

11.

~~Belle scurries down to where Jen is seated, trying not to be in anyone's way.~~

JEN
~~(whispering)~~
~~Glad you made it.~~

BELLE
~~(whispering back)~~
~~Better late than never.~~

~~Pastor Tom steps up to the pulpit. He clears his throat with gentle authority.~~

Belle sits mid-pew, scanning the program - until she hears this -

PASTOR TOM
Before we begin this morning's message, I'd like to take a moment to recognize someone very special to our church family.

He pauses and glances to Belle who looks left and right, letting the words land.

PASTOR TOM (CONT'D)
A young man who grew up right here in Bedford - probably still has the Sunday school crafts to prove it - is back with us today. And not just back in town...but home.

Pastor Tom scans the crowd. Belle follows his gaze, turns - and her eyes go wide.

PASTOR TOM (CONT'D)
Sergeant First Class Hutch Mattinson has just returned from his final overseas deployment, and I think I speak for all of us when I say - welcome home, son.

Jen's head jerks around and she immediately looks to see Belle's reaction.

JEN
(under her breath)
Did you know about this?

Belle nods a little "no".

The congregation breaks into warm applause. A few "Amens". A little old lady wipes her eyes.

12.

HUTCH, in dress uniform, stands quietly near the back. He gives a modest nod. He's not doing this for show. He looks strong, steady - but slightly uncomfortable with the attention.

Belle quickly tries to smooth her hair and sit up straighter, her expression a mix of surprise and admiration...and a few butterflies.

PASTOR TOM
We will be lucky and honored to have Sergeant Mattinson coaching the boy's basketball team at Bedford High. Go Bulldogs! We thank you for your service, Hutch. And for reminding us, especially during this season of giving, what sacrifice truly means. You've made us so proud.

~~Hutch looks around nervously and he and Belle's eyes catch each other in the crowd. Hutch perks up and can't help but smile.~~

~~He gives her a small, nervous wave.~~

~~The people around Belle all turn toward her.~~

~~Belle gives an awkward wave back before turning forward in her seat.~~

~~INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - AFTER SERVICE - DAY~~

~~"Joy to the World" rings out from the piano as the congregation begins to stir - smiles, greetings, warm chatter.~~

~~Pastor Tom steps down from the pulpit, his Bible tucked under one arm, and moves toward the back row where Hutch Mattinson, tall, composed and handsome in his military uniform, stands politely greeting a few elderly congregants.~~

PASTOR TOM
(calling out warmly)
Sergeant Mattinson!

HUTCH
Hutch to you, always, Pastor Tom.

~~Hutch brings Pastor Tom in from a handshake to a strong hug.~~

Start

End