

THE BOOK OF SANTA

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"THE BOOK OF SANTA"

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

A mini-van drives down a congested city street. It's snowing and the roads are icy.

INT. MINI-VAN - NIGHT

JILL CRAWFORD, a woman in her late 20s, is driving while talking on her cell phone. She occasionally glances over her shoulder at the back seat.

JILL

Come on, give me a break. I'll look for that tomorrow. Gee sis, it's the first day of shopping. Don't panic.

Stacked neatly on the seat behind her are several boxes, all wrapped with Christmas decor. Jill smiles as she drives and listens, her cell phone smashed against her ear.

JILL

We can still get together tomorrow night, can't we? You know I want that recipe...

Jill listens a moment then responds emphatically but still with playfulness in her voice.

JILL

Hey sis, you promised! If we had Christmas at my house this year, you'd give me that 'famous' dressing recipe of yours. Remember?

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

The Mini-Van leaves the city streets and approaches a busy, four-lane highway intersection. The light turns from yellow to red. Jill comes to a stop.

INT. MINI-VAN - NIGHT

JILL

I don't remember a CD for Judy anywhere in the deal. But...

Jill looks over her shoulder at the stack of Christmas presents. A couple of unwrapped CD's are sandwiched in between.

JILL

As luck would have it, Santa already got her a CD. It's the...uh...I can't remember. Just a sec.

Jill unbuckles her belt, reaches over the seat and grabs for one of the CD's. She misses and in the process, her foot leaves the brake.

The car inches forward. She doesn't notice.

Jill grabs again. This time she snags the CD's and pulls them to the front seat, gazing at them the entire time.

She again presses the phone against her ear and reads the label, unaware the Mini-Van is still continuing to crawl forward.

JILL

No, I think it's their second album. I bought both just in case...

EXT. HIGHWAY INTERSECTION - NIGHT

A semi-truck pulling two trailers tops the hill and heads directly toward the Mini-Van, which is now in the center of the intersection. The truck's horn begins to blow.

INT. MINI-VAN - NIGHT

Jill snaps her head toward the sound and realizes what's about to happen. A terrified look captures her face.

JILL

Oh my God!

EXT. HIGHWAY INTERSECTION - NIGHT

The truck swerves away from the Mini-Van and slams on its brakes. The trailers whip around the truck's pulling point like a tether ball attached to a pole.

Smoke boils from the tires as the rear trailer smashes into the Mini-Van just behind the engine compartment, on the passenger's side.

Like a bat hitting a ball, the Mini-Van careens into the oncoming traffic and miraculously misses every vehicle by only inches.

The van hits a curb, popping it into the air and sending it side-over-side toward a ravine. It rolls down the steep hill like a square tube, until coming to rest upside down.

In every direction, cars skid to a stop but amazingly, all miss each other. There's not another single wreck.

The semi-truck also manages to stop without hitting anyone or anything else. The driver jumps out and runs toward the ravine. Others are doing the same.

INT. MINI-VAN - NIGHT

Jill lay motionless. The deployed steering wheel airbag has her legs pressed against her chin. The gifts are scattered about the inside of the Mini-Van.

Her sister's voice can be heard over the cell phone she still clutches in one hand.

VOICE

Jill! What's happened? Jill, can you hear me? Jill!

Folks begin crowding around the Mini-Van, trying to force the door open.

The picture slowly dissolves to a close-up view of a heart monitor, the sound cross-fades to a slow, steady BEEP.

INT. JILL'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Next to the monitor, Jill lays in a hospital bed, her eyes closed, her arms at her side with multiple wires and tubes attached to each. Her head is wrapped with a bandage.

Sitting beside the bed is Jill's husband, STEVEN CRAWFORD. Although Steve is only in his early 30's much of his full head of hair has already begun to turn gray.

The room is adorned with flowers and "Get Well Soon" cards. A small Christmas tree stands in the corner with several wrapped gifts underneath.

Steve gazes at the paperwork in his hand, then looks up at Jill. Although his eyes are puffy and he looks exhausted, he forces a smile at his wife's expressionless face.

STEVE

Can you believe it? Straight 'A's' in every class. Seems we've raised a genius.

Steve stands and steps toward his wife.

STEVE

And, she won first place with that costume your sister made for her. She was so cute. A little Mrs. Santa Claus.

He leans over the bed and gently strokes his wife's soft cheek.

STEVE

I took tons of video so you won't miss a thing after you come out of this. I'm so proud of her...you will be too.

A tear wells up in Steve's eye and drops on Jill's cheek.

STEVE

She misses you so much...I miss you so much. Our first Christmas without you...I still can't believe it.

A knock at the door. Steve bites his trembling lip. He wipes the tear from Jenny's face and his eyes. He turns toward the door and clears his throat.

STEVE

Come in.

An older lady in a nurse's uniform, JENNY, slowly steps in. She speaks softly and with respect.

JENNY

Steve? It's time, honey.

STEVE

Sure. I'll be right there.

Steve leans over and kisses his wife's cheek. Then returns to the chair and gathers his things.

Jenny steps over to the bed and gazes at the monitors. She speaks with a slight Cajun accent.

JENNY

Now don't you worry, I'll take good care of her tonight.

Steve forces a smile through his blood shot eyes.

STEVE

You do every night, Jenny.

He begins to stare at Jill. Jenny steps over and gently rubs his arm.

JENNY

You know I'll call the minute anything changes.

Steve looks down then at Jenny. He pats her hand.

STEVE

Thank you. You've been so supportive. I don't know how I could've made it without you.

Jenny smiles, gives his arm a quick rub and steps back over to the monitors.

JENNY

You're welcome, honey. Now you run on home and take care of that little darling. I'm sure 'Santa' still has some work to do tonight.

STEVE

Yes he does, as a matter of fact.

Jenny presses buttons on the monitor.

JENNY

What did Natalie ask Santa for this year?

STEVE

You know that's strange. Usually she gives me her list to mail to Santa. But this year when I asked her about it, she said she had 'already taken care of it.' I just had to take my best guess.

Jenny chuckles.

JENNY

They do grow up fast. You don't think she's stopped believing in Santa do you?

STEVE

I don't think so, but with all that's happened in the last month, I've thought about telling her the truth after Christmas...

JENNY

I wouldn't do that.

Jenny stops pressing buttons, turns and gazes at Steve.

JENNY

Santa is hope to that little darling.
Don't take that away from her. Not now,
right here at Christmas.

STEVE

But Santa can't bring her mother back.
He isn't even real.

JENNY

Belief is real. And that's what Santa
is all about.

Jenny steps toward him.

JENNY

Belief in someone good, loving,
compassionate, generous, who always
watches over us and takes care of us.
Sound familiar?

STEVE

God?

Jenny now stands in front of Steve.

JENNY

You see honey, God gives you the choice
to either believe or not. He won't
force it on you. But he can't work his
miracles unless you believe. So as
crazy as it sounds, the first step to
receiving, is believing.

STEVE

I'm trying. But I have to be realistic.

Steve gazes longingly at his wife. Jenny joins him.

JENNY

I believe she's going to be just fine.

He looks over at Jenny.

STEVE

Thank you for your faith, Jenny.

Jenny smiles.

JENNY

Merry Christmas, Steve. Now you go on
home and start being Santa for that
little one. I'll see you tomorrow.

Steve bends over and kisses Jill's cheek again. He lowers his voice to almost a whisper.

STEVE

Merry Christmas, my love.

Steve gives Jenny a quick nod then heads for the exit. He stops at the door, looks over his shoulder at Jill for a moment, then disappears into the hall.

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - NIGHT

The garage door of a typical suburbia residence opens as a car slowly pulls in the snow-cleared driveway. The car stops then creeps into a dark garage.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A flickering fireplace spreads its light across a well appointed living room. Beside it, a decorated Christmas tree adds color to the light show.

A teenage girl, CHRISTI, sits on a love seat next to a very large bookcase. Her legs are curled underneath her as she reads a book.

Across from the love seat, Steve's six year old daughter, NATALIE, snuggles beneath a blanket on the sofa. Her gorgeous blue eyes darting between the flames and the tree.

An unseen door is heard opening. Natalie throws back the blanket and springs to her feet. Christi places a marker in the book, lays it on the sofa and stands.

As Steve steps into the living room Natalie runs to him, grabs his legs and gives them a hug.

NATALIE

Daddy!

Steve bends down and picks up his daughter.

STEVE

Hey little girl.

He hugs her and kisses her cheek, then glances at the sofa.

STEVE

What are you doing down here?

Christi steps up.

CHRISTI

I'm sorry Mr. Crawford, but she wanted to sleep on the sofa until you got home.

Natalie speaks with an adult demeanor, very matter-of-fact.

NATALIE

I had to make sure you put out the fire before Santa gets here.

Steve and Christi chuckle. Natalie continues with her serious expression.

NATALIE

I don't want him to get burned!

STEVE

Don't worry sweetie, I'll put out the fire. Now, let me take care of Christi so she can go home and wait for Santa too.

Natalie smiles.

NATALIE

Okay. Bye, Christi.

Christi reaches over and kisses Natalie on the cheek.

CHRISTI

Bye bye Natalie. Merry Christmas.

NATALIE

Merry Christmas to you too.

Steve sits Natalie down. Immediately she scrambles back to the sofa. Steve reaches in his pocket as he escorts Christi to the door.

Steve hands Christi a hundred dollar bill. She looks at it with amazement, then hands it back to him.

CHRISTI

Mr. Crawford, this is too much...

He smiles and gently pushes Christi's hand back toward her.

STEVE

Please take it. I wish it were more...

CHRISTI

Mr. Crawford...

STEVE

Christi, you've been watching over
Natalie for weeks. You deserve it.

Christi smiles.

STEVE

You don't know what a relief it's been
knowing that you're here, taking great
care of her.

CHRISTI

Thank you, Mr. Crawford.

Steve opens the door.

STEVE

Goodnight, Christi. Tell your folks I
said 'hello.'

CHRISTI

Goodnight, Mr. Crawford. Merry
Christmas.

Christi gives Steve a quick hug and steps out into the
night while pushing the bill into her pocket.

STEVE

Merry Christmas.

Steve closes the door and heads for the sofa.

Natalie scoots over to one end as her father takes the
cushion beside her.

NATALIE

Is mommy still sleeping?

STEVE

Yes sweetie, mommy's still sleeping.

NATALIE

That's okay, she'll be home tomorrow.

Steve looks perplexed.

STEVE

What makes you say that?

NATALIE

I don't know. It's just...what I
believe.

STEVE

Natalie, remember we talked about the possibility that mommy might not wake up. That she might go live with God?

NATALIE

I remember, daddy.

STEVE

Well, we've got to be prepared that may happen any day. Maybe even tomorrow.

NATALIE

I know that's what you say daddy, but it won't happen. She's not ready to go live with God yet.

STEVE

How do you know?

Now it's Natalie that looks perplexed. She gazes at her father with a wrinkled brow and speaks with an authoritative tone.

NATALIE

Because God told me. I asked him if mommy could stay with us and he said 'yes.' And God always keeps his word. Right daddy?

A painful look comes across Steve's face. He leans back in the cushion, gazes at the fireplace and speaks under his breath.

STEVE

Of course...he does, sweetie.

A moment passes as Steve gazes at the flames. Natalie sits up, scoots over to him and positions herself face to face.

NATALIE

Daddy, did God make everybody?

STEVE

Well, yea, he made Adam and Eve. So, I suppose you could say God made everybody.

NATALIE

If God made everybody, did he make Santa too?

Steve gazes at his daughter.

STEVE

Natalie, There's something I've been meaning to tell you. Santa isn't real...

He stares into her wide, innocent eyes, ready to absorb his every word.

A second later, he glances off to a nearby bookcase and picks up his sentence as if he'd never stopped talking.

STEVE

...really much different than us. He was born, just like you and me, but a long time ago. And Santa was such a generous fellow that after he grew up, God gave him special powers.

NATALIE

Like Jesus?

Steve cracks a smile.

STEVE

Sort of. They were good friends.

Natalie is now transfixed on her father.

NATALIE

Tell me more, daddy.

STEVE

If I tell you the story, will you go to sleep in your bed tonight?

NATALIE

But daddy, I have to make sure you put out the fire...and...I wanted to see Santa.

STEVE

Natalie, Santa is shy, he doesn't like people watching him. And I promise I'll put out the fire.

Natalie looks off as if considering her father's words. Then, looks back and smiles.

NATALIE

Okay daddy, if you'll tell me the story.

STEVE

Deal.

Steve glances at the bookcase. He stands and walks to it.

STEVE

Now, let's see...

He slowly looks closely at the books.

STEVE

...the whole story is somewhere in this
bookcase...

And selects an "Encyclopedia Britannia."

STEVE

Ah. Here it is. The 'Book of Santa.'

Steve returns to his place on the sofa. He opens the book and starts turning the pages as Natalie snuggles back under her blanket.

STEVE

You see, Santa was born just a few
years before Jesus. He was even raised
in the same town. That's how they
became friends.

He flips through about a third of the pages and gazes at the book.

STEVE

Here we are.

A close up of the encyclopedia shows he's turned to a page about wildlife in South America. Steve begins to "read."

STEVE

In the year Jesus Christ was born,
there lived a man, Santos, who had a
son named Nickolas.

Steve's voice continues as the picture fades into a hand holding a small rectangular piece of wood between the thumb and forefinger.

STEVE

Santos was a maker of 'toys and
amusements' for an evil king. A tyrant
named Herod...

INT. HERODIUM - EAST OF BETHLEHEM - DAY

The hand twirls the tiny block which looks exactly like a wooden version of a Lego piece, with three raised circles on the top and three circular indentions on the bottom.

Studying the block is HEROD, an older man in his late 60's with a long, white beard. He's dressed as a king and standing in a room with lavish furnishings.

He looks up and wrinkles his brow.

HEROD

And this is for...what?

Across the room SANTOS, a handsome man in his 30's, stands beside a table with the wooden blocks stacked in the shape of a horse.

He grabs a couple of them and demonstrates.

SANTOS

Well, your Excellency, each block can be interlocked with another, creating endless possibilities of shapes and forms.

Santos continues to lock blocks together as Herod steps to the wooden horse sculpture and examines it.

SANTOS

Using these blocks to create different forms will not only be educational for the young ones, but fun as well...

Herod makes a fist and backhands the statue sending the tiny wooden blocks flying about the room. His face fills with anger.

HEROD

No self respecting child would play with these absurd blocks of wood! What you have brought me is little better than common rocks!

Santos begins to collect the scattered pieces of what was the horse.

SANTOS

I beg your forgiveness, your Excellency. I just thought the young ones would enjoy building models of your great works.

He lays the gathered pieces on the table and looks around the room.

SANTOS

This magnificent palace, the Temple Mount. Perhaps even a statue of yourself.

Herod's face instantly softens. His eyes roll to one side as he ponders.

HEROD

Every child building a statue of me?

SANTOS

I could shape different pieces in your likeness that when put together, would form...a statue. Yes, a statue in the likeness of a great king.

HEROD

You believe children would find these 'blocks' enjoyable?

SANTOS

Absolutely, your Excellency! I will wager it will take a league of craftsmen just to keep up with the demand.

Herod thinks for a moment then looks at Santos.

HEROD

Very well toymaker, build your blocks. You may use the statue in the foyer as a guide.

A huge smile comes over Santos. He moves toward Herod.

SANTOS

Oh, thank you your Excellency, thank you so much...

Herod quickly turns and claps his hands twice. Two young, beautiful women step in. Each take Herod by an arm. The trio strolls toward an arched opening.

HEROD

I will want to see sketches by the end of the week.

SANTOS

Certainly your Excellency. Thank you again!

Santos watches as Herod and his entourage disappear through the arch. Instantly his smile dissolves. He shakes his head and begins to gather the blocks.

EXT. BETHLEHEM - NIGHT

Santos walks along a road just outside the village carrying a lantern. Over his shoulder he totes a red bag bulging with square protrusions, obviously the wooden blocks.

As he passes a field of sheep he notices they are all standing perfectly still and looking at the same spot in the sky. He stops and follows their gaze.

In the night sky, a star pulsating with light, becomes ever more brilliant and growing larger by the second.

Not far from Santos a group of shepherds catches his attention. They too are gawking at the bright spectacle. He makes his way toward them.

As he approaches the group, a small glowing orb emerges from the star and rockets toward them. Only a few feet above the frightened shepherds, it stops and hovers.

The shepherds cover their faces and kneel to the ground, but Santos quickens his pace toward it, curiously staring at the object as he moves to within feet of it.

Suddenly, the orb morphs into a beautiful female Angel. Santos stops, drops his belongings and stares in disbelief. The Angel speaks with a soft but reverberant voice.

ANGEL

Fear not! For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

One-by-one the shepherds slowly look up.

ANGEL

For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Many orbs emerge from the star and rocket toward Earth. Almost instantly the sky is filled with brilliant orbs, hovering just feet above the landscape.

The orbs morph into Angels, some male and some female. Their glow illuminates the countryside and they begin to sing in a beautiful choir of voices.

ANGELS

Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace, good will toward men.

Santos steps back and gazes at the sky. His face fills with wonderment as his eyes follow the singing Angels darting across the sky.

The first female Angel swoops down to Santos' eye level, hovers and smiles. Then, she and all the others bolt skyward. Within seconds, they all merge with the star.

The star quickly shrinks and vanishes into the night sky. The shepherds begin to stand and look at each other with dumbfounded gazes. One of them steps forward.

SHEPHERD #1

Let us go to Bethlehem.

Another shepherd speaks up.

SHEPHERD #2

Yes, let us see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.

The shepherds collectively agree and hurry off toward lights on the horizon. Santos picks up his bag and lantern and tags along.

EXT. BETHLEHEM - JUST OUTSIDE THE MANGER - NIGHT

Santos is now leading the shepherds as they step quickly toward the manger. He addresses the group.

SANTOS

The Angel said the child would be wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

He points to the manger.

SANTOS

The only one I know of inside the city of David is next to the Inn.

Santos and the shepherds converge on the manger. They peek around the corner of it's open front.

Inside they see Mary rocking and singing to the baby Jesus with Joseph at her side. Santos and the men respond with a ever-broadening smile across their faces.

INT. SANTOS' HOME - NIGHT

Santos' wife, ELIZABETH, attends a steaming pot hanging just above the flames in a fireplace. A table with places for three stands nearby in this modest, two room home.

In the second room, five year old NICOLAS, their son, creates a remarkable cadence as he taps lightly on a small drum. Elizabeth hums to the beat.

The door opens. Santos steps in and sits down his red bag. Elizabeth turns and smiles. The drumming stops and a second later, Nicolas runs in.

NICOLAS

Father!

SANTOS

I have wonderful news.

Santos sits at the table. Nicolas crawls into his lap.

ELIZABETH

Was the king pleased with your new toys?

Elizabeth also takes a seat at the table.

SANTOS

Yes, but that is not the good news.

NICOLAS

What is it, father?

SANTOS

Tonight, a new king was born not far from here.

ELIZABETH

A king? You mean the son of Herod?

SANTOS

The son of God almighty. Our Savior, the Messiah we have been waiting for.

ELIZABETH

The prophets predicted this.

SANTOS

And it has happened. I saw the Angels of God with my own eyes and have seen the child. He lies in a manger next to the Inn.

ELIZABETH

A manger?

Nicolas hops off his father's lap.

NICOLAS

Can we go see him father?

SANTOS

Well, yes, I would think so. But we have no gifts to take him...

Nicolas runs into the other room and returns with the small drum. He drapes a rope over his shoulder that holds the instrument at waist level. He speaks with authority.

NICOLAS

I can play a song for the new king.

SANTOS

Nicolas, a song is not a gift. I do not think tonight is the appropriate time...

Elizabeth leans over and touches Santos' hand.

ELIZABETH

Why not my husband? Your son plays well. You are a good teacher and he has been practicing diligently. Nicolas will not embarrass you.

Santos squirms a bit.

SANTOS

Of course, it is not embarrassment...

ELIZABETH

Then let him play. You did make the drum for him. Did you not?

SANTOS

Well...yes...

ELIZABETH

And who is to say a song is not a gift? A song is a beautiful gift.

The father looks down at his son.

SANTOS

Very well, Nicolas. But only one song.

A large grin covers Nicolas' face.

NICOLAS

Thank you father!

EXT. OUTSIDE BETHLEHEM - NIGHT

A very excited Nicolas runs ahead of Santos and Elizabeth as they make their way toward the city.

SANTOS

Nicolas!

ELIZABETH

Let him be my husband. He knows his way to the Inn.

Behind them three men on horseback approach. They are dressed in fine clothing, much as kings. Each has two large bags hanging from their saddle.

Santos and Elizabeth stop as one of the men pulls up beside them. He smiles and holds up his hand.

MAN

Greetings. May the glory of God be with you on this marvelous night.

SANTOS

And with you also, sir.

MAN

We are from the East and have followed the star to this place. Do you know where we might find the newborn king? We have brought gifts and wish to worship him.

SANTOS

We are on our way now to worship him as well. It is not far, would you care to follow us?

MAN

That would be most generous of you, sir.

Santos and Elizabeth continue on their journey. The horsemen follow.

INT. BETHLEHEM - MANGER - NIGHT

With his drum at his side, the five year old wiggles his way through the crowd that has now gathered at the manger's opening.

Nicolas pops out on the other side directly in front of the baby Jesus, now lying in a wooden rocker. Mary and Joseph sit by his side.

Nicolas looks down at the rocker, then at Mary and Joseph.

NICOLAS

I am Nicolas. I have come to play a song...

A man steps from the crowd with an angry scowl.

MAN

Have you brought a gift for our new king?

Nicolas looks saddened.

NICOLAS

I am but a poor boy, sir. I have no gift fit for a king.

MAN

Then take that noise maker out of here!

A rejected Nicolas turns and steps away. Joseph stands.

JOSEPH

Wait!

Nicolas stops.

JOSEPH

Come back here, drummer boy.

The young drummer slowly turns and looks up at Joseph.

JOSEPH

You have a song prepared?

NICOLAS

Yes, sir! Shall I play for you, sir?

Joseph glances around the crowd.

JOSEPH

Yes. I for one would like to hear it.

Mary leans forward and smiles.

MARY

Please Nicolas, play for my son.

The man steps back into the crowd. Joseph re-seats himself. Nicolas adjusts the drum to his waist and pulls two sticks from his pocket. He starts a soft cadence.

As Nicolas plays, music from the song "Little Drummer Boy" fades in and matches his beat. Mary and Joseph, as well as the crowd, smile as the small musician plays from the heart.

Nicolas' eyes focus only on Jesus as he continues to tap out the rhapsody. The newborn king turns and looks back at the boy drummer. A baby smile crosses his face.

Santos and Elizabeth push through the crowd. They look pleased and proud of their son as they watch him tap out a second verse.

The scene fades out as Steve's voice fades in.

STEVE (O.C.)

And from that moment on, Jesus and Nicolas were destined to become great friends.

INT. THE CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Natalie sits on the edge of the sofa and looks at her father. Her voice is totally sincere.

NATALIE

Did they go to Bethlehem school together?

Steve chokes back a smile.

STEVE

No, not exactly. You see, Mary and Joseph actually lived in a town called Nazareth. Not long after Jesus was born, Nicolas' father quit working for King Herod and moved his family there. As a matter of fact, they moved into a house right next door to Jesus.

NATALIE

They were neighbors?

STEVE

That's right. Nicolas' father opened up his own toy shop, right behind Jesus' house.

NATALIE

A toy shop? Did Jesus and Nicolas work there too?

Steve grins.

STEVE

Nicolas did. His father taught him everything he knew about toy making. And Jesus learned woodworking from his father, who was a carpenter. When they were growing up, Jesus would hang out at the toy shop cutting and carving the wood that Nicolas would turn into toys. That's how they became such good friends.

NATALIE

But...where is Santa, daddy?

Steve squirms a bit.

STEVE

Uh, he's coming...

He grabs the encyclopedia and begins to "read" again.

STEVE

When Jesus was but twelve years old Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. But when they returned to Nazareth, they discovered Jesus had been left behind...

Steve's voice continues as the picture fades into masculine hands carving a wooden horse.

INT. SANTOS' TOY SHOP - DAY

Nicolas, who's now a handsome seventeen year old, sits on a short stool, carving the finishing touches to the head of what appears to be a rocking horse.

He grabs a wad of rope and attaches it to the "neck" of the horse, creating a "mane." With one finger he pushes it. The horse starts rocking.

The young man sits back, gazes at the sculpture and smiles as the rope mane swings back and forth.

The door burst open. Mary, Jesus' mother, steps in with a frantic look. She's obviously upset.

MARY

Nicolas!

The young man bolts to his feet as Mary quickly gazes around the shop.

NICOLAS

What is it?

MARY

Jesus is missing. I was hoping he was here with you.

NICOLAS

Missing? For how long?

MARY

He was supposed to return from Jerusalem with my cousin, but he never arrived at her house. He is not with any of our family or friends.

Mary begins to look a bit more frantic.

MARY

Nicolas, you must help me find him!

NICOLAS

Do not worry. I will travel immediately to Jerusalem and begin searching.

Mary hugs Nicolas.

MARY

Thank you Nicolas. You are such a precious friend. Joseph and I will follow as soon as he returns.

EXT. A JERUSALEM STREET - DAY

An adolescent JESUS walks straight and steady with a look of determination on his face. Nicolas appears from behind and trots toward him.

NICOLAS

Jesus!

Jesus stops and turns. Nicolas jogs up.

NICOLAS

Jesus, your parents have been searching for you for three days. They are worried into sorrow.

JESUS

I am sorry Nicolas. I meant them no worry. But I must be about my Father's work.

NICOLAS

Where have you been?

Jesus looks puzzled at the question.

JESUS

Why, in the Temple of course.

NICOLAS

I want you to stay right here while I go fetch your mother. She is over at...

JESUS

I can not stay here. I must go to the Temple. Now.

NICOLAS

Then I will accompany you...

JESUS

No!

Jesus reaches out and touches Nicolas' arm. He speaks gently.

JESUS

Nicolas, you are my closest friend. But this is something I must do without you.

Nicolas looks off with a bit of anguish.

JESUS

I hope you will understand. Please, tell my mother where I will be.

He looks back and studies Jesus for a moment.

NICOLAS

I suppose the time has come for you to begin fulfilling your destiny.

Jesus smiles.

JESUS

The time has come for both of us to begin fulfilling our destinies, my friend.

Nicolas reacts bewildered as Jesus turns and trots down the busy street. Steve's voice fades in.

STEVE (O.C.)

Although Nicolas and Jesus remained the best of friends, from that day on, Jesus spent most of his time at the Temple.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Nicolas sits at a drafting table, studying drawings.

STEVE (O.C.)

Nicolas eventually took over his father's shop and spent most of his time inventing new toys.

Nicolas and Jesus relax in a well landscaped yard.

STEVE (O.C.)

But they always made it a point to get together every now and then, staying up into the wee hours of the morning laughing and recounting stories about their young life. Then, one day...

INT. SANTOS' TOY SHOP - DAY

The door opens. Nicolas, now in his early thirties, steps in and walks over to what looks like a little red wagon with wooden spoke wheels. He notices a letter in it's bed.

Nicolas picks up the letter and gazes at it. Immediately, his eyes dart to the bottom. It's signed 'Jesus.' He can hear his friend's voice as he starts to read.

JESUS(O.C.)

Nicolas. The time has come for me travel the country and spread the Good News of God's word. You have been like a brother to me and I will forever treasure our friendship. But I must fulfill my destiny, as you must continue to fulfill yours. We will only see each other one more time before I depart this flesh. Until then, I bid you farewell. Your eternal friend.
Jesus.

Nicolas slowly lowers the letter and stares off into space. Steve's voice fades in.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Nicolas is painting the finishing touches to a doll's pretty smile.

STEVE (O.C.)

As the months passed, Nicolas missed his friend more and more. He spent much of his time alone, in the toy shop, focusing all of his efforts on improving his skills.

Nicolas hands the doll to a young girl.

STEVE (O.C.)

Soon, he became well known in the land as a fine craftsman and a generous man.

Nicolas is listening to a group of men on a busy street.

STEVE (O.C.)

Nicolas kept up with his friend Jesus through the many stories that swept the land, tales of his great wisdom and of the miracles he performed.

A fireplace crackles. It sheds light against the little red wagon. Nicolas is sitting in a corner, gazing at it, lost in thought.

STEVE (O.C.)

But still, Nicolas missed his friendship with Jesus. It had been over three years since he'd seen him. Over three years since he'd found that letter. Then one evening...

INT. SANTOS' TOY SHOP - DAY

A knock at the door. Nicolas walks over and opens it. Jesus' mother, Mary steps in.

MARY

Nicolas, I must speak with you. It is about Jesus.

Nicolas immediately smiles. His voice is full of excitement.

NICOLAS

Is Jesus coming home?

EXT. JERUSALEM - CITY STREET - DUSK

Jesus strolls down the crowded street alone.

NICOLAS

Jesus!

Nicolas trots up to him. Jesus seems genuinely surprised.

JESUS

Nicolas my old friend. What are you doing in Jerusalem?

NICOLAS

Where are you going?

JESUS

I'm going to meet my disciples. We are going to dine on the Passover meal...

NICOLAS

No! You must come with me. Now!

JESUS

I am sorry Nicolas, but I can do no such thing.

NICOLAS

Jesus, your life is in danger. As we speak there are those that conspire against you. Looking for the right moment to turn you over to the Romans...

JESUS

I know my friend. And it is as it should be.

NICOLAS

Please, Jesus, your parents and I beg you to return to Nazareth where it is safe...

Jesus takes Nicolas by the arm and leads him to a rock ledge. They sit.

JESUS

Nicolas, do you remember I said you would see me in the flesh only one more time?

Nicolas nods his head "yes."

JESUS

This is that time. Tomorrow I will fulfill my destiny and will be with our Father in heaven.

NICOLAS

You mean, you are going to let them take your life. I will not let that happen! I will accompany your every step...

JESUS

No Nicolas. Where I go tomorrow, you cannot follow. You must return to Nazareth and continue down your destiny's path, as I must continue down mine.

NICOLAS

But you will die!

JESUS

I will not die. In three days I will rise and live in spirit among the people. You must spend your remaining years on this Earth perfecting your craft, as our Father has for you a great mission that will honor us both.

NICOLAS

I will do anything to honor your memory.

JESUS

How about promising an old friend that you will do as he asks.

Nicolas looks away as a tear falls down his cheek.

NICOLAS

I promise.

Jesus stands.

JESUS

But now you must hurry back to Nazareth. You must not be in Jerusalem after dark.

NICOLAS

Can I not spend your last remaining hours with you?

JESUS

I am sorry Nicolas. I wish there were another way. But your heart cannot be tainted by what you would see. For now, our paths must part.

Nicolas stands and gives Jesus a big hug, then takes a step backwards. Tears are still falling down his cheek.

JESUS

Please do not grieve. It is not the end, but a glorious new beginning.

Jesus pats Nicolas' shoulders.

JESUS

Now go, and do not look back. I promise, we will speak again soon.

Jesus turns and walks away. Steve's voice fades in as Nicolas watches his friend disappear into the crowd.

STEVE (O.C.)

Just as Jesus had asked, Nicolas did go back to Nazareth that evening.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Nicolas ages as he toils away in his shop.

STEVE (O.C.)

He continued honing his skill, the art of toy making, giving away everything he made to the children of Nazareth. Nicolas lived a modest life and never moved the toy store away from that small shop his father built behind their house. Even after his parents passed away, he left the toy shop in his father's name.

Nicolas is on his knees praying.

STEVE (O.C.)

True to his word, Jesus did speak to Nicolas many times as the years passed, but only through visions and knowledge placed in his heart by the Holy Spirit.

Nicolas is now an old man with a white beard. Moving slowly, he tinkers at his work bench. A small drum and sticks hangs on the wall beside him.

STEVE (O.C.)

As with all men, Nicolas grew old. Then
one day...

INT. SANTOS' TOY SHOP - DAY

A knock at the door.

NICOLAS

One moment.

With difficulty, Nicolas stands. He grabs a cane to steady
himself and turns toward the door.

NICOLAS

Come in, please.

The door opens. Jesus steps in still looking young. Nicolas
drops the cane and has to grab onto the nearby chair to
keep from falling. Jesus quickly steps over to help him.

JESUS

I am sorry I startled you my old friend.

NICOLAS

'Old' is right.

Jesus helps ease Nicolas into a chair.

NICOLAS

Is it really you?

JESUS

Yes Nicolas. It is I, Jesus.

NICOLAS

But how can this be? You are in the
flesh.

JESUS

Our Father has bestowed it.

Jesus pulls up a chair and sits.

JESUS

Nicolas, I am here to make you an offer.

NICOLAS

An 'offer?'

JESUS

You once said you would do anything to
honor my memory. Do you still feel the
same?

NICOLAS

More so than ever. You need only ask
and I will gladly do your bidding.

JESUS

As I said, this is an offer, something
you may choose to do or not.

NICOLAS

How can I refuse an offer from God
delivered by his only son? I need not
hear it to say yes.

Jesus reaches out and touches Nicolas' arm.

JESUS

Nicolas, you will become immortal, a
spirit in human form much the same way
I'm appearing to you now. You would
live on Earth and be neither human nor
spirit, but both. And one night each
year, you will perform an enormous
task, one that will take an entire year
for which to prepare. Are you sure you
want to blindly accept this offer?

Nicolas looks Jesus in the eyes.

NICOLAS

Tell me what to do my Lord and I shall
do it.

Jesus smiles.

JESUS

Very well.

He stands, walks behind Nicolas and places his hands on his
shoulder.

JESUS

Sleep, my old friend. Sleep.

Nicolas' body slowly relaxes. His arms drop into his lap.

JESUS

Before you take on this great task, you
must live another human life, but in a
distant time from now. Your first life
was to perfect your craft, which you
have done admirably. God is well
pleased.

The cane falls from Nicolas' hand.

JESUS

Your next life will be a test of your faith and spirit for your heart must be strong with God to carry out his glorious plan.

Nicolas' eyes slowly close. Jesus kneels beside him.

JESUS

But I already know your heart is pure my dear friend. My faith in you is absolute.

Jesus steps to the front of an old, unconscious Nicolas and gently places his hand on his friend's forehead.

JESUS

Sleep Nicolas, as a new life awaits you.

Jesus' voice echoes as it fades out.

JESUS

A new life awaits you...a new life awaits you...

The picture fades to black as an unseen man's voice fades in.

MAN

Nicolas. Nicolas?

INT. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Nicolas, now back in his mid twenties, stares forward with a blank look on his face. Seated across the table is a man, well dressed for the era, who leans in toward him.

MAN

Nicolas? Are you alright?

Nicolas blinks as if just waking up.

NICOLAS

Yes, I am fine.

He gazes at the man.

NICOLAS

Please, indulge me. What year is this?

The man looks confused.

MAN

The year? It is the first year of the fourth century, three hundred and one. Why do you ask?

Now, it's Nicolas looking a bit confused. But only a moment passes before he recomposes himself and leans forward.

NICOLAS

Please, forgive me. I must have been lost in a daydream. You were saying?

The man picks up a scroll from his desk and hands it to Nicolas. He speaks politely.

MAN

I said, it appears a new life awaits you.

Nicolas reacts slightly.

MAN

This is title to the remaining portion of the inheritance.

The man hands the scroll to Nicolas.

MAN

Nicolas, I am sorry for your loss. But you are fortunate to have had such generous parents. They planned ahead well.

NICOLAS

I thank God every day for them.

Nicolas rolls up the scroll and tucks it into a red bag.

NICOLAS

I assure you, the money will be put toward the needy.

MAN

I am quite sure of that. You have been a generous man to the people of Patara.

Nicolas stands and extends his hand. The man follows and they shake.

NICOLAS

It has been an honor to have been of service and a pleasure knowing you.

MAN

You are leaving Patara?

NICOLAS

Yes. I will be moving to Myra within the month, as soon as I finish closing out my business dealings here.

MAN

May I wish you all the best. The city of Patara will miss you, Nicolas.

NICOLAS

I will miss it here as well.

Nicolas reaches over the table and pats the man's shoulder.

NICOLAS

Thank you for your wisdom through the years.

MAN

Good bye, Nicolas.

Nicolas drapes the strap of the red bag over his shoulder and heads for the door.

INT. NICOLAS' HOME - DAY

Nicolas steps into a home which is modestly decorated for the time. He pulls the bag's strap from his shoulder and tosses it on the floor.

He walks over to a nearby work bench and gazes at the half-finished wooden projects scattered about the top of it. He shakes his head then steps back to the red bag.

Nicolas removes one of the scrolls and takes a seat. He unrolls it and begins to read. SETH, a man in his early twenties, opens the door and steps in.

SETH

I am sorry I am late Mister Nicolas. My humble apology.

NICOLAS

And how many times have you been late my young apprentice?

Seth thinks a moment.

SETH

None that I remember, sir.

NICOLAS

Then your apology is accepted but certainly not required. Is all well?

The apprentice makes his way to the woodworking area. Nicolas lays the scroll down and follows.

SETH

I am afraid not.

NICOLAS

How so?

SETH

You remember my uncle Elijah, the merchant.

NICOLAS

Yes, we have spoken on a few occasions.

SETH

Last night men raided his home. They held his family at bay with knives while they took everything of value.

NICOLAS

What a terrible tragedy. Was anyone hurt?

SETH

No. My uncle was not home and I suppose the robbers found no honor in harming three helpless women.

NICOLAS

Thank God. At least all that was lost can be replaced.

SETH

It will not be that easy. They looted his daughters dowries of gold. Without dowries, no man will have my cousins.

NICOLAS

Rest assured, a man of fine stature will come along...

SETH

Mister Nicolas, I have heard my cousins talking among themselves. They are considering working in the brothels to make up for the loss! If they do, then what kind of man will have them?

NICOLAS

Does Elijah know what his daughters are planning?

SETH

I do not believe so and I know the notion would break his heart.

Seth picks up a tool and starts carving away on a piece of wood.

SETH

I am sorry Mister Nicolas. Our misery need not be spread like some local gossip.

Nicolas steps closer to his apprentice.

NICOLAS

Seth, your burden is my burden. You are like family to me.

Seth stops carving and looks at Nicolas.

SETH

My poor uncle, only a year ago he lost my aunt to illness and now he has been stricken penniless.

NICOLAS

Tell your uncle to pray and not worry. God will replenish the dowries.

SETH

I am afraid my uncle has lost his faith. I heard him cursing God for what happened.

NICOLAS

That is the worst news of all. A man's worth should not be judged by how much gold he has. Perhaps I should speak to your uncle...

SETH

No, please Mister Nicolas, say nothing to him. He is a proud man and would be angry with me if he knew I had spoken of this.

Nicolas turns away from Seth's gaze and ponders. After a moment he turns back toward his apprentice.

NICOLAS

Do not fret my young friend, all will
be as it should. God will provide.

Seth returns to his carving.

SETH

I hope so, sir.

Nicolas joins Seth at the work bench. His tone has changed
to more instructional than sympathetic.

NICOLAS

Now, let us begin. There is still much
to teach you and my time here is
running short. But before I leave
Patara, I must instruct you on the art
of polishing.

He picks up a cloth.

NICOLAS

The choice of cloth is crucial for the
desired finish...

The mentor continues his demonstration while the apprentice
watches carefully.

EXT. OUTSIDE ELIJAH'S HOME - NIGHT

Nicolas hides in the shadows behind a building, gawking at
the lighted window in the house across the street. He holds
a full, palm-sized coin bag.

He glances around. Then quickly crosses the street. He
approaches the home with stealth, then assumes a normal
pace as he walks toward the lit window.

Without looking at his target, Nicolas casually tosses the
coin bag through the window's opening as he strolls past.
After a few more steps, he breaks into a sprint.

Within seconds, Nicolas vanishes into the shadows.

INT. NICOLAS' HOME - DAY

Nicolas is at his work bench when Seth steps in. His
assistant is smiling ear to ear.

SETH

Good morning Mister Nicolas!

NICOLAS

Good morning Mister Seth. How are you this morning?

SETH

I could not be better. But my jubilation pales in comparison to my uncle's.

Nicolas lays down his tools.

NICOLAS

Jubilation? I assumed your uncle was still suffering from his loss?

SETH

A miracle has happened. For the past two mornings my uncle has found a coin purse filled with gold, inside his house!

A quick and slight expression of joy rushes past Nicolas' face. His tone is slightly coy.

NICOLAS

Indeed?

SETH

It appears as if someone tossed the bag through the window. My uncle has questioned our family and friends but no one has yet claimed to be the generous donor.

NICOLAS

How peculiar.

SETH

At first, my uncle thought it might be fools gold and that someone was playing a evil trick. But today he has found out, it is indeed real gold!

NICOLAS

How very fortunate.

Seth steps to an apron hanging on the wall and begins to slip it over his head.

SETH

You were right Mister Nicolas. We can find no other explanation. The gold must be a blessing from God.

Nicolas turns his back to Seth trying to hide his gigantic smile.

EXT. OUTSIDE ELIJAH'S HOME - NIGHT

Again Nicolas hides the shadows, his eyes fixed on the flickering fire light coming from the window across the street. He holds another full, palm-sized coin bag.

He trots toward the home then slows to a normal pace. He moves the bag from one hand to the other as he approaches his target.

Nicolas strolls beside the window and cocks his arm. A door behind him opens. He wheels around, still holding the bag of gold in the air.

Facing him is ELIJAH, Seth's uncle, a handsome man in his forties. He looks at Nicolas with total surprise.

ELIJAH

Nicolas?

With his eyes fixed on Elijah, Nicolas tosses the bag through the window.

INT. ELIJAH'S HOME - NIGHT

Near the window several stockings hang from the mantel of a lighted fireplace. The bag of gold arcs through the window and lands directly into one of the stockings.

EXT. OUTSIDE ELIJAH'S HOME - NIGHT

Nicolas smiles and shrugs his shoulders. He wheels around and sprints away. Elijah takes off after him.

ELIJAH

Nicolas, I know it is you. Please, stop!

Nicolas slows then stops. Elijah trots up. He's a bit out of breath.

ELIJAH

You make it difficult for an old man to thank you.

NICOLAS

You are not 'old.'

ELIJAH

Why do you grace me with such a blessing?

NICOLAS

Because you needed it.

ELIJAH

But why did you hide and not let us know that it was you giving so graciously?

NICOLAS

Because it is good to give and have only God know about it.

Elijah cocks his head and looks at Nicolas with puzzlement.

NICOLAS

Please, I beg you. Promise you will tell no one of this until I leave Patara.

ELIJAH

You need not beg me. I give you my word.

As Nicolas turns, Elijah grabs his arm.

ELIJAH

God bless you for this wonderful gift, Nicolas. You are a Saint among men.

NICOLAS

I am no Saint. Just a humble servant of God.

Nicolas smiles.

NICOLAS

Good night Elijah.

He trots into the darkness. Elijah speaks under his breath.

ELIJAH

Good night, Nicolas.

EXT. PORT OF PATARA - DAY.

Nicolas strolls down the street toward the harbor. With both hands, he holds the end of a large, red sack. It's draped over his shoulder and resting against his back.

Seth, trots up from behind him holding a coin bag exactly like the ones Nicolas tossed through Elijah's window.

SETH

Mister Nicolas! Mister Nicolas!

Nicolas stops and turns around. He drops his bag to the ground as Seth jogs up.

NICOLAS

Seth.

Seth holds out the completely full bag.

SETH

Mister Nicolas, You left this on my workbench. I was afraid thieves may...

NICOLAS

I left it for you, Seth. I left it all for you. My home, my tools, whatever is left behind, I give to you.

SETH

But Mister Nicolas, why?

Nicolas pats Seth on the shoulder and smiles.

NICOLAS

Because it is time for me to leave and time for you to become the outstanding craftsman I know you to be.

SETH

Mister Nicolas I can not accept your generous offer, I am undeserving...

NICOLAS

You are very deserving, Seth. Please, I want you to have them.

Nicolas grabs the top of his red bag and turns back toward the harbor. Seth quickly steps around his mentor and blocks his path.

SETH

Mister Nicolas, I know it was you that threw the gold bags into my uncle's window.

Nicolas stops in mid-stride and sits the bag back down.

NICOLAS

Is this what your uncle told you?

SETH

No sir, my uncle still claims it was a miracle from God.

Seth looks at the bag in his hand.

SETH

But I can not overlook the fact that the bags he received and the bag you gave me, are identical.

Nicolas smiles.

NICOLAS

You see? Your eye for detail is remarkable. I told you that you will make an outstanding craftsman.

Seth hugs Nicolas.

NICOLAS

Always remember Seth, it was a gift from God. I merely delivered it.

SETH

Thank you Mister Nicolas. You are the kindest, most generous man I have ever known. I will miss you.

NICOLAS

I will miss you too, Seth. I promise to visit whenever possible.

Nicolas pats Seth on the back. He again grabs his red bag and heaves it over his shoulder. The apprentice watches as his mentor continues on his journey toward the harbor.

EXT. THE SEA - NIGHT

Rain is pouring down. Illuminated by the flashes of lightning, a sailboat sways violently against the choppy sea. Huge waves pound its side.

The Captain hangs onto the ship's wheel trying to keep from being pushed overboard by the massive waves. Several crewmen on the deck below are wrangling a sail.

The First Officer fights the wind and surf as he makes his way up a flight of stairs to the bridge of the ship. The Captain has to yell to be heard over the noise of the storm.

CAPTAIN

We must get the sails down!

FIRST OFFICER

The main is hung on the rigging, Captain.

CAPTAIN

We must get it down now or she'll tear apart.

The First Officer fights his way back down the stairs and yells at several of the crewmen.

FIRST OFFICER

Hold tight to that yardarm, men.

The crew grabs hold of a pole attached to the sail's mast while the First Officer climbs the tall structure. He reaches the top and begins to saw the sail with a knife.

A door swings open. Nicolas steps on deck. He hangs on as a giant wave pushes the boat to its side.

Atop the mast, a gust of wind pushes the First Officer away from the sail, causing the rope that ties him to the mast to fray against a piece of metal. Nicolas notices.

The First Officer pulls himself back to the sail. The rope securing him again pulls against the piece of metal and frays, then breaks in two. The officer begins to fall.

From Nicolas' point of view, the entire world goes into ultra slow motion. The drops of rain, the crew, everything seems suspended in time including the falling First Officer.

He sprints toward the officer, pushing his way through the crewmen that now resemble flexible statues. He carefully positions himself under the falling man.

A moment later the First Officer hovers only feet above the deck. Nicolas grabs him, turns him upright and guides his feet to a safe landing. Time resumes.

The First Officer finds himself next to Nicolas with a look of sincere puzzlement.

FIRST OFFICER

You caught me?

NICOLAS

I only broke your fall.

FIRST OFFICER

No! You caught me! How can you accomplish such a feat?

EXT. PORT OF MYRA - SUNSET

The sail boat approaches the harbor. Nicolas stands on the bow gazing ahead at the city beyond. The Captain steps up.

CAPTAIN

We will be in the Port of Myra in a few minutes. I will have your things sent to the Inn.

NICOLAS

Thank you, sir.

CAPTAIN

Nicolas, I am in debt to you for saving my officer. He is still praising your name.

NICOLAS

I only broke his fall...

CAPTAIN

Nicolas, I do not know how, but I too saw what you did. In an instant, you caught him like one catches a bag of flour.

NICOLAS

It was simply a trick of light, caused by the lightening. I merely guided him down.

The Captain pulls out a pipe and chuckles.

CAPTAIN

I know a trick of the eye when I see it.

The old sailor clenches the pipe between his teeth.

CAPTAIN

No. The story of your miraculous deed will spread among sailors like wildfire.

NICOLAS

I would rather it not. I did nothing.

The Captain smiles and pats Nicolas on the arm.

CAPTAIN

I am afraid it is too late. The die is already cast.

EXT. STREETS OF MYRA - SUNSET

Nicolas navigates through the many carts littering the busy street. He stops and chats with some of the vendors as he makes his way toward an Inn.

INT. INN - SUNSET

A bell rings as Nicolas steps into a modest boarding house. He sits down his red bag as an elderly lady walks in from another room.

LADY
Be needing a room?

NICOLAS
Yes.

LADY
For how long?

NICOLAS
I am not sure. I will be searching for permanent housing in Myra soon.

LADY
Got a nice room upstairs I could rent for a week.

NICOLAS
That will be acceptable.

LADY
Follow me.

The lady walks over to the nearby stair. Nicolas grabs his red bag, slings it over his shoulder and follows.

EXT. STREETS OF MYRA - MORNING

Nicolas steps out of the Inn and glances down the street. Few people are about, except the vendors who are busy setting up their carts.

Nicolas looks at the giant cathedral taking a prominent position at the end of the street. He walks toward it.

INT. MYRA CATHEDRAL - MORNING

Nicolas steps into the large room, kneels at the door and performs the sign of the cross. He heads toward the single isle separating the many rows of benches.

He walks up to the bench closest to the pulpit and kneels in front of it. He interlaces his fingers, bows his head and prays.

From a side entrance, a nun, ROSELIA, a pretty woman in her early 20's, walks in with more candles. She gazes at Nicolas while quietly replacing the spent candles.

Nicolas finishes his prayer and looks up at the array of candles decorating the pulpit. Through the light, he notices the nun and smiles. She returns the gesture.

ROSELIA
Good morning, sir.

NICOLAS
Good morning, sister.

ROSELIA
Welcome to our place of worship. I am Sister Roselia.

NICOLAS
Pleased to make your acquaintance. I am Nicolas.

Roselia drops a candle. A surprised look covers her face as she takes a couple of steps backward.

ROSELIA
Nicolas! You are Nicolas?

NICOLAS
Yes, Nicolas of Patara. Does my name cause you discomfort?

Roselia recomposes herself and steps from behind the candles.

ROSELIA
No. You are the fulfillment of God's promise. You are the answer we have been praying for.

NICOLAS
I do not understand...

A priest, JEREMIAH, a balding man in his sixties steps in. He walks rather hurriedly toward Roselia.

JEREMIAH
Sister, I heard a noise. Are you alright?

ROSELIA
Yes, Father.

Jeremiah slows as he notices Nicolas. Roselia motions toward him.

ROSELIA
Father, this is Nicolas.

The Priest smiles and gazes at Nicolas as he walks toward him with an extended hand.

JEREMIAH
I am Father Jeremiah.

NICOLAS
Nicolas of Patara.

The priest motions to one of the benches.

JEREMIAH
Please, let us get off our feet.

The men take a seat as Roselia quietly leaves the room. Jeremiah looks in silence at Nicolas for a few moments as if carefully selecting his next words.

JEREMIAH
I can think of no other way of saying this, Nicolas. You must become Bishop of Myra.

Nicolas looks truly shocked.

NICOLAS
Bishop? But I am not worthy to become a Bishop! I am but a toy maker.

JEREMIAH
You are a man of God are you not?

NICOLAS
Yes, I am.

JEREMIAH
Then, Nicholas, you shall be Bishop of Myra.

NICOLAS
Why would you believe this?

JEREMIAH
The former Bishop passed away last spring. We have been praying for many months for a replacement. Over the past weeks I and several other Bishops have had the same dream. A vision that Myra's next Bishop would appear here, this very morning. And his name would be 'Nicolas.'

Nicolas looks off for a moment before fixing his gaze back on the Priest.

NICOLAS

Father, I have no doubt that you and others have had this dream. But are you sure it is God's will?

JEREMIAH

Nicolas, I have been a man of faith my entire life. I know when it is God speaking to me.

The Bishop pauses a moment and shifts position. Then looks at Nicolas.

JEREMIAH

Tell me, what brought you to Myra?

Nicolas' expression changes to puzzlement.

NICOLAS

I am not sure. I awoke one morning to the notion of moving here.

The priest gives Nicolas an "I told you so look" and grins.

NICOLAS

But Father, the Church will never allow someone as young and inexperienced as I to become Bishop.

JEREMIAH

Normally, that would be true. But the Church is aware of our shared visions and have granted us the right to choose our own Bishop. Which I hope will be you.

Jeremiah stands. Nicolas follows.

JEREMIAH

Nicolas, I know God has lead you to us, but the choice is still yours. He will not force it upon you, he is simply making you an offer.

Nicolas glances off as if trying to remember something.

NICOLAS

An offer...

Jeremiah pats Nicolas on the shoulder.

JEREMIAH

Pray about it Nicolas. Ask God for guidance.

Nicolas regains his gaze on Jeremiah.

NICOLAS

I will, Father. Thank you.

The Priest heads for the door.

JEREMIAH

We will still be here.

EXT. COTTAGE NEXT TO THE CATHEDRAL - THAT NIGHT

Lightning and thunder fills the sky. A man runs through the rain down a watery street. He trots up to the cottage door and knocks. It's Nicolas.

He stands back and waits. No one responds. This time he pounds the door with his fist. Again he steps back and waits.

A moment later a commotion is heard from the other side. The door opens. Jeremiah gazes at Nicolas with sleepy eyes.

JEREMIAH

Nicolas?

NICOLAS

Father. I have decided. I will accept the offer to become Bishop of Myra.

Jeremiah smiles, then tugs on Nicolas' shoulder.

JEREMIAH

Please, come in.

The men disappear into the cottage. Steve's voice fades in.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

A group of people stand around Nicolas at a candle lit pulpit. One drapes a bright red robe with white trim over his shoulders.

STEVE (O.C.)

The very next day, the people of Myra named Nicolas as their new Bishop.

EXT. CITY OF MYRA - DAY

A crowd is gathered around Nicolas. He motions to someone unseen. One by one men step into the crowd carrying bags of grain. They cheer while Nicolas quietly walks away.

STEVE (O.C.)

And it wasn't long before Nicolas became known as a holy man, a man of compassion, always seeing to the needs of the people. Never once, did Nicolas ask for anything in return, not even thanks.

INT. FARM COTTAGE - NIGHT

Several children sit on the floor in a circle. A much older Nicolas kneels in the center, handing out gifts he retrieves from a small, red bag.

STEVE (O.C.)

But it was Nicolas' generosity to the children that became known throughout the land. Often, Nicolas would spend days traveling the country, giving away toys or candy to the children.

EXT. FARM COTTAGE - SAME NIGHT

With his empty red bag over his shoulder Nicolas walks away from the farm house. He glances over his shoulder and smiles.

STEVE (O.C.)

His kindness touched their hearts and taught them what a wonderful blessing giving is.

INT. NICOLAS' HOME - NIGHT

Nicolas is now very old. His long white beard drapes across his chest as he lays in bed reading. A tattered red bag hangs on the wall behind him.

STEVE (O.C.)

For nearly eighty years Nicolas of Myra faithfully served his people and had become the most beloved Bishop the world had ever known. He'd devoted his entire life to God and the teachings of Christ, never knowing that Jesus had once been his childhood friend.

Nicolas slowly closes his eyes.

STEVE (O.C.)

And as with his first mortal life, Nicolas grew old. Then, one night, while in his sleep, the angles came.

The book falls to the floor.

INT. THE LIGHT - DAY

Nicolas quickly opens his eyes with a slight head jerk and a gasp of air. He takes a moment to regain his composure then slowly looks around him with a puzzled look.

He's surrounded by a white, dense fog which is brightly illuminated above and below. It's as if he's standing in a cloud with a huge shaft of light piercing through it.

The fog dissipates in an area around Nicolas but remains above and below. In the distant clearing, a human form appears, walking toward him.

The form gets closer and becomes recognizable. It's Jesus. He holds out his arms and smiles as he approaches.

JESUS

Hello, Nicolas. Welcome to the Light.

NICOLAS

Jesus?

Nicolas takes a step toward Jesus then stops. He touches his temple and smiles. Images of his life as the first Nicolas, the little drummer boy, flash through his mind.

NICOLAS

I...remember...I remember it
all...God's 'offer.'

Jesus steps up and takes Nicolas by the shoulders.

JESUS

Yes, my old friend, and you have been remarkable. Our Father could not be more pleased.

Nicolas glances around.

NICOLAS

This is Heaven?

Jesus chuckles and takes a step back.

JESUS

No. This is the Light, the roadway from Earth to Heaven. But we are not going to Heaven. Not yet.

Jesus waves his arms and the fog completely clears.

JESUS

Today, we will use it to travel from one place on Earth to another.

The men are floating high above the Earth. They're encapsulated in a giant shaft of light that extends from the Earth's surface into the infinity of space.

JESUS

Today, you begin fulfilling your destiny.

Nicolas looks down. He can see the shaft of light quickly moving across the Black Sea and away from his Turkish home on the Mediterranean.

JESUS

Today, you will take charge of a kingdom our Father has created for you at the top of the world. A kingdom no other human will ever see. Save one.

The shaft of light is now moving over Finland and headed toward the Arctic.

JESUS

There, for the next thousand years, you will teach generations of apprentices the art of toy making, until they too, become master craftsmen. Master toy makers.

NICOLAS

Generations? But you said only one other human would ever see this kingdom.

JESUS

Nicolas, since the dawn of mankind our Father has had helpers living among humans on Earth. Although their existence has remained hidden to most, through them, God has performed countless miracles.

NICOLAS

You mean Angels?

JESUS

Not exactly. They are known as Elves. Living spirits endowed with special abilities, much the way you are now.

NICOLAS

You mean, Elves are real?

Jesus smiles.

JESUS

Quite real my friend. The chosen ones
are already gathered at your kingdom
and await your arrival.

The shaft of light is now directly over the North Pole.

JESUS

The Elves are extremely intelligent,
but they lack creativity. They need
guidance and leadership to bring out
their best.

Jesus steps directly in front of Nicolas and locks eyes
with him.

JESUS

I know you will teach them well
Nicolas, for in a thousand years you
will begin the great task for which you
have been destined for since the first
time you played your drum for me.

Nicolas looks puzzled as the men begin to descend toward
the icy polar cap.

NICOLAS

Great task?

JESUS

One night each year, you will gather
all the toys the Elves make and deliver
them to each and every worthy child on
Earth that celebrates my birth.

NICOLAS

Worthy? How am I to judge if they are
'worthy?'

JESUS

Throughout the year you will keep a
list of all the world's children. You
will be able to see them when they are
sleeping. You will know when they are
awake. And you will know if they have
been bad or good...

NICOLAS

I will go mad, for goodness sake!

Jesus chuckles.

JESUS

No, you will not, my old friend. Just remember, no toys to the children that are naughty, only to the ones that are nice.

EXT. THE NORTH POLE - NIGHT

The shaft of light gently eases the men to the snow-laden surface then moves off. Nicolas looks up into a crystal clear, night sky filled with brilliant stars.

NICOLAS

I have never seen the sky so magnificent.

JESUS

And you will see many more like it, my friend.

As Jesus leads them across the frozen tundra, Nicolas notices they're not sinking into the snow. They're walking on top of it and leaving no footprints at all.

They step up to a huge ice boulder. Jesus passes his hand in front of it and a portion of the ice instantly melts, revealing a lit chamber inside. Jesus and Nicolas step in.

INT. ICE ELEVATOR - NIGHT

A door closes behind Nicolas in this three-sided enclosure. Aside from its odd triangular shape, the interior resembles a modern elevator without buttons.

The men sway in unison as the elevator begins to move. Nicolas tugs the white hair on his chin.

NICOLAS

Around the world in one night. How will I ever accomplish such a feat?

JESUS

You will be able to transcend human time, this I know. But our Father has not yet revealed the exact method you will use.

Nicolas looks off and ponders.

JESUS

There is much the Elves need to learn before we concern ourselves with the delivery method. God will provide when the time comes.

Nicolas nods his head in agreement.

JESUS

Right now you must focus on the task at hand, teaching the Elves. For soon, you will become a symbol to those that cannot yet fully understand the significance of my life, the young children. Your yearly visits will show them the virtue of giving and compassion. Even after they have grown older, you will always remain dear to their hearts.

Jesus pats Nicolas on the shoulder.

JESUS

From this moment on, our destinies will forever be linked that one night a year, Nicolas. For many that know you, will be reminded of me.

A pleasant CHIME is heard. The door opens.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - FOYER - NIGHT

Jesus and Nicolas step into a large area adorned with all types of eclectic art. A number of tiny sofas and chairs are neatly arranged.

The domed ceiling stretches all the way back to the surface. Nicolas looks up at the cluster of bright stars shining through the glass ceiling high above him.

JESUS

Welcome to your new home, Nicolas.

Nicolas slowly looks around. He catches his reflection in a nearby mirror and grimaces.

NICOLAS

This is where I now live?

JESUS

This is only the entrance. We will take a tour of this vast kingdom later. But first, it is time to meet your apprentices. Are you ready?

NICOLAS

Yes, and I promise, I will not let you down.

Jesus smiles as Nicolas bends slightly backward and looks again at his reflection in the mirror.

NICOLAS

However, there is something I am curious about.

JESUS

Please, ask.

NICOLAS

You...you are still looking as you did when you were young. I still look...

Nicolas gives a quick glance at the mirror.

NICOLAS

...old.

JESUS

Because that is how you remember yourself.

Jesus steps closer to his friend.

JESUS

Nicolas, all you need do is imagine it and you can appear as you did at any age.

Nicolas closes his eyes. Within a second he morphs into the handsome, clean-shaved man he was at thirty years old. He bends back, gazes at himself in the mirror and smiles.

JESUS

Personally I like the mid-fifties, white beard look, myself.

Nicolas looks at Jesus with surprise.

NICOLAS

You must be joking.

JESUS

And come to think of it, I would like to see you heavier, perhaps with a pot belly...

NICOLAS

Jesus, I would look old...and...'jolly.'

JESUS

Precisely, my friend. A man children would trust.

Nicolas looks back at the mirror. Within seconds he grows a long white beard as his face morphs back to the way he looked in his middle age. Jesus looks on.

JESUS

That is better. But I still would like to see the pot belly and perhaps some rosy cheeks...

Nicolas gazes at Jesus with a blank look.

NICOLAS

I will work on that later.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - NIGHT

A balcony protrudes below the peak of the vaulted ceiling at one end of an enormous room. A door opens on the balcony and Jesus steps out. He walks to the railing and looks out.

Several feet below are workstations, each operated by a small, childlike, human-looking being with pointed ears. They're Elves, and are totally absorbed in their work.

Jesus leans over the rail and speaks loudly.

JESUS

Spirits of Elf, here me!

Simultaneously all the Elves stop what they're doing and look toward Jesus. The room quiets.

JESUS

Your mentor has arrived. Today, you will begin the work God planned even before time itself was created. The selfless labor of you and your generations to follow, will bring joy to the people of Earth and to our Father in Heaven. Blessed spirits of Elf, I now give you the man that will guide you through this marvelous journey. Your teacher, Nicolas.

Nicolas steps out onto the balcony wearing his bishop hat and robe. Still with the "mid-fifties white beard look" but slim. The Elves begin to clap and cheer. Nicolas waves.

Little by little a chanting grows louder among the Elves' claps and cheers. "Santa Claus," "Santa Claus," gets louder and louder until all the Elves are chanting it.

Nicolas steps to Jesus. He nearly screams to be heard over the chanting.

NICOLAS

What are they saying?

JESUS

They are saying 'Saint Nicolas' in their native tongue.

Nicolas looks agitated.

NICOLAS

Tell them to stop! I am no Saint!

Jesus pats Nicolas on the shoulder.

JESUS

You will be.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - DAY

Montage of shots. Scenes of Nicolas teaching the Elves, following Steve's narration.

STEVE (O.C.)

Hidden away under the North Pole, Nicolas spent every day for the next thousand years teaching the Elves all he knew about toy making. During this time, stories of Bishop Nicolas' good deeds and generosity began to spread throughout Europe. Soon, churches were being named after him and sure enough, just as Jesus had predicted, the Church officially recognized him as a true Saint. Although he was honored by the title, Saint Nicolas never really thought of himself as a 'Saint.' He remained a selfless and tireless mentor, passing on two lifetimes of experience as a craftsman to the Elves. He thought of them as his family and loved each and every one. And the Elves loved Nicolas, listening and learning from their teacher, handing that knowledge on to the next generation. Before long the Elves had become excellent craftsmen and Nicolas realized he had a warehouse full of toys. Then one morning...

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - FOYER - DAY

Several Elves are sprawled out on the sofas. Nicolas steps in with a steaming cup and yawns. One of the Elves, PETE, stands.

PETE

Rough night, sir?

Nicolas looks up at the sunlight shining through the glass ceiling high above him and squints.

NICOLAS

Could not sleep for some reason. Kept tossing and turning.

PETE

You should have called me, sir. I know of a liquid sleeping aid guaranteed to assure you a full nights rest.

Nicolas smiles at the tiny person as he takes a seat on the only full-size chair.

NICOLAS

Thank you Pete. I will remember that next time.

PETE

It is an Earth drink called 'wine.'

Nicolas nearly spits his drink out snapping his head toward Pete.

NICOLAS

Wine? You have not been drinking wine have you?

PETE

Oh yes, it is very tasty. And if you drink many a glass full, it will put you right to sleep.

Nicolas chuckles.

NICOLAS

I see toy making is not all I must teach you. Perhaps Elves do not get intoxicated...

Nicolas gazes at Pete and glances around the room at the other Elves. They all simultaneously shrug their shoulders.

NICOLAS

We will cover this another day. Until then, I suggest you not drink too many 'glass fulls.' In excess, it can be harmful...

A CHIME rings. All heads turn toward the elevator door. It opens and Jesus steps out. Everyone stands and Nicolas steps to his visitor.

NICOLAS

Jesus! How good to see you!

JESUS

Nicolas, my old friend!

The men embrace with pats on the back.

NICOLAS

It has been what, a hundred or so years since your last visit?

JESUS

As always, it has been too long. But today's visit brings with it a very special meaning.

Jesus gazes at Nicolas as if expecting an answer.

JESUS

Do you not remember what today is?

Nicolas looks puzzled.

NICOLAS

Tuesday?

Jesus joins the Elves in laughter.

JESUS

Yes, I believe it is Tuesday. But it is also the last day of the thousand year training.

A look of instant recognition covers Nicolas. The Elves clap and cheer.

NICOLAS

You are right!

JESUS

Tomorrow, we make preparations to deliver the toys.

NICOLAS

Still in one night?

JESUS

Still in one night.

NICOLAS

Has God yet devised a method?

Jesus gives Nicolas a coy smile.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - STABLE - DAY

Jesus and a large number of Elves circle a beautiful, white stallion. Nicolas strolls around the animal, scrutinizing and examining it.

NICOLAS

What a beautiful steed.

JESUS

His name is Amerigo. He too is a living spirit with special abilities.

One of the Elves steps out of the circle and up to Nicolas.

ELF

He can fly.

The Elf quickly steps back into the circle. Nicolas continues his examination as Jesus walks beside him.

JESUS

This is how you will deliver the gifts in one night.

Nicolas stops his examination and gazes at Jesus.

NICOLAS

But I do not understand. Even with the gift of flight, I still do not see how I will deliver all the gifts in one night.

Jesus places his hand on Nicolas' shoulder.

JESUS

Nicolas, on that night, once you have left this kingdom, you will alter the flow of time. After each delivery, time will reset itself to the moment of your arrival. Although no one will realize it has happened, not one second will pass on Earth until after the last gift is delivered.

The stallion whinnies and shakes his head "yes."

JESUS

To the world, your work will be accomplished in the blink of an eye. But to you and your assistants, it will seem as if only the night has passed.

NICOLAS

I am in awe of God's wisdom.

JESUS

Each year, your deliveries will begin with the good Dutch children of the Netherlands.

EXT. SAIL BOAT - THE NETHERLANDS - DAY

Nicolas stands on the bow gazing toward the shore and holding a golden staff. He wears his traditional red bishop robe and hat. Jesus' voice continues to narrate.

JESUS

You will arrive by boat before mounting your steed and making your deliveries, which will forever become a tradition in their country.

Beside Nicolas, the boat Captain takes a puff from his pipe. Behind him, Amerigo is tied to the deck. The stallion snorts and whinnies.

CAPTAIN

Your horse is nervous.

NICOLAS

Amerigo is not nervous, just anxious to begin his mission.

The Captain takes another draw from his pipe then turns to Nicolas and narrows his eyes.

CAPTAIN

And what mission might that be, sir?

NICOLAS

We are delivering gifts to all the children of the world who celebrate Christmas.

CAPTAIN

Why might ye be doing that?

NICOLAS

Why, to honor the birth of Jesus, of course.

The Captain points with his pipe toward the two, huge red bags near the stallion.

CAPTAIN

You tell me all them gifts are in them sacks?

NICOLAS

Amazing, is it not? All the gifts fit into those two bags. And I will deliver them all in one night.

CAPTAIN

And how might you do that?

NICOLAS

Amerigo can fly and I have the ability to...

Pete the Elf walks up. Nicolas immediately turns his attention to him.

PETE

Everything is ready, sir.

NICOLAS

Excellent. Good work, Pete.

The Captain takes a draw from his pipe as he narrows his eyes and looks at Nicolas as if he's nuts.

CAPTAIN

What be your name again?

NICOLAS

I am Nicolas.

PETE

Saint Nicolas!

The Captain chuckles.

CAPTAIN

Sinterklass?

A puzzled Nicolas looks down at Pete, who responds with a quick, authoritative tone.

PETE

That means 'Saint Nicolas' in the Dutch language.

Nicolas shakes his head in recognition. The Captain continues to laugh.

CAPTAIN

The patron saint of sailors? You can not be Sinterklass. He is myth and legend. You are an old man. Flesh and bone.

NICOLAS

But...I am Nicolas. I was once Bishop of Myra. Now, I am a mission from God.

The Captain bends down to Pete's eye level.

CAPTAIN

If he is Sinterklass, who might you be?

PETE

I am Pete, the head Elf. I make sure the chimneys are safe for the Santa.

CAPTAIN

A chimney sweep eh? Then we should start calling ye 'Zwarte Pieten.'

The Captain laughs. Pete quickly glances up at Nicolas with a dead pan face.

PETE

That means 'Black Peter.'

Nicolas nods in confused acknowledgment.

CAPTAIN

Lot of soot in those chimneys.

The Captain taps his pipe on the side of the boat, knocking the ashes out.

CAPTAIN

Tell me, why might ye be cleaning the chimneys if you are only leaving gifts?

PETE

Because that is how the Santa will make his deliveries. Down the chimney.

The Captain blows through his empty pipe.

CAPTAIN

So Sinterklass here goes down the chimneys with those bags full of gifts eh? Where might ye get them?

PETE

We make them. At the Santa's workshop,
under the North Pole.

Nicolas smiles and nods his head in innocent agreement. The
Captain gazes at them for a moment then burst into laughter.

CAPTAIN

Under the North Pole! What a story!

PETE

But it is true...

CAPTAIN

I would be an idiot to believe such
nonsense. Although it is a good story,
one worth retelling.

After the Captain's laughter subsides he narrows his eyes
and gazes at Nicolas.

CAPTAIN

I know who you really are. I have heard
of you before. You be them actors from
Spain. From the Catholic church.

PETE

Look, Captain...

Nicolas taps Pete's shoe with his.

NICOLAS

You may choose to believe whatever you
wish. But we have told you the truth.

The Captain chuckles.

CAPTAIN

I knew it! You are them actors from
Spain!

He pats Nicolas on the shoulder.

CAPTAIN

And you are very good actors, just as I
have heard. Especially the little one.
Had me going.

NICOLAS

I would appreciate it if you would not
tell the children that we are 'actors.'
It would spoil the ceremony.

CAPTAIN

Mum to the children it is
'Sinterklass.' You have my word on it.
Now, get your things together. We will
be unloading within the hour.

The Captain walks away laughing and shaking his head.

CAPTAIN

'Sinterklass,' 'flying schimmel,'
'Zwarte Pieten'...yep, had me going.

After the Captain is out of earshot, Pete gazes up at
Nicolas.

PETE

Why did we not try to convince him of
our real purpose, sir?

NICOLAS

We spoke the truth, Pete. And I felt
his disbelief will actually be for the
greater good.

PETE

How so?

NICOLAS

It may be best not to reveal our frigid
location, lest someone might perish
trying to find it.

PETE

But Spain? What if someone searches for
the workshop in Spain?

NICOLAS

At least it will be warmer.

EXT. PORT IN THE NETHERLANDS - DAY

Sailors tie off the boat with large ropes while others
lower a ramp in the ship's hull to the dock.

In the cargo hold, Nicolas sits atop Amerigo on a sparsely
adorned, leather saddle. The red toy bags hang across the
stallion's rump, resting against each of his hind legs.

The ramp makes contact with the dock. Immediately Amerigo
trots toward it with Nicolas barely hanging on. Sailors
jump aside as the stallion leaps from the boat.

Amerigo slowly floats across the ramp and hovers several feet above the dock. Nicolas re-positions himself, grabs the reins and gives them a tug.

NICOLAS

Amerigo. Down.

The sailors stop what they're doing and watch in awe as the stallion slowly descends.

On the bow, the Captain also gawks in disbelief as he steps forward for a better view.

CAPTAIN

Sinterklass?

Nicolas guides Amerigo to a gentle landing some distance from the boat. Pete rides up on a gray donkey.

PETE

Are you alright, sir?

NICOLAS

Yes. But it appears I have yet to master riding a flying horse.

Pete looks over his shoulder and sees the sailors still staring.

PETE

I think we should get going, if you want to keep them believing we are actors from Spain.

Nicolas and Pete ride off toward the town as Steve's voice fades in.

STEVE (O.C.)

After a thousand years of preparation, Nicolas finally began the journey he had spent two lifetimes preparing for. With each passing year word spreads further of the Saint's annual appearance. And before long, every country in the world had its own tale about Nicolas and his helpers.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Nicolas and Pete are standing on a street corner handing out gifts to the group of children surrounding them.

STEVE (O.C.)

In Germany, he became known as Kris Kringle or Belsnickle, meaning 'Nicolas in Furs.' In England he's known as 'Father Christmas.'

Nicolas stands by a Christmas tree inside a French style home. He munches a cookie and takes a drink from a glass of milk.

STEVE (O.C.)

In France, children know him as 'Pere Noel,' leaving drinks and desserts for the busy traveler to snack on.

Two children stuff carrots inside a pair of shoes next to a fireplace, then run away laughing.

STEVE (O.C.)

Other children would place their shoes next to the fireplace, filling them with carrots and hay for Amerigo and Pete's gray donkey, Mistletoe.

With mouths agape and all eyes fixed on the story teller, a man sits in front of a large group of children, telling them an obviously gripping story.

STEVE (O.C.)

Over the next five hundred years almost every culture in the world had written a song or story about the generosity of Saint Nicolas. And then, one night...

EXT. SKIES ABOVE NORWAY - DUSK

Nicolas and Pete are riding their equine side by side, flying just above the tree tops through the occasional low cloud. Nicolas looks at Pete and smiles.

NICOLAS

Good job as usual, Pete.

PETE

Thanks boss.

NICOLAS

Another successful delivery. Not a house left unvisited, not a toy left in the bag.

Pete glances at the small, square protrusion sticking out of the red bag.

PETE

Uh, sir. I think there's still one gift left.

Nicolas reaches down and fingers the outside of the bag's protrusion. He wrinkles his brow.

NICOLAS

You are right. But I am sure we have visited every child on the list.

Nicolas ponders a moment.

NICOLAS

It is possible the the wrapping department miscounted.

Pete rolls his eyes and looks away with a frustrated face.

PETE

Again.

Nicolas smiles.

NICOLAS

Do not fret about it my faithful assistant. Let us enjoy the beauty of the night. Perhaps take the scenic route over the lovely shores of Finnmark.

PETE

Sir, I was hoping to get home as soon as possible. Mistletoe and I are a bit fatigued.

The brown donkey snorts and slowly shakes his head "yes."

NICOLAS

Of course, Pete.

Nicolas turns his gaze to Mistletoe.

NICOLAS

I am sorry you are feeling poorly Mistletoe.

Again Mistletoe snorts. Nicolas looks at Amerigo.

NICOLAS

How about you, Amerigo?

The stallion whinnies.

NICOLAS

Ah. It sounds like you are feeling much like myself. A bit frisky.

Nicolas turns back toward Pete.

NICOLAS

Please, take the quickest route home. Amerigo and I will not be far behind.

PETE

Are you sure, sir?

Nicolas pulls Amerigo's reins and begins a banking turn away from Pete.

NICOLAS

I will see you soon, my friend. Enjoy your rest.

Pete shouts as Nicolas flies away.

PETE

Be safe, boss.

Nicolas waves his hand over his shoulder as he and Amerigo disappear into the clouds.

EXT. SKIES ABOVE FINNMARK - DUSK

Nicolas and his stallion fly only a few feet above a dense forest of snow-covered treetops. The sun peeps over the horizon and illuminates Nicolas' smiling face.

NICOLAS

What a beautiful sight to behold. How could anyone not marvel at God's creation?

Nicolas passes over several clearings in the forest revealing reindeer and other animals grazing in a small area spared by the snowfall.

He pulls the reins. Amerigo banks, turning the sunshine to their broadside. The stallion whinnies as he straightens his turn. Nicolas shrugs his shoulders.

NICOLAS

I do not know. I simply felt drawn to go this way.

Amerigo whinnies again.

NICOLAS

I know, I do not want Pete to worry
either. But...

A look of recognition comes over Nicolas' face as he surveys the ground.

NICOLAS

Look Amerigo, there is a house we did
not visit.

The saint and stallion fly over a small cottage with smoke billowing from the chimney. A stable stands close by.

NICOLAS

That is why we still have a gift left.

He pats his stallion on the neck.

NICOLAS

Alright my friend, take us down.

The cottage door opens. A woman steps out and makes her way toward the stable.

Nicolas' jaw slightly drops. He stares at her as if in a trance and cranes his head to keep her in view as Amerigo circles the cabin's rooftop.

Unaware of the flying stallion overhead, the woman disappears into the stable. Amerigo and his rider descend to the cottage's roof and make a soft landing.

EXT. CABIN'S ROOFTOP - MOMENTS LATER

Nicolas dismounts and reaches into the red bag. The stable door opens. The woman steps out. The Saint peeks over the saddle and again, locks his eyes on her image.

Still unaware of her new roof-top house guest, the woman closes the stable door and makes her way toward the cabin.

Nicolas, frozen in a trance watching the woman's every move, absentmindedly takes a step backwards. He loses his footing and begins to slide down the roof.

With his hand still in the red bag and it still attached to Amerigo, Nicolas drags the stallion down with him.

The woman stops, looks up toward the noise but sees nothing, as Nicolas and Amerigo are nearly to the ground.

On the other side of the cottage, Nicolas falls in a large snowbank. A second later, Amerigo lands only a few feet away.

The woman hears the THUD of falling bodies and rushes to the other side of the cottage.

EXT. SIDE OF COTTAGE - SECONDS LATER

Nicolas sits up and crawls toward his stallion, still laying on his side.

NICOLAS

Amerigo! Amerigo, are you hurt?

Amerigo snorts and slightly moves his front leg. Nicolas re-positions himself and gently lifts the trembling appendage. He gazes at it for a moment.

NICOLAS

Have mercy.

The woman rounds the corner and comes to an abrupt stop. She looks up and sees the skid marks in the snow covered roof leading directly to the fallen strangers.

She gazes at Nicolas tending to his injured steed some 30 feet away.

NICOLAS

It appears your leg is broken, my friend.

Nicolas is still examining his stallion's leg as the woman, CLARA, a very attractive lady in her mid 40's, runs toward him as fast as she can through the snow-covered tundra.

Nicolas hears her, turns and watches her approach. They never take their gaze off each other as she kneels down beside him.

CLARA

Did you just fall off the roof?

NICOLAS

I am terribly sorry. This is all my fault.

Nicolas gazes back at Amerigo's leg.

NICOLAS

I am afraid my steed's leg is broken, all because of my clumsiness.

CLARA

Broken? Here, let me look.

Clara scoots Nicolas out of the way and repositions herself for a better look at Amerigo's injury. She pulls the scarf from her neck and wraps it around the stallion's leg.

NICOLAS

I am no healer, but I do not think a scarf will set a broken leg...

CLARA

What is your horse's name?

NICOLAS

Actually, he is a stallion. His name is Amerigo.

Clara grasps the leg over the scarf with both hands. She leans toward the stallion's head.

CLARA

Hello, Amerigo. I can fix this if you'll let me.

Amerigo snorts and whinnies "yes."

CLARA

Good. Now hold on, this may hurt a little bit.

Clara closes her eyes and squeezes. The stallion stiffens but remains silent. Nicolas' eyes widen as he watches her hands, the scarf and finally the leg, begin to glow.

NICOLAS

How are you doing this...

Clara puffs her lips.

CLARA

Shh. I've got to concentrate.

A moment passes. The glowing subsides and Amerigo takes a deep breath. Clara releases her hands. The scarf remains in place, almost as if molded to the stallion's leg.

She sits back on her knees and too, takes a deep breath. Then opens her eyes, turns to Nicolas and smiles.

CLARA

His leg should be healed by morning.

Nicolas holds out his hand.

NICOLAS

Thank you....

CLARA

My name is Clara.

She daintily shakes his hand.

NICOLAS

I am Nicolas.

CLARA

Pleased to meet you.

Nicolas gazes in wonderment at the hand that shook Clara's.

NICOLAS

Your hand, it is so warm...

Clara ignores Nicolas' comment and gazes toward the stable.

CLARA

We need to get Amerigo to the stables.

She leans over and looks at the stallion.

CLARA

Do you think you can make it?

Amerigo whinnies.

CLARA

Alright, here we go.

Clara and Nicolas move to the other side of the fallen stallion. The Saint, taking a position near the saddle, Clara near the neck. Both kneel and grab on.

CLARA

Don't put too much pressure on it at first. Ready? On three.
One...two...three.

Amerigo wiggles then hobbles to his feet. He swaggers a moment before regaining his balance.

CLARA

Good. Here we go. Gently, now.

Clara and Nicolas lead the limping stallion toward the barn helping him maintain his balance along the way. Night is about to set in and it begins to snow.

INT. STABLE - DUSK

Nicolas opens the door. Clara leads Amerigo to just inside the large structure and hands the reins to Nicolas.

CLARA

I'll get some light going.

She heads toward a nearby tack room.

CLARA

The lantern should still be warm, I was just in here...

NICOLAS

Yes, I know.

Clara pauses for a second and gazes at a smiling Nicolas before disappearing into the tack room. Her disembodied voice is heard.

CLARA

So, you were watching me?

Clara emerges from the tack room with the lantern. She gazes Nicolas with a puzzled face.

NICOLAS

I saw the lantern light go out just before Amerigo and I fell from your roof...

CLARA

Wait, wait, wait. You both fell? From the roof?

Now it's Nicolas who looks puzzled.

NICOLAS

Why...yes.

CLARA

Would you mind telling me how your stallion ended up on my roof?

NICOLAS

Amerigo simply landed. He has become very sure footed on pointy surfaces...

CLARA

Wait, wait, wait. He jumped from the ground to the roof with you on him?

NICOLAS

No, we dropped from the sky. God has given my trusted steed the gift of flight.

Clara stares at Nicolas for a moment and responds with a slightly sarcastic tone.

CLARA

Right.

Nicolas follows Clara back to where Amerigo has been patiently standing. She kneels with the lantern and examines the stallion's injured leg.

CLARA

Alright, I'll bite. Why did you and Amerigo decided to land on my roof?

NICOLAS

To deliver you a gift.

Nicolas slips his hand into the red bag hanging from Amerigo's side. He retrieves a small box wrapped with red and green paper.

Clara slowly turns her attention toward Nicolas, who's holding the colorful box out to her. She stands, accepts the gift and carefully removes the wrapping.

Pulling off the last bit of wrapping reveals a Music Box. Clara smiles as she glances at Nicolas and lifts the lid.

Inside is a miniature representation of Clara's cabin, stable and the surrounding area. The song "Jingle Bells" plays.

NICOLAS

Merry Christmas, my dear.

Clara goes slack-jawed with disbelief. She smiles and stares in wonderment as the music plays on.

NICOLAS

I hope you like it.

CLARA

How??? Where???

NICOLAS

It was made specifically for you in my workshop.

For a moment, Clara gazes with admiration at the Music Box. Then closes the lid and locks eyes with Nicolas.

CLARA

Who...who are you?

NICOLAS

I am Nicolas. Some may call me 'Saint' Nicolas...

CLARA

Wait, wait, wait. You're saying you're 'Saint Nicolas,' 'Kris Kringle,' 'Sinterklass,' that guy?

NICOLAS

I am also known by those names.

Clara looks at Nicolas a moment and ponders.

CLARA

I don't know how you did it, but...thank you, 'Saint' Nicolas. It's...it's simply beautiful.

Nicolas returns the smile. Clara carefully sits the Music Box on a nearby ledge and again bends down. She gently lifts Amerigo's injured leg with her fingertips.

CLARA

Feeling better?

Amerigo whinnies "yes."

CLARA

Try putting a little more pressure on it.

The stallion slowly extends his hoof to the ground. He applies pressure and whinnies "yes."

CLARA

Good.

Clara stands and hangs the lantern on the post holding up the ledge. The light now illuminates a good portion of the stable's interior.

A wide isle runs down the building's length with a brightly colored sleigh parked at the end. The isle is flanked with eight individual stalls, four on each side.

Clara gazes towards the stalls and calls out.

CLARA

Gentlemen! Your attention please.

In near perfect unison eight, horned reindeer heads peek over their stalls.

CLARA

We have an injured guest and I'm going to need your help.

Nicolas gazes at them in awe.

CLARA

Nicolas and Amerigo, I'd like you to meet my friends.

Clara points at each stall.

CLARA

This is Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, and Vixen. Over here is Comet, Cupid, Donder and Blitzen.

She addresses the group.

CLARA

Gentlemen, this is Nicolas and his steed Amerigo, who, as you can see, is injured. I'm going to need a volunteer to give up their stall...

Before Clara can finish her sentence every stall door opens and all eight reindeer step out. Clara smiles.

CLARA

You're all very gracious, but I only need one.

She turns to the closest stall. Dasher's.

CLARA

Thank you, Dasher.

Clara leads Amerigo into Dasher's stall.

CLARA

Amerigo, I promise, in no time you'll feel good as new.

She turns to Nicolas and points to a bag of oats in the corner.

CLARA

Nicolas, would you mind fetching a scoop of oats?

NICOLAS

Certainly.

Dasher follows the Saint, curiously watching his every move. Nicolas kneels down and pulls out a scoop full of oats from the bag. He looks eye to eye at the reindeer.

NICOLAS

It is very kind of you to share your quarters, my new little friend.

Dasher shakes his head up and down. Nicolas stands, takes the oats to the stall and passes the scoop to Clara.

CLARA

Thank you.

She pours the oats into a hanging feeder and gazes at Amerigo.

CLARA

Just in case you get hungry. And there's plenty of fresh water in the trough.

Amerigo whinnies "yes."

CLARA

I'll be back in the morning to check on you again.

NICOLAS

The morning? Oh no. I can not be gone until morning. Pete will worry himself to death.

CLARA

Pete?

NICOLAS

My assistant. He was riding with us earlier tonight. I told him I would only be an hour or so behind him.

CLARA

Nicolas, Amerigo is in no shape to travel right now. He'll need all night just to heal enough to travel by morning.

Clara steps out of the stall and closes the half-door.

CLARA

I'm sorry if your assistant will worry,
but it's only for a few hours.

NICOLAS

Perhaps. It seems at the moment my
options are limited.

Clara grabs the music box and holds it fondly.

CLARA

Please, you brought me such a beautiful
gift, allow me to return the gesture
and offer you a bowl of fresh stew.

Nicolas looks at Amerigo and ponders.

NICOLAS

I should really stay here...

CLARA

It's pretty tasty.

Nicolas steps up to the stall where Amerigo has turned
around and now faces him. The Saint rubs the stallion's
neck.

NICOLAS

Will you will be alright, my friend?

Again, Amerigo whinnies and shakes his head "yes." Nicolas
looks at Clara and smiles.

NICOLAS

Thank you Clara. I must admit a bowl of
stew does sound quite appetizing.

CLARA

My boys will be here if he needs
anything.

Nicolas gives Amerigo one last neck rub then joins Clara.
They head for the stable doors.

CLARA

You know, it's possible your assistant
went on to bed and isn't waiting up for
you.

Nicolas ponders.

NICOLAS

He did say he was fatigued. Maybe I am worrying over nothing.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Pete stands on the balcony overlooking the workshop. Below, a crowd of Elves are gathered, all gawking and discussing the paper work each has in their hands.

PETE

Listen up everybody!

The room begins to quiet.

PETE

Do all of you have your grid map?

The crowd collectively shake their head "yes."

PETE

Red Squadron, you will begin in the Santa's last known position, located in Alpha Sector. Upon arrival, you will execute the maneuver Pete One, a criss-cross pattern covering precisely ten square miles. Upon completion of said maneuver you will return to base.

Several Elves standing close are all wearing red uniforms. They collectively acknowledge Pete's orders.

PETE

White Squadron. You are to pick up where Red Squadron left off in Alpha Sector, then move into Beta Sector as per your sealed orders. Blue Squadron. Your orders are to...

A voice from behind Pete whispers his name. He turns around and sees Jesus, just out of the crowd's view, motioning to him from across the room. Pete turns back to the crowd.

PETE

Blue Squadron. Please open your sealed orders now. I will return in a moment.

Below, a group of Elves tear open envelopes sealed with a wax seal emblem that reads: SC * NP.

Pete turns and heads toward Jesus as he speaks.

PETE

Sir, with all due respect, I am really busy here. The Santa is overdue. I must conclude he is missing and possibly injured...

JESUS

He's fine, Pete.

PETE

Begging your pardon, sir...

JESUS

Pete. Trust me. He's fine. He'll be back tomorrow.

PETE

Are you sure, sir?

Jesus shoots Pete an "are you kidding me?" look. Pete reacts as if he had just remembered something.

PETE

Oh. Yes, of course you are right.

He takes a deep breath.

PETE

Whew! What a relief. I thought we had lost him.

Jesus kneels down to Pete's eye level and smiles.

JESUS

No Pete, there is no loss tonight. Only gain. As a matter of fact, Nicolas is doing quite well right about now.

INT. CLARA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Nicolas and Clara are sitting at a wooden dining table, a steaming bowl in front of each. Nicolas lowers a spoon from his mouth, looks at Clara and smiles.

NICOLAS

Absolutely delicious.

CLARA

My own recipe.

NICOLAS

I can say with all honesty, this is the best stew I have ever tasted.

CLARA

Thank you.

Each take another spoonful. Clara sits her spoon down and gazes at the Music Box sitting nearby.

CLARA

So, tell me, how did you make that Music Box so detailed? You must have lived in the area before.

NICOLAS

I have flown over your country many times, but never in this particular area. As I mentioned, the Music Box was made in my workshop by my assistants, the Elves.

CLARA

You really believe you're the Saint Nicolas?

Nicolas seems shocked by her question.

NICOLAS

Clara, you said earlier you had heard of me. Why are you so surprised?

CLARA

Because I heard of 'Saint Nicolas' when I was a child. He's nothing more than a myth, a legend, a story you tell little children.

NICOLAS

But, here I am. I am not a myth, a legend, or a story. I am telling you the truth. Only your faith will allow you to believe.

CLARA

Nicolas, I have no doubt you're a sweet, wonderful man. But it's hard for me to believe you're the real Saint Nicolas.

NICOLAS

As it is hard for me to believe you can heal a broken leg overnight. Yet, I entrusted my injured steed to your care without question.

Clara's smiles.

CLARA

Point taken.

Her eyes dart to the Music Box.

CLARA

Whoever you are, thank you again for the beautiful gift. I never received a present from Saint Nicolas before.

Nicolas ponders.

NICOLAS

I wondered why I did not remember delivering gifts to your home, although you said you had heard of me as a child.

CLARA

I heard of Saint Nicolas from my friends. You see, I was raised in an orphanage that didn't celebrate Christmas.

NICOLAS

That would explain it.

CLARA

But even so, I haven't believed in such tales in a long time.

NICOLAS

Did your parents pass away?

This question seems to sting Clara. She gazes off.

CLARA

I don't know anything about my parents and I never asked.

An awkward silence fill the room a moment before Nicolas leans in and speaks softly.

NICOLAS

Clara, why do you live here, in this desolate area, alone?

CLARA

I'm hiding from a maniac.

NICOLAS

Who?

CLARA

His name is Odin and he's a very dangerous man.

Clara gazes at Nicolas for a moment and takes a breath.

CLARA

About ten years ago, I had been shopping in the little village I lived close to. On my way home I saw a man mangled in the streets by a bucking horse. I ran over to him and laid my hands on his wounds. Within minutes he was healed enough to stand. He was very grateful.

NICOLAS

I can imagine.

CLARA

As I walked away I noticed that an old man had been watching me. A somewhat ghastly looking gray-bearded man with a staff, a tattered wide-brim hat and a dusty traveling coat. He stepped in front of me and blocked my path.

NICOLAS

Indeed.

CLARA

He looked at me with one eye and said 'I am Odin. Come with me.' I told him I would do no such thing and walked away.

NICOLAS

What did he do?

CLARA

He followed in behind me saying if I would show somebody he called 'Valkyries' how to heal his soldiers, he would win this, 'Battle of Ragnarök.' I told him to leave me alone, that my healing powers were a gift from God and couldn't be taught. Luckily, right at that time, a carriage came by and I hopped in. As I was being whisked away he stared at me and said that when the time was right, he would find me.

NICOLAS

My goodness.

CLARA

I thought he was just insane. But then I started seeing him everywhere. Outside my home, in the village, wherever I went, there he was, just staring at me.

NICOLAS

Did you tell the authorities?

CLARA

He'd disappear before they got there, but there would always be these two Ravens flying in circles where he had been standing.

NICOLAS

Ravens?

CLARA

Charcoal black. Before long, his constant appearance scared me into moving. But no matter where I lived Odin would show up and tell me that running was pointless. When he needed me, he'd just come and take me.

NICOLAS

Mercy.

CLARA

Then I heard about this place and bought it. Without telling a soul, I left everything behind and moved here.

NICOLAS

I assume this 'Odin' fellow has yet to discover the location of your new abode?

CLARA

So far, no. Although I get spooked every time I see a Raven.

NICOLAS

I can imagine.

Nicolas repositions himself as he ponders. The light of the fireplace shines off his eyes.

NICOLAS

Clara. I know a place where Odin would never find you.

Clara looks interested.

CLARA

Where?

NICOLAS

My workshop, at the North Pole.

CLARA

The North Pole? I don't even know where the 'North Pole' is.

NICOLAS

It is under the ice at the top of the world and very cold. Too cold for Odin to look for you there.

CLARA

Why do you have a workshop where it's so cold?

NICOLAS

It's a long story that I will be happy to tell you sometime. But for now, please believe me, at my workshop, you would be forever warm and safe from Odin.

CLARA

So...I would come and stay at your place. Which is, underground. At the North Pole.

NICOLAS

Of course, you would have your own private accommodations and could stay as long as you wish.

Nicolas glances around the cabin.

NICOLAS

But I am afraid that we will not be able to take along too many of your belongings.

CLARA

The only belongings I would want to take are the reindeer.

Clara's eyes focus on the Music Box.

CLARA

And your wonderful gift, of course.

Nicolas smiles and gazes into Clara's eyes for a moment before his face returns to a more serious expression.

NICOLAS

The reindeer? I meant to ask, how did you come by the reindeer?

CLARA

They came with the place. But they've been my constant companions for ten years. I'm sorry to hang that kind of burden on your gift, but I can't just leave them here.

NICOLAS

It is no burden. Of course they too are welcome to stay at my workshop. There is plenty of space.

Nicolas ponders.

NICOLAS

It is transporting them there that seems to pose a challenge. As strong as Amerigo is, I do not think he can haul you, me and eight reindeer.

CLARA

He doesn't have to. The reindeer can walk if there's a path to the top of the world.

NICOLAS

I do not know, but if there is, I'm sure God will show us the way.

Clara gazes at the Music Box for a second then smiles at Nicolas.

CLARA

I suppose I'll have to move the Music Box down a notch. That is the sweetest gift anyone has ever offered. But I need to sleep on it before I say 'yes.'

NICOLAS

Of course. You must be tired.

Nicolas stands.

NICOLAS

I should let you turn in.

Clara also stands. Nicolas smiles and gazes into her eyes.

NICOLAS

Thank you for such a pleasant evening.
I do so enjoy your company, Clara. And
thank you for the delicious stew.

Clara returns the smile.

CLARA

You're welcome.

Nicolas grabs a lit lantern and heads for the door.

NICOLAS

If you will excuse me, I am off to your
stable to check on Amerigo and get some
rest.

CLARA

Goodnight, Nicolas. Sweet dreams.

NICOLAS

Goodnight Clara.

Nicolas reaches for the door.

CLARA

Oh, wait.

She grabs a nearby quilt.

CLARA

I know there's blankets in the bunk
room...

And hands it to Nicolas.

CLARA

...but here's an extra in case you get
cold.

Nicolas takes the blanket and smiles.

NICOLAS

Thank you, Clara. But believe me, I am
well used to the cold.

INT. STABLE - DAWN

The shadow of a woman is cast in the bright morning
sunlight that pierces the stable's open doors.

Clara steps in and makes her way toward Nicolas who's
brushing down Amerigo.

CLARA

Sleep well?

NICOLAS

Very well, thank you. Your bunk room was quite comfortable.

Clara strokes the stallion's neck.

CLARA

How are you doing, Amerigo?

Amerigo shakes his head "yes" and whinnies. Clara kneels down for a better view of his leg.

CLARA

Looks like he's almost healed.

Nicolas gazes at Clara.

NICOLAS

Thanks to you.

Clara smiles and begins removing his scarf "bandage." She cast her gaze at Nicolas.

CLARA

Would you like some breakfast?

NICOLAS

Thank you, Clara. That would be marvelous.

CLARA

Let me make sure this is healing properly.

Clara returns to removing the bandage as Nicolas' eyes wonder to the sleigh. He gives Amerigo another good neck rub and steps toward it.

NICOLAS

Did this sleigh also 'come with the place?'

CLARA

Yes, it did. It looks like the reindeer were meant to pull it, but apparently the previous owner never used it. Neither have I.

NICOLAS

Who was the previous owner?

Clara takes the scarf bandage off and looks at Nicolas.

CLARA

You know, I never met him. I bought the place through an escrow agent. But I hear he was a strange man. He claimed Angels delivered the reindeer. Supposedly, they told him how to build the stable and sleigh, which apparently, he did.

NICOLAS

Angels with gifts of reindeer? How peculiar.

CLARA

He claimed the angles told him he was to be their caretaker until 'the one' arrived. Said the reindeer were a gift from God and could fly.

Clara examines Amerigo's leg.

CLARA

The agent told me that on his death bed, the old man grabbed him by his shirt and said he had to tell him something that he must pass on to the new owner. To make the reindeer fly, just call out the word 'on' before each of their names.

NICOLAS

Very strange.

CLARA

Then, the old fellow died. But the agent kept his word and did pass on this 'secret incantation' to me.

NICOLAS

Have you ever used this 'incantation?'

Clara giggles as she stands.

CLARA

Of course not.

She glances at Amerigo and rubs his neck.

CLARA

Good as new Amerigo.

The stallion whinnies and shakes his head. Clara regains her gazes on Nicolas.

CLARA

I thought the old man was drinking way too much of his home made whiskey. But you know, I have always wanted to hook the boys up and take a ride...

Her eyes widen.

CLARA

Hey, maybe we should try it out right now.

Nicolas looks a bit confused.

NICOLAS

Before breakfast?

Clara's voice fills with enthusiasm.

CLARA

It's a beautiful morning, there's a fresh pack of snow and I've always wanted to try this.

She gazes around the stable at the reindeer.

CLARA

Hey guys, want to go for a run?

The reindeer all snort and shake their head "yes." Clara disappears into the tack room. Her unseen voice is heard.

CLARA

From what I can tell it's not all that hard to hook up.

She returns with an arm full of leather harnesses and dumps them on the ground. Then grins at Nicolas.

CLARA

If you know how, that is.

INT. STABLE - A FEW MINUTES LATER.

All of the reindeer have been harnessed to the sleigh, which stands poised near the open stable doors. Nicolas is bent down, making adjustments to the lead reindeer.

The Saint stands and gazes longingly at Clara, who is securing the reins to the sleigh's bench seat.

NICOLAS

I must say, the morning sun only
accentuates your beauty, Clara.

Clara turns and slowly strolls toward Nicolas.

CLARA

Thank you Nicolas. And I must say, I
see a quite handsome face underneath
that white beard.

Nicolas looks a little embarrassed.

NICOLAS

I suppose I could shave it off...

Clara steps up to Nicolas and gazes into his eyes. She
reaches out and gently strokes his face over his long white
whiskers.

CLARA

No, I like you like this. It's not the
man's face that matters, it's what's in
his heart that counts. And I have a
feeling your heart is...

Clara's eyes widen as they are drawn over Nicolas' shoulder
through the open barn doors and into the sky beyond. In the
distance, two large black Ravens flies across her view.

CLARA

Oh no. Don't tell me...

Nicolas appears puzzled as Clara's face goes blank.

NICOLAS

What is it Clara?

He looks over his shoulder. On the horizon, headed toward
the stable, are two Ravens circling a horse and rider. A
panic-stricken look comes over Clara's face.

CLARA

We've got to get out of here. Now!

She locks eyes with Nicolas.

CLARA

Okay, you've got yourself a renter.
Saddle up Amerigo and let's go.

Clara runs back to the sleigh and frantically makes
adjustments while Nicolas lags behind.

NICOLAS

Clara, I am not going to charge you rent. This is a gift...

CLARA

Whatever! Just come on. We've got to hurry!

Nicolas makes his way to Clara and stands next to the sleigh.

NICOLAS

Maybe I should talk to this fellow, discuss it man to...

She stops and snaps her head toward him.

CLARA

Nicolas! There's no 'discussion' with Odin! You can't talk or reason with him. He thinks he's a God! And he's here for one reason. To take me with him. So if you really meant what you said then please, let's go now!

Nicolas gazes into Clara's eyes only for a moment then heads toward Amerigo's saddle. Clara lightly snaps the reins.

CLARA

Okay boys, tighten it up a little.

The straps tighten and the sleigh moves forward a bit, positioning Clara directly beneath a rafter.

CLARA

Nicolas, could you make sure the straps in the front are...

Just as Nicolas grabs for the saddle Clara quickly stands and accidentally knocks her head against the rafter. She slumps back down to the sleigh's bench seat.

NICOLAS

Clara!

Nicolas climbs into the sleigh and leans over an unconscious Clara. He adjust her to a more comfortable position and strokes the side of her face.

NICOLAS

Clara, can you hear me?

She continues to lay unconscious.

NICOLAS
Clara, it is Nicolas.

Nicolas looks out the open stable doors and sees the two black ravens closing in. Followed closely by a white, eight-legged stallion and rider.

NICOLAS
We must go.

Nicolas jumps out of the sleigh, grabs Amerigo's saddle and his staff. He gazes at his stallion as he tosses the items into the back of the sleigh.

NICOLAS
Are you able to travel?

Amerigo whinnies and shakes his head "yes."

NICOLAS
Then let us make haste.

Nicolas climbs back into the sleigh. He glances at Clara then looks forward and sees the intruder nearly upon them. He grabs the reins and gives them a snap.

NICOLAS
Onward boys!

The harnesses tighten. The reindeer move in unison, pulling the sleigh toward the open doors of the stable.

EXT. OUTSIDE CLARA'S STABLE - MORNING

Odin rides up just as the reindeer bolt through the open doors at a gallop. Snow sprays the air as the sleigh turns away from the stable, with Amerigo following close behind.

Odin is a thin, gray-bearded old man with one eye. His leathery face is mostly hidden by a huge, broad-rimmed hat. He wears a dirty, pale-blue, leather trench coat.

He watches as the sleigh turns toward a clearing in the trees and vanish over the horizon. He smiles, snaps his reins and gives chase.

EXT. PATH THROUGH FOREST - MORNING

The reindeer pull the sleigh briskly up and down the hills of the mountain path. Nicolas does a double take as he sees Clara regaining consciousness.

NICOLAS
Clara!

Clara slowly sits up.

CLARA

Where are we?

NICOLAS

Are you hurt?

CLARA

Nothing more than a bruised noggin.

She looks around.

CLARA

So, it looks like we're going to take that ride after all. Where's Odin?

NICOLAS

I left him at the stable. Maybe he'll leave and we can return later for your belongings...

Then locks her gaze behind the sleigh.

CLARA

I don't think so.

Nicolas glances over his shoulder and catches a glimpse of Odin far behind but approaching quickly. He gives the reins a snap and yells.

NICOLAS

Faster boys, faster!

The reindeer quicken their pace. But the huge gallops of Odin's eight-legged stallion continues to close the gap between him and the sleigh.

Amerigo, galloping directly behind the sleigh, leaps up and takes to the sky. Clara watches slacked-jawed as the stallion glides over and in front of the sleigh.

CLARA

He can fly!

NICOLAS

Told you.

Amerigo flies ahead putting more distance between him and the sleigh with each gallop.

Clara gawks at Nicolas.

CLARA

Then...you really are Saint Nicolas,
aren't you?

NICOLAS

I have been telling you that as well.

Nicolas gazes forward as Amerigo disappears into the sky.

NICOLAS

He must sense danger ahead.

CLARA

Do you remember what direction we went
when we left?

NICOLAS

No. Why?

CLARA

One way leads down the mountain, the
other leads to the edge of the
mountain. As in, 'cliff.'

Odin is now only a few hundred feet behind them. Ahead,
Amerigo flies back toward the sleigh.

The stallion hovers over the racing reindeer and faces
Nicolas. He begins to whinny and shake his head "no."

CLARA

Okay, now I know which way we're going.

Clara looks behind her and sees that Odin has nearly caught
up with the sleigh. She gazes forward as she speaks.

CLARA

So Clara, what's it going to be?
Falling off a cliff or life with Odin?

Nicolas gawks at the pursuer, toward the cliff now only a
few hundred feet away then at Amerigo, still shaking his
head "no." He turns back to Clara and smiles.

NICOLAS

I believe it will be neither. God has
already given us the answer.

Nicolas faces forward, snaps the reins and yells.

NICOLAS

On Dancer. On Dasher. On Prancer. On
Vixen...

One by one the reindeer start snorting as their name is called. Each sparkle with a golden aura of light. Clara gazes in disbelief. The cliff is now fast approaching.

NICOLAS

On Comet. On Cupid. On Donder. On
Blitzen.

As with the first four, the reindeer react with fits and snorts as their name is called. A golden aura of sparkling light now surrounds the entire team.

The sleigh reaches the mountain cliff. Two by two the reindeer leap off the edge and fly into the air, pulling the sleigh with it.

Nicolas and Clara look behind them and see Odin's eight legged-stallion skidding to a halt at the edge of the gorge. Odin glares at them as he gets smaller and smaller.

Amerigo flies up beside the sleigh and matches its speed. Nicolas and Clara smile and gaze at each other in amazement as they disappear into the clouds.

EXT. SLEIGH - SKY - MORNING

Clara leans back in the bench seat and props up her feet on the front of the sleigh. She gazes forward at the reindeer galloping through the sky.

CLARA

This is incredible! I'm going to the
top of the world in a sleigh pulled by
flying reindeer.

She gazes at Nicolas with wonderment.

CLARA

Did I say incredible? I
mean...well...double incredible! Or,
what comes after incredible?

She leans forward and directs her comment to the reindeer.

CLARA

Why didn't you guys tell me about this
before?

NICOLAS

You did not ask properly.

Clara laughs then gazes at Nicolas and smiles.

CLARA

No. It's because you are 'the one.'

Nicolas returns the smile.

NICOLAS

I am so glad that you are safe.

Clara mimics his voice.

CLARA

And I 'am' so glad you saved me.

She giggles. Nicolas looks a bit perplexed.

NICOLAS

I have been meaning to ask you. What dialect of English are you speaking?

The sleigh slowly disappears over the horizon as Clara's giggle fades out and Steve's voice fades in.

STEVE (O.C.)

As always, true to his word, Nicolas built beautiful living quarters for Clara and fancy stables for her reindeer.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Clara, with her sleeves rolled up, carefully paints a wooden, toy horse.

STEVE (O.C.)

She began helping the Elves in the workshop with everything from toy construction to packaging.

Clara is in the workshop surrounded by Elves, all tugging at her apron. She says something to one, then frantically turns, smiles and speaks to another.

STEVE (O.C.)

Before long, she came to love the Elves as a mother would her children. Healing them when they were sick and seeing to their every needs.

Nicolas steps in and smiles longingly at her. She looks over the Elves and returns the smile.

STEVE (O.C.)

As the months passed into years, Clara and Nicolas fell deeply in love. She knew Nicolas wanted to marry her and she wanted to marry him.

Clara is in the reindeer's stable standing by a stall labeled "Blitzen." She looks lost in thought as she strokes the reindeer's head poking over the stall's half-door.

STEVE (O.C.)

But Clara felt unworthy to be Nicolas' wife. She realized he would never age as she grew older. Someday she would be with God in Heaven, leaving Nicolas behind on Earth, alone and without her. Clara just couldn't bear the pain of hurting someone she loved so dearly.

Clara and Nicolas sit at the dining table eating and laughing.

STEVE (O.C.)

But she never told Nicolas of her fear and told him she would have to 'think about it' when Nicolas hinted at marriage. Then one night...

INT. CLARA'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Clara sits in a rocking chair next to a crackling fireplace. A roll of yarn lays in her lap. The CLANKING of needles is heard as she knits a sweater.

Then, a knock at the door. Clara stops knitting and leans forward.

CLARA

Come in.

The door opens and Jesus steps in. Clara looks puzzled.

CLARA

May...I...be of assistance?

Jesus steps up to her, smiles and extends his hands.

JESUS

Hello Clara. I am Jesus, Nicolas' friend.

Clara drops the sweater and needles and stares slack-jawed. She extends her hand for a shake.

JESUS

I am so very pleased to meet you in person, finally.

CLARA

You are the Jesus...I mean...Jesus Christ?

JESUS

Yes, that is correct.

Clara tosses the knit work to the floor and lifts herself from the rocking chair. She nervously gazes at the cluttered surroundings.

CLARA

Oh...I'm...so sorry. I wasn't expecting...

She uses her foot to scoot away the pile of yarn in front of Jesus and begins to awkwardly fall to her knees. She looks away.

CLARA

You know, I was raised Jewish. I don't even know how to address you. Sir?...Lord?...

Jesus kneels

JESUS

How about friend?

He stands her up.

JESUS

Because there is something I must tell you, as a friend.

Clara gazes into Jesus' eyes.

JESUS

Clara, you are hesitant to accepted Nicolas' proposal for matrimony.

She breaks her gaze and steps away.

JESUS

You need not worry about mortality...

CLARA

But it's not fair to Nicolas! He would have to watch his wife grow old and die. He's immortal and...

JESUS

So are you.

Clara wheels around and again, locks her eyes with Jesus.

CLARA

What?

JESUS

Even when you were very ill, you have never used your healing powers on yourself. Have you?

CLARA

No, I haven't.

JESUS

That is all you have to do to become immortal, Clara.

Jesus steps toward Clara.

JESUS

Clara, God is very pleased that you have used your gift to help others through the years. But it was always meant for you, for this time. To allow you to become Nicolas' wife and stand by his side for eternity, if that is what you wish. That would also please God.

Like a child, Clara gazes into Jesus eyes.

CLARA

How?

JESUS

By simply using your gift and believing. But of course, it is your choice.

Clara looks at Jesus a moment then smiles. She crosses her arms and places each hand to the opposite shoulder. Jesus steps back as Clara closes her eyes.

The same glow that illuminated Amerigo's injured leg forms a ring above Clara's head. It begins to spread toward her feet, finally engulfing her entire body.

A moment later, the glow fades. Clara takes a deep breath and opens her eyes. Jesus smiles.

JESUS

May I be the first to congratulate the bride?

Clara jumps toward Jesus and gives him a big hug.

CLARA

Thank you. Thank you, Jesus. And please, thank God for answering my prayers.

JESUS

You already have.

A MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Clara and Nicolas sit at the dining table talking.

STEVE (O.C.)

That night Clara told Nicolas that she no longer needed to 'think about it.' If Nicolas proposed, the answer would be 'yes.'

Nicolas is on one knee offering the Music Box to Clara.

STEVE (O.C.)

Nicolas even went back to Clara's cabin and retrieved the Music Box as a gift of engagement.

Jesus stands in front of Nicolas, Clara on one side, Pete on the other. Behind them, a huge crowd of Elves look on. Some are crying.

STEVE (O.C.)

Soon, Clara and Nicolas were married by Jesus himself, with Pete serving as the Best Man. Their love for each other only grew stronger and stronger as the years passed.

Clara sits at a desk surrounded by hundreds of letters. Some are placed in neat stacks, the rest are scattered about.

STEVE (O.C.)

Clara took charge of sorting through the millions of letters Nicolas receives from children all over the world each year.

Nicolas sits at a drafting table. Several hand-drawn sketches lay on the floor beside him.

STEVE (O.C.)

Nicolas kept designing new and better toys, always trying to outdo whatever he had done the previous season.

Nicolas steps into a workshop filled to the brim with toys. Pete walks up and shrugs his shoulders.

STEVE (O.C.)

And the workshop kept growing, and growing, and growing.

Nicolas sits atop Amerigo with two large red bags draped down the stallion's flanks. Pete rides up on Mistletoe. They talk.

STEVE (O.C.)

To keep up with the demand, Nicolas devised a system where he and Amerigo along with Pete and Mistletoe, would deliver the toys to some countries on the sixth of December.

A quick shot of Nicolas, the reindeer and sleigh.

STEVE (O.C.)

On December 24th, Christmas Eve, he would use the reindeer and sleigh to deliver the toys to the rest of the world.

A shot of Nicolas climbing into a chimney.

STEVE (O.C.)

On that night, Nicolas would deliver his gifts in the same way as he did the bags of gold to the merchant's daughters, without being seen.

Nicolas laying gifts near a fireplace.

STEVE (O.C.)

For years he managed to keep his true identity a mystery, until one night...

INT. BRITISH TENANT HOUSE - NIGHT

An unseen clock ticks. The view slowly pans across its face which reads ten o'clock precisely. The view zooms in on a calendar noting the day as December 24th.

Standing beside the calendar is a small, gray mouse standing perfectly still.

The view continues to pan across the room to a fireplace crackling with activity. Several stockings are hung on the mantle. The view moves to two children, fast asleep.

In the corner of the room, a young man, CLEMENT CLARK MOORE, sits at a table with a quill pen in hand. A candle illuminates a single piece of paper that reads:

A POEM FOR MY LOVING CHILDREN.

Moore stares at the paper a moment, sits the pen down on the table and rubs his eyes. He grabs a sleeping cap, puts it on and blows out the candle.

He steps over to the children, bends down and gently kisses each. Then pulls back the cover of a nearby bed and crawls in. The CRACKLING of the fireplace is all that's heard.

Then, a loud BANG. Moore throws back the cover and springs to his feet. His wife, with handkerchief wrapped around her head, sits up.

WIFE

What was that noise?

MOORE

I don't know.

Moore rushes to the window. He parts the curtains, throws open the shutters and peers outside. The full moon brightly illuminates the white snow, making visibility easy.

From his second floor window, Moore can see the sleigh and reindeer on a rooftop several houses down. He watches in amazement as Nicolas pops up from a chimney.

The man turns to his wife.

MOORE

You won't believe this.

The wife has already laid back down and pulled the covers over her head.

WIFE

Unless it's Saint Nicolas himself, I'm not interested.

MOORE

I think it is.

Her reply is sarcastic.

WIFE

Good night, dear.

Moore sits on the edge of the window. He leans his head outside and hears Nicolas calling out the reindeer's name in the distance.

He watches as the reindeer and sleigh take to the sky with Nicolas at the reins. They fly directly over him and disappear over his roof.

Moore sticks his head further out the window, trying to keep Nicolas in his view. Suddenly, he hears a CLATTERING sound from inside. His wife and kids continues to sleep.

Moore quickly pulls his head in, stands and wheels around. The fireplace extinguishes and enlarges. A much fatter Nicolas wearing his traditional "Santa" suit drops down.

Nicolas steps in and dusts the soot off his pants. He spots Moore, puffs his lips and gives him the "quiet sign" while pointing to the children.

A dumbfounded Moore shakes his head "yes."

Nicolas slings the huge red bag from his back to the floor. As he kneels down, a lit pipe appears, clenched between his teeth.

But the smoke doesn't dissipate into the room. Instead, it gathers and circles just above the red "Santa" cap Nicolas wears.

He reaches into the bag and pulls out a wrapped gift. He gazes at it. Then with a huge ear-to-ear grin, winks at Moore.

Nicolas chuckles to himself as he reaches in the bag and pulls out three more gifts. He stands and places one in each one of the stockings.

After the last stocking is carefully stuffed, Nicolas faces the man and quietly chuckles again. His now, quite-round belly jiggles from the laughter.

Moore too begins to laugh but quickly slaps his hand against his mouth. He glances to his wife and kids. They still remain fast asleep.

Nicolas waves goodbye, grabs his red bag and slings it over his shoulder. He takes a couple of puffs from his pipe as he steps backward into the fireplace.

The Saint glances up the chimney then places his index finger beside his nose. He looks at Moore, nods and smiles.

A second later, Nicolas disappears up the chimney. The fireplace returns to its normal size and the CRACKLING of the logs return.

Moore turns toward the window but in an instant, finds himself again sitting at his table with a quill pen in hand.

The clock ticks. Moore snaps his head and gawks at the time. It reads ten o'clock precisely.

He wrinkles his brow shakes his head slightly, as if trying to remember something.

Suddenly his eyes widen. He jumps up from the table and runs toward the door.

EXT. BRITISH TENANT HOUSE - NIGHT

The door flies open. Moore rushes onto the landing and dashes down the stairs. He runs several feet away from the house and looks up.

On the roof, he can see Nicolas placing the bag in the back of the sleigh and take the drivers seat. Nicolas snaps the reins and whistles. The sleigh launches.

NICOLAS

That's it for this season boys. Good job!

Nicolas notices Moore watching him and pulls the reins. The sleigh flies directly over the wide-eyed observer. "Santa" leans out and shouts.

NICOLAS

Merry Christmas!

The sleigh bolts down the center of the street. Nicolas seems "intoxicated" with joy as he looks both ways and yells at the houses.

NICOLAS

Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!

Lights can be seen illuminating some of the windows. With sleeping gowns and frayed hair, many of the residents poke their head out with candles in hand, gawking.

When the sleigh reaches the end of the street, it takes off like a jet. The bright moonlight silhouettes the image of Santa and his sleigh against a star-lit sky.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP

The image of an old book. On its pages, nothing but handwritten text. Nicolas' voice is heard.

NICOLAS

Merry Christmas to all. And to all, a good night.

A hand closes the book.

NICOLAS

What do you think?

Nicolas sits at a drafting table with the book in front of him. Blueprints and notes are scattered about the rest of the desktop.

He looks up at Clara, her hand draped on his shoulder. She appears a bit perplexed.

CLARA

Did you really buzz those houses at the end?

NICOLAS

Of course not. He made that part up. But it does give it a 'punchy' ending, doesn't it?

Clara smiles and pats Nicolas' shoulder.

CLARA

It's very nice, dear. Now it just needs some illustrations to go along with it.

Nicolas' face lights up.

NICOLAS

I agree! What a brilliant idea!

INT. NEW YORK CITY - TENANT HOUSE - NIGHT

A lantern sits on the corner of a drafting table. A handsome young man, THOMAS NAST, leans over and brushes the finishing touches to a very detailed illustration.

An inscription at the bottom reads: BY THOMAS NAST

Nast dips the pen into the inkwell and slowly moves his hand toward the paper. Then, a loud KNOCK at the door which startles him. He drops the pen. Ink smears the drawing.

Another KNOCK. Nast grimaces. Another KNOCK, this time louder. He cranes his head and yells at the door.

NAST

Go away! You have already ruined three weeks of my work!

A second later, yet another loud KNOCK. Nast stands and marches to the door. He grabs the knob and throws it open.

Standing just outside is Nicolas, looking exactly like the "Coca-Cola" version of Santa Claus. Pete stands beside him holding what appears to be a file, topped with a bow.

NAST

Is this a joke? Old man, you just ruined...

NICOLAS

Nothing. Your work is as it was before my arrival. I'm sorry if I startled you, Thomas.

NAST

How do you know my name?

Nicolas and Pete look at each other and begin to chuckle.

NAST

What is so funny?

NICOLAS

We've been delivering gifts to you since you were born. This is my assistant Pete, and I am Nicolas of Myra.

PETE

Saint Nicolas.

NICOLAS

Among many other monikers.

NAST

The Saint Nicolas? That is preposterous.

NICOLAS

Remember that new box of crayons and drawing pad you got for Christmas when you were ten years old?

Nast looks startled.

NAST

How did you know about that? No one knew where they came from.

NICOLAS

That's because I gave them to you. You needed your artistic abilities nurtured.

Nast begins to scrutinize Nicolas.

NAST

How could you...

NICOLAS

Listen, Thomas, I have an assignment for you. I feel it's time for the world to know the truth about me and I want you to tell them.

Nicolas glances at Pete, who hands Nast the file.

PETE

In this dossier are some basic facts about the operation. Description of the workforce, toy distribution, children demographics from the letters we receive and the general area of the workshop at the North Pole. I regret to inform you we cannot confirm nor deny the workshop's exact location.

Pete smiles.

PETE

You will also find some snappy illustrations plus a 'behind the scenes' look at our operation...

Nicolas reaches out and touches Pete's arm.

NICOLAS

Above all Thomas, please, pay particular attention to the illustrations. The ones people have been drawing of me are ghastly.

Nicolas glances at Pete. He nods. They take a step back. Santa looks up, then back to Nast. He touches the side of his nose and smiles.

NICOLAS

Spread the word, Thomas. See you at Christmas.

Nicolas and Pete rocket toward the night sky. Nast bolts through the door.

EXT. SKY OVER NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Nast trots down the gas-lit street gazing upward. He stops and watches the sleigh vanish behind tall buildings then into the night sky. He shakes his head in disbelief.

INT. NEW YORK CITY - TENANT HOUSE - NIGHT

Nast steps in and closes the door. He walks over to the drafting table and sits. He pulls the bow off the file and begins to open it, then, glances at the table.

The pen he'd dropped was now neatly tucked into the inkwell. He gazes at the illustration. The ink smudge is gone.

Nast quickly opens the file and begins reading as Steve's voice fades in.

MONTAGE OF SHOTS

Nicolas, sleigh and reindeer fly through the sky.

STEVE (O.C.)

As the years passed, the image of the Santa Claus we know today became firmly established in the hearts of everyone. His sleigh and eight reindeer were soon recognized by all.

A family decorates a Christmas tree.

STEVE (O.C.)

Before long, his yearly visits became the biggest event of the year.

A child writes a letter.

STEVE (O.C.)

Children would spend weeks getting ready for Santa's magical visit.

Nicolas and sleigh fly through a thunderstorm.

STEVE (O.C.)

In any weather, under any conditions, Santa Claus always delivered his gifts on Christmas Eve without fail.

Scenes of a terrible snow storm.

STEVE (O.C.)

But one Christmas Eve, in the mid
1930's, there came a blizzard like the
world had never seen. That night...

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - NICOLAS' OFFICE

Nicolas sits at a console of old style computer monitors.
He leans forward, presses a button and gazes at one of them.

The monitor's depiction resembles a modern satellite view
of the Arctic Circle with bands of clouds racing across the
North Pole.

Nicolas presses buttons and gawks at another monitor. It
depicts the black and white video image of blizzards
billowing through various cities. Snowbanks are enormous.

Clara walks up as Nicolas studies the images.

CLARA

Still bad?

NICOLAS

No. It's worse. The visibility is so
poor, I'm afraid we'll run into
something. How are the reindeer taking
it?

CLARA

They're raring to go, especially
Rudolph.

NICOLAS

Rudolph needs more training.

Nicolas points to the monitors.

NICOLAS

He's not ready for this.

CLARA

Nicolas, we found Rudolph nearly three
years ago and you still haven't
completed his training. Why?

NICOLAS

Clara, he's not like the rest.

CLARA

Nicolas, you're over protecting him. He
wants to feel 'normal' not 'special.'
Did you know none of the other reindeer
will let him play in their games?

Nicolas looks surprised and a bit angry.

NICOLAS

No I didn't. I'll have to speak to them about that...

CLARA

I agree, dear. But that's not the point. You don't need to protect him, you need to encourage him by completing his training. Once you do, I guarantee, he'll earn the respect of the other reindeer and you won't need to give them a speech.

Nicolas ponders a moment.

NICOLAS

You're right, my love. Perhaps my protection of him has been a bit 'smothering.'

Clara kneels down and grabs Nicolas' hand.

CLARA

You're a kind and gentle man, Nicolas.

He glances at the monitors.

NICOLAS

Unfortunately, I don't see how that helps much tonight.

She stands and kisses his forehead.

CLARA

You're also brilliant. You'll think of a way to deliver those gifts.

After exchanging quick smiles, Mrs. Claus heads toward the door.

CLARA

Dinner is still waiting whenever you want it.

NICOLAS

Would you save it for me? I 'think' better on an empty stomach.

CLARA

Of course, dear.

Clara exits. Nicolas stands, glances at the monitors and walks to a nearby panel. He presses a button. The panel opens revealing the interior of what looks like an elevator.

Nicolas steps in and glances up.

NICOLAS
Observation deck.

An old-style elevator PING is heard. The doors close.

INT. OBSERVATION DECK - DUSK

Nicolas enters a large, octagon-shaped room with walls made of glass. Through the panes, it appears the blizzard has subsided, although a huge, dark cloud grows on the horizon.

The structure is several feet off the snowy landscape with an excellent view of the surrounding tundra.

Nicolas steps to one of the glass panes and gazes out. His reflection reveals the concern on his face as he watches the distant clouds grow ever larger.

NICOLAS
Lord, how am I ever going to make it through that?

Jesus' voice is heard from across the room.

JESUS
Clara is right. You will think of something.

Jesus steps up to Nicolas. They both gaze at the billowing clouds.

NICOLAS
I've never faced anything like this before. Do you think God could help us out here? Maybe work a little atmospheric miracle?

JESUS
I'm sorry, my friend, he doesn't do weather anymore. However, I can make a suggestion.

Jesus points to a window in the opposite direction of the clouds.

JESUS
But you had better hurry.

Nicolas trots over to the window and gazes out.

Not far away, trudging through the snow, is a hornless, small reindeer.

JESUS

Your solution is getting away fast.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE OBSERVATION DECK - DUSK

Light peers through an open door in the "shaft" of the mushroom-shaped observation deck. Human tracks in the snow lead away from the structure and intersect reindeer tracks.

Nicolas pushes his way through the snow, quickly closing the gap between him and the small reindeer in front of him. He stops and cups his hands around his mouth.

NICOLAS

Rudolph!

Rudolph stops. He turns and gazes at Nicolas for a second. What appears to be a sock covers the end of his nose. He looks forward again and continues his trek.

NICOLAS

Rudolph! Please, wait!

Rudolph stops again. Nicolas pushes forward with even more vigor and catches up to the reindeer. The clouds are starting to roll in fast and the snow begins to increase.

NICOLAS

Where are you going, my friend?

Rudolph looks at Nicolas with sad, "Bambi" eyes. A teardrop falls down his hairy cheek and collects with others that have frozen to his fur.

Nicolas falls to his knees and sits back on his heels. He brushes away the ice tears from the reindeer's face.

NICOLAS

Please, forgive me Rudolph. In my zeal to protect you, I have failed you.

The wind picks up speed as the blizzard blows in.

NICOLAS

Let's go back to the workshop. I promise, next week we'll start your training and you'll never, ever have to wear this again.

Nicolas pulls the sock from Rudolph's face and quickly looks away. He holds out his hand to protect his eyes from the blinding red light pulsing from the reindeer's nose.

A second later, the snow and wind stop. Nicolas slowly stands, turns his back to Rudolph and looks around. His face fills with wonder.

The red light has created a bubble of energy that surrounds them. Outside the bubble, the blizzard rages on. But inside, all is calm. Nicolas looks up.

Above him, the red light has parted the clouds and snow, offering a bowl-shaped, clear view of the twinkling stars in the night sky.

The tiny creature closes his eyes and performs the reindeer version of gritting his teeth. The illumination from the red light morphs into a spotlight.

Nicolas slowly turns around. The light has dimmed enough for him to look over Rudolph's head. The tundra ahead is visible as far as the eye can see.

NICOLAS

Rudolph, with your nose so bright. You
could guide the sleigh tonight!

Rudolph snorts and shakes his head. Nicolas laughs.

NICOLAS

Yes, that does rhyme.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - SLEIGH LAUNCH BAY

The Elves are buzzing around the sleigh, which now looks like a fancy version of the original. Behind the bench seat rest Nicolas' old red bag, tied with a new red sash.

Nicolas and Clara walk in, arm in arm. Pete meets them at the sleigh.

PETE

We're ready, sir.

NICOLAS

Wonderful, Pete. We still have plenty
of time to make our deliveries.

PETE

Please, sir, be careful. It always
worries me when you go out alone.

NICOLAS

Don't worry, We'll be fine.

Nicolas knees down to Pete's eye level.

NICOLAS

Thank you Pete. You're a fantastic assistant and a great friend. I promise, I'll be extra careful.

Pete nods. Nicolas stands and faces Clara. They embrace.

NICOLAS

I love you, Clara my wife.

CLARA

And I love you, Santa Claus my husband.

After a one last big hug Clara steps back as Santa climbs aboard the sleigh. Jesus walks up and pats Nicolas on the shoulder.

JESUS

God speed, my friend.

Nicolas smiles and returns the pat. Jesus steps back from the sleigh as the Elves gather around. Nicolas gazes across the crowd. The room quiets.

NICOLAS

I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart. Year after year, your tireless efforts bring joy to the children of the world.

Nicolas focuses on Jesus and smiles.

NICOLAS

And hopefully, remind some why we celebrate this Holiest of nights.

Then returns his gaze to the crowd.

NICOLAS

Without this night and without you, I would have nothing to deliver. I'm privileged to be a part of such a marvelous team.

The crowd claps. Nicolas waits a moment before continuing.

NICOLAS

Tonight marks a very special occasion. We have a new member of the reindeer team who will guide us through this terrible storm. Thanks to him, even a blizzard won't stop us. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Rudolph.

The crowd begins to clap and cheer. From a side door, two Elves wearing very dark sunglasses, lead Rudolph to the front of the team and harness him at "point position."

Although it's difficult to tell, Rudolph is wearing a small, black metal cap that covers only his nose. In the front of the cap, is what looks like a tiny door.

The Elves finish their harnessing and step back. Nicolas takes his seat and grabs the reins. He glances around the room. It quiets.

A giant smile covers Nicolas' face. He looks forward and snaps the reins.

NICOLAS

On Dancer, on Dasher, on Prancer, on Vixen. On Comet, on Cupid, on Donder, on Blitzen....

Each reindeer "activate" as their name is called.

NICOLAS

...and on, Rudolph!

The tiny door in Rudolph's nose cover opens. The bright red glow shoots a focused spotlight down the shaft of the sleigh's launching tube. The crowd oohs and aahs.

Nicolas reaches in his pocket, pulls out a pair of stylish sunglasses and puts them on. He snaps the reins again.

NICOLAS

Let's fly, boys!

The crowd steps back. The sleigh moves forward and starts gaining speed as it enters the launching tube.

The Elves gather around the end of the tube and watch the sleigh vanish up a ramp.

EXT. NORTH POLE ABOVE THE WORKSHOP - NIGHT

The blizzard rages on. Double doors, like that of a missile silo, push away the snow as they open. Beneath the doors, a faint red glow begins to intensify.

As the glow gets brighter, a bubble of energy emerges through the doors, forcing the inclement weather away from the opening.

The winds begin to die, the snow stops falling. The red glow from the opening is now nearly blinding.

Suddenly, Rudolph, followed by the reindeer and sleigh, blast through the open doors. They rocket skyward, encased in the red glow of the protective energy field.

Nicolas takes off his sunglasses and gazes ahead. On either side the blizzard rages on, but in front of him, the view is perfectly clear. He mutters to himself in amazement.

NICOLAS

This will work.

Then gives the reins another snap.

NICOLAS

Onward boys, time's a wasting.

The sleigh makes a banking turn and heads for the horizon. As the sleigh shrinks in the distance, Nicolas' voice is heard. He sounds very 'jolly' as he laughs.

NICOLAS

Ho, ho, ho. It's going to be a Merry Christmas after all. A Merry Christmas indeed. A good night to all...

Steve's voice fades in as the sleigh disappears into the clouds.

STEVE (O.C.)

...and to all, a good night.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Steve lays the book on his lap and looks at his daughter on the sofa. She's fast asleep. Only a small flame on a pile of ashes remain in the fireplace.

Steve stands, steps to the bookshelf and returns the encyclopedia to the open slot between the others.

He walks to the sofa, gathers Natalie's blanket and gently picks her up. She moans a bit but stays asleep.

With child in his arms, Steve turns and stares at the Christmas tree. The small flicker of firelight shines against it's tinsel and ornaments.

A moment later, the flame in the fireplace dies. A small night-light kicks on behind him. Steve turns and heads for the stairs.

As Steve walks away, the view closes in under the sofa, where the small night-light now illuminates a piece of paper lying on the floor.

As the view closes in, the child-like writing on the paper comes into focus. It reads:

DEAR SANTA. DON'T BRING ME ANY TOYS THIS YEAR. I'D RATHER HAVE MY MOMMY HOME FOR CHRISTMAS. BUT PLEASE STOP BY ANYWAY FOR MILK AND COOKIES. NATALIE.

A moment later the letter begins to inexplicably flutter. It flies into the fireplace and disappears up the flue.

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE ABOVE ROOF - NIGHT

Natalie's letter burst from the chimney completely unscathed without a single scorch mark.

EXT. MONTAGE OF CHRISTMAS SCENES - NIGHT

It rides the wind as it passes suburban homes, all lit with colorful Christmas lights and decorations. Some with folks singing Christmas carols in the front yard.

The letter continues toward the city skyline in the distance, passing a Christmas tree lot with a family buying one of the few remaining trees.

It flutters past a well-lit frozen pond where skaters are gliding effortlessly around the edges, while others climb a nearby hill and ride their sleds to the bottom.

As the letter closes in on the city, it flies up and over a cross on a church steeple. Below, folks are gathering around a manger scene while others head inside.

A huge sign atop a skyscraper that reads "Central Hospital" comes into view. The letter changes course and heads straight toward the building.

It drops down to street level, dodging a horse drawn sleigh and popping over the long lines of last minute shoppers crossing the street in both directions.

The letter comes to an intersection with a sign that also reads "Central Hospital." It floats over to the building and flies straight up the wall.

A black mitten with a white, fur cuff and a bright red sleeve opens against the backdrop of the night stars.

Natalie's letter gently lands in the open mitten which closes and snatches the letter from view.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A nurse slowly walks down a long hall casually glancing into the open doors of each patient's room. She looks into Jill's room, abruptly stops and looks again.

Standing beside the bed with his back toward the door is someone that looks like Santa Claus, leaning over Jill with his hand on her forehead.

NURSE

Excuse me. Visiting hours are over.

Santa doesn't respond. With more of a stern voice.

NURSE

Hey, 'Santa Claus.' This is ICU. You're not supposed to be here.

Santa still doesn't respond. The nurse looks down the hall to another nurse sitting at a work station.

NURSE

Better call security.

When she looks back into the room, Jill is still in bed but Santa is gone and the window is open. She snaps her head back toward the station and yells.

NURSE

Call now!

INT. JILL'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

The nurse runs into the room and begins examining Jill. A moment later, a second nurse enters followed by the security guard, who immediately steps to the window.

Both nurses attend to Jill as the guard examines the window. Something outside catches his attention. He leans through the frame and gawks.

The reindeer and sleigh hover only a feet from the building. Nicolas is taking his seat when he notices the guard staring at him.

Nicolas winks at the guard and gives him a "salute." He grabs the reins, gives them a snap and whistles. In an instant the sleigh rockets into the night sky.

The first nurse turns to the guard.

NURSE #1

Did you find something?

He looks at her, absolutely and totally dumbfounded.

GUARD

Huh?

NURSE #1

You whistled.

GUARD

No I didn't.

Jill's eyes open. The attending nurse yells.

NURSE #2

She's awake!

The first nurse quickly steps back to the bed and both nurses help Jill as she begins to sit up.

NURSE #1

Take it slow, Jill.

Jenny the nurse steps in. She gazes at the open window, at Jill and smiles. Then steps to the bed as the nurses reposition the patient.

NURSE #1

How do you feel?

Jill blinks her eyes as she looks at each nurse.

JILL

I... I feel fine. Actually, really refreshed.

She gazes around the room with a wrinkled brow then back to the nurses.

JILL

Did I just see 'Santa Claus?'

From across the room, the guard replies enthusiastically.

GUARD

Yes, you did.

Everyone in the room looks quite perplexed except Jenny. She simply smiles.

EXT. SKY OVER CITY - NIGHT

A forward view from behind the sleigh as Nicolas guides the reindeer around tall buildings.

NICOLAS

Another great job well done, boys!
Let's go home.

With a snap of the reins the reindeer pull upward toward the stars in a clear sky.

Jesus now sits beside Nicolas. In unison, they both lean back in the bench seat and prop their feet up on the front of the sleigh. Nicolas gazes at Jesus with sincerity.

NICOLAS

Thank you so much for that. It was the best gift I've ever delivered.

JESUS

You're very welcome. I owe you big time anyway. And besides, Jill was going to make a full recovery eventually.

NICOLAS

But you made it happen tonight. And for that, I am eternally grateful.

Jesus smiles at Nicolas then cast his gaze forward at the clear, gorgeous night sky.

NICOLAS

And happy birthday. You're what... 'two thousand something' this year?

Jesus snaps his head toward Nicolas and "acts" indignant.

JESUS

Younger than you!

Nicolas laughs. The sleigh turns and silhouettes against the moon. Their voices can still be heard as the reindeer and sleigh begin to shrink in the distance.

NICOLAS

That's right, no matter how old you
get, I'll always be older.

JESUS

Ho, ho, ho.

Both men bust into laughter as the sleigh turns and
disappears among the twinkling stars.

FADE OUT:

THE END