Scene 1

(Scene opens with Sara in her apartment pulling out dresses from a closet as she sings)

Song: Christmas is My Favorite Time - Sara

Sara:  
The Christmas party is starting soon  
Hard to believe that it’s after noon  
I don’t even know what I should wear  
Got to decide now, it’s getting late  
Going again and without a date  
What if I change the color of my hair?  
(Spoken) I don’t think so . . .

How I love the Christmas season  
It’s my favorite time of year  
Kinda wish I had my own reindeer  
Spoken – “well . . . not really”

Christmas brings us all together  
People come from everywhere  
Christmas brings us all together  
A time to show we care  
I love the smells that fill the air  
Wonders and wishes and  
such scrumptious dishes  
Christmas is my favorite time . . .

Get back on track and make up my mind  
Remember to be polite and kind  
You just never know who you might find  
spoken: “not that I’m looking “

It might be nice to meet a friend or two  
Can’t hurt to look - just peruse the room  
Probably be like every time before

How I love the Christmas season  
It’s my favorite time of year  
Kinda wish I had my own reindeer
Christmas brings us all together  
People come from everywhere  
Christmas brings us all together  
A time to show we care  
I love the smells that fill the air  
Wonders and wishes and  
such scrumptious dishes  
Christmas is my favorite time . . .  

Spoken - “I’m gonna be late!”

Instrumental Transition - People walking into and at party

Song: Christmas is my Favorite Time – Tony

Tony Sings – walking into party

People are buzzing around the room  
I should have used a nam de plume  
Then no one would even know I’m here  
Simple Hors d’oeuvres and some snacks to eat  
Not like I’m cooking to compete  
And very soon this food will disappear  
How I love the Christmas season  
It’s my favorite time of year  
Everyone is filled with Christmas cheer  

Christmas brings us all together  
People come from everywhere  
Christmas brings us all together  
A time to show we care  

I love the smells that fill the air  
Wonders and wishes and  
such scrumptious dishes and  
Christmas is my favorite time . . .

Charlie: Let’s eat!

(Ending orchestra hit)

(At end of song they arrive at the party from opposite directions. Tony is handed a plate of food and settles downstage left. Charlie is with his daughter, Amber, sees Sara enter downstage right and approaches urgently)

Sara:  Hey, Amber! Hi, Sweetie!

Charlie:  Sara, there you are. (while Charlie and Amber talk, Amber wanders into the crowd)
Sara: Sorry, I was working on my blog, and time got away from me.

Charlie: Doesn't matter. Now that you're here, I need you to schmooze with some of the high rollers.

Sara: Charlie, you know I hate schmoozing! (Brett spots Charlie and heads for him with purpose)

Charlie: But you're so good at it. (notices Amber is missing) Oh, great, now I've lost Amber.

Sara: I'll go find her. (She disappears into the crowd while Charlie calls after her)

Charlie: No, you're supposed to... never mind. (wanders into the crowd)

(Tony crosses to center stage as Amber emerges from the crowd and intercepts him)

Amber: Excuse me, do you know where the little weenies are?

Tony: (squats to her level) I don't think there are any little weenies.

Amber: But they’re my favorite part. (Sara emerges carrying a water glass and spots Amber then moves to intercept)

Tony: (glancing at his plate) Maybe if you try something you've never had before, you'll find something you like just as well.

Sara: Amber! There you are. (to Tony) I hope she's not pester ing you. (continuing to talk to Tony but looking at Amber) She's not supposed to talk to strangers.

Amber: He says they don't have any of the little weenies.

Sara: What?! No cocktail weenies? But that’s one of the best party foods ever! What office party is complete without cocktail weenies, Swedish meatballs, and finger sandwiches?

Tony: I'm afraid there isn't any of that.

Sara: Really? What do they have? Let me see that. (she takes his plate and hands him her drink, then starts sampling)

Tony: Help yourself. There are seared Ahi tuna bites, smoked salmon with a dill sour cream – sun-dried tomato tapenade on polenta triangles, – roasted mushrooms stuffed with spinach, bacon, and feta - mini-quiche-

Sara: (interrupting) Well, the mushrooms are a bit overcooked, but it’s not bad. This polenta is nice, but the tapenade is a bit “briny”. Would it have killed the caterer to simplify? (Charlie spots the two, excuses himself, and moves toward them.) I mean, this isn’t the most accessible menu.

Charlie: Well, I see you two have met.
Tony: Not formally, she just stole my plate. (Sara reacts a little like she just got caught with her hand in the cookie jar, swaps the plate back for her water)

Charlie: Tony, this is my sister, Sara. Sara, I’d like you to meet Anthony Antonio Antonetti.

Sara: Seriously? Tony, Tony, Tony. Did your parents just not like you?

Charlie: Sis!

Tony: It's alright, Charlie, not the first time I've heard that. Actually, they liked me a lot, I'm named after my grandfathers Anthony and Antonio. Nowadays, most people just call me Tony A.

Sara: *(spit take, then coughing and sputtering)* Wait, what? You're Tony A? From the Food Channel?

Tony: Guilty as charged.

Charlie: Tony and I met in college. Last week he called me and said he needed to get out of the city for a while.

Tony: Charlie used to talk about this quiet little town he grew up in, so I asked if I could come visit.

Charlie: And I said I'd set him up with a place if he'd cater this little shindig for me.

Tony: Are you okay? You look a little pale.

Sara: I'm fine. Would you excuse me, please? I need to go. *(embarrassed, she makes a hasty retreat as Brett spots Charlie and heads his way)*

Tony: It was very nice to meet you, Sara. *(turning back to Charlie)* So that's your little sister?

Charlie: Yep. In all her awkward glory.

Brett: Charlie, I was hoping I'd see you here. Your star has arrived!

Charlie: Brett, it's the station Christmas Party. You knew I'd be here.

Brett: Good point. I'd like to run a little something by you. *(spots Tony)* Oh, hello there! I am Brett Michaels, *(sings “Breakfast with Brett” radio show theme)* - weekdays 6-10 am *(shakes Tony's hand)*

Tony: Nice to meet... *(interrupted by Brett)*

Brett: I know. *(putting an arm around Charlie and guiding him back into the crowd)* Listen, Charlie, I was thinking .... Instead of our usual Christmas bonuses this year...

Charlie: Brett, not at the party.
Brett: Oh, right. Business talk for business hours. (To Tony) Nice to meet you. (begins schmoozing again)

Tony: You, too.

Brett: I know.

Tony: Interesting personality.

Charlie: Brett is a piece of work, but he's a ratings winner. Hey, how'd you like to see my family's restaurant I used to tell you about? I could treat you to dinner there tomorrow night.

Tony: Uh... will your sister be there?

Charlie: She should be. She's there at least 4 nights a week. Tomorrow night's beef stew night, so she'll be there for sure.

Tony: Great! What do I wear?

Charlie: Something casual.

(Lights out)
Scene 2

(Lights up on Cooke’s Place. It’s not fancy, basically a diner. A few tables and a counter with stools and a cash register. There should also be a door or a path in the back that leads to an unseen kitchen/pantry/walk in fridge. The last few couples are leaving, and Grampa is manning the register. One couple is settling their bill, and another couple is waiting right behind them. Pete busses the tables.)

Grampa: Well, Martha, it sure was good to see you here tonight. How’s that shoulder doing?

Martha: Still sore, but it’s getting better.

Grampa: Well, that’s good. Betty says they really miss you down at the Bowl-a-rama. She says Carmen is in the gutter more often than not.

Martha: Well, if they can hold on until January, I should be back.

Grampa: Well, that’s good. Merry Christmas!

Martha: Merry Christmas to you!

Grampa: See ya in church. (next couple steps up.) Mayor

Mayor: Joe

Grampa: Always good to see you here.

Mayor: Like I always say, my wife’s happy she didn’t have to cook, and I’m happy I didn’t have to eat her cooking!

Grampa: It’s always nice to take money from a politician. (As they leave, Grampa counts through the money in the drawer) Pete, how many hamburgers did you eat tonight?

Pete: Well, let’s see, I had… I had (pauses to count and chew his food) Six, but the last two was because that couple that was sitting there sent ‘em back. They said they was too red in the middle. (He heads towards the kitchen)

Grampa: You could have just thrown them back on the grill. You didn’t have to eat them!

Pete: (turning back) I didn’t mind, I like ‘em red in the middle.

Grampa: That boy ain’t right. (Sara enters looking a bit down)

Sara: Hey, Grampa, you got anything left to eat? I’m starved.

Grampa: Didn’t you eat at the party? You love party food.

Sara: I do. There just wasn’t any.

Grampa: Well, Charlie should’ve said something. I could have at least sent over a plate of cold cuts.
Sara: No, there was food – it was just all fancy stuff.

Grampa: Oh! No cocktail wienies and finger sandwiches?

Sara: Nope. Not a one in sight. Hey, isn't tonight chili night?

Grampa: Yep. Hey, Pete! How much Chili do we have left?

Pete: *(walking back eating from a rather large bowl)* This here’s the last of it.

Grampa: The last – how many bowls of that did you have?

Pete: Just this one. *(pause)* But, I did put some of it on my burgers.

Sara: I’m gonna see if there’s anything in the fridge. *(Sara heads towards the kitchen as Nana and Amber enter)*

Grampa: Good luck.

Amber: Hey Grandpa! I went to a Christmas party tonight.

Grampa: Well, don’t you look pretty in your party dress!

Amber: Nana says I look like a princess.

Grandpa: Well, I’ll tell you what, Princess Amber, why don’t you come on into the kitchen, I think there’s two pieces of Apple pie left and just enough ice cream to… *(Sara comes back in with the ice cream and a large spoon)* Okay, just pie then. Pete, why don’t you take Amber into the kitchen and get her a slice?

Pete: Sure! Uh… can I have the other one.

Grandpa: *(Looks at Pete like he’s stunned he has more room)* Why not? *(Pete and Amber exit. Sara joins Nana at a table and Grampa pulls up a chair as well)*. Well, Sara tells me the food at the party left a little to be desired.

Nana: Oh, I didn’t think so. Charlie’s friend, the TV Chef, put together quite a spread. He's very talented.

Sara: I’m sure he is. It just wasn’t what I wanted.

Nana: Well, it wasn’t your party, now, was it, dear?

Sara: Nana, don’t start.

Nana: I’m just saying, it was Charlie’s party. When you hire a caterer…

Sara: *(under her breath)* Oh, don’t say it.

Nana: for, say, a wedding reception-
Sara: Oh, here we go!

Nana: I'm just sayin'. Then you can set your own menu... He is single, by the way, the chef.

Sara: You are impossible!

Nana: Well, he is.

Sara: Well, you can forget it! Even if I was interested, I’m sure he’s not.

Grampa: Well, now what makes you say that?

Sara: 30 seconds after meeting him, I insulted his food.

Nana: Oh, Sara!

Sara: I didn’t know he was the caterer.

Grampa: Alright, settle down you two.

Nana: Well, how’s she ever going to get married if she insults every man she meets.

Sara: I do not insult every man I meet!

Grampa: I said settle down!

Sara: She started it. She’s always pushing me towards every eligible bachelor she meets. I’ll find my own husband, thank you.

(Grampa turns to look between Sara and Nana during the exchanges)

Grampa: She’ll find her own husband.

Nana: And how is she going to find a husband when she isn’t even looking?

Grampa: You’re not looking?

Sara: I don’t need to look. I’ll know.

Grampa: She’ll know.

Nana: And how will you know?

Grampa: How will you know?

Sara: I’ll just know.

Grampa: She’ll just know.

Nana: (to Grampa) Oh, you’re no help.

Sara: Seriously, Nana, I know you mean well, but I don’t need you to play matchmaker for me.
Nana: I just want you to be happy. But you keep waiting for a fairy tale, and fairy tales are pretty scarce.

Sara: I know.

Grampa: Shouldn’t you be getting Amber home?

Nana: Fine, fine, I get the message. Amber! Come on, sweetheart, time to go.

(*Amber and Pete re-enter*)

Amber: Nana, can I sleep in your bed tonight?

Nana: Only if you wear socks! (*to Grampa and Sara*) That child’s feet are like ice.


Grampa: Goodnight, Pumpkin.

Sara: Goodnight, Sweetie.

Nana: (*stopping at the door and turning back*) He’s handsome, too.

Sara: Nana!

Nana: Well, he is.

Grampa: Goodnight, Betty.

Nana: Goodnight.

Grampa: I’ll see you in a little while.

Pete: You know what, I think I’m gonna head out, too, Joe. I think I got a touch of indigestion.

Grampa: I can’t imagine why. (*Pete exits, and Grampa retrieves a broom from behind the counter. He holds it out to Sara, still at the table with her ice cream*) As long as you’re still here, you might as well help. (*She takes the broom and begins to halfheartedly sweep*)

Sara: Hey, Grampa? How will I know?

Grampa: How will you know what?

Sara: You know...when I meet the right guy?

Grampa: Oh, you’ll know. Sometimes it takes a while longer than others. Take your father, for instance. I thought he would never ask your mother out. She used to come in here 4 nights a week just to watch him work. Spent most of the night nursing her iced tea at that table right over there. Then one night he looked up, and it was like he was seeing her for the first time. From that moment on, he was captivated.
Sara: How was it for you?

Grampa: Oh, I knew right away when I saw your Nana. It took her a little while to figure out just how charming I was. But, eventually, I swept her off her feet.

Sara: That’s what I want. I want a man to be captivated. I want us to look into each other’s eyes and just know that we’re going to spend the rest of our lives together.

**Song: Swept off My Feet**

Sara: Is it too grand a dream?  
Is it too much to hope for? 
To think there is someone waiting for me 
Someone I least expect  
Somehow our eyes connect  
At least that is how I dream it would be

Someday I’ll be swept of my feet in love  
My life will be complete with the one I love 
When I gaze in his eyes, I’ll see 
And know he is the one for me  
Overcome by his charm  
I will fall in his arms  
And be swept off my feet in love

He’ll be romantic  
Thoughtful and kind  
A gentleman, sure 
But not too refined  
A friend I can count on to always be true  
He’ll be the one, and I’ll finally say “I do”

Someday I’ll be swept of my feet in love  
My life will be complete with the one I love 
When I gaze in his eyes, I’ll see 
And know he is the one for me  
Overcome by his charm  
I will fall in his arms  
And be swept off my feet in love

*(Sara dances with broom during instrumental portion of song)*

When I gaze in his eyes, I’ll see 
And know he is the one for me  
Overcome by his charm  
I will fall in his arms  
And be swept off my feet in love
Scene 3

(Scene opens with Charlie escorting Tony into the lobby at the station. (It should look like a fairly typical lobby)

Charlie: So that’s the nickel tour.

Tony: You’ve got some nice studios here Charlie. So, is this where your sister does her podcast?

Charlie: Yeah, how did you know about her podcast?

Tony: Somebody mentioned it at the party. I’ve – (Brett enters and interrupts.)

Brett: Charlie, glad you're here. (Sees Tony) Oh, pardon moi! Did I interrupt? (Sticks a hand out to Tony) I am Brett Michaels, (singing) Breakfast with Brett – weekdays 6-10 am.

Tony: Yes, we've met.

Brett: Oh, you’re probably right. I meet so many people.

Charlie: Brett, this is my friend Chef Tony A, from the Food Channel. He catered the Christmas party.

Brett: Oh, right. Loved the food at the party.

Tony: Thanks.

Brett: Hey, you're Italian, right? Have you ever been to Italy?

Tony: Several times. I – (interrupted by Brett)

Brett: I’ll bet you do quite well with the ladies. I hear you TV Chefs are like rock stars.

Tony: Well, I - (interrupted again by Brett)

Brett: Hey, is it true what I hear about Italian women that they don’t shave or wear deodorant? How do you deal with that?

Tony: (incredulously) What? -

Brett: Oh wait, I might be thinking of the French. Honestly, I might be able to get past the hairy pits, but I’m very sensitive to smells. I’m guessing you are too, being a chef, I mean.

Tony: Yes. Sense of smell is very important for a chef.

Brett: I’ll bet it is. Just between you and me, I do a little cooking myself. Nothing fancy, but I can do things with a George Foreman grill that would blow your mind. Anyhoo, good talk. Arrivederci! (mispronounced as he exits)
Tony: (turning back to Charlie) Hey, ah, Charlie, is there coffee around here?

Charlie: I think we both could use some! It’s back in the break room. I can have somebody get you a cup.

Tony: No, no, no, I’ll find it. (exits as Sara enters from the opposite direction)

Sara: Hey, Charlie.

Charlie: Hey, Sara. Oh, are you here to do your podcast on holiday party foods?

Sara: Yes. I was going to feature all the classics--

Charlie: Excellent! I just had a great idea. How would you like to have on your podcast as a special guest Chef Tony A of The Food Channel?

Sara: No, no, no, I don’t think so.

Charlie: Come on, Sara. Think of the potential boost to your subscriber base. He could do something like ... 5- star party foods made simple. (Tony enters, walking up behind Sara)

Sara: Oh, sure, like overly briny tapenade and those tiny pretentious little quiche Lorraines.

Tony: Actually, those were Quiche Alsatians. Simple mistake, they’re virtually the same except for the onion.

Sara: (flustered) Oh, uh... Tony, Charlie didn’t say you were... I mean did you hear... er ... I was just ... I have to go. (Sara exits quickly)

Tony: Nice to see you again, Sara. (watches her exit) She sure is interesting, your sister.

Charlie: Oh no. I remember that look. Don’t waste your time.

Tony: I didn’t see a ring.

Charlie: Wouldn’t that make Nana happy! In fact, she’d be happy if Sara just dated once in a while!

Tony: Hurt in a previous relationship?

Charlie: I’m not sure she’s ever had a previous relationship.

Tony: But I met her little girl, the little red head.

Charlie: Oh, no, that’s my daughter, Amber!

Tony: So... Sara is single, then?

Charlie: Hopelessly! But if you want to try to melt the ice queen, good luck.
Scene 4

(Scene opens in Cook’s Place. The place is fairly busy with Pete busing tables. Polly, the waitress, and Grampa are moving from table to table.)

Polly: Okay, that’s 2 specials and a chicken plate. Did you want slaw or potato salad?
Rev: Hey, Pete, should I get the slaw or the potato salad?
Pete: I’m potato salad over slaw every time. Slaw makes me... slaw makes me... slaw makes me gassy.
Rev: Potato Salad it is. Nobody wants a gassy Pastor. (Polly turns to head for counter)
Mayor: Oh, Polly? Could I get some more sweet tea, please?
Polly: Really, Mayor, you've had four glasses already.
Mayor: What can I say? Serving the public is thirsty work.
Polly: All right, Pete, make sure the Mayor has a full glass of tea and a clear path to the men’s room. (Sara enters and heads for an empty table center stage)
Sara: Evening everybody.
Everybody: Sara!
Polly: Evening Sara. The usual?
Sara: Hey, Polly. It's beef stew night, right? (Polly nods)
Grampa: (Heading toward the table with a basket of bread.) Well, my day has been exhausting, how about yours?
Sara: Oh, not bad if you don’t mind opening your mouth and shoving your foot in and chewing on it just so you can pull it out and shove the other one in.
Grampa: Uh-oh, what happened?
Sara: I stopped by the station, and Charlie suggested that I have Chef Tony A on my podcast. I shot down the idea, and I insulted his food.
Grampa: Well....I mean...
Sara: He was standing right behind me.
Grampa: Ah.
Polly: Here you are. One special and one sweet tea.
Sara: Thanks, Polly.
Polly: Don’t look now, but Chef Tony A just walked in with your brother.

(Charlie walks right in and over to Sara’s table with Tony following close behind)

Charlie: Polly, how’s the best waitress in town?

Polly: Well, if I see her, I’ll ask her. You gonna introduce me to your friend?

Charlie: Of course, where are my manners? Polly, I’d like you to meet Chef Tony A. Tony, this is Polly, the best waitress Cooke’s Place has ever had.

Tony: Pleased to meet you.

Polly: Likewise. Can I get you two gents something?

Charlie: Can I get two sweet teas and a menu for my friend?

Tony: Oh, I don’t need a menu. I’ll have what she’s having. (to Sara) Is this seat taken?

Sara: Would it make a difference if I said yes?

Charlie: Not really.

Sara: Then have a seat.

Charlie: I’d love to, but, gee, look at the time! Just remembered; I have to pick up Amber from dance class. Polly, can I get my usual to go? And throw in another for Amber?

Polly: Chicken on the wing, coming right up.

Charlie: Thank you so much. (to Sara and Tony) You two enjoy your dinner. It’s on me tonight. Have a fantastic evening! (Charlie heads to the register)

Sara: Wait, you can’t just

Pete: Here you go. Beef Stew and sweet tea. Wait a minute! You’re that TV chef, ain’t you?

Tony: Just call me Tony. And you are?

Pete: Pete.

Tony: This looks pretty good, Pete.

Pete: It’s Sara’s favorite, right Sara? She’s always here on beef stew night. (Pete heads back to kitchen)

Tony: So, what is it that makes this stew so special?

Sara: I don’t know. I just like it, I guess.

Tony: (tasting the stew) mmmm. That is good. Thick broth, veggies are chunky, not overcooked. The meat is tender, not stringy. What is that sweet tanginess?
Sara: I’m not sure.

Grampa: *(having overheard the last few comments.*) She just doesn't want to give away the family secret. It's apple juice. *(sticking out a hand)* I’m Joe Cooke, Sara and Charlie’s Grampa.

Tony: Pleased to meet you. I’m Tony.

Grampa: Well, you enjoy the stew, Tony.

Tony: I will. Thanks!

Rev: *(having just paid for his meal makes his way to the table)* Excuse me, Sara, I just wanted to thank you for the note of encouragement.

Sara: You’re welcome, Reverend McCullough.

Rev: And you must be that chef friend of Charlie’s, right?

Tony: Yes, call me Tony.

Rev: And you can call me Mac. If you’re going to be in town Sunday, we’d love to see you in church.

Tony: Oh, ahhh...No offense, Reverend, but I’m not much of a churchgoer.

Rev: No? I go all the time. *(laughs at his own joke)* People tend to notice when I’m not there. *(laughs again)* But seriously, if you change your mind, we’d love to have you. Sara, see you Sunday?

Sara: I’ll see you there.

Tony: So, Sara, Charlie was telling me about your "Gal about Town" podcast and, since I'm staying in town for a bit, I was hoping maybe I could talk you into showing me around.

Sara: I’m afraid I’m not much of a tour guide.

Tony: Okay, how about we just take a walk then, enjoy the moonlight. You don’t have to be a tour guide to take a walk, right?

Sara: Look, I’m sure that being the star of your own cooking show....

Tony: Three

Sara: What?

Tony: Three. I have three shows

Sara: Right, And I’m sure that’s really charming with all the ladies, but I’m not interested in being another notch on your skillet handle.
Tony: Notch on my skillet handle? What kind of a guy do you think I am?

Sara: Well, obviously not a churchgoer.

Tony: Just because I don’t go to church doesn’t mean I’m on the prowl!

Sara: If you’ll excuse me, I think I’ll see if Pete needs any help in the kitchen. *(She takes her plate and silverware and heads for the kitchen)*

Tony: Sara, I... *(standing up quickly and spilling tea)* Well, that went well.

Grampa: *(Coming over with a couple of towels)* Ah, don’t worry about her. She can be a little hot headed sometimes, like her father.

Tony: That’s your son, right?

Grampa: *(Nods)* Ah, yep, yep. He was quite a chef, too. In fact, that’s his beef stew recipe.

Tony: It really is good, Joe.

Grampa: That girl loved her daddy. She was just a teenager when he died, and I think beef stew night is like a little hug from heaven every week.

Tony: If you don’t mind my asking, how did he die?

Grampa: Drunk driver hit him head on one night. Killed him and her mother. He was all set to take over family business, too. I thought Charlie might take over, but food has never been his passion.

Tony: What about Sara?

Grampa: Oh, she could do it if she wanted to. Problem is, she doesn’t know what she wants.

Tony: I understand that. I used to love to cook. But the last few years, I’ve felt like maybe I’m losing my passion. I was thinking if I left the TV thing and opened my own place, maybe I could rekindle the flame. What do you think?

Grampa: *(chuckling)* Son, having your own place might quench whatever flame you have left if you’re not ready for it.

Tony: What do you mean by that?

Grandpa: I been doing this for a long time, and I can tell you right now, I don’t do it because I love to cook. I cook to love. The regulars and the people I work with, I cook to make them happy. But I’ll tell you the truth, I’m getting too old and too tired to do it much longer.
Song: I Wanna Retire

Grampa: I Wanna retire, Squire
    I wanna take it easy
    On some breezy tropical shore
    Don’t wanna work no more

    I wanna take my leave, Steve
    I wanna quit that rat race
    No more fast paced meetin’ at four
    Don’t wanna work no more

    I wanna vacate, Nate
    Come with me, mate
    We’ll sail right into the blue
    Sittin’ on my pension
    Not to mention
    There’s nothing I’ve gotta do.

    I wanna retreat, Pete
    I wanna spot of cool shade
    Fresh lemonade, sit in my chair
    Don’t even have a care.

    I wanna it a day, Ray
    I wanna watch the sunset
    Fish in my net, Paradise shore
    Don’t wanna work no more

    I wanna work on my tan, Stan
    That’s the plan man
    Brother, it’s long overdue,
    Sittin on my keister until Easter
    If that’s what I wanna do.

    I wanna retire, Squire
    I wanna take it easy
    On some breezy tropical shore
    Don’t wanna work no more
    Don’t wanna work no more
    Don’t wanna work no more!

(During the song Grampa works the room – addressing the patrons as well as Tony – Pete should be in the dining room for the song)

Tony: Joe, are you serious about retiring?

Grampa: I’d retire tomorrow if I could, but somebody has to pay the bills around here.
Tony: *(taking a pen out of his pocket and writing on a napkin)* Ah, take a look at this. Would, uh, this pay the bills? (Pete wanders over and starts eavesdropping)

Grampa: *(trying to hide his excitement)* Well, that’s ahhhh... it just might... I, uh,... just what are you proposing, Son?

Tony: I believe I’m proposing a way for you to retire. The way I see it, it’s a win-win. You get to retire, and I get to open my own place.

Grampa: Well,...that would be., ah...... *(spots Pete)* uh, but what about Pete.

Tony: I’m sure we’ll need someone to, ah... do,, whatever Pete does.

Grampa: And Polly?

Tony: I’ll need an experienced waitress.

Grampa: Well ... you know what? I’ve been trying to retire for a long time, and this is the best offer I’ve had.... It’s the only offer I’ve had. Make it so! *(Sara emerges from the kitchen. She sees Grampa and Tony laughing and shaking hands, rolls her eyes, and tries to sneak quietly to the exit, only to be spotted by Pete)*

Pete: Hey Sara, did you hear? Your brother’s friend is buying the restaurant.

Sara: He’s what? But this is our place.

Grampa: Not anymore.

Tony: Sara, I’d love your help with the remodel and the new menu. Maybe you could even review the place on your podcast when I re-open.

Sara: What about beef stew night?

Tony: Well, we can do a fine dining version. Elevate it, deconstruct it.

Sara: But, that’s not beef stew night.

Tony: Sara, I do fine dining, not rustic diner.

Sara: You want a review? I’ll give you a review. At the party, the quiche was dry, and the tuna was practically raw!

Tony: It was seared tuna, Sara; it’s supposed to be that way.

Sara: I know.... I like my tuna from a can. *(she storms out)*

Grampa: That’s actually true. Chicken of the Sea with a dollop of mayo – right out of the can – disgusting!

Tony: Is she going to hate me forever?
Grampa: Oh, don’t worry about her, she’ll come around. Hey, Polly.

Polly: Yes, Joe?

Grampa: Other than your pearly whites, what have we got that sparkles around here?

Polly: I think there’s still some sparkling grape juice from New Year’s.

Grampa: Well, pour everybody a glass. I’m throwing myself a retirement party!

**Song: I Wanna Retire Reprise**

Tony: I wanna roll up my sleeves, Jeeves

Joe: Better get your game on,
Get in the zone. Open the doors
This place will soon be yours

Tony: I wanna work on my chops, Pops

Joe: No need to stop
When there is so much to do

Tony: Getting’ back in the kitchen
Not to mention

Both: Come up with a menu, too

Joe: I’m gonna retire, Squire

Tony: Take it easy, oh, so easy

Joe: I’m gonna take it easy

Both: On some breezy tropical shore
Don’t wanna work no more
Don’t wanna work no more
Don’t wanna work no more

**Song ends - Scene ends and lights dim**
Scene 5

(Nana’s living room. She’s on the couch on the phone)

Nana: Now, Martha, I’m just telling you so you can make it a matter of prayer, but I heard her septum wasn’t really deviated. Uh-huh, and now the whole thing is infected, bless her heart. But, you didn’t hear that from me. (Sara enters and plops into a chair, still pretty agitated) Oh, uh, Martha, I’m gonna have to let you go. Sara just got home. See you at the bowling alley. (hangs up and begins talking to Sara without missing a beat) Sara, you have to see the video I took at Amber’s dance class. I do believe she’s the fastest learner in the class. Why she-

Sara: How could he do it?

Nana: How could who do what, dear?

Sara: How could he waltz in here and ruin everything?

Nana: Well, I’m sure he didn’t mean to.

Sara: It’s not enough his fancy foods ruined the Christmas Party, now he’s convinced Grampa to sell Cooke’s Place!

Nana: What are you talking about?

Sara: That Tony person is buying Cooke’s Place, and he’s changing everything!

Nana: (gasp) Who told you that? Was it Jeannette? She is such a busybody. Gossip, gossip, gossip. She can’t really help it though. Her mother was the same way, bless her heart. But you didn’t hear that from me.

Sara: Nana, I was there. He’s changing everything, even the beef stew.

Nana: Oh, I see. Well, you know your grandfather couldn’t keep going forever. This day was bound to come.

Sara: I know. But I just didn’t think it would be so soon. (Grampa enters, humming)

Grampa: Oh, hey, little girl!

Sara: Don’t talk to me! (she storms out)

Grampa: What put a bee in her- (interrupted by Nana)

Nana: Joe!

Grampa: What?

Nana: She’s a little upset, and I think you know why.

Grampa: Oh... she told you, huh?
Nana: She did. And come to think of it, I'm not too happy with you either. You sold Cooke's Place without even so much as asking me?

Grampa: Well. I,... uh,... yeah.

Nana: It's bad enough you didn't ask me, but Sara practically grew up in that place.

Grampa: I know, poor thing. But I'm just too old to keep doing this. I'd have been retired years ago if it hadn’t been ... well,... you know.

Nana: I know. And I miss him, too.

Grampa: How mad is she?

Nana: Pretty mad. You blind-sided her.

Grampa: Well, it all happened pretty quick. Blind-sided me too. Should I go talk to her?

Nana: I don't think that would be wise right now. I'll go check on her in a bit.

Grampa: Oh, speaking of checks *(pulls out the napkin)* "check" this out.

Nana: Oh, my word! Is that..?

Grampa: Yep. Welcome to retirement!

*(Black out)*
Scene 6

(Lights up inside the New restaurant, empty except for Tony. Charlie enters as the lights come full)


Tony: To be honest, I’m a little nervous about how people react to the change. (Brett enters)

Charlie: And, by "people," you mean my sister?

Tony: Pretty much. We haven’t spoken since the night Joe agreed to sell me the place. She won’t return my calls-

Brett: (interrupting) Charlie, I have something I want to run past you.

Charlie: Brett, you remember Chef Tony A.

Brett: Of course! Tonight’s the big night, right? Bringing fine dining to our little neck of the woods.

Tony: That’s right. We’ve been working hard remodeling, setting the menu, training the staff-

Brett: I’m sure you have. I can hardly wait. You know, if you want this business to grow, put an ad on my show! (laughs) Can I borrow Charlie for a sec (puts his arm around Charlie and walks him off to the side. Meanwhile Leanne enters)

Leanne: So, this is what you’ve been up to for the past 9 months!

Tony: Yea, what do you think?

Leanne: As your friend, congratulations! As your agent, when are you coming back to work? This extended sabbatical thing is not sitting well with the network.

Tony: I know. I had to get out of the grind – I needed something new, something to rekindle the flame.

Leanne: And..?

Tony: And… one thing at a time. I’m just getting this place off the ground. I’m not ready to jump back into the pressure cooker yet.

(Leanne’s phone rings)

Leanne: Hold that thought. (she moves to back of restaurant to take the call)

(Sara enters, puts her phone on a back table, and approaches Tony)

Sara: Tony?
Tony: Sara! I wasn't sure you'd come.

Sara: Before you say anything, I want to apologize for the way I acted at the restaurant the night you bought Cooke’s place and to say I'm sorry for all the horrible names I called you.

Tony: I don't remember you calling me any names.

Sara: I was alone in my room at the time, but I apologize anyway. The truth is, Grampa is happier than I've seen him in ages. Retirement suits him well.

Tony: I'm glad to hear it. So, how long did it take you to forgive me?

Sara: About 10 months.

Tony: It's only been 9 months.

Sara: I'm optimistic.

Tony: I see. Listen, Sara, I wanted to invite your whole family to be my guests at the opening tonight. Will you please join them?

Sara: Oh, well, I-

Tony: Please, it would mean a lot to me, and I'd love your opinion on the place. (Leanne hangs up from her call and heads towards Tony)

Sara: Alright. (she turns to exit and almost runs into Leanne) Oh, excuse me. I'll see you tonight, Tony.

Tony: Great!

Leanne: What was that about?

Tony: Nothing.

Leanne: Tell me she isn't the reason that you abandoned your career and set up shop is tiny town!

Tony: No.... not entirely.

Leanne: Tony, Tony Tony, are you kidding me? This is about a girl?

Tony: No, Leanne. You know how burned out I was. Look, Leanne, you’re a great friend and a great agent, and I appreciate how hard it's been on you.

Leanne: Do you? I've had all the big wigs beating down my door for weeks asking me when their number one ratings draw is going to decide to get back to work. They've got three shows on indefinite hiatus while you try to find your mojo.

Tony: I just needed to get out of the grind.. I thought a new venture might reignite the flame.
Leanne: Okay, what about this? You can stay here, BUT we create a whole new series

Tony: Leanne-

*(Sara sneaks in unseen to retrieve the phone she left on a table and overhears, getting angrier the more she hears)*

Leanne: We'll bring in a whole crew and follow you - documentary style, and show people what it takes to get a new place off the ground. It'll be fantastic. You get a new show, the network gets their ratings winner, and if the girl works out, we even get a touch of romance. Maybe we even do a wedding special, and you could host a competition show to pick the caterer. This place just might be a gold mine!

*(Sara takes a step toward Tony and Leanne, thinks better of it, and leaves)*

Tony: Slow down, Leanne! You've already got me down the aisle! I'm not ready for any of that yet.

Leanne: Listen, at least give those ideas some thought, okay? I can pitch those to the network and maybe get some balls rolling anyway. It might be enough for now.

Tony: Thanks, Leanne. I'll let you know if anything changes.

Leanne: I'll try to keep holding them off. But, pretty soon, the network is going to go looking for somebody else.

Tony: I know. *(Leanne exits as lights go down)*
Scene 7

(Lights up on restaurant. Francois is briefing the staff which includes Pete and Polly.)

Francois: Alright, people. We open in 5 minutes. You all know the specials for tonight, yes? Remember to push the braised short ribs and the lamb. Tonight’s fresh fish is the mesquite grilled silver salmon with the parsnip puree. All the promotion and the broadcast has us fully booked, so stay on your toes. Service is the key to fine dining. Keep the glasses full and the tables clear, but don’t rush the diners. Let them enjoy the experience to the fullest. Tonight is a big night! Are we ready?

Staff: Ready.

Francois: Alright. Open the doors.

Song: We are Open for Fine Dining

We are open for fine dining
And for you we are designing
A meal that is superb in ev’ry way
When the chef prepares the dishes
he is thinking of your wishes
"extr’ordinary" ev’ry one will say

Our salads are supreme.
We make ev’ry type of cream.
Our entrees are divine
And our desserts are so sublime

Our menu is auspicious, and, of course, it is delicious
Perfectly prepared for you today
And although it’s quite ambitious,
rest assured it is nutritious.
We wouldn't have it any other way

Our salads are supreme.
We make ev’ry type of cream
Our entrees are divine
And our desserts are so sublime

We serve chicken cordonbleu, fresh cut prime rib with au jus
Nothing but the finest cuts will do
Have a glass of Perrier, taste our Dijon shrimp flambé’
perhaps you’ll try a nice soufflé’

Our presentation’s grand
Fine cuisine we understand
Perfection we demand
You’re ev’ry wish is our command
We are open for fine dining
And for you we are designing
A meal that is superb in ev'ry way
A meal that is superb in ev'ry way

(During song, customers enter and are seated, wait staff sing while taking orders and serving food. Customers should be dressed nicely with men in coat and tie. As song ends, Brett Michaels enters with his date and approaches the maître de)

Brett: My good man, I am Brett Michaels, Breakfast with Brett - weekdays 6-10 a.m. I believe I have a reservation.

Francois: Yes, Mr. Michaels, if you would follow Emilia.

Brett: (to hostess) Emilia, hi, Brett Michaels. Would you like a signed autograph? (hostess shakes her head “No” and leads Brett to his table. As he walks, he waves and points to everyone in the room like it’s a red carpet walk at a Hollywood premier.)

(Sara, Amber, Charlie, Nana and Grampa Joe enter and are met at the maître d stand by Francois. Grampa Joe is not wearing a jacket)

Francois: Welcome to Chef Tony’s. Do you have a reservation?

Charlie: We’re the Cookes.

Francois: Ah, yes. (to hostess) Seat the Cookes at the Chef’s table, please. (as family move to be seated, Grampa Joe is last in line and gets stopped by Francois) Sir, excuse me, you have perhaps forgotten your jacket in the car?

Grampa: Nope, didn’t wear one.

Francois: I am sorry, sir, but a jacket is required.

Grampa: Well, that’s just silly.

Francois: Well, we’re happy to provide a jacket for you.

Grampa: How much is that gonna cost me?

Francois: Oh, no charge. You can simply return it as you leave. (motions to hostess who brings a jacket that is very oversized and helps Joe put it on) There you are. It’s much better, no?

Grampa: Definitely, no. (Joins the family at the table)

Polly: Nice outfit, Joe.

Joe: Uh-huh.

Pete: (enters carrying a tray of appetizers.) Hey, ya’ll. Here’s your hors d’oeuvres.
Grampa: Pete, we didn’t order anything yet. We just sat down.

Pete: Chef Tony sent these over. He said these are on the house. For Amber, we have cocktail weenies. And for Sara..

Sara: Finger sandwiches?

Pete:Yep. Horse radish and rare roast beef and ... some other stuff. They have a real fancy name I can’t remember, and these are really good. *(grabs one and eats it as he exits)*

Grampa: Did you see the prices on this menu? I’d have to come out of retirement just to afford the tip.

Charlie: Well, remember, Pop. This is fine dining. It’s supposed to be an extravagant experience.

Grampa: Um-huh.

Martha: Joe, good to see you. How’s retirement?

Grampa: Everything you said it would be.

Martha: Fishing every morning?

Grampa: And Wheel of Fortune every night. So how was the food?

Martha: Oh, Joe, you know I would never say anything... however, the food was delicious. But it’s pretty pricey. More of a special occasion place instead of a twice a week like Cooke’s place used to be. *(she exits as the Mayor approaches)*

Mayor: Joe!

Grampa: Well, hey, Mayor.

Mayor: What do you think of the place?

Grampa: I hardly recognize it.

Mayor: You’ll love the food. I had the prosciutto wrapped pork medallions with the fig sauce; the wife went with the salmon. They were de’lish! *(Tony enters and heads to the table)*

Nana: Oh, it sounds delicious.

Tony: Mayor, good evening. I trust you’re finding everything is to your satisfaction.

Mayor: I did. It’s like I used to tell Joe, my wife’s happy not to cook, and I’m happy not to eat her cooking. We may just have to eat here every night. *(Mayor exits)*

Tony: That sounds great!

Grampa: *(to the family at the table)* Sounds like a tax hike is coming.
Amber: (to Tony) Thank you for the little weenies.

Tony: You’re welcome. How is everyone tonight?

Grampa: Looks like you’ve got a good crowd here tonight.

Tony: So far, so good. Sara, how are the finger sandwiches?

Sara: (a little cool) Good.

Tony: I’m planning to offer them as occasional appetizers.

Sara: I’m sorry, would you excuse me please? (she gets up)

Tony: Is something wrong?

Sara: I’m not feeling well... I just need to go home.

Tony: (to Charlie) Charlie, is she alright?

Charlie: Uh ... she gets migraines ... they come on suddenly. I’m sure she’ll be fine.

Rev: (stopping while being shown to nearby table) Well, there’s our little superstar!

Tony: Superstar? What’s this about?

Charlie: Amber is going to sing a solo in our church Christmas program.

Tony: It’s kind of early for Christmas.

Rev: Oh, no! We’ve just started rehearsals, but our Christmas program does start the season.

Amber: Will you come see me?

Tony: (a little hesitant) Well, I...

Amber: Please? I came to your special night.

Tony: You sure did. I suppose I should return the favor. I wouldn’t miss it.

Amber: Promise?

Tony: I promise. Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to get back to the kitchen. (exits)

Rev: Good to see you guys.

Polly: Here are your drinks. And Chef Tony wanted me to let you all know tonight’s meal is on the house.

Grampa: Oh! Well, in that case, I’ll have the most expensive thing you’ve got. (lights fade as others mime giving orders to Polly)
Scene 8

(Lights up on the station lobby. Tony is there with Leanne)

Tony: How could she say that? I mean, she didn't even stay for the meal!

Leanne: Come on, Tony. It's one review on a podcast. How bad could it be?

Tony: It's a small town, Leanne. She's the "Gal About Town." I'm the stranger who bought their beloved local gathering place.

Leanne: Fine. Cut your losses and come back to the network.

Tony: I can't do that, Leanne. I'm not ready.

Leanne: Okay, what about bringing in crews and doing that start-up idea. It gets you back in with the network, and the exposure could bring people in. You get a thriving restaurant and create a little tourism industry in this one horse town.

Tony: No, Leanne.... no.

Leanne: Fine. But, when you finally are ready, I can't guarantee the network will still have a spot for you.

(She turns to leave, and Charlie enters)

Charlie: Tony, I'm sure she wasn't trying to sabotage your success. That's just not how Sara thinks.

Tony: Oh, really? You heard what she said - Cooke's Place was “comfortable” where Chef Tony's is “pretentious.” You don’t think that’s personal?

Charlie: No, I think she... Look, she said the food was on par with anything in Manhattan.

Tony: She didn't even eat the food, Charlie. What about that?

Charlie: Look, I told her to meet me here so we could talk this out.

Sara: (enters, sees Tony, and immediately tries to turn and leave)

Charlie: (Catching her before she can escape) Oh, no, you don’t. Tony seems to think you’re still upset about Cooke’s Place, and you’re trying to sabotage his business.

Sara: Sabotage? No, I....

Tony: Come on, Sara. Don’t pretend, you wish I had just left town.

Sara: I’ll admit I was upset at first, but...
Tony: But what? But take your fancy décor and pretentious food and head back to New York? I’ve got news for you, Sara. Cooke’s Place is gone, and running me out of business isn’t going to bring it back. You know, I did your Grandpa a favor buying that place. He practically begged me to buy it so he could retire.

Sara: Oh, really? Or was it so you could score another big ratings winner for the network? Honestly, I’m surprised all the cameras weren’t here for opening night! When do they arrive? Next week?

Tony: What are you talking about?

Sara: I heard you and your agent planning your big comeback.

Tony: Leanne, right .... and I told her no.

Sara: You what?

Tony: I told her no. And I’ve pretty much blown my relationship with the network.

Sara: I had no idea. I thought... I mean, when I heard...

Tony: I didn’t buy this place for the network. I bought it to get away from the network. And, maybe, so I’d have an excuse to stick around and get to know you. Maybe Leanne was right. This was all a mistake. (exits)

Sara: I blew it again, Charlie. I’m sorry.

Charlie: This isn’t your fault, Sis. The problem is, financially, professionally, emotionally, Tony has put all his eggs in this basket. (lights fade)
Scene 9

(Back at Chef Tony’s – the place is not as busy, but still half-full. The Mayor and his wife are seated downstage center. Tony emerges from the kitchen and visits a few tables, ending up at the Mayor’s.)

Tony: Mayor, Mrs. Humphries. How is everything tonight?

Mayor: Not so good, I’m afraid.

Tony: Is something wrong with the food? I can send it back and have a-

Mayor: No, no, the food is fine. It’s just … I’m not sure how to say this.

Tony: How to say what?

Mayor: My wife’s taking cooking lessons. I’m afraid we’ll be eating at home more.

Tony: I see. Well, in that case, I’m sorry for both of us. Hope you have a good night.

(The Mayor and his wife head for the door, Tony spots Sara and turns to head for the kitchen)

Sara: Tony, wait. (Tony stops, Sara begins to move his way, but the Mayor and his wife are between them.)

Tony: Here to gloat?

Sara: No, of course not.

Tony: Why not? You were right.

Sara: Tony, I didn’t come here to say I told you so. I came here to say I’m sorry.

Tony: You’re sorry?

Sara: Yes. I never meant to sabotage you.

Tony: I know. The truth is you were absolutely right. I looked at the comment cards from that first night. Too Pricey, too pretentious, nice but expensive. Everything you said was right there. This town is not the place for a high end, fine dining restaurant.

(As they talk, we see wait staff being dismissed by Francois. Sara notices)

Sara: Wait, what’s happening? (she drapes her coat over a chair)

Tony: Business has been way down. A month in, and I’m having to cut staff. Don’t worry, though. I’m keeping Polly and Pete. They work hard, and I know it would break Joe’s heart if I let them go.

Sara: Have things gotten that bad?
Tony: Another few weeks like this, and I’ll have to close down altogether.

Sara: Tony, I really am sorry, and I want you to know that I’ve been praying for you.

Tony: Well, it appears He isn’t listening.

Sara: He’s always listening.

Tony: Not to me. All I wanted was for this place to be successful. Then I could forget the network and just settle down to a nice simple life. It looks like those prayers fell on deaf ears. I’m just going to end up crawling back to the Food Channel.

Sara: Maybe not. I believe God has a plan for you, Tony.

Tony: What would God want with a burned out TV chef with a failing restaurant?

Sara: I don’t know. Sometimes we just have to come to the end of ourselves before we can hear his voice.

**Song: What You Need**

Sara: You've given up and now you've given in
Quit before you've had a chance to win
Caught up in a rush to make your dreams come true
Not thinking there may be another plan for you

What you want may not be what you need
Lost in your desire to succeed
Thinking your success is found in what you do
What matters most is just a prayer away for you

What you need is a place where you can start again
What you need is a brand new point of view
I know God has made a way
He will hear you when you pray
He has a plan for you

Tony: I hear your heart,
I know you care for me
If not for you, I don't know where I'd be
You say that there is more to life than I have found
I need to find the answer, turn it all around
What I need is a place where I can start again
What I need is a brand new point of view
You say God has made a way, and I can find it if I pray

Sara: He has a plan for you to find what you're searching for,
I know it's true
His endless love and His hope, and His strength is there for you, for you!
Sara: What you need is a place where you can start again.

Tony: I want a brand new start

Sara: What you need is a brand new point of view.

Tony: I’ll open up my heart for God to make a way

Sara: He will hear you when you pray
He has a plan for you.
He has a plan for you.

*Song Ends – Dialog continues*

Sara: I really do feel like God has a plan for you.

Tony: I sure wish I had your faith.

Sara: It only takes a little. I really should going. *(both reach for her coat, hands meet for an awkward moment)*

Tony: Let me get that for you. *(she lets go, and he drapes the coat over her shoulders. She reaches up and touches his hand again)*

Sara: I really should be going.

Tony: Yes, you said that.

Sara: I mean, I’m sure Nana has a new video from Amber’s rehearsal. *(suddenly remembering)* Oh, I almost forgot. Amber asked me to remind you that you promised to come see her in the Christmas Program.

Tony: That’s right. When is it?

Sara: Saturday night at 7. Will you be there?

Tony: I’m not exactly expecting a big dinner crowd, so I should be able to get away. Tell her I wouldn’t miss it.

Sara: *(she begins to leave, pauses and looks back.)* I’ll see you Saturday night then. *(exits)*

*(Tony lets the door close and walks back to the table center stage. He begins to clear the table, lights fade)*
(Cooke’s living room. Scene opens with Mrs. Cook on the phone, Grampa reading a book)

Nana: Well, now, Martha, I feel sorry for the boy, I really do. (Sara enters unseen) They say things have gone from bad to worse. Now, you didn’t hear this from me, but I heard the mayor offered him a bailout. Yes, now like I said, I feel sorry for him, bless his heart, but I don’t think that city money should be...

Sara: Should be what, Nana?

Nana: Should be ashamed of herself for spreading rumors like that. That’s just gossip, and you know I just don’t have any use for gossip. Well, I gotta go, Martha. Sara just got home. Uh-huh, bye.

Grampa: I tell you, Sara, there’s just no telling how many rumors would be running wild in this town if your Nana wasn’t there to shut ‘em down.

Nana: I just can’t abide gossip. I never have.

Grampa: Mm-hum, she’s been on the hotline with the Ladies’ League of Justice all afternoon, spreading news and guarding the truth.

Nana: It’s the Ladies’ Prayer League, and we’re just sharing prayer needs.

Grampa: Fox News, CNN, and the internet could not spread news as fast as you can.

Sara: Alright, that’s enough you two. Nana, how was Amber’s rehearsal?

Nana: Oh! She was so adorable. I’ve already put some of the videos on The Facebook. Would you like to see?

Sara: No, I’ll wait until tomorrow night.

Grampa: So, where have you been this evening?

Sara: I stopped at Chef Tony’s on the way home. I’m worried about him, Grampa.

Grampa: Running a restaurant can be tough.

Sara: It’s not just that. I think he’s giving up, not just on the restaurant, but on himself.

Grampa: Well, when you pour yourself into something, it’s hard not to take it personally when it fails. What he needs is someone he can talk to, someone to encourage him. You know there was a time, early on, when Cooke’s Place was struggling to make it. Times were tough for everybody, but, ...ah, ...well, ... the odds were against us, and the situation was grim. If it hadn’t been for your Nana there – she kept telling me my food was fantastic, and that one of these days we’d have the best restaurant in town. She was right. I don’t know if I’d have had the courage to keep going if it hadn’t been for her.
Sara: That’s what worries me. Tony doesn’t have anybody like that.

Nana: Not yet, anyway.

Sara: Nana, don’t start.

Grampa: Oh, no, no, you listen to your Nana, Sara. She always tells the truth. It’s part of the Ladies’ Justice League motto.

Nana: You are impossible, Old Man. *(lights fade)*
Scene 11

(Lights up on church. Crowd is seated to see the program, and Rev. McCullough is working the crowd as some still enter. He is in a biblical Shepherd’s costume)

Rev: Martha, good to see you tonight. How’s the ladies’ bowling team doing?

Martha: Two more wins and we’re in the finals. You should have seen the whippin’ we put on Willowridge the other night!

Rev: In Christian love, of course.

Martha: Oh, absolutely.

Rev: Well, I look forward to putting another trophy in the vestibule.

Martha: Thank you, Reverend.

Rev: Mayor, have you been working out? You look like you’re losing weight.

Mayor: No, but I have been eating at home lately. The wife’s been taking cooking lessons.

Rev: My prayers are with you both.

(Pete and Polly enter, and the Rev. moves to them)

Rev: Well, I didn’t think we’d be seeing you two tonight, I figured you’d be working.

Polly: Nothing on the books tonight at Chef Tony’s, so he closed up early.

Pete: Hey, Reverend, are there going to be snacks later?

Rev: Yes, the Ladies’ Prayer League is providing a nice Christmas dessert reception.

Pete: Good, ‘cause I’m starved.

(Grampa, Nana, and Sara enter as Reverend greets them)

Rev: Joe, how’s retirement treating you?

Joe: (gives him a thumbs up.)

Rev: And, Betty, how’s retirement treating you?

Betty: (groans and shakes her head no.)

(Charlie and Amber, who is in biblical garb, enter)

Rev: Hey, here’s our little show stopper.

Amber: Do you like my costume?
Rev: I sure do. Why don’t you go ahead and get in your place? We’ll be getting started in just a minute.

Amber: Okay.

Charlie: Will you be joining us for Christmas dinner again this year, Reverend?

Rev. Is Joe smoking the turkey?

Charlie: It wouldn’t be Christmas if he didn’t.

Rev: Then you can count us in.

(They head for a seat as Rev. McCullough heads for the podium. We see Tony sneaking in and looking around. He spots an empty seat which just happens to be next to Sara and heads for it.)

Tony: Is this seat taken?

Sara: Tony! You made it.

Tony: A promise is a promise, isn’t it?

Sara: I’m glad you’re here. Have a seat.

(Rev. McCullough moves center stage. Lights dim on crowd and a spot shines on the Reverend.)

Rev: What do you do when your world is turned upside down? I don’t know if that’s ever happened to you, but it sure did to me. I’ll never forget that night. I run a small Inn and the Romans decided to conduct a census. To tax the people, you have to count the people, right? Well, the city was overrun. I was renting space in the dining room, putting pallets in hallway; I even rented my children’s rooms and moved them to mine. We were finally settling in for the night when this young man and his wife showed up. Poor girl was in labor, and they had already been turned away from every other Inn in town. Well, I couldn’t turn away a woman in labor, so I rented them a corner of my stable. A couple of hours later, my youngest daughter woke me. She heard noises outside. I told her to stay behind while I went to see what was happening. I don’t know what I expected to find, but I can tell you I wasn’t prepared for what I saw. The stable was packed with shepherds. It looked like they’d just driven their entire flock in from the hills to come gawk at something in my stable. And there were angels, not that I’d ever seen angles before, but that’s what they were, I’m sure of it. And in the middle of this wild and wonderful scene, was a beautiful baby boy. This young girl had given birth, and the manger was turned into a makeshift cradle. That’s when I heard the voice of my youngest. She had followed me, too curious to stay behind. She walked up to the baby and began to sing. (He steps aside, and we see a backdrop painted with a manger scene and people dressed as Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, Shepherds, Wise men and Amber waiting to sing.)
Song: The Gift You Are

Amber: Prophets told of His birth
Son of God came to earth as a King
Star so bright through the night
Shows the way
Born this day
Is a King, is a King

The gift You are
The hope you bring
Pouring out forgiveness
Changing everything
With grace in hand
You saw my heart
And did for me what no one else could do
That’s when You became the gift You are

Church Choir: Shepherds heard, angels sing
Wise men bow, gifts they bring to a King
Humble place, see God’s face
Holy Child, meek and mild
Is the King, He is the King

The gift You are
The hope you bring
Pouring out forgiveness
Changing everything
With grace in hand
You saw my heart
And did for me what no one else could do
That’s when You became the gift You are

Your love is never ending
Your love will never change
Your love will go the distance
No matter how far

Your love is never ending
Your love will never change
Your love will go the distance
No matter how far

The gift You are
The hope you bring
Pouring out forgiveness
Changing everything
With grace in hand
You saw my heart
And did for me what no one else
And did for me what no one else
And did for me what no one else could do
That’s when You became the gift You are

Rev: The Babe in that manger grew to be an extraordinary man. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, and did all manner of miracles. He taught us about God’s Kingdom. And then He gave His life in exchange for our sin and rose again, defeating death and opening the gates of heaven for us to enter. He lives today and offers hope for the hopeless and life everlasting - the free gift of salvation for all who will receive it. I can’t think of a better Christmas gift. Merry Christmas, and may God bless you.

(Lights come back up on the crowd and people begin to mingle. The room should gradually empty leaving only Rev., Tony, and Sara by the end.)

Sara: Tony, I really am glad you came.

Tony: I made a promise, didn’t I?

Sara: So, who’s watching the restaurant?

Tony: Nobody, I just closed up for the night. In fact, I may have closed up for good. I think it’s time to throw in the towel. I’m going to call Leanne later, and we’ll see what happens from there.

Sara: I’m so sorry.

Tony: It’s okay. So, are you headed to the dessert reception?

Sara: Honestly, I’m starved. I haven’t had dinner and I cannot begin to face that many desserts with a stomach this empty.

Tony: Well, I know a place we could probably get right in. Why don’t you let me make you dinner?

Sara: That sounds nice. Just let me tell Nana where I’ll be, and I’ll meet you there.

Amber: (running up to Tony) Mr. Tony! Did you like my song?

Tony: I loved your song.

Amber: Then why do you look so sad?

Tony: Do I look sad?

Amber: Nana says that when a person is happy it shows in their eyes. Your eyes look sad.

Tony: I just have a lot on my mind right now.
Amber: Like what?
Amber: Well, I think I might have to close my restaurant and go back to TV. I don't really want to, but I can't really see another way.
Amber: Did you ask God?
Tony: I don't think God cares about my restaurant.
Amber: Daddy says God cares about everything and everybody.
Charlie: (from across the room) Amber, sweetheart, you need to come on. We're heading over to get some cake.
Amber: When you don't know what to do, you should always ask God because He has a plan. Do you want me to ask Him for you?
Tony: I think that would be great.

(Amber runs to meet Charlie and both exit. Reverend approaches Tony)

Rev: I'm sorry, but I couldn't help overhearing what Amber was telling you. She's right, you know. God does care, and He does have a plan for you.
Tony: I guess I just have a hard time believing that.
Rev: Maybe that's because you don't really know who God is.
Tony: What?
Rev: Lots of people have their own idea of who God is, but few take the time to actually get to know Him. Christmas is a perfect example.
Tony: I'm not sure I follow you.
Rev: We celebrate Christmas, the time when Jesus came to earth as a baby and was laid in the manger. But we don't really take time to think about why He came. Sometimes we say that the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes was the first Christmas gift. But the gift wasn't the baby, that was just the package the gift came in. The gift was life - His life for ours. And just like any gift, the gift of salvation he offers is free for the taking. What we do with it is up to us.
Tony: Just like that.
Rev: Just like that. When we accept His gift, we get the promise of eternity, but we also get to spend our lives here getting to know Him and living out the plan He has for us. The Bible says it's a plan to give us the future we hope for.
Tony: Wouldn't that be nice.
Rev: It certainly is.

Tony: Reverend, I promised a certain young lady I’d cook her dinner. Can we talk more about this later?

Rev: Anytime.

(Tony shakes the Reverend’s hand and heads for the door. Lights fade)
Scene 12

(Chef Tony’s Kitchen. As the lights come up we see Chef Tony entering the empty restaurant. He looks up and begins to speak)

Tony: God, I’m not sure if You really exist. Honestly, I feel a little silly even talking to You. But if You are listening and You do have a plan, I want to know what it is, because I’ve sure made a mess of things on my own.

Song: If You Hear Me

Tony: Where did I go wrong? What else could I do? There is nothing left that I can hold on to. I had to take a chance; do what I thought I should. I’m not sure what I’d change even if I could

If you hear me, If you’re real
You must know how I feel
If you see me, if you care
Search my heart, hear my prayer

I want to believe, make a brand new start
If You can fill the emptiness inside my heart
I give my life to You, receive the hope You bring,
I need Your gift of love that changes ev’rything,

If you hear me, If you’re real
You must know how I feel
If you see me, if you care
Search my heart, hear my prayer

I need to carry on
Please help me to be strong
My will to try is gone
I can’t do this on my own

If you hear me, If you’re real
You must know how I feel
If you see me, if you care
Search my heart, hear my prayer
Hear my prayer

(song ends with Tony on his knees)

Tony: I’m so tired of doing things on my own. I need your help. I want the gift Mac talked about. I want the faith that Sara has – that Amber has. I need to know that you’re thinking about me and that I’m not all alone. Please!
Sara: (off stage) Tony? (she walks in) Are you looking for something?

Tony: No, I think I just found it actually... I hope you like Italian. I was just going to throw together one of my mom’s old standbys.

Sara: Ah, so pasta tonight!

Tony: Yep, seems like Momma always had a pot of water ready for pasta. Tonight, it's angel hair with a little garlic, some leftover grilled chicken, some roma tomatoes, and basil. I like to make it when I need something quick and easy.

Sara: Sounds yummy.

Charlie: Be right back. (he heads to the kitchen, Sara continues to talk, raising her voice to be heard in the kitchen)

Sara: So, you and Reverend McCullough seemed to be having a really interesting conversation.

Tony: Yes, you could say that. I’m thinking that my status as “not much of a churchgoer” may be in danger.

Sara: Oh, really? That must have been some conversation.

Tony: (returning with two plates) Dinner for two in a private setting, no less! Here you go. Bon Appetit. Tell me something, do you think me coming here and buying this place was all part of some grand plan?

Sara: I think it was. Otherwise Grampa wouldn’t have been able to retire. And we would probably never have met.

Tony: So, God’s plan was for us to meet?

Sara: I like to think so.

Tony: And for me to fail?

Sara: I don’t know about the failing part. I have a feeling God’s not through with this place just yet.

Tony: Well, He might not be, but I am.

(serves up the food)

Sara: Ummm, now this is good.

Tony: Thanks, just a little comfort food.

Sara: No, this is what you should be serving! People would eat this up, uh – no pun intended.

Tony: You know you may be on to something. It’s inexpensive, not fussy at all.
Sara: There’s nothing else like it in town.

Tony: Really? Wait a second... you know, it wouldn’t take much to switch the decor to a casual Italian look. I could make the change... and reopen before Christmas... Sara, I want you to be a part of it!

Sara: Sure, I could feature the new place on my holiday podcast.

Tony: No, I don’t mean just helping remake the restaurant. Sara, I want you to be a part of all of it.

Sara: Tony, what are you saying?

Tony: I’m saying that I have been captivated by you since you ate off my plate at that Christmas party a year ago.

Sara: *(a little stunned at his choice of words)* Captivated?

Tony: Completely. I know this sounds silly, but when I bought this place, I had this dream that I could get you to work with me, and we would be wildly successful, and I’d somehow sweep you off your feet.

Sara: *(almost dreamlike)* Sweep me...

Tony: Right off your feet.

**Song: Dance with You for a Lifetime**

Sara: Didn’t meet the way I thought we would

Tony: You didn’t act the way I thought you should
But even at first glance, it seemed there was no chance for anything more

Sara: But things began to change

Tony: My whole world rearranged

Tony & Sara: I wanna dance with you for a lifetime
Hold you close to my heart
When I’m with you, it feels like the world stands still
I wanna dance with you for a lifetime
To music we only hear
There’s no other place I’d rather be
Than dancing with you for a lifetime

Tony: I didn’t really sweep you off your feet

Sara: Couldn’t say you made me feel complete

Tony: There was a connection
Sara: But not the perfection I was looking for

Tony: Still you caught my eye

Sara: I didn’t even try

Tony & Sara: I wanna dance with you for a lifetime
            Hold you close to my heart
            When I’m with you, it feels like the world stands still
            I wanna dance with you for a lifetime
            To music we only hear
            There’s no other place I’d rather be
            Than dancing with you for a lifetime

Tony: For a lifetime

Sara: For a lifetime

Tony: For a lifetime

Tony & Sara: We’ll dance forever
            Never let go
            As years go by our love will grow
            We’ll dance forever
            Never let go

Tony: As Years go by

Sara: As Years go by

Tony: As Years go by

Tony & Sara: I wanna dance with you for a lifetime
            Hold you close to my heart
            When I’m with you, it feels like the world stands still
            I wanna dance with you for a lifetime
            To music we only hear
            There’s no other place I’d rather be
            Than dancing with you
            Dancing with you

Tony: For a lifetime

Sara: For a lifetime

Tony: For a lifetime

Sara: For a lifetime
Tony: For a lifetime

Sara: For a lifetime

Tony: So, what do you say, Sara? *(Gets on one knee and takes her hand)* Will you marry me?

Sara: I say this is the best Christmas ever ... consider me swept.

Tony: Really? You’ll marry me?

Sara: Try to stop me!

*(Sara kisses Tony and they exit as music plays off the scene and lights fade)*
Scene 13

(Lights up in Grampa and Nana’s place)

Nana: Joe, you don’t suppose that if this place tanks like the last one, Tony will take Sara off to Paris or somewhere.

Grampa: Oh, this new place isn’t gonna tank. I’d bet my retirement on it.

Nana: What makes you so sure.

Grampa: I dropped by this afternoon. There’s love in the food.

Nana: There’s what?

Grampa: Never mind, I just know.

Nana: Do you think Sara’s happy now.

Grampa: She was happy before.

Nana: She was lonely before.

Grampa: Well, she’s not lonely now. I’ve never seen her happier.

Nana: She does look happy. (phone rings) Oh, it’s Martha. Hello, Martha!

Grampa: Betty, we’re going to be late as it is.

Nana: (shushing him) Yes! Wait til you see the ring, Martha. It’s an Italian Heirloom.

Grampa: She means it was his grandmother’s ring.

Nana: Well, she was from Italy, wasn’t she?.. What’s that, Martha? ...Of course, we'll be there.

Grampa: Not if we don’t get going.

Nana: Oh alright, grumpy pants! No, not you, Martha. I was talking to Joe. We’ll see you there. Uh-huh. Bye. (Lights down)
Scene 13

(Lights up on the new Tony's Place)

Tony: Merry Christmas, Mayor, Mrs. Humphries. It’s good to see you again! How did the cooking lessons go?

Mayor: Not so well. But the fire chief said most of the damage was superficial, and once the painters finish, the smoke smell should be gone.

Tony: So,... same spot tomorrow night?

Mayor: If it’s available.

Tony: Always for you, Mayor.

(Joe and Betty arrive, Polly greets them)

Polly: What can I get you two?

Nana: How’s the Fettuccini Alfredo?

Polly: Alfredo himself would be proud.

Nana: Then that’s what I’ll have.

(Tony starts to make his way over)

Polly: Joe, for you, I'd suggest the beef stew.

Grampa: Italian beef stew?

Tony: No, this one's an old family recipe from her side of the family.

Grampa: Sounds delicious.

Song: We Are Open - Reprise

We are open and we're cooking
If you're hungry come here looking
You're sure to leave here full and satisfied
When the chef is in the kitchen
You should have no apprehension
Each dish is made with care and served with pride
Our salads crisp and green
Fresh Italian our cuisine
With pasta made each day
There simply is no other way
No way!
Ravioli or Stromboli
For dessert try our cannoli
Maybe just a plate of fruit with cheese
Try our chicken scaloppini
Or perhaps some fresh linguini
Any choice you make will please
Our salads crisp and green
Fresh Italian our cuisine.
With pasta made each day
There simply is no other way

We are open and we're cooking
When you're hungry come here looking
You're sure to leave here full and satisfied
Enjoy a meal that's made and served with pride

Tony: Merry Christmas, Reverend McCullough!
Rev: Tony, it's been great seeing you and Sara together in Church.
Tony: Well, you know, she's turning me into quite the church goer lately.
Rev: That's what happens when you start going to church for a girl and find the Savior.
Tony: Thanks, Reverend. The last few weeks, my whole life has changed! I can't ever remember a better Christmas than this one. It has a whole new meaning now. Actually, to be honest with you, after we had that talk and I prayed, lots of things have been changing. And, you know, none of this would have happened (looking at Amber) without a certain little girl's very wise words.

Rev: Tony, I can tell you with certainty that that prayer was just the beginning.

Tony: Speaking of beginnings, my new business partner is in love with me!
Sara: How can I not be? He swept me off my feet!
Rev: You have a lot to look forward to. (to Sara) Have you set a date for the wedding?
Sara: Yes, March 2, my dad's birthday.
Tony: We were hoping you would be able to do the honors.
Rev: I'll be there.

Entire Cast: We all will!

(Laughs, smiles and hugs as song begins . . . a few more people enter the restaurant as the song begins)
**Song:** Here with you & My Favorite Time (reprise)

**Tony:** When we first me you insulted my food
**Sara:** When we first met I found you a bit crude
**Tony:** You helped me see from a new point of view
**Sara:** And I finally gave you a five star review
**Tony:** I can’t think of anywhere I’d rather be than standing right here with you
**Sara:** I can’t think of any words I rather say than yes, I do!
**Tony and Sara:** I can’t dream anything, sing anything,

hope for or wish for or find anything more than I have found in you

(Seated Cast begins to stand, and others enter the restaurant)

**Cast Sings:** Christmas brings us all together
and love is in the air
Christmas brings us all together
A time to show we care
More than dishes, more than wishes
God sent His Son
And He is the One who makes
Christmastime our favorite time
Christmas is our favorite time
Christmas is our favorite time of year!

The End