alone, too. But the problem with  
being alone is... It's very lonely.

Emma's gaze flickers downward - something glints under his shirt. A ROYAL MEDALLION necklace, a stag-with-heart crest.

EMMA  
Oh, my! What a beautiful necklace.

Nick startles slightly and tucks it back beneath his shirt.

NICK  
Nothing special. A family thing.

EMMA  
Really? Tell me more.

NICK  
I'd rather not. My family and I  
don't get along at the moment.

EMMA  
They can't be that bad. I'd give  
anything to have a family.

NICK  
Some things are hard to explain.

EMMA  
Please. You can trust me.

Emma searches his eyes – the almost-confession hangs between them. He leans in. Are they about to kiss?

**EPISODE 6**

MAXWELL (O.S.)  
Lady Emmeline!

Emma and Nick jump apart. Maxwell enters with a big folder.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)  
Is that fraternization I see?

EMMA  
No! We were just talking. Closely.

MAXWELL  
Investors at tonight's cocktail party will want to know everything about you and your family.

NICK  
But she has no family.  
(looks at Emma)  
Right?

Emma forces an unsure smile. Maxwell raises an eye at Nick.

MAXWELL  
Shouldn't my sommelier-in-training be training? You. Wine cellar. Go!

Nick smiles at Emma and leaves. Emma pulls Maxwell aside.

EMMA  
Maybe now's a good time to tell me just who I'm supposed to be?

Maxwell hands her the thick folder he walked in with.

MAXWELL  
It's all here. Handcrafted by moi.

EMMA  
(skimming)  
Orphan, no family – okay, at least that's not a lie.  
(beat, jaw dropped)  
(MORE)

EMMA (CONT'D)

Wait. I've won ten humanitarian awards and I spend most of my time traveling all over the world?

MAXWELL

Good, huh? Aren't you incredible?

EMMA

I've never been out of the state!

MAXWELL

Study this file. Own it. Do it for the chateau. And those foster kids!

He hurries off. Emma walks while reading and – BAM! She slams straight into CHESTER, who's been lurking. Papers scatter.

EMMA

Sorry! I'll be out of your way as–

CHESTER

You're not going anywhere until you tell me exactly who you are.

Emma staggers back, scared.

## EPISODE 7

CHESTER (CONT'D)

There is no record of an heiress named Lady Emmeline ever existing.

EMMA

All records are sealed. It was done to protect me from kidnappers.

CHESTER

That's very convenient.  
(eyes the scattered file)  
What's with all this info on you?

EMMA

Mr. Maxwell's prepping my PR profile. And you are...?

CHESTER

Chester Hall. Of Hall Real Estate.

He offers his hand. She shakes – he holds on a beat too long.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Look – I don't care where you came from. Old money, new money. Or maid's quarters.

EMMA

Me? A maid? Surely you're joking.

CHESTER

But if you're here to interfere with the sale...we have a problem.

EMMA

Sale?

CHESTER

(leans in, suspicious)  
Did someone send you here to dig up dirt on me?

EMMA

No! Before today, I didn't even know who you were.

Chester studies her – weighing every word.

CHESTER

Heiress or not, crossing me would be a shameful waste of your time.

Emma's breath stutters – panic rising. Just then—

NICK (O.S.)

Everything okay here?

Nick steps in behind Chester – steady, protective. Chester turns on the fake charm: smile brightens – artificially warm.

CHESTER

Just welcoming our guest!  
(to Emma, overly polite)  
Enjoy your stay, Lady Emmeline. I'm never far away if you need me.

He strolls off – hands in pockets, predator-calm. Nick turns to Emma – his worry obvious.

NICK

You okay?

EMMA

I'm not sure.

EXT. CHÂTEAU BAR – DAY

Outside, BEN (40s) watches them with a long lens camera.

CLICK! CLICK! CLICK! Photos taken of Emma and Nick – close enough to look romantic. Ben lowers the camera – smiling.

BEN

Did I just find Prince Nicholas?

**EPISODE 8**

INT. CHÂTEAU BAR – DAY

Emma still trembles. Nick stands close – calm, protective.

NICK

You can talk to me. Bartenders are great listeners.

EMMA

I don't even know where to begin.

NICK

If it's a secret, whisper it here.  
(leans over, close)  
Can't hear you. Louder, please.

Emma playfully swats him. He pulls her close just as Maxwell barrels in. His composure drops – not these two at it again!

MAXWELL

What is this: a hearing aid lesson?

Emma and Nick jump apart like two guilty teenagers.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)

You have a date tonight.

EMMA

A date? With who?

Maxwell flips his phone around, showing the profile of a too-handsome influencer type in a speedo: PIERCE LANFORD III.

MAXWELL

Pierce Lanford the 3rd. Trust fund.  
Big wallet. And he's looking to  
invest in a hotel like this one.  
(snaps his fingers)  
Let's get you changed for tonight.

Emma nods, still shaky. She looks back at Nick.

EMMA

We'll talk later?

MAXWELL

No, you will not. How many times  
must I say: no romancing the staff.

EMMA

It's talking, not romancing.

MAXWELL

Talking becomes romancing!

Maxwell ushers a despondent Emma out.

Nick watches her go, masking hurt. He polishes a glass, then  
slips out his medallion – thumb tracing the stag-heart crest.

QUEEN EVERHART (V.O.)

The duchess will be a perfect wife.

NICK (V.O.)

I'm not in love with her.

QUEEN EVERHART (V.O.)

Love fades. Duty doesn't!

NICK (V.O.)

Then I'll never get married!

QUEEN EVERHART (V.O.)

Wait, don't walk out. COME BACK!

The memory shatters. Nick tucks the medallion away.

Outside the window, BEN photographs every second.

EXT. CHÂTEAU BAR – DAY

Ben zooms in on the shot of Nick with the medallion. Grins.

BEN

I think I got you!

## EPISODE 9

INT. CHÂTEAU LOBBY – DAY

Maxwell speed-walks with a clipboard and nearly collides with  
Ben – who is now suited and calm.

BEN

Mr. Maxwell, I presume?

Maxwell freezes – stranger danger.

MAXWELL

What are you attempting to presume?

BEN

I'm with the Korinthian royal family. Under Queen Everhart.

Ben flashes his royal crest ID. Maxwell brightens.

MAXWELL

Does the Queen want to stay here? Because of the heiress, am I right?

BEN

Actually, I'm searching for a missing royal – the Queen's son, Prince Nicholas Everhart.

Nick exits the bar, hears his name – ducks behind a column.

BEN (CONT'D)

The Queen and his fiancée, Duchess Minka, want him to come home.

Ben shows an engagement photo – NICK + MINKA.

BEN (CONT'D)

I believe he's staying here.

MAXWELL

If a prince was here, I'd know. But sadly, he's not.

BEN

You sure? Maybe tending bar?

Nick presses flatter against the column. Maxwell GUFFAWS.

MAXWELL

Nick? A prince? Maybe he's a prince of procrastination, that is!

BEN

But your bartender looks almost exactly like him!

MAXWELL

Yes, yes – and people say I look like George Clooney. Forgive me. I must prep for tonight's party.

Maxwell speeds off. Frustrated, Ben texts a discreet photo of Nick on his phone to DUCHESS MINKA.

BEN'S TEXT  
MEDALLION: 82% MATCH. Is it him?

MINKA'S TEXT  
Get a better shot of his face.

Ben scans the lobby. Nearly spots Nick - but Nick slips away.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Nick hurries toward the exit - nearly collides with Emma.

EMMA  
Whoa - where are you going?

NICK  
Lady Emmeline, it was nice to meet you, but I must leave. I quit.

EMMA  
You can't! I need you at the party - what if I mess everything up?

Nick stops - torn. Fear pulling him one way, Emma the other.

NICK  
Come with me. There's something you should know. About who I really am.

He grabs her hand, not giving her a choice but to follow him.

## **EPISODE 10**

INT. WINE CELLAR - NIGHT

Nick leads Emma in. Warm lighting. Oak barrels glow.

EMMA  
So, what do you want to tell me?

Nick starts, stalls, uncorks a bottle.

NICK  
I need a drink first.

He starts to drink straight from it. She takes it away.

EMMA  
If you don't want to stay here, I won't force you.

NICK  
No one is forcing me to do  
anything. Not you. Not anyone. And  
especially not my family.

EMMA  
What did your family make you do?

Nick eyes Emma carefully - badly wanting to confide in her.

NICK  
I need to be honest about who I am.  
Just like how honest you are.

Emma flinches - guilt. Covers with a weak smile.

EMMA  
Honesty can be a relative term.

NICK  
I can't lie anymore. See, I'm -

A CREAK. FOOTSTEPS above! Nick freezes.

MAXWELL (O.S.)  
Nick? You down here?

NICK  
Coming, Mr. Maxwell!

He turns to go. Emma grabs his hand - vulnerable.

EMMA  
I don't care who you are.  
Just...stay?

A beat. He softens. How can he deny her?

NICK  
Okay. But just for tonight.

She hugs him - surprising both of them.

MAXWELL (O.S.)  
NICK! WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON?

Nick pulls away, hurries off. Emma watches - spellbound.

EXT. KORINTHIA COUNTRYSIDE (STOCK FOOTAGE) - DAY

TEXT ON SCREEN: **Meanwhile in Korinthia...**

INT. MINKA'S PALACE SUITE - NIGHT

MINKA - a cheetah in human form - lounges with a tablet - Ben's photos of Nick + the Chateau collision pic with Emma.

MINKA

Is that really you, Nicholas? And is she why you ran away from me?

She doesn't like the answer she's imagining.

MINKA (CONT'D)

Drusilla - book the Royal Suite at Château Élan. Tell Daddy I'm spending Christmas in the States.

DRUSILLA (O.S.)

Right away, Duchess!

Minka traces Emma's face - nails sharp. A poisonous smile.

MINKA

When I'm done with you, no one will love you. Especially not my prince!

### EPISODE 11

INT. CHÂTEAU ÉLAN/BALLROOM ENTRANCE - NIGHT

The château glows with magic. Emma steps in wearing a red gown - pure showstopper. Guests whisper and gossip about her

Maxwell beams - proud of his creation.

MAXWELL

Everyone loves you! Tonight, you're not a maid - you're a miracle.

EMMA

Thanks So... Where's my date?

MAXWELL

I'll see what's holding him. For now - mingle. Go on!

He nudges her off and rushes away. Emma spots Nick at the bar - staring at her like he's never seen the color red before.

INT. CHÂTEAU ÉLAN/BALLROOM BAR AREA - NIGHT

Emma crosses over to him. He takes her in, amazed.

NICK  
You look breathtaking.

EMMA  
These shoes are pure torture!  
(soft, sincere smile)  
I'm glad you stayed.

NICK  
You don't need my help to be a hit.  
Everyone here loves you.

EMMA  
Everyone?

Before he can answer, PIERCE LANGFORD III (20s0)- handsome entitlement - slams down a half-finished drink.

PIERCE  
I wanted a Manhattan, not Skid Row!

NICK  
I'll be happy to remake it.

PIERCE  
Do hurry. I bore easily.

Emma bristles at this man's behavior - heat rising.

EMMA  
Maybe try saying "please?"

Pierce sizes her up - amused.

PIERCE  
And who are you: my mother?

EMMA  
No. But I sure would like to ask  
her why she raised such a rude man.

PIERCE  
You need to shut your mouth!

EMMA  
Say "please" and maybe I will!

Maxwell rushes over with a panicked laugh.

MAXWELL  
Lady Emmeline, why are you making  
such a fuss over our special guest?

Pierce does a double-take. Eyes Emma with new appreciation.

PIERCE

Wait. You're Lady Emmeline? Nice to meet you. I'm your date.

(offers his hand, smiles)

Pierce Langford the Third. You're quite the firecracker.

Emma swallows, horrified. This is the man she has to impress?

## EPISODE 12

Maxwell slips between them – smile tight.

MAXWELL

Holidays make everyone testy. Lady Emmeline – why don't you show Mr. Langford our holiday décor? It's all such a lovely shade of green!

Pierce offers Emma his arm – confident, performative.

PIERCE

Let's start over. Dance with me?

Emma forces a polite smile and takes his arm. Nick watches – jaw tight around a cocktail shaker.

A jovial Josephine and underwhelmed Chester approach Maxwell.

JOSEPHINE

(re: Emma and Pierce)

Look at them! The heir and the heiress. Nice work, Maxwell. we're getting reservation inquiries.

CHESTER

Inquiries don't equal bookings.

MAXWELL

But they will. Rumors are already circulating that royals are hiding out here. Can you imagine?

Nick freezes at hearing that – then turns, only to find Ben approaching the bar, angling for a clear look at his face.

BEN

You new? You look familiar.

NICK

(adjusts his eyeglasses)

I don't think so. Pardon me, but I need to grab some more vermouth.

He ducks out fast. Ben watches him go, suspicious.

INT. HALLWAY ALCOVE - LATER

Emma slips into a quiet corridor - overwhelmed.

EMMA (V.O.)

I can't keep pretending like this!

She turns to walk away. Pierce appears, blocking her path.

PIERCE

It's not even midnight and already  
my Cinderella is running away.

EMMA

Just needed a moment to college my  
thoughts. Go enjoy the party.

PIERCE

Everything I enjoy is right here.

His eyes crawl over her.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

Forgive me for my rude words  
earlier. I'm better with actions.

He reaches for her. Emma politely pushes his hands away.

EMMA

Maybe we should get back to -

PIERCE

The only thing we should be doing  
is getting to know each other a lot  
better. Like this...

He leans in - going for a kiss. Emma jerks back.

EMMA

No - please stop.

His smile drops, ego bruised.

PIERCE

I'm not used to hearing that word.

He steps closer, cornering Emma - intent clear.

### **EPISODE 13**

Pierce grabs Emma's wrist - too tight. She struggles.

EMMA  
Pierce - I said NO!

Someone yanks Pierce off her. It's Nick - fury in his eyes.

NICK  
She said no. Back. Off.

Pierce steadies, sneering.

PIERCE  
Careful, pretty boy. You're out of  
your league. Now run along and -

Nick CLOCKS him - clean shot. Pierce reels - stunned. Emma  
GASPS - not expecting that. Nick checks on her.

NICK  
You okay?

She nods - shaken. Nick guides her back into the ballroom.  
Behind them, Pierce rises, seething.

INT. BALLROOM - DAY

Nick leads a rattled Emma in as guests stare at them.

EMMA  
Was punching him a smart idea?

NICK  
You know a better way to stop him?

Pierce storms in.

PIERCE  
HEY!

Nick shields Emma from Pierce.

NICK  
Stay away from her.

PIERCE  
No one tells me what to do.  
Especially not a glorified busboy.

He SHOVES Nick, who crashes into a GINGERBREAD VILLAGE. Candy  
everywhere. The party freezes. Then every phone goes up.

PIERCE (CONT'D)  
The heiress is with me.

NICK

Not anymore.

They CLASH – a fierce, chaotic tangle. Across the room, Chester pulls Alan away from the dessert table.

CHESTER

Stop eating and start shooting!  
(under his breath)  
This hotel is DONE.

Alan films it all, giddy. Josephine marches over to Maxwell.

JOSEPHINE

This is a party – not a brawl!  
And why is STAFF fighting over our  
heiress? FIRE HIM!

MAXWELL

I'll get the boys to tone it down.

Maxwell steps in. Pierce swings. Nick ducks. Pierce accidentally punches Maxwell. Maxwell collapses!

Emma clings to Nick, horrified. Even Pierce is shaken.

Nearby, Chester pours himself a smug drink.

CHESTER

Now this is a party!

#### **EPISODE 14**

Pierce hovers over a dazed Maxwell.

PIERCE

Mr. Maxwell, that was an accident!  
Blame the help!

Nick grabs Pierce, furious.

NICK

Outside. You and me. Now.

Pierce wrenches free.

PIERCE

How many times do I have to say it–  
NO ONE tells me what to do!

Pierce swings. CRACK! His fist connects with Nick's cheek. Nick's EYEGLASSES FLY OFF – skittering across the floor.

NICK  
My glasses!

Ben – lurking at the perimeter – SNAPS a rapid burst of photos – finally getting a clean shot of Nick's face.

Emma drops to the floor with Nick – both scrambling blindly.

EMMA  
I've got them! I've got them!

She finds his glasses – puts them back into his hands. Nick shoves them on – his secret identity saved. Then looks up.

NICK  
Uh-oh...

The ballroom GUESTS stare at the wrecked ballroom from the fight. Emma stands – forces a smile, breathless but gracious.

EMMA  
Thank you all for coming – but our holiday gathering has clearly reached its end. Good night!

A painfully awkward beat. Guests trickle out, gossiping. Chester smirks, practically glowing. Josephine looks sick.

CHESTER  
Come along, Josephine. I'll show you those sales figures again – although at a discount now that your château's a wrestling ring.

He cackles, dragging her off. Pierce hustles after them.

PIERCE  
You won't tell my father about what happened tonight, will you?

Emma kneels beside the still-dazed Maxwell.

EMMA  
Mr. Maxwell? Can you hear me?

He blinks up at her.

MAXWELL  
Is it time for hot chocolate?

His head drops back down. Emma looks to Nick.

EMMA

Can you get him some ice?

Nick rushes to the bar – passing Ben, who lowers his camera, already certain. Ben quietly clicks on a recorder.

BEN

Confirmed visual. The bartender at the Chateau Elan is the prince!

### EPISODE 15

INT. MAXWELL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Maxwell sits with an ice pack on his head. Nick sits across from him, ashamed. Emma hovers protectively.

MAXWELL

You're lucky I'm not pressing charges. I'm just firing you.

NICK

Fine. I'll be out in the hour.

Nick stands up. But Emma, appalled, pushes him back down.

EMMA

You can't fire this man for protecting me!

MAXWELL

He's a bartender, not a bodyguard!

EMMA

If Nick goes - I go.

MAXWELL

Don't be absurd. We have a deal.

EMMA

Can you see the news? HEIRESS FLEES CHATEAU AFTER ASSAULT! News at 11.

Maxwell shoots upright – bangs his head – winces.

MAXWELL

Fine! He stays. But you two must cooperate.

He points at them like a referee at a boxing match.

MAXWELL (CONT'D)

Professional interactions only. No touching. No talking, No gazing. No-

EMMA

We get it. No, no, no, no, no!

MAXWELL

(glares at Nick)

Let me tell Josephine the bad news you're staying. Ugh - I need cocoa.

Maxwell hobbles out. Emma and Nick share a smile.

NICK

It was okay if he fired me. I only agreed to stay tonight.

EMMA

You have to stay longer. What if Pierce tries to kiss me again?

NICK

Are you trying to blackmail me?

Emma shrugs. Nick laughs - moves in for a hug - when Maxwell pokes his head back in.

MAXWELL

Nick - since you're now rehired, clean up the ballroom. Immediately.

Nick follows Maxwell out, grinning at Emma. She winks back.

EXT. CHÂTEAU - PARKING AREA - NIGHT

From his car, Ben uploads the clear shot of Nick: glasses off, identity unmistakable.

BEN (TEXT → MINKA)

This a clear enough shot for you?

Three dots... Bubble bubble...

MINKA (TEXT)

Don't tell the Queen yet. I need to confirm it's him. I'm on my way.

BEN

(to himself)

And I thought tonight was messy...!

**EPISODE 16**

INT. PALACE SUITE - KORINTHIA - NIGHT

Minka lounges in silk, flipping through Ben's photos. Nick – glasses off – Emma practically in his arms.

MINKA

You broke off my engagement... So I may just break off your face.

She scrolls through more photos of Nick at the bar.

MINKA (CONT'D)

A prince playing bartender? Cute.

Minka's skittish assistant DRUSILLA enters and bows.

DRUSILLA

Duchess, about your trip to the States -

MINKA

Am I packed yet? My wardrobe must say, "I came to conquer."

DRUSILLA

The pilot suggests waiting. There's a major storm advisory.

MINKA

I am a major storm advisory. And I say we leave within the hour.

DRUSILLA

But the airport warned -

Minka grabs Drusilla's chin – gentle but terrifying.

MINKA

Do I look like a woman afraid of weather? The storm should fear me.

Drusilla nods frantically and scurries out. Minka fits a sharp, crown-adjacent headpiece – less tiara, more weapon.

She scrolls to Emma's photo in her "Christmas Heiress" look.

MINKA (CONT'D)

Let's see how long this heiress lasts once she realizes there's only room for ONE future queen.

Mink applies lipstick like war paint.

**EPISODE 17**

INT. CHÂTEAU ÉLAN - LOBBY - DAY

Morning chaos. Phones buzz. GUESTS beg Maxwell for rooms.

MAXWELL

One at a time, please. I still have  
a terrible headache!

Josephine storms over with her tablet.

JOSEPHINE

Mr. Maxwell, have you seen this?!

ON SCREEN – the headline:

**THE CHRISTMAS HEIRESS AND HER TWO SUITORS?!**  
Handsome Bartender vs. "Party Prince" Pierce!

Photos of Nick and Pierce mid-fight – Emma between them.

MAXWELL

Josephine, I am so sorry.

JOSEPHINE

I'm not. We're selling out!  
(pats his shoulder)  
Thank God we rehired that hot  
bartender. The public loves a mess!

Nick listens nearby, uneasy. Emma enters and catches his eye  
– a tiny, charged smile. CHESTER cuts between them, cold.

CHESTER

Enjoy your fifteen minutes. I don't  
know who you are or where you came  
from, but I'll make sure you go  
back to where you belong.

Nick sheepishly steps away. Emma watches him go, worried.

INT. CHÂTEAU - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The STAFF and EMMA gather for Josephine's morning meeting.

JOSEPHINE

To keep building on our sudden popularity, I am thrilled to announce – a WEEK OF CHRISTMAS WONDERS AT THE CHATEAU ELAN!

MAXWELL flips display boards like Vanna White as she lists:

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

Snow & Soirée! Cocoa Couture Night!  
Christmas Karaoke! Silent Auction!

EMMA raises a tentative hand.

EMMA

Could the events benefit Merry Pines Foster Home? They're losing funding. And Christmas should be about giving, not just getting.

The room hushes. Josephine softens – genuinely moved.

JOSEPHINE

That's the spirit of Christmas.  
Merry Pines is our beneficiary!

Emma exhales, relieved. Nick approaches her with quiet pride.

NICK

You really are too good to be true.

EMMA

You're pretty good yourself.

They're about to hug – when MAXWELL squeezes in.

MAXWELL

Remember: professional distance!

Emma blushes. Nick steps back.

Chester glares at them from the door, wheels turning on how he can use their relationship to the hotel's disadvantage.

## **EPISODE 18**

INT. LOBBY BAR – DAY

Pierce sits at the bar, nursing an espresso like it personally offended him. Chester slides into the seat beside him – all charm and calculation. Shows him his tablet displaying the gossip coverage of Pierce and Nick fighting.

CHESTER  
You're front page news.

PIERCE  
I've never been so embarrassed.  
Look at me - fighting like a frat  
boy. Now I'm the villain, and the  
heiress hates me.

CHESTER  
From what I hear, your entire  
family hates you - and they still  
keep signing the checks. If you  
play your cards right, you can get  
the Heiress's money next.

Pierce blinks - not sure he heard right.

PIERCE  
What makes you think I'm only  
interested in her for her money?

Chester just stares at him. Pierce exhales - surrendering.

PIERCE (CONT'D)  
What do you propose I do?

CHESTER  
Get her to fall for you. Then take  
her out of here - anywhere. St.  
Barts. New York. Hell, take her to  
Cleveland for all I care. I just  
want that heiress out of my hair.

Pierce narrows his eyes.

PIERCE  
What's in it for you?

Chester gestures to the lobby - his kingdom in waiting.

CHESTER  
You're looking at it.  
(offers his hand)  
Partners?

Pierce hesitates - then takes the deal. Shakes his hand.

PIERCE  
Partners.

CHESTER grins - satisfied. The deal with the devil is sealed.

**EPISODE 19**

EXT. CHATEAU VINEYARD - NIGHT

Golden lights thread through frosted vines. Laughter and carols drift from the terrace. Emma walks alone.

NICK (O.S.)  
You hiding from me?

She turns - Nick stands a few feet away. Looking handsome.

EMMA  
Just needed a minute to breathe.  
It's beautiful out here.

He steps closer. His eyes on Emma, not the vineyard.

NICK  
Couldn't agree more.

She smiles faintly, eyes glimmering in the lamplight.

EMMA  
The carols. The trees. Makes me  
happy and sad at the same time.

NICK  
Sad? Christmas is supposed to be  
the happiest time of the year.

EMMA  
(swallows)  
As a kid, I avoided Christmas. It  
reminded me of everything I didn't  
have. This is the first time it  
feels real.

Nick's expression softens - her honesty disarms him.

NICK  
You deserve it. All of it - the  
lights, the laughter... And someone  
to share it with.

She meets his eyes; his words land.

EMMA  
You shouldn't say things like that.

NICK  
Why not?

EMMA  
We're not supposed to get close.

NICK

That's only when Maxwell's  
watching. And he's not here.

He pulls her gently toward him. She closes her eyes...

EMMA

Is this really happening?

Nick leans in – their lips about to meet...

MAXWELL (O.S.)

Emma! Emma, where are you?

Nick jolts back. Hides behind the vines. Maxwell rushes up.

MAXWELL (CONTINUING) (CONT'D)

What are you doing out here –  
weeding?

EMMA

Just thinking.

MAXWELL

Think in the lobby. We have a  
special guest.

EMMA

If this is Pierce again –

MAXWELL

It's Duchess Minka of Korinthia!  
She'll be staying here until  
Christmas. Come help me greet her!

He hurries Emma away. Nick steps out from the vines – shaken.

NICK

Minka? Here? Oh, no...

## **EPISODE 20**

INT. CHATEAU GRAND HALL – NIGHT

The doors BURST open. Minka sweeps in – diamonds, white fur,  
full blizzard diva. Drusilla struggles behind with mountains  
of luggage. ALAN snaps photos.

Nick stands nearby with Emma. She's curious. He's panicked.

ALAN

Duchess Minka, welcome! What brings  
you to Georgia for Christmas?

MINKA

I needed a change of scenery and a change of heart. Especially since it is still broken by the Prince.

(pauses, perfectly tragic)

So I came to America seeking a little of that comfort and joy I heard so much about in carols...

Nick rolls his eyes and mutters:

NICK

Oh, please. She's milking this.

EMMA

You know her?

He freezes, then forces a smile.

NICK

I'll get the wine she likes-

(catches himself)

I mean, what I think she likes.

He darts off. Maxwell escorts Emma forward.

MAXWELL

Duchess, may I present Lady Emmeline - our Christmas Heiress.

Minka studies Emma like prey.

MINKA

So you're the one men are fighting over.

She lets her fur drop onto Drusilla, who collapses. Alan helps her up - a tiny spark lights up between those two.

MINKA (CONT'D)

Your dress is lovely. It must be so freeing not to care about labels.

Emma forces a smile. Alan steps in with his camera.

ALAN

Duchess? Heiress? A photo?

MINKA

Of course. Say "Happy Christmas!"

SNAP! Minka acts like she's ecstatic; Emma looks unsure.

MINKA (CONT'D)

I must go freshen up. Join me later  
for a pre-drink before dinner?

She glides away. Emma turns – runs straight into Pierce.

PIERCE

Lady Emmeline, can I apologize?

EMMA

For what – being alive?

PIERCE

I was out of line last night. The  
bartender must have put something  
in my drink to make me so surly.

EMMA

You're blaming Nick? Forget it.

PIERCE

I told my father about Merry Pines.  
He wants to fund a new home. Can we  
talk about it? For the children?

That hits Emma's heart. Emma softens, but stays guarded.

EMMA

I'll talk business. Nothing else.

Pierce offers his arm. She reluctantly takes it.

Nick watches from the corner – uneasy. Minka suddenly sweeps  
past. Nick darts behind a Christmas tree. She pauses,  
suspicious...then moves on. Nick exhales – that was close.

## **EPISODE 21**

INT. CHÂTEAU BAR – EVENING

Emma enters, cheerful – until she realizes the bar is empty.

EMMA

Nick? Hello?

Nick suddenly pops up from behind the counter – she jumps.

NICK

Listen fast. That Duchess can't see  
me. She can't even know I'm here.

EMMA

Why? What's going on?

NICK  
It's complicated. You see, I'm -

MINKA (O.S.)  
Lady Emmeline? Hellooo!

Emma peeks around the corner. Sees Minka approaching.

EMMA  
She's heading over here now!

Nick's face goes white. Alan strolls over with his camera.

ALAN  
Hey, you two! How about a photo to -

NICK  
Alan. Cover my shift. I'll give you  
all my tips. Plus a hundred bucks.

ALAN  
Sold.

Nick ties his apron around Alan. Emma is baffled.

EMMA  
Nick - seriously - what is  
happening? Why are you scared of -  
(turns to see Minka)  
Minka!

Nick dives under the bar. Alan stands stiffly, trying to play  
along.

ALAN  
Wine, ladies?

Minka frowns as Alan pours wine. She scans the room, hunting.

MINKA  
Where is that hot bartender? The  
one from your photos.

EMMA  
Um - he quit. Too much stress.

MINKA  
Quit? Oh, that's upsetting. He  
looked so much like my...

Minka suddenly stops. Sniffs the air. Perks up.

MINKA (CONT'D)  
I smell his cologne. He's here.

Minka moves behind the bar. Emma tries to block her.

EMMA  
Minka - wait!

Minka reaches the hiding spot - empty. Alan hands her a glass. She swats it away.

MINKA  
Where are you keeping him?

EMMA  
I'm not keeping anyone!

MINKA  
So innocent. So sweet. I see why he likes you. And no wonder I don't.

Minka pushes Emma aside and heads out.

MINKA (CONT'D)  
Tell that man he can't avoid me forever. I will find him.

And she's gone. A beat later, Nick appears behind a column.

NICK  
Thanks! I owe you one.

EMMA  
What you owe me is an explanation. Right now. Who are you?

Nick swallows - cornered. He's out of places to hide.

## **EPISODE 22**

Nick freezes - truth trembling at the edge of his lips.

Before he can answer- A LOUD BELL CLANGS from the courtyard.

MAXWELL (V.O.)  
(over PA)  
TREE LIGHTING IN TWO MINUTES! All guests and staff to the courtyard!

Emma flinches. Nick shuts his eyes - terrible timing.

EMMA  
Nick, look at me. If you walk away from this moment, so do I. Just tell me the truth.

NICK

After the Tree Lighting.  
Meet me in the wine cellar.

The bar door SLAMS open – Maxwell, frantic as ever.

MAXWELL

What are you two doing here?! This  
isn't a romance novel – MOVE!

He physically ushers them out in opposite directions. Emma looks back at Nick – a final charged flicker.

EXT. CHÂTEAU COURTYARD – NIGHT

The HUGE towering Christmas tree glows as GUESTS gather. Carols, twinkling lights, faux snowflakes drifting.

Emma is swept into the crowd by Maxwell. Nick slips behind garland – already hiding from everyone.

Minka glides to the courtyard and bumps directly into Pierce. At first they are annoyed, then catch each other's eyes.

For a moment they are caught off-guard by attraction. They both freeze. Frost meets fire. A strange unexpected spark.

PIERCE

Duchess! I can't believe a prince  
would leave someone like you.

MINKA

(frowns, annoyed)  
Thank you for ripping open a fresh  
wound.

PIERCE

Sorry. I didn't mean to upset you.

MINKA

If you're really sorry, you'll help  
me find the man who is posing as  
one of the hotel's bartenders.

PIERCE

Not the pretty-boy bartender  
drooling over the heiress?

MINKA

I think he's my fiancé.

PIERCE

Don't you mean...ex-fiancé?

MINKA

Oh, I'm still going to marry him. I just need to find that bartender to see if my intuition is correct. Help me find him and I'll help you win Lady Emmeline's heart.

Pierce's pupils dilate – she has him. He smiles.

PIERCE

Sure. But why waste time with those two losers when you and I could –

MINKA

(sharp)

Don't flirt. It doesn't suit you.

Pierce deflates, oddly aroused. She snaps her fingers. As if like magic, Drusilla appears with a tray of champagne. Minka takes two flutes off the tray. Gives one to Pierce.

MINKA (CONT'D)

Help me track him down. You'll get your heiress. I'll get my crown.

PIERCE

And Christmas will one helluva holiday.

The two toast. A toxic sparkle flickers between them just as

The tree lights up! Everyone CHEERS but Emma and Nick who eye each other nervously and with deep longing.

### EPISODE 23

INT. WINE CELLAR – NIGHT

The cellar glows – tiny candles tucked between barrels and bottles. Soft. Warm. Magical.

Emma steps inside, instantly drawn into the quiet romance of it. She gently hums a public-domain carol: GREENSLEEVES.

Nick emerges from behind a rack of wine casks – nervous, vulnerable, almost boyish.

NICK

My mother used to sing that same song to me on Christmas Eve.

Emma turns, surprised. Their eyes meet – charged already.

NICK (CONT'D)  
I wasn't sure you'd come.

EMMA  
You promised to tell me the truth.  
I want to know. Everything.

NICK  
I don't know where to start.

EMMA  
Start with your mother. Does she  
know you're here?

Nick looks down – the weight of his past heavy on him.

NICK  
None of my family knows I'm here.  
But Minka... She could ruin that.

EMMA  
Minka? Is she part of your family?

NICK  
(pitifully laughs)  
She wishes. That woman is nothing  
but trouble.

EMMA  
Did you...used to date her?  
(studies him, tense)  
What a minute – are you...

Nick doesn't deny it. He just waits. Emma shakes her head.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
Sorry. I'm being ridiculous.  
There's no way you could be...

NICK  
Could be who?

Emma pulls back – overwhelmed.

EMMA  
I need to go back to my room.

Nick steps forward – gentle, desperate.

NICK  
Don't you want to know more?

EMMA

Know what? That you used to date a Duchess? How am I supposed to compete with someone like her?

NICK

You can't. Because you're better. You're someone I think I could...

Emma's breath catches – waiting.

EMMA

You think you could what?

Nick cups her face – his thumb trembling against her cheek. She nods – giving permission. Their lips meet – slow, then hungry. The world evaporates. A long, forbidden kiss.

They break only enough to breathe.

EMMA (CONT'D)

...this is real.

NICK

The realest thing I've ever had.

He kisses her again – deeper. The candles flicker wildly/

EMMA

Nick... What about the rules?

NICK

(smiles, devilishly)  
We're breaking them.

He pulls her close – and blows out a candle.

## **EPISODE 24**

NT. NICK'S ROOM – MORNING

Soft morning light spills across the room.

The shower runs behind a half-fogged glass door – steam drifting. Nick's clothes from last night lie across a chair.

The main door clicks open.

Pierce slips in. Silent. Predatory. Uninvited.

He scans the room—eyes locking onto Nick's folded shirt. A gold chain peeks from the pocket. Pierce pulls it free...

THE STAG-HEART ROYAL MEDALLION glints in his hand!

A slow, villainous smirk spreads across his face. He twirls the medallion once—like a fisherman testing bait.

The shower shuts off.

Pierce melts into the shadows.

Nick steps out of the bathroom – towel low on his hips, running a hand in his wet hair, still buzzing with happiness.

He freezes.

Pierce stands dead center in the room – dangling the medallion by its chain. Nick's face drains of all color.

PIERCE  
(mock-sweet)  
Rise and shine... Your Highness.

Nick's eyes widen – pure shock, pure panic.

He's been found out.

## EPISODE 25

PIERCE (CONT'D)  
You know, I've always been good with headlines. Wanna hear the one I came up with for you?

Nick swallows hard.

NICK  
Pierce, don't -

Pierce ignores him, pacing with theatrical flair.

PIERCE  
Picture it: "Runaway Prince Serving Cocktails in Georgia – EXCLUSIVE."  
I describe the Chateau. The bar.  
Your little Clark Kent glasses.  
(chuckles)  
Boy, you fooled us good! You're quite the little trickster.

Nick's fists clench. A muscle in his jaw twitches.

PIERCE (CONT'D)  
And wait til I tell the press I about your heiress girlfriend.  
(MORE)

PIERCE (CONT'D)

And why she's the reason you ditched your fiancée, the Duchess Minka.

NICK

Emmeline is NOT part of this.

Pierce grins. Bullseye.

PIERCE

No? Because from where I'm standing, she's the main star of this PR fiasco. See, once the Queen gets wind of your romance— she'll want to know what this "princess wanna be" did to trap her son.

Nick's face drains. He can see the future. It's awful.

NICK

Don't drag her into this.

Pierce steps closer - enjoying every second.

PIERCE

If this goes public, the tabloids will devour her. Gold-digger. Schemer. Prince-stealer. They'll paint her as the girl who ruined a royal engagement. And Lady Emmeline will hate you for putting her in the crossfire.

Nick's breath catches - protective panic rising.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

And Minka? She'll take legal action. Parliamentary action. Hell - religious action if she has to. Girls like her don't survive scandals like that. It'll destroy her. And she'll blame you.

Nick's eyes burn.

NICK

(whispers)

Please. Don't hurt her. Do whatever you want to me - just...not her.

Pierce softens. Nick's begging gives him pure pleasure.

PIERCE

Then do exactly what I tell you.  
Break her heart. Convince her you  
were never serious. Make her walk  
away from you. And then she'll be  
available...for me.

Nick's voice cracks.

NICK

You don't understand what you're  
asking.

PIERCE

(smiles coldly)  
I understand perfectly.  
Break her heart. Or I break your  
entire life. And hers, too.

Nick stands there - defeated. Pierce strolls to the door.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

You have until tonight.

Pierce tosses the medallion back to Nick and exits.

Nick sinks to the bed, breath shattering. Stares at his royal  
medallion...broken by what he has to do.

## **EPISODE 26**

EXT. CHÂTEAU GROUNDS - DAY

Fresh snow. Holiday music drifting.

Emma crosses the path toward the bar, clutching a small Merry  
Pines music box with a red bow on it. Giddy and carefree.

Pierce suddenly intercepts her path. Slathers on the charm.

PIERCE

Emmeline, lunch with me today?

EMMA

Pierce, I don't want to lead you  
on. I'm seeing someone else.

PIERCE

The bartender?

EMMA

Yes.

PIERCE  
I wouldn't if I were you.

EMMA  
Well, you're not me.

PIERCE  
Don't say you weren't warned.

Overconfident, Emma leaves. Chester approaches Pierce.

CHESTER  
I told you to make her fall in love  
with you, not keep hating you.

PIERCE  
Patience. Her true feelings for me  
are all about to change.

Pierce smiles. Chester frowns, unsure.

INT. CHÂTEAU BAR - DAY

Nick wipes down the counter like he's scrubbing pain off his  
skin. He's distant. Hollow.

Emma steps up to him, hopeful and gentle.

EMMA  
Surprise. Merry early Christmas!

She offers the music box. Turns it on. GREENSLEEVES tinkles  
out. Emma looks at him expectantly. This just pains Nick. He  
doesn't look at her. Emma is baffled by his reaction.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
It's the carol you said your mother  
sang to you as child.

NICK  
Emma, we can't do this.

EMMA  
What are you talking about?

Nick forces every word out like it hurts.

NICK  
You deserve someone honest. I have  
too many secrets.

EMMA

Nick, I don't care who you used to be. I care about who you are now!

NICK

I can't get involved. I'm sorry.

EMMA

But Nick, last night -

NICK

- was a mistake. I just wanted to have some fun. And now it's over.

This rejection hits her like a physical blow. Emma turns to go. Then reconsiders. Spins around. SLAPS Nick on the cheek.

Nick doesn't react, just stands frozen. Unemotional. Distraught, Emma wipes her tears and runs out.

All is quiet except the TINKLE OF THE MUSIC BOX which slowly winds down...until it is silent, too. Rage overtakes Nick.

NICK (CONT'D)

Damn you, Pierce! Damn you for making me break her heart!

Nick hurls a glass across the bar, shattering it.

## **EPISODE 27**

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - NIGHT

A winter-wonderland party: faux snow, silver décor, a GIANT Christmas tree. Nick tends bar with dead eyes, mixing drinks like he's not in his own body.

He looks up - freezes: Emma enters on Pierce's arm. Beautiful. Devastated. Pierce beams like he owns her.

Alan swoops in with his camera.

ALAN

Smile!

Emma doesn't. Pierce tenses.

PIERCE

At least pretend you like me.

EMMA

But I don't like you.

PIERCE

Then pretend you want my dad to  
fund those foster homes you love.

Emma forces a brittle smile. Pierce accepts it – pleased.

They pass the massive tree. It WOBBLES. Alan notices –  
panics. Gestures urgently for Maxwell to come over.

ALAN

Mr. Maxwell, that tree looks like  
it's about to fall over!

Maxwell follows his gaze – horrified.

MAXWELL

Oh, dear. I'll get maintenance.

He turns – and walks straight into Minka and Ben. Both look  
ready to bite someone.

BEN

Where is the bartender?

MAXWELL

We have so many. Be more specific?

MINKA

The one who looks like my prince.

BEN

We need to question him  
immediately. Royal business.

Nick is nearby and overhears this. He ducks behind the  
Christmas tree, heart racing. Through the branches he watches  
Emma and Pierce dance – Emma's fake smile trembling.

NICK (V.O.)

I should have run days ago. But  
even now, just seeing her... It's  
like breathing for the first time.

Nick is suddenly yanked away by an irate Maxwell.

NICK

For the love of Santa – STOP  
staring at the heiress and go talk  
to the Duchess. She and that  
investigator are asking about you.

NICK (CONT'D)

I can't.

MAXWELL  
And why on Earth not?

NICK  
Because I quit.

Nick hands him his apron. Maxwell is flabbergasted.

MAXWELL  
You can't quit. It's Christmastime!

Nick heads for the door – determined. Then stops. Across the room he sees Emma, still smiling through pain, while Pierce chatters nonstop. Nick's chest caves.

NICK (V.O.)  
If I walk out now. I'll never see her again. And she won't know I'm falling in love with her.

He hesitates – a moment too long. A shadow glides behind him. Minka leans in, lips almost brushing his ear.

MINKA  
Got you!

### **EPISODE 28**

Nick whirls around. Minka stands inches behind him – eyes narrowed, predatory. Nick panics – hunches, slaps on a dopey smile, and slips into the worst Southern drawl imaginable.

NICK  
(awkward drawl)  
Uh– evenin', ma'am. I'm just the part-time, uh, beverage associate.

MINKA  
You look a lot like a man I used to be romantically involved with.

Nick LAUGHS too loudly – a messy, nervous sputter – and accidentally spits on her.

NICK  
Oh– how you do go on!

Minka freezes, disgusted. She pulls out a small embroidered hanky, wipes her face, and lets out a long, icy sigh.

MINKA  
I flew across an ocean for nothing.

She turns and searches the crowd for Drusilla, who is by the Christmas tree sharing a cookie with Alan.

MINKA (CONT'D)  
Drusilla! We're leaving!

Drusilla turns around in shock and accidentally backs straight into the garland wrapped around the base of the Christmas tree. Her bracelet SNAGS.

DRUSILLA  
(gasp)  
Oh- no- wait- I'm stuck-

She yanks her hand free - and the entire garland comes with it, snapping upward and jolting the tree. Alan's looks up.

ALAN  
The tree! It's FALLING!

Maxwell spins around and SCREAMS.

MAXWELL  
NO, NO, NO! EVERYONE LOOK OUT!

Too late.

The massive tree tips - slow, towering, unstoppable - directly toward Emma and Pierce. Ornaments burst off their hooks. Garland whips the air. Guests SCREAM and scatter.

Pierce reacts instantly, but not heroically. He SHOVES Emma toward the tree as he scrambles away for safety.

Emma falls and hits the floor hard. She looks up in horror. The tree is seconds from crushing her.

Nick sees everything. He LAUNCHES forward - dodging falling ornaments - sliding across the slick floor - and DIVES.

His arms wrap around Emma - pulling her clear just as the giant tree CRASHES down where she lay.

In this process, Nick's glasses SKITTER away across the floor. His shirt rips open- the royal medallion gleaming for everyone to see.

Emma gazes him, stunned.

EMMA  
You saved me?

NICK  
Of course I did.

She swallows, voice shaking.

EMMA

I thought you hated me.

Nick's voice is soft, raw.

NICK

I could never hate you.

Her gaze drops to the medallion - then to his uncovered face. She puts it together.

Nick freezes - realizing she's seeing the truth. He turns- the crowd stands in stunned silence, staring at him.

Minka shoves her way through the wall of guests, eyes blazing. She points at him accusingly, trembling with fury.

MINKA

I knew it was you!

### **EPISODE 29**

Emma stares at Nick - really seeing him for the first time.

EMMA

Wait! Nick, are you -

Before she can finish, Alan's voice slices through the stunned silence.

ALAN

It's Prince Nicholas of Korinthia!

The ballroom erupts in a shockwave. People turn. Phones rise.

Josephine lurches forward, hand pressed to her heart.

JOSEPHINE

The runaway prince is here?  
In my hotel? Serving drinks?

She GASPS so hard she nearly faints. Maxwell catches her.. then instantly faints himself.

Nick scrambles for his glasses, desperate, but they slide under a table - his FACE fully exposed. The medallion gleams on his chest. There is no hiding anymore.

Minka rushes over to Nick and pulls him up..

MINKA

I accept your apology for running,  
my love! And I forgive you!

She grabs Nick's hand, lifting it high like he belongs to her. Nick pulls his hand back, shaken, overwhelmed.

Minka turns to the crowd with poison-sweet confidence.

MINKA (CONT'D)

And I want everyone to know I  
forgive Prince Nicholas for having  
an affair with Lady Emmeline.  
You call her the Christmas Heiress.  
I call her the Home-wrecking Whore.

NICK

Wait- Minka- that's not true!

But his objections are drowned out as GUESTS and PRESS Emma like vultures.

GUEST #1

Was it your idea to make the prince  
run away from his family?

GUEST #2

Were you two having an affair?

GUEST #1

Did you know who he really was this  
whole time?

Emma is still on the floor, dazed. Her eyes flick from the medallion... to Nick's uncovered face... to the crowd tearing into her. Her breath trembles. She dissolves into tears.

EMMA

You're really the prince? This  
entire time? You were hiding?

NICK

I tried to tell you.

EMMA

You didn't tell me anything.  
All you did was lie!

Emma scrambles up and runs, devastated. Nick bolts after her.

NICK

I never meant to hurt you!

But Minka SNATCHES his wrist and yanks him back, nails digging into him. She leans in, voice razor-sharp:

MINKA

Are you really going to chase her  
in front of all these cameras?  
Haven't you embarrassed me and your  
mother enough?

She fixes his collar, smiling for the cameras.

MINKA (CONT'D)

Now behave. Play nice. Or I won't.

Nick looks at her in absolute horror.

Nearby, Ben gets on his phone.

BEN

Tell the Queen I found him. Her son  
is coming home.

### EPISODE 30

EXT. CHÂTEAU ÉLAN - DAY

PAPARAZZI swarm the front doors, demanding to get in.

INT. CHÂTEAU ÉLAN LOBBY - DAY

Behind the locked door, Maxwell waves his clipboard at them.

MAXWELL

Shoo! Go away! Get out of here!

Josephine rushes up to Maxwell, horrified.

JOSEPHINE

Bookings are being cancelled.

MAXWELL

But we're trending like crazy!

JOSEPHINE

For the wrong reasons! The press  
calls us a sex scandal hideaway for  
the rich and famous!

She faints into Maxwell's arms. He nearly buckles under her.

MAXWELL

Someone get water! And maybe a therapist!

Chester strolls past the chaos, unfazed, dialing fast.

CHESTER

(into phone)

We can buy the Chateau by sundown. Josephine will sell in panic. This hotel has become a tabloid joke.

Ben rushes over to help Maxwell carry Josephine to a chair.

BEN

Sir, I'm sorry for all the fuss this little incident has caused.

MAXWELL

The only one who should be sorry is that bartender wanna-be. Where is your precious prince anyway?

BEN

Locked in his room. I'm waiting for instructions from the Queen on how to handle his delivery back home.

MAXWELL

At this point, throw a stamp on his butt and just ship him out C.O.D.!

INT. EMMA'S SUITE - DAY

Emma sits curled on the edge of her bed, phone trembling in her hand. ON SCREEN - a cruel headline featuring her face:

**WHY DID PRINCE EVERHART RUN AWAY FROM HIS FAMILY?  
ROYAL INSIDERS: "THE HEIRESS IS TO BLAME."**

Her face collapses.

EMMA (V.O.)

This entire time Nick was a prince. Engaged to another woman. Of course he was too good to be true!

She wipes a tear with the back of her hand. PING! She gets a new notification on phone:

**MERRY PINES FOSTER HOME DONATION PAGE: 62%  
FORECLOSURE DEADLINE: UNCHANGED.**

Emma cries harder – a breaking point.

EMMA  
(soft, devastated)  
Was all of this for nothing?

A FLOORBOARD CREAKS. Emma turns, startled.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
Hello? Is someone here?

A HAND suddenly covers her mouth!

Nick pulls her close, eyes wide, breathless, panicked.

NICK  
(whispered urgent)  
Don't scream. Please. It's me.

Emma trembles – caught between fear and the man she just learned she never truly knew.

### EPISODE 31

NICK (CONT'D)  
Emma, listen to me. We can still be  
together. If we leave right now.

He lowers his hand. Emma turns to him, bewildered.

EMMA  
Together? Where?

NICK  
Anywhere. We run. We use your money  
and disappear until this whole  
thing blows over.

Emma flinches – a painful truth rising.

EMMA  
What money?

NICK  
Maxwell said– you're an heiress.

Emma lets out a tiny, heartbroken laugh.

EMMA  
Is that why you want me to runaway  
with you? Because you think I can  
bankroll your escape?

NICK

No! I don't care about your money.

EMMA

Good. Because I have none. That was a lie. You want to know what else was a lie?

NICK

Your feelings for me?

EMMA

No. Not one bit.

(soft)

I didn't fall for the prince, Nick. I fell for the bartender who made me feel seen. Who made me feel like I didn't have to be alone anymore.

That lands HARD. Nick exhales, moved. He lifts his hands to her face.

NICK

Then let's go. Before they force me to go back to Korinthia and lock you out of my life.

Emma hesitates— then leans in.

They kiss. Deep. Desperate. Real.

CLICK! They freeze. Someone's opened the door. They turn to see Pierce leaning casually against the frame, phone raised, smirk lethal.

PIERCE

Well, well... Royal scandal caught live.

Nick steps in front of Emma, protective — but Pierce is delighted.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

Oh, don't stop on my account. This is excellent footage. You know how much the press will pay for this?

EMMA

Just leave us alone, Pierce!

PIERCE  
 (taunting)  
 The runaway prince and the holiday  
 heiress from hell? Not on your  
 life. Smile big for the camera.

Nick SNAPS – lunges – and punches Pierce so hard he drops  
 like a decorated Christmas tree. Pierce collapses, phone  
 still in hand.

Nick looks back at Emma – reaches out his hand. Hopeful.

NICK  
 Come with me.

Emma hesitates. This decision determines her entire future.

NICK (CONT'D)  
 (desperately impatient)  
 Make up your mind. Please, Emma –  
 right now. Do you want to be with  
 me or not?

### **EPISODE 32**

Emma reaches out and takes Nick's hand. Nick's face lights up  
 – relief flooding him. They gingerly step over Pierce's  
 unconscious body and RUN.

INT. CHÂTEAU HALLWAY – DAY

Alarms BLARE.

GUESTS poke their heads out, phones recording as Emma and  
 Nick run past them.

GUEST #1  
 That's the prince!

GUEST #2  
 And the heiress!

Nick and Emma SPRINT by Maxwell, who carries a tray of cocoa.

MAXWELL  
 (startled screech)  
 AHHH!

He drops the entire tray. Cocoa everywhere.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Nick and Emma burst through double doors - SLAM into racks of sheets. Fabric FLOODS over them like ghosts.

A HOUSEKEEPER shrieks. Nick pulls a sheet off his head

NICK  
Sorry! Carry on!

They dash out in a tangle of sheets.

INT. SIDE CORRIDOR - DAY

Nick and Emma skid around a corner - breathless - only to find Chester blocking one end.

CHESTER  
Game over, heiress.

They spin back the way they came - but Ben now blocks the other end.

BEN  
Impressive footwork, Your Highness.  
But the marathon ends here.

Nick instinctively pulls Emma behind him - there is nowhere left to run.

### **EPISODE 33**

INT. CHÂTEAU WINE CELLAR - DAY

A once-cozy tasting room has been hastily converted into a holding cell. Ben roughly escorts Nick and pushes him inside.

NICK  
You're holding me prisoner?

BEN  
Just until the Queen decides what to do with you. Then you may wish you had it this nice.

SLAM. Ben locks the door, trapping Nick inside.

INT. WINE CELLAR HALLWAY - DAY

Maxwell nervously approaches Ben as he locks the door.

MAXWELL

Do we have to keep him here? No one will ever want to stay once they learn our wine tasting room is doubling as a jail cell!

BEN

This is the safest location. The Queen wants him guarded until we determine secure transport.

As they turn the leave, Pierce limps toward them dramatically, an ice pack pressed to his jaw.

PIERCE

I want that man arrested! Assaulted by a prince! My father will be furious when he hears about this.

MAXWELL

(smiles weakly)  
Do we really have to tell him?  
Maybe we keep it between us?

PIERCE

(pauses, calculating)  
Maybe charges aren't necessary. I'm open to making a deal.

Ben narrows his eyes.

BEN

What kind of deal?

Pierce steps closer, lowering his voice.

PIERCE

A little royal hush money. The Queen pays me for my silence – and I won't file charges.

MAXWELL

(gasps)  
An American blackmailing a royal?  
If Oprah Winfrey was here, she'd slap you herself!

BEN

I'll inform Her Majesty. But understand – you're lucky she tolerates extortion.

PIERCE

I prefer the term: financial appreciation.

Pierce limps off smugly. Ben turns back to Maxwell.

BEN

The Queen's orders are explicit: No visitors. No press. And most importantly – the prince can have no more contact with that heiress.

Maxwell nods nervously.

MAXWELL

I'll keep her upstairs.

BEN

Not good enough. Send her away.

Maxwell swallows hard – hating this.

MAXWELL

I'll arrange for her to leave the Chateau immediately.

Ben nods, satisfied, and exits. Maxwell is ready to collapse.

### **EPISODE 34**

INT. CHÂTEAU HALLWAY - DAY

Maxwell hustles toward Emma's room, clutching a folder labeled DEPARTURE - IMMEDIATE. He hesitates – miserable.

Chester walks by and spots the folder.

CHESTER

What's that?

MAXWELL

It's, um, the Queen's orders. The heiress has to leave the Château.

CHESTER

(smiles)

Let me be the one to tell her.

MAXWELL

Oh! I don't know if that's –

CHESTER

Maxwell, you cry at dog food commercials. Let the adults handle the difficult conversations.

He SNATCHES the folder and pushes into Emma's suite, slamming the door on Maxwell.

INT. EMMA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Emma is crying quietly when Chester barges in.

CHESTER

Pack your things. You're done here.

EMMA

What? Why?

CHESTER

The Queen doesn't want her son near you. Neither do I.

Emma steadies herself, wounded.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

And bad news - there's no more money for your foster home. This hotel is tanking. So you can't milk us for charity money anymore.

EMMA

That isn't fair! I never did anything wrong.

CHESTER

What have you done right? You humiliated this entire hotel, chasing your little Lancelot. Now Josephine has to sell before our reputation sinks - thanks to you

EMMA

I didn't want any of this to happen. I just wanted to help!

CHESTER

You have a twisted idea of "help."  
(beat, savoring it)  
So when those kids lose their home, you can tell them it's your fault.

He drops her departure folder on the bed and leaves smugly.

Emma sinks to the floor – DESTROYED.

**EPISODE 35**

INT. CHÂTEAU – LOCKED STORAGE CELLAR – DAY

Nick sits on the cot, staring at the floor – defeated.

A SHADOW moves across the crack under the door. Nick lifts his head. FOOTSTEPS. Slow. Deliberate. Getting closer.

He stands.

NICK  
(soft, hopeful)  
Emma...?

The LOCK CLICKS. Metal turning. Nick's breath catches – terrified to hope – but hoping anyway.

The door creaks open. A figure steps inside, backlit. Face emerging from darkness...

It's Minka.

The warmth on Nick's face drains, replaced by cold dread. This is the one woman he didn't want to see.

She carries a heavy, old-fashioned wicker basket – the kind that looks like it could hold a picnic or body parts.

She sets it down. A metallic CLINK inside makes Nick flinch.

MINKA  
Hello, Nicholas.

He doesn't answer. She shuts the door – CLICK. Locks it.

NICK  
What are you doing here?

MINKA  
Can't I visit my fiancé?

Minka steps closer, slow and regal, eyes never leaving him. She opens the basket...reaches inside...pauses.

Nick tenses. Unsure how scared to be.

She pulls out a long, gleaming knife. Turns toward him, holding it steady. Dead-eyed. Silent.

A murder beat. Horrifying.

MINKA (CONT'D)

You owe me an explanation. And it better be a good one.

Nick swallows hard – dread rising.

**EPISODE 36**

Nick stays frozen as Minka holds the knife.

Then she calmly reaches into the basket, takes out a loaf of bread, and slices it cleanly.

Nick exhales – hating she saw his fear.

MINKA (CONT'D)

I came to feed you, not kill you.

She places the bread slices on a tin plate and pours water.

NICK

Bread and water?

MINKA

Prisoner cuisine.

NICK

Seriously?

MINKA

You think you deserve better after vanishing at our engagement party? Leaving me to explain why a prince ran out on me?

NICK

I was suffocating. I had to run away and find a new life.

MINKA

Then why did you ask me to marry you in the first place?

NICK

Because my mother forced me to! Don't pretend you weren't in on it.

MINKA

My family is drowning, Nicholas. If I don't marry into a name, they lose everything.

Nick absorbs that.

NICK  
I thought marriage was supposed to  
be about love?

Minka gives a sharp, bitter laugh.

MINKA  
Love doesn't last. Duty does.  
And you will honor your mother's  
wishes and end my humiliation.

NICK  
(softly, sincere)  
I never meant to hurt you, Minka.

She looks at him. For a fleeting second, she breaks. Softens.  
Feels something. Then she shutters it away.

MINKA  
Tomorrow I'll bring you something  
more substantial to eat.

NICK  
How long will I be locked in here?

MINKA  
That's for your mother to decide.  
She gives the orders, not me.

She turns. Her heels CLACK sharply as she exits. The door  
SLAMS and locks. Nick sits, completely gutted.

### **EPISODE 37**

NT. CHÂTEAU - HALLWAY / STAFF LEVEL - NIGHT

Emma - suitcase in hand - rounds a corner and slows when she  
hears voices ahead. At the end of the hall, Chester and  
Pierce lean against the wall, laughing.

PIERCE  
Minka's got him eating like a royal  
prisoner down in the wine cellar.  
Bread. Water.

CHESTER  
Maybe she'll toss him a peanut  
butter sandwich if he behaves.

Emma freezes - listening, processing.

PIERCE

Should we tell her he hates the  
crusts?

CHESTER

Let her find out when he throws the  
plate at her.

They laugh as they head toward the elevators. Emma's mind  
races. She pivots direction – fast – and slips away.

INT. MAXWELL'S OFFICE – DAY

Emma sneaks in. Opens a cabinet. A row of labeled keys. She  
spots one: WINE CELLAR. Takes it.

She turns and stops. Maxwell stands in the doorway.

MAXWELL

Emma Rivers – what are you doing?

Emma stiffens, but doesn't drop the key.

EMMA

Getting him out. He's down there  
because he fell in love with me.  
I'm not leaving him to suffer.

Maxwell enters, shutting the door behind him.

MAXWELL

If they catch you, you could be  
arrested.

EMMA

Then I'll get him out before they  
can catch me.

Maxwell steps closer, voice low. Genuinely concerned.

MAXWELL

This is a royal arrest, dear. They  
won't just escort you out.

Emma holds her ground.

EMMA

I know. But I love him. Wouldn't  
you do the same if you were me?  
Please, don't tell anyone.

A beat. Maxwell studies her – impressed, worried, moved.

MAXWELL  
 (small smile)  
 Tell anyone what?

Emma lets out a breath – grateful. Rushes out with the key.

INT. CHÂTEAU – CELLAR HALLWAY – DAY

Emma moves quickly, determination cutting through her fear. She stops at a locked door. Takes out the key. Slides it into the lock...

A SHADOW drops over her. Emma freezes mid-turn.

MINKA (O.S.)  
 Step away from that door.

Emma's eyes widen – caught.

**EPISODE 38**

Emma turns slowly. Minka stands framed in the hallway light, furs and fury. Chester lurks behind her, loving this.

MINKA (CONT'D)  
 The heiress breaking into the  
 prince's cell? How poetic.

EMMA  
 (quiet, desperate)  
 You don't understand. I'm not who  
 you think I am. Nick and I -

Minka SLAPS her – so hard Emma's cheek snaps to the side.

MINKA  
 There is no more "Nick and you."  
 There never was. He belongs to me.

Emma steadies herself, blinking tears. Chester steps up.

CHESTER  
 I believe you forgot this?

Chester reveals he is holding her suitcase.

CHESTER (CONT'D)  
 A car is waiting to take you back  
 to...wherever it is you came from.

EMMA  
 Can't I at least say goodbye?

CHESTER

No.

Chester and Minka both grab Emma by the elbows and haul her away. Her shoes scrape against the tile as she's led away.

But neither Chester or Minka noticed one crucial thing: the key Emma left in the cell door.

The knob turns. Slowly.

CLICK.

Nick pushes the door open a crack and peers into the empty corridor. His path to freedom wide open.

**EPISODE 39**

EXT. CHATEAU ENTRANCE - DAY

Emma is ushered through the doors by Chester into a howling whiteout. Wind claws at her hair, snow stinging her eyes.

Maxwell lingers in the doorway, torn.

MAXWELL

Maybe we should wait until the storm passes -

CHESTER

(flat, final)

No. She leaves now.

Snow gusts between them as Maxwell steps forward, practically shielding Emma with his own coat. He guides her toward the covered waiting area.

MAXWELL

(soft, breaking)

I'll try to send the rest of the money to Merry Pines anyway. You kept your promise as long as you could.

Emma shakes her head, breath trembling.

EMMA

I didn't hold up my end. You shouldn't have to hold up yours.

Maxwell's jaw tightens. He says nothing - because if he speaks, he'll cry.

Behind them, Chester checks his watch for the tenth time.

CHESTER

Where is that driver? I told him to  
be here half an hour ago!

Right then, headlights slice through the blizzard. A sedan  
crawls up the drive, tires skidding on ice.

Chester smirks.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Finally.

The driver – sunglasses, chauffeur's cap – steps out and  
opens the back door. Emma turns and gives Maxwell one final  
hug before climbing into the car.

The sedan pulls away from the Chateau. Maxwell waves sadly.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Maxwell, give it a rest!

MAXWELL

Blow it out your hole, you scrooge!

Maxwell storms back inside. Chester guffaws, startled by the  
sudden bite.

INT. CAR - DAY

Emma, shivering, stares out the window as the Chateau  
vanishes in the white.

NICK (O.S.)

So - where am I taking you? Home?

EMMA

I don't really have a home. I'm all  
alone.

NICK (O.S.)

You're only alone if you want to  
be.

Emma freezes. That voice....

EMMA

Excuse me, but can you sound -

The driver brakes to a halt. He turns, removing his cap. And  
then his sunglasses.

It's Nick! Emma GASPS.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
You...?!

**EPISODE 40**

Emma stares at Nick, stunned.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
H-How...?

NICK  
I slipped out of the cellar,  
borrowed the driver's jacket and  
told him he had the night off.

He flashes a roguish grin.

NICK (CONT'D)  
We can go anywhere we want now.

Emma's eyes fill instantly. A tear escapes before she can stop it. She leans in - he meets her halfway.

They kiss - desperate, relieved, happy at last.

The storm hows around them, wind rocking the car.

Nick pulls back, breathless

NICK (CONT'D)  
Okay, let's get out of here before  
the storm gets worse.

He shifts into DRIVE.

Nothing.

The tires spin. He presses the gas harder - the car lurches... then the engine sputters and dies.

NICK (CONT'D)  
That's not good.

He tries again. The engine whines, wheels uselessly churning ice. Emma grips the seat, fear creeping in.

EMMA  
Nick, if we don't get out of here,  
they're gonna realize you're gone.

NICK  
And discover I'm right outside!

The two of them exchange a long, nervous look – panic rising in the quiet. Snow slams against the windows. They're stuck. In a blizzard. With no plan. What do they do now?

### EPISODE 41

Emma and Nick sit in the glow of the dashboard, both breathing fast—both knowing the same thing:

EMMA

Any second now, someone will notice you escaped. A search will begin.

Nick perks up with an idea.

NICK

There's one place they won't check.

The old gardener's cottage.

EMMA

I don't know about any cottage.

NICK

Hopefully they won't know either. It's on the far side of the vineyard. Come on!

Nick grabs Emma's suitcase and and yanks his door open—blizzard air punching inside. Emma follows him out.

EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

Wind blasts their faces as they half-run, half-stumble through the vineyard.

Emma clings to her coat. Nick stays glued to her side, guiding her through the wind until he points to the haven ahead: a RUSTIC OLD COTTAGE.

INT. OLD GARDENER'S COTTAGE - DAY

They tumble inside and slam the door behind them. The cottage is freezing—their breaths puff white.

Emma hugs her arms for warmth. Nick clocks it.

NICK

I'll get a fire going.

He kneels at the old stone hearth, striking a match. His hands shake—from cold, adrenaline, maybe everything.

The match fizzles. Emma moves beside him, gently taking his hands in hers.

EMMA  
Here, steady.

Their fingers lace. Their breaths sync. For one suspended moment, the world is only the two of them.

Now calmer, Nick strikes a match. A flame catches.

They look into each other's eyes -heat growing between them just as the fire begins to crackle to life.

THUD. A heavy knock against the outside wall.

Emma jumps. Nick freezes.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
Nick...did someone follow us?

#### **EPISODE 42**

Emma grips Nick's arm. He crosses to the frosted window.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
Nick, be careful!

He nods. Dares to look outside: a loose shutter slams in the wind with another THUD noise. Nick exhales, lightly laughs.

NICK  
Just the wind. This place is basically held together with hope and rusty nails.

EMMA  
I thought we were done for.

Nick pulls a blanket around her shoulders.

NICK  
I wouldn't let anyone hurt you.

She meets his eyes, calmer now.

EMMA  
Maybe we should find something to eat?

NICK  
(quiet)  
I'm not hungry.

The air shifts.

Emma steps closer. They come together slowly— a kiss deepening with relief and everything they've held back.

They ease down onto the old rug, wrapped in quilts and in each other. A night that is rare, perfect.

They make love gently, unguarded, safe at last as the storm rages outside.

Later...

Emma curls against Nick's chest. A quiet tear slips free. Nick brushes her cheek.

NICK (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

EMMA

I'm so afraid this is all a dream.

Nick kisses her forehead.

NICK

If it is, I don't want to wake up.

They nestle beneath the blankets, fingers intertwined, the fire keeping them warm.

### **EPISODE 43**

EXT. OLD GARDENER'S COTTAGE - DAY

A beautiful morning. The storm is over.

INT. OLD GARDENER'S COTTAGE - MORNING

A pale ribbon of morning light slips between the curtains.

Emma wakes in Nick's arms, her cheek rising and falling with his breath. For one suspended moment, she lets herself believe this is their life.

A low RUMBLE breaks the spell.

Emma stiffens. Nick's eyes snap open.

They listen.

Another engine, then another. Nick bolts upright.

NICK  
That doesn't sound good.

They rush to the window.

In the far distance – a ROYAL MOTORCADE snakes up the Chateau drive, black cars gleaming with the Korinthian crest.

Nick's blood drains from his face.

NICK (CONT'D)  
(whispers)  
It's her.

EMMA  
Minka?

Nick shakes his head.

NICK  
My mother.

Emma's breath catches.

NICK (CONT'D)  
She's come to take me away.

He tears himself from the window, panicking.

NICK (CONT'D)  
We have to go. Now.

He starts grabbing their things with shaking hands. Emma crosses to him, cups his face.

EMMA  
You can't keep running.

NICK  
Do you know what she'll do to me  
for disappearing? For defying her  
order to marry Minka?

EMMA  
Whatever happens next, we face it  
together. You're not alone anymore.

Nick pulls her into a kiss – grateful, scared, torn.

NICK  
Just be prepared. My mother's anger  
is legendary.

Emma swallows, her confidence wobbling for a beat. What kind of dragon is her prince about to face?

**EPISODE 44**

INT. CHATEAU LOBBY - DAY

Absolute chaos.

Staff scramble into formation. Holiday décor gets shoved into place. Maxwell wipes his brow so aggressively he nearly peels skin. Ben BURSTS up from the cellar, breathless.

BEN

Maxwell, the prince is gone!

MAXWELL

What do you mean he's gone?

BEN

I mean gone! Vanished! I thought you said this place was secure.

MAXWELL

It's a hotel, Ben! Not Alcatraz!

Ben throws his hands up as they rush to Josephine, who is corralling staff into a crooked line.

JOSEPHINE

Everyone -bellies tight, smiles high. This may be our last chance to impress anyone at this hotel.

The main doors sweep open-

QUEEN EVERHART enters. Regal. Icy. Devastatingly composed.

Maxwell and Josephine bow so low they nearly fold in half.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

Your Majesty - welcome to the Chateau!

MAXWELL

We are honored - absolutely honored - by your visit!

QUEEN EVERHART

I came to bring my son home. Where is he?

The lobby freezes. No one breathes.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)  
Am I speaking an alien language?

Ben forces a weak smile and steps forward.

BEN  
Your Majesty, about your son—

QUEEN EVERHART  
If you lost him, Ben, I won't be  
happy. It's not too late to bring  
back the guillotine.

Ben pales. Maxwell sways. Josephine presses a hand to her heart. Everyone panics. What are they going to tell her?

#### **EPISODE 45**

MAXWELL  
(wildly improvising)  
Perhaps, Your Majesty would like to  
visit our luxury spa? Hot stone  
treatment, full aromatherapy. Or!  
Or! A private wine tasting. You  
should see the way our grapes gush!

Queen Everhart lifts one sharp, lethal eyebrow.

QUEEN EVERHART  
Where. Is. My. Son?

The lobby falls silent. No one dares breathe.

And then... A calm, steady voice from behind:

NICK (O.S.)  
I'm right here, Mother.

Everyone whirls around.

Nick stands in the doorway— Emma's hand firmly in his.

Gasps echo through the lobby. Phones rise. A tray of pastries  
crashes to the floor.

Queen Everhart GASPS. She is not pleased.

#### **EPISODE 46**

Chester, Pierce, and Minka sweep in from the side corridor  
like vultures sensing a feast.

MINKA

Queen Everhart, thank goodness  
you're here. Please – talk some  
sense into your son. I still want  
to marry him. I love him.

NICK

You do not. That's a lie.

QUEEN EVERHART

(whips toward him)  
Silence!

The whole lobby jolts.

Queen Everhart's attention snaps to Emma— cold, assessing,  
royal judgment in its purest form. She steps closer.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)

So. You are the heiress who set all  
of this in motion.

Emma trembles, but steps forward anyway.

EMMA

Your Majesty... I'm not an heiress.

A rippling RUMBLE of whispers sweeps the room.

Maxwell goes ghost white. Emma forces herself to finish.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I'm a maid.

A collective GASP shakes the hall. Chester lights like a kid.

CHESTER

I knew it!

Josephine staggers forward.

JOSEPHINE

No. No, no – you're an heiress!  
Our beautiful Christmas heiress!

EMMA

I let you all use my face and my  
name for publicity. Because you  
needed me to be an heiress.

Josephine clutches Maxwell's arm – furious.

JOSEPHINE

Did you know about this?!

MAXWELL

Which answer won't get me killed?

Emma finally turns to Nick. He looks like the ground has been ripped out from under him.

NICK

(softly)

All this time, you lied to me?

His face crumples – hurt, disbelief, betrayal all colliding at once. The look on his face shatters Emma's heart.

### **EPISODE 47**

EMMA

My real name is Emma Rivers. And I am raising money for Merry Pines Foster Home – that part wasn't a lie. It's also true I don't have any family myself.

Nick's chest tightens.

NICK

Why did you never tell me?

Emma takes a shaky breath.

EMMA

Because I got caught up. For the first time, I felt beautiful, important. People noticed me. I just wanted to be someone else for a little while. Can you understand that?

Nick hesitates – then something inside him softens. He steps closer, voice gentle.

NICK

More than you know. I did the same thing, didn't I? And honestly, if neither of us had pretended to be someone else, we may have never fallen in love.

Emma freezes.

EMMA

You...love me? The real me?

Nick answers by kissing her. A long, breath-stealing, unapologetic kiss.

Pierce GASPS. Minka SCREAMS.

MINKA

Queen Everhart! Make them stop!

Queen Everhart doesn't raise her voice. She calmly reaches for a porcelain vase on a side table and SMASHES it against the marble floor.

Emma and Nick jump apart, jolted by the sound. And absolutely terrified by the menacing look on the Queen's face.

**EPISODE 48**

QUEEN EVERHART

Nicholas. Unhand that woman. Now.

Nick steps in front of Emma, shielding her.

NICK

Mother, I love her!

Emma grips his arm, voice soft but unwavering.

EMMA

And I love your son. Very much.

QUEEN EVERHART

You cannot be with my son.

NICK

Why - because she's poor?

QUEEN EVERHART

No, because she is dishonest. And dishonesty is something I will never tolerate. From anyone.

Emma flinches as if struck. Nick rounds on his mother.

NICK

Mother, that's enough-

But Emma is already backing away. Her eyes shine with new tears. Her breath fractures.

EMMA

(voice breaking)

She's right. I... I shouldn't be with you.

Nick reaches for her.

NICK  
Emma, wait—

But Emma turns and runs, tears streaking down her cheeks as she vanishes down the corridor.

Nick stands frozen in place, trapped between his mother's fury and the woman slipping out of his life.

### **EPISODE 49**

The Queen steps forward, regal and unshakable.

QUEEN ELARA  
Nicholas, it's time to come home  
and resume your royal duties.

Nick unbuttons his shirt. Lifts the medallion, staring at it — the weight of a lifetime in his palm. A flicker of fear... then resolve.

NICK  
No. Not if coming home means losing  
myself.  
(softly)  
Forgive me, grandmother...

With one decisive move, he rips the medallion off.

The Queen gasps — as if he tore out a piece of her. He places it firmly into her hand.

NICK (CONT'D)  
I won't live another lie.

The Queen falters. This is one outcome she never imagined.

Minka rushes into his path, breathless, desperate.

MINKA  
Nick, think of what you're giving  
up. Fame... Riches... Me!

NICK  
Minka, you're a very misguided  
woman. I truly wish you the best.  
But it can't be with me.

Her face crumples—not in heartbreak, but in disbelief that anyone would reject her.

Nick turns away. For good.

NICK (CONT'D)

EMMA!

He bolts. The Queen stares sadly at the abandoned medallion.

QUEEN EVERHART

(softly, shaken)

Oh, my sweet boy. What have I done?

INT. THE CHATEAU HALLS - DAY

Nick sprints full speed, heart hammering. He shoves open heavy doors, turns corners, slips past startled staff.

NICK

EMMA! EMMA, WHERE ARE YOU?

INT. CHATEAU BAR - DAY

Emma fights with a stuck service door. The lock jams.

EMMA

Come on - open! Please!

Nick bursts in, breathless, frantic.

NICK

Emma!

She spins around, fear and heartbreak tangled.

EMMA

No, don't come closer. You're only making this harder. We can't do this, Nick. We just...can't.

### **EPISODE 50**

On the bar counter sits the little music box she gave Nick.

Nick spots it and lifts it carefully.

NICK

Emma, don't let this be the only thing I have to remember you by.

He winds it. EVERGREEN begins to play, soft and fragile.

Emma freezes at the sound. Nick steps toward her.

NICK (CONT'D)

We haven't even begun to make all  
the memories we could.

Emma shakes her head.

EMMA

You should hate me. I lied to  
everyone – to you. I ruined  
everything.

NICK

You're the only one who ever loved  
me for me. And everything you  
did...you did to help those kids.

EMMA

But I even screwed that up! Now  
there won't be enough money to  
save their home.

Emma breaks down again. Nick gently touches her shoulders.

NICK

Emma, I walked away from the crown.  
From the title. All of it. I broke  
my grandmother's promise when I  
took off the medallion.

Emma turns and sees his bare chest. Shocked.

EMMA

Why?

NICK

Because it stopped giving me  
strength. It was strangling me.  
(beat)  
Being a prince doesn't matter if I  
can't have my own happy ever after.

She blinks, stunned. Nick lifts her chin, tender.

NICK (CONT'D)

You're all I want.

THEY KISS. A slow, emotional, all-in kiss as the Christmas  
lights glow and the music box plays its last fading notes.

From the doorway–

Queen Everhart watches, half-hidden by the archway.

Her expression unreadable. Touched? Or angrier than ever?

**EPISODE 51**

The tiny music box on the bar plays its soft Christmas lullaby, the notes drifting through the empty room like falling snow.

The QUEEN almost involuntarily begins to HUM ALONG.

Nick and Emma break their kiss, startled.

QUEEN EVERHART

I used to sing this to Nicholas  
when he was a baby.

EMMA

It's my favorite carol.

The Queen steps closer – surprised, something gentle cracking through her frost. She offers Emma a small, sincere smile.

QUEEN EVERHART

Perhaps we have more in common than  
I believed.

She turns to Nick. A lifetime of pressure in her eyes.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)

Since your father passed, I carried  
everything alone. The crown. The  
country. The grief.

(eyes fill with tears)

I tried to be unbreakable, but all  
it did was break the two of us  
apart.

Nick's breath catches. The Queen reaches up and touches his cheek, tender and trembling.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)

I want you to be happy, Nicholas.  
And I want you to rule beside me –  
not just as your Queen, but as your  
mother.

(looks to Emma)

And if this is the woman you choose  
to stand beside you, then I choose  
her, too.

Emma's eyes well. Nick pulls his mother into a hug. Emma joins – the three of them wrapped together in a warm, fragile moment. A new family.

Then – urgent FOOTSTEPS. Maxwell enters the bar, unsteady.

MAXWELL

Your Majesty! There's something you need to know. The truth. All of it. And Emma's part in it.

Nick and the Queen separate, uneasy. Emma stiffens.

**EPISODE 52**

Suddenly, Josephine, Pierce, Minka, and Chester flood into the bar - all mid-argument, all equally outraged.

CHESTER

Josephine, end this nonsense. The theatrics. The sentiment. We have a sale to finalize - and the first thing to go is him.

He jabs a finger at Maxwell.

Maxwell straightens - trembling, but resolute.

MAXWELL

I'm not going anywhere. Not until everyone hears the truth.

Pierce folds his arms, smirking.

PIERCE

Oh, this should be good.

Maxwell steps forward - facing Josephine, the Queen, Nick, Emma...everyone.

MAXWELL

I did all of this not just to help Emma save Merry Pines Foster Home... but to save my home, too. I've lived in this hotel since I was a child. It's the only family I've ever had. But Chester is about to convince Josephine to sell - and take all of this away.

Gasps ripple across the room. Chester steps forward to Josephine like a shark catching blood in the water.

CHESTER

So sad, but too bad.

(to Josephine)

Josephine - fire him. And while you're at it, I demand you press charges. This is fraud.

(MORE)

CHESTER (CONT'D)

I want both him and that fake  
heiress in jail for the rest of  
their lives!

Both Emma and Maxwell eye each other with fear.

**EPISODE 53**

The Queen lifts a regal hand. Her gaze pins Chester.

QUEEN EVERHART

Excuse me - your name?

Chester puffs up proudly.

CHESTER

Chester! Chester Matthew James  
Hall, Your Majesty.

He bows - overeager. The Queen closer, controlled and lethal.

QUEEN EVERHART

Chester, the only fraudulent heart  
in this room is you.

Chester freezes - mid-breath, mid-smirk - caught.

CHESTER

I beg your pardon?

The Queen turns to the room, her voice rising in strength.

QUEEN EVERHART

Maxwell acted from love - love for  
this hotel, a home to people who  
may never have found one otherwise.  
He risked everything because this  
place matters.

Maxwell blinks back tears. The Queen turns to Emma - proud.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)

And this young woman risked  
everything for children who aren't  
even hers. That is loyalty. That is  
heart. That...is Christmas.

Emma smiles big. Nick pulls her close, loving her even more.

Pierce frowns, thrown. Minka crosses her arms, rethinking her  
alliances. Josephine wipes away a tear.

Chester, meanwhile, shakes with rage.

CHESTER

Outrageous! I won't let you make a fool of me, you crown-wearing cow!

Chester lunges at the Queen!

**EPISODE 54**

Ben bursts out and – WHAM! Tackles Chester to the floor.

BEN

You're going to jail, chap!

He drags a sputtering Chester out. The doors slam behind them. Nick rushes to his mother.

NICK

Are you alright?

The Queen straightens her crown, completely unfazed.

QUEEN EVERHART

Goes with the job.  
(eyebrow lift)  
Still want to be Prince again?

Nick nods – certain. She softens, lifting the medallion and placing it around his neck with quiet pride.

The Queen turns to the room – regal and warm.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)

As for this hotel – and its financial predicament– I would like to personally purchase it.

Josephine GASPS so loud it scares everyone around her.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)

On one condition: management does not change.

Josephine bursts into grateful tears. The Queen looks out over the glowing room.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)

This is where my son rediscovered love...and where I remembered I am still a mother.

The room melts. Maxwell, overwhelmed, hugs her. She flinches – then laughs, patting his back.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)  
My gentleman, please! Do calm down!

Emma steps forward, hopeful, voice trembling.

EMMA  
Your Grace, what about the Merry  
Pines foster home where I grew up?

The room becomes still – waiting for the Queen's answer.

### EPISODE 55

All eyes are on the Queen.

She gives Emma a warm, proud smile.

QUEEN EVERHART  
As for Merry Pines... I will fund  
it fully. And I would like Emma to  
serve as Korinthia's Charity  
Ambassador for Children.

Emma gasps, hand over her heart.

Josephine sobs into a napkin. Maxwell openly cries.

The Queen takes Emma's hands. Eyes her with true admiration.

QUEEN EVERHART (CONT'D)  
You have the heart of a princess,  
my dear. Let the world feel it.

The Queen pulls Emma into a hug. Nick watches, glowing.

EXT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

A GRAND HOLIDAY CELEBRATION BEGINS.

Music swells. Lights twinkle. Snow dusts the windows.

Across the room – Pierce and Minka share a knowing, wicked  
grin...drifting into a dance.

Drusilla and Alan sway in their own odd rhythm.

Ben and Josephine dance – a surprisingly sweet pairing.

The Queen spots Maxwell and reaches for him.

QUEEN EVERHART  
Come along, Mr. Maxwell.

MAXWELL

You want to dance? With me?!

QUEEN EVERHART

I insist. Queen's orders.

She pulls him onto the floor. He turns poinsettia red.

Nick steps beside Emma – offering his hand. She takes it.  
They move into the glow of lights, slow and close.

NICK

A Merry Christmas, Emma.

EMMA

And a happily-ever-after, Your  
Highness

**END**