

~~Belle looks down the line of VOLUNTEERS. They look as weathered as the BEDFORD HOUSE. Pastor Tom's look of worry deepens.~~

PASTOR TOM
~~We are never given more than we can handle.~~

BELLE
(chuckling)
~~He sure does like to test us though doesn't He?~~

PASTOR TOM
~~You always pass with flying colors, my dear. But this does bring some things up in regards to my contributions here.~~

BELLE
~~What are you saying?~~

PASTOR TOM
~~Perhaps this is His way of gently nudging me to bow out with grace. My duties to the church are exhausting at times, and maybe I will have more to give to the congregation if I concede that in reality, I passed this torch to you a long time ago.~~

BELLE
~~I'm not loving that interpretation of the message.~~

PASTOR TOM
~~You know me, I won't be able to stay away for too long. But when you decided to forego greener pastures and stay in Bedford -- keep this place alive, you became the heart of Bedford House. I know when to hang up my hat.~~

BELLE
~~Well if anyone deserves to take a step back and rest, it's you. I promise to do my best not to let you down.~~

~~Pastor Tom gives her a small hug.~~

PASTOR TOM
Belle. I can say with complete certainty, that could never happen.

~~INT. BEDFORD HOUSE -- MAIN ROOM -- LATE AFTERNOON~~

~~Gray winter light filters through high windows. Belle kneels beside a donation bin labeled "TOYS -- AGES 5-8." It's nearly empty.~~

~~She checks her phone. No texts. No calls. She refreshes. Nothing.~~

~~Behind her, a space heater clicks loudly and dies. She taps it -- no luck. Her breath fogs just a little.~~

~~Belle stands, crosses to another bin: "WINTER COATS." She lifts a garbage bag from it. It splits down the side, spilling musty, torn jackets onto the floor.~~

~~She closes her eyes. Just for a second.~~

~~She forces herself to keep moving. Stacks some canned goods with more hope than sense. "Crushed Pineapple." "Beets." That's it.~~

~~From a corkboard nearby, she pulls down a flyer:~~

~~"TOY PICK-UP DAY: DEC 20 -- HELP US BRING JOY THIS HOLIDAY!"~~

~~A flickering light above sputters out completely. The room dims.~~

~~Belle crosses to the door. Looks out at the road.~~

~~Empty.~~

~~She closes the door. Locks it. Leans against it.~~

~~Still not crying. Still not breaking. But close.~~

~~INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE -- DAY~~

~~MAYOR LUCAS QUINN paces back and forth in his office, while a nervous Belle sits in quiet anticipation.~~

MAYOR QUINN
All right...how do I put this? I really haven't been looking forward to this conversation.

Start

BELLE

I can handle it. I know you well enough to know if you called me here, it can't be good news. Just rip off the band aid.

MAYOR QUINN

I am getting some word from city council there may be some changes coming with Bedford House.

Belle straightens up in her seat, alert.

BELLE

Changes? Okay...like what?

MAYOR QUINN

Well, I know how hard you work and I think we can both agree that over the years Bedford House has been an integral part of our community. But-

Mayor Quinn wrings his hands, uncomfortable.

BELLE

Yes?

MAYOR QUINN

But in recent years, it hasn't been the haven it once was. The building needs a ton of work, and to be honest, the council is full of church members. And they have pushed to relocate Bedford House - something smaller, more manageable...

BELLE

More manageable?

MAYOR QUINN

They're trying to get support to renovate the existing space into a new special event facility for the church.

BELLE

I don't understand. How could you relocate Bedford House? It's been there for 60 years. I grew up volunteering there.

MAYOR QUINN

I am not saying I agree with the idea. But it sure would help if we could punch it up a bit, bring it back to its hey day. Especially if people could see it really shine during the holidays.

BELLE

I'm already stretched so thin. And Pastor Tom hasn't announced it yet officially, but he's retiring from the center.

MAYOR QUINN

(groans)

That's not good news. I know how close you have grown since your parents both passed.

BELLE

He's the only family I've got. And I don't want to let him down.

MAYOR QUINN

I do have some good news. Open mind, please. I'm on your side.

BELLE

Go ahead. Good news, please.

MAYOR QUINN

I have a nonprofit consultant who is coming in to advise us. Give the place a fighting chance.

BELLE

Is now really the time to bring in someone from outside the community? Just give me some time. I can handle this. I didn't know this was a concern, but now that I do I will be 100% committed to-

MAYOR QUINN

(cutting her off)

You already give 1000%. This isn't something you can do on your own. We need to see some pretty significant revitalization.

BELLE

Okay. Got it.

9.

MAYOR QUINN

Belle, this isn't a reflection of you or your worth in this community. You are invaluable.

BELLE

I appreciate that.

MAYOR QUINN

I mean it, Belle. And truth be told, if Bedford House does relocate and you aren't comfortable with that, you have a job here in this administration. I'd hire you in a heartbeat.

BELLE

That's flattering. Thank you for the offer. But I really hope all those years at Bedford House haven't been in vain.

MAYOR QUINN

Just - consider all your options. You have a gift with people. It shouldn't be wasted.

Belle takes a deep breath.

~~INT. BEDFORD HOUSE -- DAY~~

~~Belle takes a big gulp of coffee as she organizes some clothing donations.~~

She looks up at the clock and starts to hurry.

Belle mutters under her breath to herself, obviously still shaken and irritated.

BELLE

Outside consultant my foot. Just what we need -- someone to tell me how to repurpose a mop closet.

The stack of clothes she is sorting tumbles over. She shoves it back onto a shelf, visibly annoyed and frustrated.

Pastor Tom rushes in and grabs a folder from his desk.

PASTOR TOM

Belle? What are you doing here on a Sunday morning? Service starts in ten minutes.

10.

BELLE

I know. I know. Just trying to sort thru these donations, get a jump on this week before they get here.

PASTOR TOM

How about you put it all down and get to church? That looks like where you need to be right now. Plus, you don't want to miss this service. There's a little something special that I know will brighten your day.

Pastor Tom grabs her coat and places it over her shoulders, hands her purse to her.

BELLE

I'm coming, I'm coming.

Belle gets up and pulls her coat on. Pastor Tom tilts his head as he notices her disheveled appearance.

PASTOR TOM

Any lipstick in that purse?

BELLE

Okay. Why are you acting so weird?

PASTOR TOM

Just thought you may want to look your best.

Belle applies a little makeup in the mirror.

BELLE

You've never cared if I wore makeup before. What are you up to?

Pastor Tom gives a little shrug and a conspiratorial grin and holds the door open for her.

~~INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY -- DAY~~

~~The pews are full. Christmas greenery wraps around stained glass windows. A CHOIR of modest but eager voices sings the last notes of "Angels We Have Heard On High".~~

Belle walks in, searching the crowd.

~~JEN HUGHES -- Belle's oldest friend and confidante, late 30's, is already looking for her and waves her over.~~

End