

## It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Love

My favorite time of the year has finally arrived. The walls are swept with Christmas lights, and miniature Christmas trees are placed in every corner. My jar of candy canes is the perfect addition to the numerous holiday decorations in the office.

I peak out the window. Wreaths are hung on every door, and snowflakes sprinkle out of the sky. Carolers go door-to-door singing traditional Christmas songs, while children walk down the street alongside their parents. Grand smiles grow on children's faces as they approach the toy store.

Tonight is even more special than any other day in December; tonight is the annual Christmas Eve party. It's very formal, but it's just members of the office, our close friends, and family.

It is truly a magical night. The owner of our company met the love of his life at the party, and they've been married for thirty wonderful years. I seek to be just like him—successful and in love. What else would anybody wish for?

Once I get home from work, I put on a red, ankle length dress and curl my hazelnut brown hair, grabbing a white faux fur sweater from my perfectly organized closet. Once I'm all dazzled up, I catch a taxi to travel to the party.

I enter the room, and my expectations are blown away. Holiday music carries gracefully throughout the room. It is covered from head to toe in wreaths, lights, big red bows, and circle standing tables draped in snow-colored table cloths, each with a festive table setting. It looks like something out of a Hallmark movie. The room is also lined with tables full of Christmas cookies and appetizers; I grow hungry just looking at it.

I dart to the cookie table just as Chris Taylor strides through the doors. His usual blue collared shirt and jeans are replaced by a white tux; he looks like a completely different person.

I hustle towards him, only to be beaten by another girl. Her blonde hair is secured in a high bun, and she's wearing the most beautiful white dress I have ever seen. She looks angelic. . . . It makes me sick.

She just doesn't seem like Chris's type—the natural and funny girl. Instead, she looks like the popular girl from high school on a trust fund. I know I sound rude, but I can't wrap my head around why Chris is with someone like that. There is no way I'm going over there now, but I start to wonder why the image of Chris with another girl is unpleasant.

I return to the table and stuff my mouth with snowman frosted sugar cookies. "Mm, why do these taste so good?" I wonder out loud. The buttery flavor dissolves in my mouth like melting snow. If you've ever met me, you'd know I have a fetish for frosting.

Once my mouth is stuffed as full as bunny cheeks, my friend Kayla sneaks up behind me. “Don’t you see what’s going on over there? You’ve got to fight for your territory!” Kayla motivates, pointing over to Chris.

Before I can reply, I gulp down the cookies in my mouth with a glass of egg nog. “Kayla, we’re just friends. Besides, they look good together,” I lie. In my very true, honest opinion, they look like two enemies forced to sit next to each other. I wonder, why they don’t look happier together?

Kayla rolls her eyes. “No, Jenna. Me and you are friends; you and he are meant to be together.”

As much as I love Kayla, she has a way of sticking her little nose into my business. Whether it’s work, family drama, or my love life, she’ll want every last tiny detail. Although, sometimes her involvement is helpful. Kayla has helped me through every troublesome situation from my childhood to adulthood. There is no possible way I’d be where I am today without her. She was even the one who got me this job at the office. After the business I previously worked at went bankrupt, she put in a terrific word with her boss, and I was ultimately hired. She also introduced me to Chris. She calls herself my guardian angel, or even sometimes, Cupid. Deep down, I have no choice but to agree.

I brush off her comment, for I know she means well and only wants to see me happy. I would be just as well without Chris though. I can be my own independent woman if I wanted to. It is the twenty-first century after all.

But who in the world am I kidding. “Fine, okay. You’re right. . . . I like him.”

“Yay!” she squeals. “I knew I sensed something from the very beginning!”

“Shhh,” I hush. “Not too loud. I don’t want anyone to know, especially Chris.”

“Jenna! That’s the one person you *need* to tell.”

I wonder what is holding me back from asking him out. The best reason I can come up with is that I don’t want to lose my friend. After hours of passing funny notes in the office, staying up late to watch movies, and working together on projects, I don’t want to risk losing all of that and make it weird. The thing is, our relationship could be so much better if I would just tell him that I love him. “You know, what, Kayla? I’m going in.”

“Yes! You’ll kill it! You got this!” Kayla cheers. I don’t have the self control at the moment to hold back my smile.

“Thank you, you know, for always being there to help me out.”

“What else would I want to do? Now go over there before he starts making out with that other girl.”

I begin to walk over. My heart thumps at an uncontrollable pace, and the holiday music becomes hushed. A part of me wants to swirl back to Kayla, but I know this is what I must do. I can't keep living my life in dreams and hopes; I have to take control of what I want.

Chris notices me coming and waves me over. Now there's no going back. "Hey Jenna, I haven't seen you all night."

I take a deep breath. "Can we talk outside for just a second?" To my surprise, the girl next to him looks relieved that I approached him, as if she's been waiting all night for this.

"Yeah, uh, sure," he grins.

Once we exit the building, I realize I haven't thought about what I'll tell him, but I guess it's too late now. Chills run up my spine, and the freezing weather turns my breath into visible puffs like smoke. My teeth chatter, and my body shivers. I wrap my arms around my chest to keep warm. "So, there's something that I really need to tell you," I jump in, frightened of how he will react. I no longer know if I'm shaking from the cold or from fear.

"Before you say anything," Chris begins, and I grow terrified about what he might say. "Do you want to go out sometime? I know we've been close friends for the past few years and the last of my intentions is to mess that up, but I can't deny that I've had a crush on you for awhile. You're beautiful and smart, and I don't know if I'd even have any friends in the office if it weren't for you. I've meant to do this so much earlier, but I didn't have the guts. So, Jenna Johnson, will you go out with me?"

I freeze. I didn't imagine he'd be the first to ask. Then I remember something important. "But who was that girl you were talking to in the party?"

"Uh, that was my sister, Anna. Why do you ask?"

I can feel my cheeks reddening by the second. I can't believe I couldn't come to the conclusion they were related. How did I become so quick to point to conclusions? I guess love really does make you blind—and jealous of your crush's sister. "No reason at all. I just liked her dress," I reply, trying to hide what I really thought. "And, yes. I would love to go out with you."

Before either of us can react, Kayla jumps and squeals through the window like she's won the lottery. She notices us staring at her and automatically halts her celebration, aware of how much I want privacy. Kayla points to a big crowd of people and slowly backs away to talk to them, all the while a grin is widening on her face.

I sigh, "I'm sorry about that. She's only trying to be supportive."

"No, I totally get it. My sister was actually pressuring me this entire night to finally ask you out. She kept saying that if I didn't pull it together, you'd never accept."

“That’s too funny,” I chuckle, “Kayla’s also been doing the same thing to me!” We laugh in unison. Then, I meet Chris’s eyes, and I realize he’s stopped laughing. My cheeks flush, and Chris’s blue eyes glimmer in the reflection of the glistening moonlight.

“I don’t want to seem too blunt, but do you want to go get some coffees now?” he suggests. “I know I just asked you out, and if it’s too fast I—”

“Of course I’ll get coffee now! You know how much coffee I drink,” I respond.

“Great, let’s go,” he gestures and holds my hand in his.