

DAAPHNE
~~Tomorrow on Christmas Eve?~~

MICHAEL
~~Actually, about Christmas Eve... I
 have a proposition.~~

DAAPHNE
~~(dramatically)
 I can't hear anything on an empty
 stomach.~~

MICHAEL
~~Daphne...~~

DAAPHNE
~~(louder)
 My ears don't work when I'm
 STARVING!~~

MICHAEL
~~(laughing)
 Fine! Pancakes first, holiday plans
 second.~~

~~Daphne bounds off as Michael's phone buzzes with a text from
 Jeff.~~

~~TEXT READS: MIAMI FLIGHTS BOOKED!~~

~~A pull back to reality for Michael as the holiday music
 continues to play and lights begin to shut down in the
 quickly emptying studio.~~

~~7 INT. OLGA'S DINER - DAY 7~~

~~The classic diner hums with the steady rhythm of silverware
 against ceramic plates and the chit-chat of morning regulars--
 construction workers in heavy boots, office workers grabbing
 to-go orders, and an OLDER GENTLEMAN, 70s, sitting at the
 counter. A floor-to-ceiling Wishes Tree (angel tree) in the
 front window, its branches left with only a few colorful
 paper tags bearing holiday requests from local families in
 need. JOY, late 60s, with reading glasses dangling from a
 beaded chain, pours a steaming cup of coffee for the older
 gentleman.~~

~~OLDER GENTLEMAN
 (very warmly)
 My favorite cup of joe in Buffalo.~~

~~A wink from Joy and a slightly longer smile reserved for him,
 then she's on her way to other customers. The older gentleman
 resumes doodling on his napkin.~~

Michael (with Charlie the tree) and Daphne enter, making
 their way past the Wishes Tree, and take their places in
 their usual booth. Joy spots them and gives a warm nod of
 recognition that she will be right with them. Michael
 carefully props their rescued Charlie Brown tree against the
 booth window.

Start

MICHAEL
 Busy in here today, huh?

Joy's coffee pot begins to pour and she jumps right into the
 conversation.

JOY
 Christmas shoppers and Christmas
 avoiders--they all need feeding.
 Been on my feet since five and
 already filled this pot eight
 times.
 (eyeing the scraggly tree)
 What'd you do, rescue that poor
 thing from a wood chipper?

DAAPHNE
 Exactly!

MICHAEL
 You guys don't recognize a good
 tree when you see it.

JOY
 Uh-huh. Maybe I'll bring an extra
 mug--that tree looks like he could
 use a little pick me up.
 (to Daphne)
 What'll ya have, honey?

DAAPHNE
 The gingerbread pancakes, please.
 Extra whipped cream.

JOY
 Smart girl. Olga's been
 experimenting with extra molasses
 this year--practically therapeutic.
 (to Michael)
 And you? The usual?

MICHAEL
(eyes darting over the menu)
Do I want to try the cinnamon swirl, or do I want to stick with my go-to, blueberry? It's a harder decision than you think.

JOY
(no time for this)
I'll bring you one of each.

A nod from Michael. And Joy is off.

DAPHNE
(suspicious)
~~What's going on with you, dad?~~

~~A look of admission from Michael. We follow Joy with her steaming pot of coffee, humming "Jingle Bells" slightly off-key through the bustling diner as she reaches a set of patrons with their backs turned to us.~~

JOY
~~Need a top off, honey? You look like you got more on your mind than just breakfast.~~

~~Joy pours into a mug, we reveal the mug belongs to Mia. Sitting next to Mia is Cruz, and they are deep in conversation.~~

MIA
~~Oh, actually, could I get it to go? And the check when you get a moment.~~

JOY
~~Sure thing. Big day of shopping?~~

MIA
~~Among other things, yes. Never a dull moment this time of year.~~

JOY
~~Don't I know it! How are the pancakes?~~

CRUZ
(mouth full)
~~Maybe even better than my mom's.~~

End

MIA
(nudging him playfully)
~~Hey----~~

~~Joy leaves Cruz and Mia.~~

MIA (CONT'D)
(referring to her planner)
~~You have nativity practice right after this and then we can have lunch together, but I have a big presentation this afternoon, so I need to prepare for that. I also need to pick up the ham for grandma's, and I need to wrap the teachers' gifts, so...~~

CRUZ
~~Mom, you're making my head spin!~~

MIA
~~I'm making my own head spin.~~

CRUZ
~~Mom, can we do something fun today-- something that's not in that planner.~~

~~Mia smiles.~~

MIA
~~Unscheduled fun... (jokingly)
Let me just write that down in this planner right under--~~

CRUZ
(playfully grabbing the pen)
~~Noooo, Mom! I'm taking the pen!~~

~~Back at the booth with Michael and Daphne, they are deep in convo and breakfast.~~

DAPHNE
~~Miami?!~~

MICHAEL
~~It is just an interview for right now, to see what's out there.~~

~~Michael lifts his coffee cup to his lips, takes a big swig, then turns to the scraggly tree propped next to him in the booth.~~