

'Bells: From Manger to Reindeer'

TITLE CARD: Bethlehem, Judea 3 BCE

Against black, sounds of lamentations and violence. And then:

EXT. BETHLEHEM - NIGHT

An ongoing massacre. Soldiers storming into households. Women screaming. Brutal violence visited on families. Soldiers exit homes wiping swords, high on the fumes of murder.

Rising up, from above we slowly move towards the scene of JOSEPH, MARY and JESUS being accosted. In pure silence, a large Viking of a man on a suitably large horse arrives and intervenes, saving the child from certain death. We don't hear any of the dialogue. But ultimately, we do hear the faint tinkling of BELLS.

CLOSE on the distracted man's face; it is illuminated. Our view is obliterated into white...

TITLE CARD: North Pole, Present Day

EXT. NORTH POLE COMPLEX - DUSK

...and from this obliteration of white, snow now swirls as the North Pole and its quaint expanse is revealed. We head towards broad, latticed, Tudor-styled windows. We arrive at them to see elf children (elflings) inside, sitting in a clutch of about nine, intently watching something.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

...and because of this, the world
was renewed, it kept spinning as
before...

INT. NORTH POLE COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

Still on the elflings. Other-worldly, luminescent eyes. Shiny-faced, enraptured. Pointy ears twitching.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.C.)

...and they all lived -and loved-
happily ever after.

INT. NORTH POLE COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

We now see the woman. This is MRS. CLAUS. But not what you're expecting; tall, even when seated, thick black hair, olive skin.

She wears a diaphanous white dress, embroidery and lace its themes. Arms and lower legs tanned. She's barefooted; her toenails are painted a deep blue, stardust accenting each one.

The elflings cheer and clap...as well as issuing the distinctive elfling CHIRP only heard when a wee one's inner song of elf jollity insists on being shared with everyone. "Read us another!" "Or two!" "Or SEVEN!" More cheering, more clapping...and more chirping.

MRS. CLAUS

What would you like to hear next?

Instantly, a stream of yelled story titles fills the air.

CLOSE ON Mrs. Claus, delighted.

MRS. CLAUS (CONT'D)

Would you like me to choose? Or would you like to take a vote?

Joyous pandemonium ensues.

LUNA (O.C.)

Please tell us the story of how you and Santa came to be Mr. and Mrs. Claus.

Now silent, the elflings turn to LUNA, the tiniest of the group. Squinting their disapproval, blinking their confusion and everything in between.

ELFLING #1

Don't be such a DWARF, Luna! That's just plain-

MRS. CLAUS

(softly)
Language, please.

ELFLING #2

They've ALWAYS been Santa and Mrs. Claus!

ELFLING #3

Since...since FOREVER!

Everyone looks to Mrs. Claus. But she and Luna are already regarding each other with gentle eye-smiles.

MRS. CLAUS

It is true. My name was not always what it is now.

Ah; the same reaction as always over the years: a communal gasp, dead silence...and twitching ears.

MRS. CLAUS (CONT'D)

And Santa was not always his name.

Although...

(leaning forward
conspiratorially)

...Claus has ALWAYS been his name.

Silence. Then:

MAN (O.C.)

(booming)

And what do we have HERE?!?

Voice heavy with mirth and seasoned with music, SANTA CLAUS arrives. An older version of our Viking. A giant of a man. Long white hair, long white beard. Both braided accented by misshaped beads, bored-out pebbles and slim metal bands bound by gold cord just a touch thicker than thread. Sporting ornate, jangling sleigh-slippers, black caftan pants, a white shirt and a bold red vest with brass buttons, his cheeks are rosy, his eyes a-twinkling. He places his hand on his wife's shoulder, squeezing with gentle pressure as if it was made to do this, and this alone.

Mrs. Claus nuzzles, giggling like a girl.

MRS. CLAUS

We have some gobsmacked elflings,
my dear. Some elflings very much
interested in learning how
everything started.

Santa has brought with him a large wooden tray. On it, heaps of a kind of biscuit -PICS- a large stone jug of milk and an assortment of tiny mugs festooned with the twelve days of Christmas images. In concert, Mrs. Claus lifts the jug as Santa holds out the tray to the elflings. They are well-mannered, taking one pic and one mug, and waiting for Mrs. Claus to pour their milk.

SANTA CLAUS

Ah. I'm going to assume you're not
referring to 'the big bang', or
Cheonjiwang Bonpuri, or Jamshid, or
Coatlicue, or Diné Bahane, or
Hiranyagarbha...or even
Unkulunkulu...

They all laugh at his buffoonish face as he says this last one. And chirp.

Santa sits down beside his wife, giving her a tiny hip-check.

SANTA CLAUS (CONT'D)
 No, I suspect that you want to hear
 how my beloved ANDROULA...
 (kissing her at her
 temple)
 ...and I came to be US.

The elflings are both soothed and thrilled by the sight of the Clauses in this moment. They've always loved the inner glow they radiate, how they shine. But now, they watch them with an additional dollop of wonder, seeing them differently for the first time.

LUNA
 (biting into her pic)
 Please.

SANTA CLAUS
 It IS a long story.

MRS. CLAUS
 North Pole nights were MADE for
 long stories.
 (hip-checking him back)
 My dear CLAUDIUS.

SANTA CLAUS
 Very well. If you're all
 comfy...we'll begin.

TITLE CARD: Jerusalem, 24 B.C.E

EXT. JERUSALEM - DAY

Against black, a Hebrew song is sung by a man. On-screen, Biblical verses foretell the arrival of a Messiah.

'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' Isaiah 7:14

'I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.' Deuteronomy 18:18

'I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him;

his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.'
Daniel 7:13-15

We open up on Temple Mount, daytime activity around it. Priests in their raiments, worshippers with their sacrificial animals, moneychangers. This is the ancient foundation city.

Rising up into the air, we fly beyond the city's gates, across the Mediterranean. The screen tags the countries we're flying over, using contemporary names, each lighting up and then going blank in sequence.

As we pass over Europe, another song rises. It mixes with the Hebrew. It is a playful song sung in Norwegian by a woman.

We descend approaching Norway. We pass over Kristianland, a seaside village. We're low enough to only JUST make out violence unfolding below, fire and smoke. We carry on inland some distance over trees. The song is all we hear now, and ultimately, this fades as we arrive at the shore of a lake.

EXT. REMOTE NORWEGIAN LAKE - DUSK

Pre-teen CLAUS sits eating with his UNCLE at a fire. They're resting against a large abutment of smooth rock. A reindeer, recently killed, is heaped to the side. Claus stares at it.

UNCLE

You like them.

CLAUS

It's good to have. For everyone.
Several feasts, to be sure.

UNCLE

I was not referring to you liking
their meat. You like THEM.

CLAUS

I-

UNCLE

You would have one as a pet.

CLAUS

No!

UNCLE

(laughing)

Yes!

CLAUS
They're beautiful. I...

Claus recedes into silence. His uncle waits.

UNCLE
Speak! I am your uncle. Not your
father. Speak plainly. Speak from
your heart.

CLAUS
I would like to ride one.

UNCLE
(not laughing)
Your wish is to ride one-

CLAUS
I didn't say I WISHED-

UNCLE
-and that the glorious beast could
fly, and you could ride him across
the sky. Pleasing the night and its
children, the stars.
(pausing)
Show me the whittling you have been
working on.

Claus reaches into his pocket and pulls out a partially
carved wooden reindeer. His uncle examines it carefully.

UNCLE (CONT'D)
This is good! You are improving all
the time! You have a feel for
releasing the animal from within
the wood.

His uncle gently elbow-pokes Claus in the ribs.

UNCLE (CONT'D)
Clearly this ARTISAN has a
wonderful teacher.

CLAUS
He's all right.
(poking back)
But he teases me too much
sometimes.
(shrugging)
It's just a carving.

UNCLE
 (noting the reindeer)
 And THAT is just food. Often things
 have more than one meaning.

As if the 'honesty floodgates' have been opened...

CLAUS
 Uncle, do you hear sounds?

UNCLE
 What kind of sounds?

CLAUS
 (thinking hard)
 Like water. Over stones. Like
 songs. Happy songs.

His uncle regards him solemnly.

CLAUS (CONT'D)
 (perking up)
 Not water! Bells!

UNCLE
 Bells. Such as your-mother-my-
 sister wears?

CLAUS
 Yes! But not-

UNCLE
 You hear her jewellery? Do you hear
 them now? The bells?

CLAUS
 (half-pouting)
 Not now. And they're not hers.
 These bells are different. There
 are many, many of them.

UNCLE
 (ruffling Claus's hair)
 These are OUR secrets. The
 bells...and the flying reindeer. I
 promise I will tell NO ONE.
 (at Claus relaxing)
 If you promise to tell me when you
 next hear these bells of yours.

EXT. REMOTE NORWEGIAN LAKE - NIGHT

They prepare to sleep. Out of his personal pack, Claus brings forward a RED BLANKET. His uncle smiles.

UNCLE

I remember your-mother-my-sister crafting that for you. When you were a baby.

CLAUS

She says it will always keep me warm. Even as I grow. And it has. Always.

EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - DAY

As per the V.O.

UNCLE (V.O.)

On the morning you were born, one of your favourite beasts wandered into the village. It immediately went to where your-mother-my-sister was giving birth to you, collapsed in front of the hut...and was dead before it made the ground shake.

EXT. REMOTE NORWEGIAN LAKE - CONTINUOUS

Claus stares at his blanket.

UNCLE

In the middle of it all, without even knowing of the animal's arrival...

EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

As per V.O.

UNCLE (V.O.)

...she cried out that she wanted its hide. Some of us laughed, others simply nodded.

EXT. REMOTE NORWEGIAN LAKE - CONTINUOUS

UNCLE

Your mother has 'the touch'.

CLAUS

She made this out of a reindeer
hide? How? I never knew...

(now turning the blanket
over in his hands)

Is that what you mean by 'the
touch'? That she has the ability to
fashion-

UNCLE

(shaking his head)

She has 'the touch' as well as 'the
sight'. And 'the knowing'. Maybe
that one is the most powerful.
Nobody has ever successfully lied
to your-mother-my-sister. She
always knows the truth.

(laughing)

Your mother ruined my childhood.

(pausing)

These are gifts passed down
generation to generation through
daughters. From her mother, your
grand-mother, and her mother, and
her mother too, on and on and on.

(pausing)

As for how she managed to turn a
hide into a blanket...I cannot
explain it. Some things are best
left unexplained.

(softly musing)

I also have NO idea how she managed
to make it a red such as THAT.

CLAUS

Mysteries.

Claus unfurls the blanket. It unexpectedly covers him, and
some of his uncle. Claus moves closer to him to better share
the blanket. Both settle in. After a quiet interlude of Claus
staring up at the Northern Lights:

CLAUS (CONT'D)

The passing down of- Of these
mysteries. My mother's abilities. I
have no sister.

UNCLE

No. No, you do not.

EXT. REMOTE NORWEGIAN LAKE - DAWN

Claus's uncle is first to wake up. He looks around...then looks down to find both of them bundled comfortably; our red blanket 'EXPANDED' to accommodate them.

EXT. THICK FOREST - LATER

They transport their kill. It's rough going. Tricky bits are well-navigated. His uncle compensates for Claus's size.

UNCLE
(stopping)
Wait!

His uncle closes his eyes. Breathes. His eyes flash wide.

UNCLE (CONT'D)
March!

CLAUS
What's wrong?

They reach a clearing. His uncle stares at the sky.

UNCLE
Smoke!

EXT. SEASIDE NORWEGIAN VILLAGE - LATER

Mayhem and destruction everywhere. Nobody about. Only corpses. Claus finds the bodies of children. His uncle finds a woman. He falls to his knees, sobs over her.

UNCLE
They took her necklace. Her bells.

Stone-faced, Claus stares off into the distance.

BELLS.

CLAUS
They're ringing.

It takes his uncle a few seconds to process this, but he visibly calms.

UNCLE
You hear them? Your bells?

CLAUS
They're ringing.

EXT. SEASIDE VILLAGE - LATER

The bodies are piled. Claus places his carving inside his mother's coat. Pyres are lit.

Pulling a sailing craft out of a hiding place, they load whatever supplies are left.

CLAUS (V.O.)

But where are we going? Shouldn't we stay?

UNCLE (V.O.)

Whoever did this...they may return. We need to GO.

CLAUS (V.O.)

Go where?

UNCLE (V.O.)

To wherever you hear your bells ringing truly.

His uncle notes Claus's doubt.

UNCLE

Everyone is gone, Claus. We are the last of our village. There is no reason to remain here.

(considering the horizon)

You were born to be out there.

CLAUS

Out where?

UNCLE

Out there in the world that's not here. Beyond here. Beyond all this.

CLAUS

How do you know?

UNCLE

You have always had that faraway look in your eyes. A TWINKLE. And now, out of this unspeakable tragedy, the freedom for you to discover your true destiny and follow your bells no matter where they ultimately lead you. US.

TITLE CARD: 7 B.C.E.

EXT. KENYAN CITY - DAY

We venture through a thriving city.

RULER (V.O.)
(heavily accented voice)
This is something I have never
experienced.

CLAUS (V.O.)
The exotic nature of the animals?

INT. RULER'S STATELY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Here is wealth. Well furnished, but not overdone. A middle-aged, somewhat rotund African man - our RULER- squats before a table, on which stand three carved wooden animals, each nearing nine inches tall. He moves them about, fascinated.

RULER
No! The gifts I usually receive as
tribute are the stuff of gold, or
jewels, or perfumes, rich silks or
tapestries. But these...

We now see a man standing before him. He is in his late-20s. Tall. Broad. Long blonde hair. A rough stubble. This is an older Claus.

CLAUS
Please accept my apologies. I did
not mean to insult you with my
offering.

RULER
(rising)
Nonsense! These are MAGNIFICENT! My
children will be-
(looking to a nearby aide)
Summon my children!

RULER'S AIDE
My lord?

RULER
Tell them I have a surprise for
them. Tell them a curious man by
the name of- I'm sorry, I'm pitiful
with-

CLAUS
Claus, my lord.

RULER

Tell them Claus from the northern reaches of the world has brought them gifts.

(winking at Claus)

Astounding playthings suitable for children who have been...very good of late.

The aide departs.

CLAUS

You know your children well, my lord?

RULER

I have eyes in the back of my head.

CLAUS

(grinning)

Naughty or nice.

RULER

What's that?

CLAUS

It sounds like you know when they've been either.

RULER

(laughing)

Or both! And you? Children?

CLAUS

No. Not yet.

RULER

You're still a young man! There's plenty of time. But make sure you do have them; you'll need them to care for you when you're in your doddering years.

(regards Claus carefully)

Although there's something about you that speaks of- Of never reaching that state.

CLAUS

It is a dangerous world.

RULER

Danger is not what I was thinking-

The sounds of three young children interrupt him, calling out 'Father! Father!' The Ruler points to the gifts on the table. Each child (all under the age of 10) goes to the one they're drawn to, as if fated. They are instantly in awe of the pieces.

CLOSE on Claus; he appears even happier than them overcome by a glorious joy. The Ruler notices this. It distracts him.

RULER (CONT'D)

Children, this is Claus. He comes from the northern reaches of the world. Where the skies at night move like rainbows in streams.

He looks to Claus for confirmation.

CLAUS

They DANCE. And sing.

RULER

But he's not just from the northern reaches! He's also travelled almost as many miles elsewhere as there are stars in the sky.

The children approach Claus, spellbound.

RULER'S ELDEST DAUGHTER

Tell us a story!

CLAUS

And what payment would you offer for my tale-telling?

She holds out her carving to Claus, who narrows his eyes at her. Playfully.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

You're willing to exchange a gift just given you for a collection of untested words?

RULER

(laughing)

Daughter! Do you value your gift so little?

RULER'S ELDEST DAUGHTER

(without hesitation)

No, father. I value his story so great.

RULER

Join us for our evening meal,
Claus. For your saga retold, let
the payment be wine for a parched
throat, food for an empty belly-

CLAUS

And attentive ears for a lonely,
wandering soul.

The children cheer.

RULER

(to his aide)

Tell the cook to prepare a dinner
with food enough to accommodate a
guest.

(considers Claus)

Tell her TWO guests.

RULER'S ELDEST DAUGHTER

Where does your story begin?

CLAUS

My beginnings are perhaps for
another time. For now...

Claus brings a red sack forward to the table. This is his old blanket. Transformed. It has a gold twined rope draw-cord. He drops to his knees. Undoing it, he reaches in and brings out something wrapped in cloth. He uncovers a quite-detailed carving. When he places it on the table, the children are mesmerized. Then he retrieves another. And another. Again and again. These are the 7 Wonders (and more) of The Ancient World.

When he's done, the boy pokes his head inside the sack.

RULER'S SON

Where did you fit it all?!? It's
MAGIC, Father!

RULER

What are these? More carvings?
(laughing)
Are THESE ones for me?

CLAUS

Among other occupations I have
held, I am a teacher. These assist
me in my work.

(ruffles boy's hair)

Now;

(MORE)

CLAUS (CONT'D)

allow me to tell you of the wonders
of the world that I've been
fortunate to see.

As Claus showcases each carving, by way of dots on a map his progress is shown over the years from Norway through Europe to the eastern reaches of the Mediterranean. We see him at each archeological site with his uncle, the V.O. providing the information. The children are enthralled. The Statue of Zeus @ Olympia; The Temple of Artemis @ Ephesus; The Mausoleum @ Halicarnassus; The Colossus of Rhodes; The Ziggurat of Ur; Stonehenge; Petra; The Library @ Alexandria; The Lighthouse @ Alexandria; The Egyptian Labyrinth @ Faiyum; The Great Pyramid of Giza; The Ishtar Gate of Hillah; The Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Amongst others. Finally, we see his uncle ill, dying, and finally, Claus burning his body. But before he does, CLOSE on Claus considering tucking inside his uncle's coat a carving. It is an unfinished fish. He decides not to, but leaves another one instead.

During all this, the Ruler watches the interplay between Claus and his children.

INT. RULER'S DINING ROOM - LATER

Everyone is seated at a very big table, eating dinner with gusto. CLOSE on Claus downing a mug; he's left with a milk moustache. He holds up the jug to a servant, who fills it.

CLAUS

...and then there's SNOW.

RULER'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER

What's THAT?

CLAUS

Imagine rain. Now imagine cold.

Colder than the coldest night.

(gets nothing but stares)

Now imagine if you can, cold that
is colder to the degree that I am
older than you.

(nuthin')

Very well; then imagine tiny white
feathers, some no bigger than
grains of sand, floating down from
then sky, so many of them that you
can scarcely see your hand if you
bring it up in front of your face.
Imagine all this accumulated on the
ground, piled as high as you are
tall!

(still getting stares)

(MORE)

CLAUS (CONT'D)

Then I suppose you won't believe me
when I tell you about ICE.

RULER'S SON

We know about ICE!

RULER'S ELDEST DAUGHTER

Father has it brought to us at
special times of the year.

RULER'S YOUNGER DAUGHTER

From the mountains!

Claus is astounded.

The Ruler claps his hands. He whispers something to one of
his attendants. As the man races off, the Ruler looks smug.

CLAUS

At the time of year when it's
sufficiently cold, a lake can
freeze and turn to ice. It's like a
great stone bed. One you can walk
on. If the wind has blown
sufficiently and in just the right
way, its surface can be as smooth
as the skin of the most innocent,
and you can see through it more
clearly than the purest of still
water. Often we could see the fish
swimming beneath us. We could force
our way through the ice with a
spear to get to the water below. Or
if we weren't feeling particularly
patient, a large rock could be
heaved downward...being careful not
to mistake your feet for-

Claus's attention is diverted as the attendant returns with
an exquisite chest, as big as four loaves of bread combined.
Reaching into a pocket, the Ruler brings out a key and opens
the box. A smaller box is revealed, which the Ruler too,
opens. Finally, he gestures for the attendant to present the
third chest to Claus. Once Claus sees what's in it...ice from
the nearby mountains...he's notably moved. Once more, the
Ruler is distracted; there is something quietly profound
about this visitor.

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - LATER

ALL THREE CHILDREN

A song! A song! Sing us a bedtime
song!

RULER'S ELDEST DAUGHTER
 From the far reaches of the world.
 YOUR world!

At first Claus hesitates and looks to the Ruler, who happily gestures his approval. Claus breaks into the song that we recognize as the one heard at the beginning of this tale. But he stops; it's too painful for him to remember. And so he thinks, then begins singing another tune, one that's a little more lively, in another language. The children slowly fall asleep. Claus's goes from singing the words...to talking...to whispering...to a silent smile.

EXT. RULER'S COURTYARD - NIGHT

The Ruler and Claus sit under a gloriously star-crammed sky.

RULER
 You don't want to talk about why
 you're out in the world. I respect
 your need for privacy.

CLAUS
 Thank you.

RULER
 But tell me; what have you been
 DOING out in the world all these
 years?

CLAUS
 I have been a soldier. A master-of-
 arms. Mercenary. Courier. Somewhat-
 advisor. Bodyguard. Envoy.
 (pausing)
 I'm good with people. It helped
 during the brief time I was a
 slave.

RULER
 And a teacher, as well.
 (pausing)
 What do you teach?

CLAUS
 Children.

The Ruler is very pleased at this answer.

RULER
 You have a natural affinity with
 them.

CLAUS

(thinking deeply)

All those I knew as a child were killed. Murdered. Since that time, there has been a part of me that yearns to connect with young ones. No matter where I am.

RULER

And offer gifts made by your own hands.

He notes the instant smile on Claus's face.

RULER (CONT'D)

Well, my 'young ones' are enamoured of you. Even without their gifts, you captivated them with your tales.

CLAUS

They're fine children.

RULER

I have a proposition for you. Stay here a while and be their tutor. Their teacher. The last one died in his sleep recently. He'd been MY teacher as a youth.

(noting Claus considering)

Is there somewhere you need to be?

CLAUS

No.

(beat)

Not yet.

RULER

Well, no matter your decision, I would love to see your maps from all your journeys. Maps are a particular passion of mine.

CLAUS

I have no maps. I use no maps.

RULER

No maps! But that's impossible! How do you know where you're going?

CLAUS

I- I just DO.

TITLE CARD: Nazareth, 5 B.C.E.

Visuals as per V.O.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

EXT. CAVE - NIGHT

Joseph kneels outside a secluded cave, praying.

INT. CAVE - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE on Mary's face. No strain. Gazing upward, smiling. Beatific.

EXT. CAVE - CONTINUOUS

Against the sounds of a happily burbling newborn, Joseph rises and enters the cave.

EXT. BETHLEHEM FIELDS - NIGHT

Visuals as per the V.O.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

For unto you is born this day in
the city of David a Saviour, which
is Christ the Lord."

EXT. BETHLEHEM - NIGHT

We pass through this town to find Mary, Joseph with the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, laying in a manger with the shepherds in attendance, enraptured by the sight.

TITLE CARD: Percepolis, Persia, 3 B.C.E.

EXT/INT. PERCEPOLIS, PERSIA - DAY/NIGHT

MONTAGE:

An entirely different world: mysticism and wonder. We see THE MAGI, eleven-or-so Zoroastrian 'wise men' at work, star-gazing, making astronomical calculations, consulting with each other, et cetera. We see their caravanserai being put together, supplied, manned by some six dozen armed protectors. Then, with great ceremony, they depart in the middle of the night, the sky slowly segueing from black to blue, and as they head out, The Star is revealed to us, clearly invigorating everyone.

END MONTAGE

TITLE CARD: Sofia, Bulgaria, 3 B.C.E.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Very, very faintly, BELLS.

In the dark, a man sits up. It's Claus. His hair is even longer now, and he has a full -though not yet overgrown- beard. He blinks, peering straight ahead. These are eyes that SEE. Rising, he moves deftly out of the room, silently and swiftly navigating his way through a home overstuffed with sleeping people, finally exiting into a back yard.

EXT. HOME - CONTINUOUS

It's eerily quiet. Claus begins scanning the heavens. Nothing. Disappointed, dispirited, he seems wobbly on his feet, as if he's been gut-punched. He staggers to a huge tree, the centerpiece of the property. He leans against it, closing his eyes. Defeated. He slides down the tree trunk, eyes still shut.

When he's finally at ground level, he brings his knees to his chest, resting his brow on them. Finally, he raises his head until it's inclined towards the sky once more. He opens his eyes to find The Star twinkling between branches. He stares and stares; it's clear that this is a momentous development. Tears flow. He stands, walks forward beyond the limits of the tree, and we see him humbled, blissful as he stares up at this beacon.

EXT. SOFIA, BULGARIA LANDSCAPE - LATER

Claus departs at speed on a horse.

CLOSE on Claus; with conviction right there in his expression, there's a twinkle in his eye. And he appears to be SAYING SOMETHING TO HIMSELF.

EXT. ANCIENT PERSIAN LANDSCAPE - DAY/NIGHT

MONTAGE:

The Magi continue their journey. We also see them at rest, including engaging in their practices of their faith.

END MONTAGE

EXT. ANCIENT LEVANT LANDSCAPE - DAY

Claus arrives where a bridge has been washed out/destroyed. CLOSE on him as takes all this in. His recitation is a little louder at this point. Names?

In seeing there are no other options but to return the way he came, he whirls to depart, his recitation unaltered.

EXT. ANCIENT PARTHIAN LANDSCAPE - DAY/NIGHT

The Magi continue their journey.

EXT. A SAILING VESSEL - NIGHT

Claus sits, his back resting against his horse's leg. He's quietly reciting names. DEFINITELY names. A FELLOW PASSENGER hears him.

FELLOW PASSENGER

I don't know what you're saying,
but if you want to have an actual
conversation, don't be a stranger.

No response from Claus. It's as if he's meditating.

TITLE CARD: Jerusalem, Judea 3 BCE

EXT. JERUSALEM - NIGHT

High above the city.

TITLE CARD: King Herod the Great, Roman Client King of Judea.

INT. HEROD'S CASTLE, JERUSALEM - NIGHT

Herod stands at a window, looking out. He can see the Magi's serpentine caravanserai approach the city, illuminated by lit torches carried by members of the entourage.

EXT. JERUSALEM - CONTINUOUS

A soldier races through the city and into the palace.

INT. HEROD'S RECEIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The soldier arrives at the room where Herod is and moves swiftly past the guards.

KING HEROD

What do they want?

SOLDIER

(out of breath)

They wish an audience, my lord.
Something to do with the birth of a
new king.

(pause)

A king of the Jews.

Herod visibly blanches.

INT. HEROD'S RECEIVING ROOM - LATER

The Magi are received. They communicate through their own interpreter. With every communication, Herod checks with his own translator for confirmation. N.B. The interpreter and translator speak concurrently as needed.

MAGI #1

(in ancient Persian)

Some time ago, we began seeing portents of a new ruler in the workings of our arts. A king of kings, an emperor of all. We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage, to pay tribute to him. To your son?

Herod's anxiety shows in his voice.

KING HEROD

When was this child to have been born?

MAGI #

(in ancient Persian)

Some time ago. More than a year, less than two.

KING HEROD

Why the delay in your pilgrimage?

MAGI #1

(in ancient Persian)

Your highness... Sometimes the stars...our arts...do not reveal the future so much as uncover and delineate the past, propagating our understanding of the present.

MAGI #3

(in ancient Persian)

Revelation submits to no contract made by man. It happens when it is meant to happen, if it is to happen at all. There is, of course, a purpose to everything under the sun.

MAGI #2

(in ancient Persian)

Often the lagging of time provides the potential for heightened comprehension of truth.

KING HEROD

(muttering to himself)

Truth. WHOSE truth?

(aloud once more)

Tell me; how does it come that men from so far away have an interest in what transpires with the Jews?

MAGI #1

(in ancient Persian)

Sire, Persia is the home of no small number of Jews. When King Cyrus set free the captive Jews in our homeland some half a millennia ago, though a number of them returned to Israel, the overwhelming majority remained. Many, many times more than those who left. But even non-Jews, those who practice our faith know of the prophet Daniel.

MAGI #3

(in ancient Persian)

And of Nehemiah, and Habakkuk and Esther.

Herod is unhappy with everything he's hearing.

KING HEROD

Whatever you have determined about this child, he is not mine. I have no son his age.

The Magi huddle to commiserate.

MAGI #3

(in ancient Persian)

What of the priests here? What do THEIR arts tell them?

Herod thinks long on this. Then...

KING HEROD

You are my guests. My assistants will see to your every need. Please, rest, eat, and in the morning, return here to discuss this issue anew. In the meantime, I will meet with my priests.

The Magi file out of the room. Once gone, Herod gestures to an aide.

KING HEROD (CONT'D)

I want them here. NOW.

INT. TEMPLE OF THE PHARISEES - LATER

The aide has arrived at the temple; there is a furor. Agitated 'discussion'.

HEROD'S AIDE

I was bidden by the King to attend you and take you to him. As quickly as possible.

The Pharisees ignore the aide.

HEROD'S AIDE (CONT'D)

He- He is in no mood to be kept waiting. He has barely contained his- I will leave you to your brief considerations, but we must-

The aide is summarily cut off by a scythe of a sweeping arm from the HIGH PRIEST.

INT. HEROD'S RECEIVING ROOM - LATER

Herod receives the Pharisees. The high priest reads from a scroll.

PRIEST

'Thus it has been written through the prophet Micah: 'And thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, even though you remain least among the clans of Judah, nevertheless, the one who rules in Israel for me will emerge from you. His existence has been from antiquity, even from eternity. Therefore that ruler will abandon them until the woman in labor gives birth. Then the rest of his countrymen will return to the Israelis. Then he will take his stand, shepherding by means of the strength of the Lord, by the power of the name of the Lord his God. And they will be firmly established; indeed, from then on he will become great to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace.'

KING HEROD

And do you believe this prophet of yours?

The Pharisees cannot provide a firm response.

KING HEROD (CONT'D)

(furious)

Why do I have these men from the
east telling me of this news and
not my own priests?!?

EXT. ANCIENT ASSYRIAN LANDSCAPE - DAY

Claus continues his journey apace; he has the look of a
fevered man. Uttering fevered recitations.

EXT. HEROD'S CASTLE, JERUSALEM - LATER

The Magi leave Jerusalem; the star moves before them.

KING HEROD (V.O.)

Go and search carefully for the
child. As soon as you find him,
report back to me, so that I too,
may go and worship him.

EXT. BETHLEHEM - LATER

Their anticipation mounting, the Magi arrive in Bethlehem,
their ecstasy barely restrained.

INT. JOSEPH AND MARY'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

The Magi meet Joseph and Mary, and Jesus, who is now a
toddler. (We do not see the front of him.) They present him
with gold, frankincense and myrrh.

EXT. MAGI ENCAMPMENT - DAY

The caravanserai celebrates.

EXT. MAGI ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

Out of utter quiet, one of the tents is aglow from within.

INT. MAGI TENT - CONTINUOUS

The Magi face a blinding white light. Their expressions are
ones of wonder.

INT. HEROD'S RECEIVING ROOM - DAY

Clearly displeased, Herod addresses a man.

KING HEROD

When did you see them? In which direction were they going? These Magi.

MAN

Away, my lord. Away from Jerusalem.
(thinking)
Home?

KING HEROD

You're sure of this?

MAN

Yes, your grace.

KING HEROD

(to an aide as he turns
his back)
Reward him.

It's clear that the King is near-apoplectic, fury close to boiling over. He waits for his aide to complete the command and the man gone.

KING HEROD (CONT'D)

I want all of them dead.

AIDE

The Magi, your grace?

KING HEROD

All male-born in Bethlehem. Two years or younger.

AIDE

The entirety of them, sire? Their numbers-

KING HEROD

(spinning to the aide)
ALL OF THEM!

EXT. JOSEPH AND MARY'S HOME - NIGHT

Joseph helps Mary and Jesus prepare to leave, as does a friend.

FRIEND

But why, Joseph? And where are you going?

Calming himself, Joseph takes the man at the shoulders.

JOSEPH

I have been told me we must leave. I will not tell you to where we will be travelling, in case you are asked.

FRIEND

Asked? By whom?

JOSEPH

Herod's men.

EXT. BETHLEHEM - LATER

At long last, Claus has arrived at Bethlehem. The Star still sits above the town. CLOSE on him slowly coming to a stop, his recitation of names trailing off. His relief is palpable.

BELLS.

He continues on his way, now merrily reciting names when we hear screams and shouting. He speeds his horse in the direction of the noise.

EXT. BETHLEHEM - CONTINUOUS

Joseph, Mary and Jesus have been stopped by a gang of MOTLEY SOLDIERS. This is our opening scene.

SOLDIER

Give us the boy, or we'll kill all of you. We're here on the King's orders.

The soldiers continue to try to complete their task.

CLAUS (O.S.)

Stop.

They all look to this giant of a man holding a suitably giant sword.

SOLDIER

We have no quarrel with you, stranger. Be on your way.

CLAUS

If your intent is to harm these people, then I have a quarrel with YOU. Leave them, or I'll separate all of you from your ragged, insolent breaths.

The soldiers attack Claus. But they're not seasoned, well-trained Roman soldiers; he dispatches them quickly. Picking up a handful of dirt, he cleans his sword as he approaches.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

I am Claus.

JOSEPH

I am Joseph. This is my wife Mary, and our child Jesus. Those men were seeking to take his life. Only last night an Angel of the Lord forewarned me in a dream to flee to Egypt. Herod's thugs have murdered many little ones of parents unwarned. We are indebted to you. For being here. Right now.

Claus seems in a trance as he regards the child snuggling in Mary's arms.

CLAUS

I was drawn here.
(beat, then quietly)
Perhaps going all the way back to my youth.

JOSEPH

It is the Lord's workings.

CLAUS

I am not of your faith.

JOSEPH

Nevertheless, you have done a saintly thing. He brought you here, and we are grateful to him for his watch over us.

MARY

And to you.

BELLS.

Claus turns away slightly, his attention commanded by someone, some THING else. His face is illuminated.

ANGEL

(not heard, but words read
on the screen)

Because thou hast done this,
risking thy life and freedom for a
little child, brave intervention
has precipitated momentous
intervention. The purpose of your
life has now changed, good Claus.
Its meaning has been magnified,
though its fullness will not be
truly manifested for scores upon
scores of generations. In the
meantime, do not diminish the
importance of the role you will
play in the lives of children
wherever your journey takes you.
Though the years may mount to
numbers incalculable before your
real purpose takes on its rightful
form, until that time, be deedful
in the world for the betterment of
those most innocent and least
equipped to deal with the cruel
travails of terrible and mournful
content.

(beat)

Despite this calling, unlike with
others over the millennia, Moses,
David, Abraham included, you are
not asked to prove yourself to God,
to strive for some form of
salvation. This is no test, Claus.
Your story is not the humble hero's
journey to sacrifice and endure all
manner of tortuous travails. You
have not been chosen to prove your
worthiness; it has been found to be
plentiful. And in this, never shalt
thou taste of death until thy work
for the Lord is finished. Indeed,
when your peoples' Gods are long
forgotten, the fires upon their
altars sunk to whitened ashes and
the voices of their worshippers
have given way to silence and in
all the world there is none to do
them reverence, your fame shall
perish nevermore.

(MORE)

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Verily, there will come a time when thou shalt live in every heart so long as men shall celebrate this chosen one's birthday, as long as gleeful children the world over praise thy multifarious names at the season of winter solstice, with generosity and good cheer abounding.

CLAUS

Why me?

ANGEL

(as before)

Because of the gifts you have so often given children. Because of your unbridled charity. Because of your unceasing generosity. Both in spirit...and in your handiwork. Most of all, because you are a man who can still see through the eyes of a child. Thus are you perfectly suited for this task.

CLAUS

Am I to journey this path alone?

ANGEL

(as before)

For only for a while longer. But any burden your wait will impose upon your soul in the interim will dissipate, misty wisps vanishing, joy replacing them.

The illumination fading, Claus is visibly affected. Faint sounds of lamentation in the distance snap him out of his reverie. He looks to Joseph.

CLAUS

Perhaps I should escort you safely into Egypt.

JOSEPH

The Lord will protect us from here.

CLAUS

I mean no offense, but your Lord did not protect you from Herod's men.

MARY

But he did. In YOU.

After considering this, Claus reaches into his red sack and retrieves one of his carvings. It is the fish from before. It has been lovingly whittled to completion, finely detailed.

CLAUS

A gift. For your son. Please consider it an offering.

Mary uncovers Jesus. Claus is struck by the child's face. He extends the fish to him; a hand is the only part of the child that we see. At its touch, (and the happy burbling the it makes) Claus speaks one final time.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

Peace be with you.

JOSEPH

And may the Lord watch over YOU and keep you safe.

Claus watches them depart on their journey, and then he likewise does on his.

EXT. JERUSALEM - ALL

Time-lapse of the area over three decades of development, of commerce, travellers, sunrises, sunsets, et cetera. Slowly at first, turning into a blur until:

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD: Jerusalem, Judea, 30 C.E.

INT. PALACE OF PONTIUS PILATE - DAY

More than thirty years have passed, but Claus does not appear 'older'. Rather, more 'mature'. With an even greater commanding presence. He is brought before a rather officious looking aide; this is a man who controls the comings and goings of all who wish to see Pilate.

CLAUS

I am here in service of Pilate. Please tell him that Claus- That The Northling CLAUDIUS has arrived from Rome with the item he had commissioned him to 'retrieve', and requests an audience.

OFFICIOUS AIDE

(eyes narrowing, taking the measure of the man)
(MORE)

OFFICIOUS AIDE (CONT'D)

I thought you were but an empty legend. A myth. In equal parts warrior, poet, comedian-jester, tutor, trusted confidant, emissary, spy-

Claus laughs a hearty, voluminous laugh; this consigliere cannot help but be caught up in it. A little.

CLAUS

Do I look like a spy?

OFFICIOUS AIDE

It is also said that you have travelled far beyond the borders of the Empire. Beyond even the lands of conjecture to places undreamt of, too strange for the mind to even propose. To places that, were you to describe them, our ears would feel broken, inclining us to madness, so great the exotic nature of them, far beyond our modest powers of comprehension. That not even Pilate's most accomplished trickster is capable of conjuring up such impossibilities by way of ingenious words, no matter how induced. That you have seen the very margents of our world, peered over the edge and laughed. That you have learned a thousand languages, even those spoken by insects, animals and gods. That you have entertained at the courts of kings and queens and emperors of the land and of the sea, that you can juggle axes and torches while partaking of a fruit that-

CLAUS

(clearly enjoying the exchange)

Swords. Well, daggers to be precise. Though axes hadn't ever occurred to me previously, so thank you for that. And kittens. Can't forget the kittens. Size doesn't matter. As long as they have a pretty 'mew'.

OFFICIOUS AIDE

I beg your pardon? Daggers? Kittens? MEW?

CLAUS

Yes. Daggers, torches, and kittens.
And the fruit was normally
something local. So a mangustaan,
or a rambutan, or a
kharbozeh...even perhaps a
pomegranate, a malagasy, or maybe
langsat...

The aide shakes all this off.

OFFICIOUS AIDE

That you've witnessed a fantastical
collection of unusual animals-

CLAUS

A menagerie. 'Collection' is so
mundane. And they've proven to be
anything but mundane.

OFFICIOUS AIDE

A fantastical menagerie of unusual
animals, from peril-fraught demons
with talons and teeth like lethal
needles to gentle beasts with
impossibly long necks, the height
of a tall tree. From skin to scale,
from feather to fur, from those
that swim to those that fly, from
those that climb to those who move
at speeds incomprehensible. That
you've wrestled the alligator and
the crocodile both, charged atop
the beast with one horn, enormous
striped cats, and an elephant, with
trunk as long as a snake, and ears
as big tents-

CLAUS

Saving the best for last, I've
ridden reindeer.

Silence.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

A magical breed, these regal
northern beasts, tall as some
horses, with antlers as broad as my
arms can reach...

(spreading his arms wide)

I have flown across the sky on
them, touched the moon, blown
kisses to the stars, all the while
revelling in the myriad sensations.

(MORE)

CLAUS (CONT'D)

The fresh-scented wind, the bracing
cool air, being able to see to
forever...and beyond.

The aide is now sighing and shaking his head.

OFFICIOUS AIDE

All lies, then. I'll inform the
Procurator of your arrival.

INT. PILATE'S RECEPTION ROOM - LATER

TITLE CARD: Pontius Pilate, Procurator of The Roman Province
of Judea

PILATE examines the item Claus has delivered.

PILATE

I am in your debt, good Claudius.
This is something I thought I would
never see. I will send this to
Antipas, and with what transpired
this morning between us, it will
surely put an end to our conflict.
For a time, leastwhiles.

He tosses Claus a bag of coins.

CLAUS

Thank you, Procurator.

PILATE

Tell me; since your arrival in the
city, have you heard anything about
this man who had been proclaimed
'The King of the Jews'?

CLAUS

I arrived not long after dusk
yesterday. I have not had time to
hear word within the city's walls.
But I did speak with some
travellers as I approached
Jerusalem, and we both know that
ofttimes accurate news is all the
moreso outside a city.

PILATE

Perhaps I should have my spies
venture outwards on occasion. What
did they tell you?

CLAUS

That this teacher was seen entering the city four days gone. Meek and mild he appeared, humbly riding on an ass's colt, which was a good sign, for the Jews have a tradition that kings go forth to war bestride horses, but when they go in peace they use an ass for mount. This man's disciples claimed he had worked wonders, making blind men see and lame men walk, even raised corpses from the dead. That he went into the temple, and instead of making sacrifices, preached unto the people, bidding them to live as brethren, fear God, honour the King, and render unto Caesar that which is rightly his.

PILATE

And your sense of all this? I've heard about your intuition. Some might call you a soothsayer. Never mind a sorcerer, capable of making people feel compelled to tell you what they know, even if you ask but a simple question.

CLAUS

He seems a prophet rather than a priest or king, Procurator. My sense is that the Empire shouldn't be concerned.

(pondering)

I cannot say the same for your Caiaphas.

PILATE

Ah, Caiaphas, high priest of the Pharisees in their counsel the Sanhedrin. He took custody of this self-styled King of Jewry in the middle of the night, tried him on a charge of blasphemy and treason and judged him worthy to be crucified. He then brought the case to me on high petition, telling me that this man had fomented sedition, and urged that I give him over to be crucified as one who preached treason to the Empire.

(MORE)

PILATE (CONT'D)

Knowing full well that I alone, as Procurator, can mete out sentence of death, he also knew that if I declined to proceed as requested, these priests and their paid underlings might rouse the louse-bit rabble to rebellion, and as the gods are aware, we have not troops sufficient to put one down. Furthermore, should insurrection come, Rome would have my life. I am sent out here to govern and to rule, but chiefly to collect the tax. And a people in rebellion pay no tribute to the throne.

Claus waits for Pilate to continue.

PILATE (CONT'D)

This morning, before all was done and our Galilean sentenced, my wife sent urgent word to me. She said 'Have nothing to do with that righteous and innocent man, for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of him'.

(beat)

Though she has marvellous instincts, I have nonetheless dispatched him to Golgotha. There, he will be crucified and left on his cross to be devoured by birds and other wild animals, no different than contemptible criminals. The only thing that will remain of him is the notice I had made to be posted above his head: 'The King of The Jews'.

(beat)

Good Claud- CLAUS, you and I have known each other for some years now. I respect your honesty. Your unflagging candour.

(further beat)

I am regarded as a cruel procurator by some. Indeed, by many. Am I? Cruel? Speak freely.

CLAUS

I am honoured to be your trusted messenger, your sometimes-envoy.

PILATE

Continue...

CLAUS

Yours is a difficult assignment.
 This is no sinecure you hold. You
 have but a single legion to police
 this country, with treason and
 rebellion lifting their heads on
 every side. Do you one thing, the
 Jews cry out against you for that
 you have trespassed on some rite or
 custom which they hold in
 veneration. Do you the other, again
 they howl, this time to the heavens
 that the iron heel of Rome
 oppresses them. I have seen much
 cruelty in the world. Gross
 abominations of behaviour.
 Unspeakable acts of depravity, the
 likes of which I pray I never again-
 (pausing)
 Do YOU feel you are a cruel
 Procurator of Rome's?

PILATE

Perhaps.

CLAUS

(considering this)
 Perhaps history will judge you more
 fairly than some now do.

PILATE

Well answered! Your journeys have
 undoubtedly shown you that the
 nature and circumstances of the
 scribe determines which truth
 history speaks.

CLAUS

And what IS truth?

PILATE

I have heard the sages argue about
 it , but never have I found two who
 could agree on it.
 (beat)
 When do you depart from Jerusalem?

CLAUS

In three days.

PILATE

Good. Join me for evening meal. I fear today will leave me in need of gentle distraction, and you have always provided me a surfeit of it. In the meantime, your lodgings await you.

EXT. JERUSALEM - LATER

We are above the city. The sky is as grey as it could be and not be black. The clouds are thick. We can just make out Golgotha and the throng surrounding it. We head to ground, once more over the city.

EXT. CLAUS'S JERUSALEM LODGINGS - CONTINUOUS

One of Pilate's men stands looking at something. Transfixed. In a REVERSE shot, with PILATE'S AIDE in the background, we see what he's been looking at: we track around front to see Claus, sitting cross-legged, eyes closed. Mouthing names.

CLAUS

(eyes still closed)

You bring word from Pilate. Has he changed our eating hour?

PILATE'S AIDE

I- I thought you were asleep my lord.

CLAUS

(laughing)

I am nobody's ANYTHING. And I wasn't sleeping.

PILATE'S AIDE

Oh.

CLAUS

I was-

BELLS. Ever so faintly ringing.

PILATE'S AIDE

Thinking?

CLAUS

(clearly distracted)

The opposite of thinking, actually.

Frowning, Claus opens his eyes; he's shocked to see how dark it's gotten.

PILATE'S AIDE

The opposite?

CLAUS

The absence of thinking, removing all thoughts from the mind.

PILATE'S AIDE

That sounds like being drunk.

Claus's patented laughter once more fills the air as he rises up effortlessly as if levitating, and turns very nimbly.

CLAUS

I know some spiritual elders in the east whose bellies would shake so much at your observation as to want to buy you a drink. Or share three or eight. So; to where am I being summoned, if not to feast?

PILATE'S AIDE

Oh. Golgotha.

CLAUS

In what capacity am I to accompany you?

PILATE'S AIDE

Capacity?

CLAUS

Casually? Or officially?

BELLS.

EXT. JERUSALEM, APPROACHING GOLGOTHA - LATER

They proceed to the crucifixion, the soldier walking, Claus riding. He notes the roiling sky. The road. The people. He's seeing it all, taking it all in, absorbing it; his attention is anything but cursory.

BELLS.

(At no point do we see Christ in toto; we see as little of him as is practically possible.)

As Claus arrives, we hear Christ's final words.

JESUS CHRIST
 (in Aramaic, subtitled in
 English)
 Father, into your hands I commend
 my spirit!

EXT. TEMPLE MOUNT - CONTINUOUS

A mammoth thunderclap and the brightest lightning strike
 imaginable.

INT. TEMPLE MOUNT - CONTINUOUS

The densely-woven 40' high, 4" thick Temple veil/curtain
 tears from the top down. Thus struck, we now look out onto
 the Temple-proper, the people present besides themselves,
 panic unleashed, scattering and wailing.

EXT. GOLGOTHA - CONTINUOUS

It's clear that soldiers have already broken the legs of the
 criminals on either side of Christ. They pause, distracted by
 Claus's arrival.

SOLDIER #1
 (gesturing with a
 sledgehammer)
 This one, now.

CLAUS
 (waving them off)
 No.

SOLDIER #2
 Who are you?

PILATE'S AIDE
 He was sent by the Procurator. He's
 Pilate's man.

The men are in awe that goes beyond simple wonderment at
 Claus's physical stature.

CLAUS
 (to one of the soldiers)
 Give me your spear.

Placing his hand on Christ's thigh, he pierces his side.
 Blood and water issue from the wound.

BELLS.

Claus's face is illuminated once more.

ANGEL

(not heard, but words read
on the screen)

Once, in decades long passed, you came to the defence of a child being attacked by murderers. Even if the ensuing years had been empty of beneficent behaviour and kind considerations, your true nature has once again been displayed, this time in the pity that bade you save a man from brutish violence. On both occasions, your preternatural disposition led to your saintly gestures. Blessed be, Claus.

Claus drops the spear as if it were burning his hand.

CLAUS

My real purpose?

ANGEL

(as before)

Thy true work is not yet started, Claus. What is behind you is but a sliver of the way that lies ahead. Verily, before this day's end, your journey will have taken a new turn towards your ultimate destination, your ultimate role. Fear not the calamity that precedes it. Your life alone has come to an end; seek her out. She awaits you.

CLAUS

She?

ANGEL

(as before)

Cleave to her, but know that your children shall not issue from your loins, but rather be the sons and daughters of the world, ever requiring care in the ways that you and she are abundantly capable.

Slowly, Claus turns to see MARY MAGDALENE and others...including Mother Mary, whom he hasn't seen in 35 years.

EXT. JERUSALEM - LATER

Claus proceeds back to the city on horse. All Hell has broken loose. Rain sheets in mad strikes of wind. The ground shakes. The earth boasts chasms. Buildings collapse. Routs of people scatter aimlessly as ants from a disturbed anthill. His horse spooked, Claus slides out of the saddle and with a gentle smack, he encourages the horse to escape to instinctive safety.

BELLS.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Help me!

Claus turns in the direction of the scream, heads down an alley. A lightning flash illuminates the darkness; ahead is a woman trapped by debris; our Mrs. Claus. He goes to her. Lifts a timber off her foot. Picks her up into his arms. He's delighted; this is no slip of a girl; this is a woman of Amazonian proportions. He carries her away from the melée, away from buildings and into the open.

He sets her down gently. All the while, she's been staring.

CLAUS

Rest assured that you're safe now.
There's no need for alarm or worry.

(at her continued stare)

I understand. Something has
happened that goes beyond
everything that's unfolding before
us here in the city.

WOMAN

(nodding)

I was visited by a voice. But the
words were not spoken. I did not
have to 'listen' to understand what
was being told me. I thought myself
mad.

Now Claus is staring.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I was to venture into the streets.
That the road beneath my feet would
buckle asunder, just as my life's
road would turn. That I should fear
not-

CLAUS

The calamity.

Calm consumes her, fear vanquished.

ANDROULA

That one would come for me. That I
was to leave my prior life and
cleave to him.

(beat)

You are he.

CLAUS

And you, she.

EXT. CLAUS'S JERUSALEM LODGINGS - LATER

Claus's horse munches away in safety.

INT. CLAUS'S JERUSALEM LODGINGS - CONTINUOUS

Claus tends to the woman's foot. It's clear that things have
shifted in him; his face is lit from within because of her.
(This is the Santa we see at the beginning of this tale.)

CLAUS

What is your name?

WOMAN

Androula.

CLAUS

Greek?

ANDROULA

I am a Cypriot.

CLAUS

How are you here? In Jerusalem?

ANDROULA

I was kidnapped by slavers when I
was young and taken across the
bright waters. In time, I was
brought to the city.

CLAUS

Where do you live? What has been
your life?

ANDROULA

Of late, I have been in the
household of Herod Antipas. At
first, they thought I was a boy.

(MORE)

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

But then I became a dancer and a hetaerae-

CLAUS

(as her hesitation)
A whore.

ANDROULA

(nodding)
But I am too-
(looking down on her body)
I am too much like a man in structure for either pursuit. I was never requested. I next worked in the kitchens, then as a servant, drawing baths, washing clothing, tending babies and the such, where my-

CLAUS

There are good words to describe women so BLESSED physically as you. Statuesque. Diaoxiàng. Sttuaskua. Escultural. Sadaul. Heykel gibi.

He's made her laugh.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

Indeed, you are as the Valkyie are said to be.

ANDROULA

Val-ky-rie?

CLAUS

Legendary female warriors from my parts of the world. Or perhaps one of the not-quite-mythical Amazonian race from yours.

ANDROULA

Though they sound as of tongues foreign, your kind words are poetry to my ears, and their meanings a balm. I thank you.

CLAUS

Where I come from, women are as revered for their hardiness as much as their heartiness. Their strength...physical, mental, emotional...are valued as much as features, how pleasing they are to look upon and-

ANDROULA

Where you lead, I will follow.

A further revelation in him blossoms.

CLAUS

You and I, we shall, as ordered,
cleave to one another as EQUALS. As
partners in this wonderful
adventure before us. WE will follow
the lead provided us, as one.

This affects her as much as anything else that's transpired;
they are now attuned to each other.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

(grinning)

Antipas, you say? I once took
something from his father, Herod
the Great. And now, I take from the
son, Herod the Lesser.

ANDROULA

They will search me out. You will
not be safe.

CLAUS

They will believe you perished in
the calamity. When in fact, that is
where you have been born anew.

MONTAGE: (set against the sound of Claus reciting names by
way of a song)

-Jesus is wrapped in linen in a tomb. We depart the tomb,
still keying on Christ, and once outside, we see soldiers
rolling a huge boulder in front of it. Mary Magdalene, Mother
Mary, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus and others observe this.
-Claus sits at Pilate's feast, distracted.
-Claus races back to Androula; we witness his arrival, how
impassioned they both are, but we see nothing past the first
kiss.

END MONTAGE

INT - CLAUS'S JERUSALEM LODGINGS - DAY

Androula watches Claus carving a small something. His 'song
of names' continues. She revels in its sounds as much as she
does the spirit with which he sings it. Something is stirred
within her, and she begins scrounging up pieces of material,
et cetera, full of intent. As Claus begins to watch her, his
song fades.

ANDROULA
Who are they?

CLAUS
Who are who?

ANDROULA
Those names. The names you've been
singing.

It's as if it's the first he's ever heard the notion. He
keeps watching her efforts.

CLAUS
What do you seek?

Her response is soft, and self-conscious.

ANDROULA
Something to CREATE with.
(pointing at his
knifework)
Something like THAT...and yet not.

MONTAGE:

We see Claus at market, retrieving items various items from
vendors. Every seller is affected by him, mood instantly
turning to cheer, no matter how the transaction began. In one
instance, he overpays, no matter the vendor's complaint.

Claus and Androula work together in his lodgings, using
everything they've gathered. THIS is our future Santa and
Mrs. Claus.

They construct wedding bands out of the finest gold yarn and
the stringy meat of a palm tree frond intricately wound. Two
children witness their wedding ceremony. (They are
appropriately rewarded.)

With a bounty of things they've made -tiny carvings and hand-
made littles- for children, they leave them anonymously
throughout the city as dawn looms. (So yes; the first
recipients of gifts in the 'spirit of Christmas' were Jewish
children.)

END MONTAGE

EXT. YAFFO, PHILISTIA, 30 C.E.

Claus and Androula ride to a dock.

ANDROULA

Rome is such a faraway place. Where
Caesar resides. The capital of the
empire. And now I shall see it for
myself!

Grinning as he leaps off his horse, Claus helps Androula
down, but not before pausing for a kiss. He slings his red
sack over his shoulder.

CLAUS

We're not travelling to Rome, my
love.

The CAPTAIN of the ship awaits.

CAPTAIN

They told me to expect a giant of a
man!

(gesturing at the sack)
Though you travel light.

CLAUS

Looks can be quite deceptive. You'd
be surprised at how much I can
carry in it.

Claus hands the Captain a note.

CAPTAIN

Passage for one to Rome?

CLAUS

She's not here. I travel alone.

The Captain acknowledges this with a respectful nod/bow.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

And there's been a change in
destination.

(turning to Androula)
I understand that Cyprus is quite
beautiful this time of year.

EXT. SHIP - LATER

The captain is busy making final preparations.

CAPTAIN

Did you hear about the so-called
miracle?

CLAUS

Which one? The world always seems ripe for a miracle.

CAPTAIN

The man they crucified. The so-called 'King of the Jews'. Their Christ.

Claus is stopped in his tracks.

CLAUS

What of him?

CAPTAIN

You're familiar with this man?

CLAUS

I was at Golgotha when he died. I was there.

CAPTAIN

Well, he was placed in a cave, with a large boulder sealing it. Guards were posted. The following morning, the boulder had been rolled aside, and the tomb was empty. The guards maintain that nobody had come and made off with the body. I know one of the guards; he's not the sort to lie.

(pausing)

They say he is risen.

CLAUS

What does that mean? Risen?

CAPTAIN

That this Christ was resurrected. That he had risen from the tomb, rose and walked again amongst mortal men.

CLAUS

(eyes locked on Androula)

A miracle.

CAPTAIN

As you say, the world is always ripe for one.

TITLE CARD: Limassol, Cyprus.

EXT. SHIP - LATER

Androula stands at the prow of the ship in pea-soup fog. Searching. Claus joins her, enfolds her in his arms.

CLAUS

You're shivering.

(beat)

The breeze DOES bring with it a rumour of cooler weather.

ANDROULA

I'm not cold, husband. I'm trembling because I've yearned so much, so long to return home. I'd given up hope in Jerusalem. I thought I'd never see-

Finally, the drapes of mist dissolve. Land can be seen. Androula jumps up and down like a little girl. Claus laughs as she leaps onto the dock; again, this is no fainting maiden. She begins asking dock workers questions, going from one group to another.

Claus smiles at this as he leads his horse onto land.

CLAUS

Thank you for getting us here safely.

CAPTAIN

You're welcome. Your wife...the woman who isn't here. She's overflowing with...

CLAUS

(laughing)

Some might say 'piss-and-vinegar'. Please forgive my Mandarin.

CAPTAIN

I was going to say 'childlike enthusiasm'.

Claus watches her and smiles. He offers up a Buddhist quote in Magadhi Prakrit, the Buddha's tongue.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

What language is that? And what does it mean?

CLAUS

It means that you are a kind and generous man. May health and good fortune go with you.

CAPTAIN

Should you ever need conveying anywhere, anywhere at all, find me, or send word. I'd be honoured to take you wherever you please.

Claus reaches inside his sack and retrieves two small items for the Captain.

CLAUS

(leading his horse away)
For your children.

CAPTAIN

How did you know I have children?
And TWO of them?!?

Androula races back to Claus, tugging at his hand.

ANDROULA

Husband! They're still here!
Everyone's still here!

At his generous, big-chested laugh, she gets a little abashed. Girly. She brings his hand to her lips.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

You've made me so...so...! I have not felt this happy since...since I was HERE last.

CLAUS

(pulling her close)
Lead on!

As they proceed, Androula points things out. Sometimes enthusiastically, sometimes not so much. But invariably, her joy returns.

At last, when they round a corner, Androula's MOTHER. Androula stops, overcome.

ANDROULA

(voice breaking)
Mama! Mama!

The woman looks up, doesn't recognize Androula at first...and then her hands go to her face.

An emotional reunion. Then the happy tumult of a sizeable celebratory crowd. Lots of tears throughout.

Eventually, Claus is noticed. The crowd goes silent.

Androula doesn't quite understand at first, but then sees their fear. She loses herself to laughter. She goes to Claus.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)
Everyone, this is Claus.

Silence.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)
Claus is my HUSBAND.

Another celebration erupts.

EXT. VILLAGE OF LIMASSOL - LATER

Claus sits with children at his feet, and one on each knee. They are transfixed as he tells them tales of his travels, sipping from a mug as he does.

Androula watches this while she's catching up with her family and other villagers.

VILLAGER #1
Your husband is a strange man. I'm glad you love him, and it's clear that he loves you, but he-

VILLAGER #2
He doesn't drink.

ANDROULA
What do you mean?

VILLAGER #3
He's very polite about declining some wine, or ouzo...but still he refuses.

ANDROULA
Oh.

VILLAGER #1
He asks for MILK.

ANDROULA
Milk.

VILLAGER #2

Milk.

VILLAGER #3

(laughing)

But he's an ENTHUSIASTIC milk drinker!

VILLAGER #1

I've never seen anyone so passionate about drinking milk! His thirst seems ENDLESS.

VILLAGER #2

He's like a suckling babe.

VILLAGER #3

An ENTHUSIASTIC babe. A giant one!

ANDROULA

(grinning)

Then this is a good thing.

VILLAGER #1

And what of you?

ANDROULA

Of me and milk? Well, I-

VILLAGER #2

No. You and children.

All the women consider this. Finally, into the nearby happy squealing, the high din of laughter:

VILLAGER #3

We're going to need more goats.

EXT. CLIFFS ABOVE LIMOSSAL - LATER

On an outcropping high above the village, Claus and Androula are on their backs, making out animals in the clouds.

CLAUS

Would you like to stay a while?

ANDROULA

Could we?

CLAUS

Of course. For a while, certainly.

ANDROULA

And then? After this? What about YOUR home? Do you have no desire to return there?

CLAUS

My home is now with you. Wherever we go, wherever we are. But some day, I will take you to the lands I left.

(wistfullly)

WE left, my uncle and I. I will show you its wonders! The sky at night... It DANCES with colour!

ANDROULA

Didn't you say it's cold there? What was the word you used? FREEZING?

CLAUS

Yes, but you will always have ME to keep you warm.

ANDROULA

When? When do you think we might venture there?

CLAUS

I don't know. When we do, it will have been worth the wait. But before that...

(gesturing)

Out there. All of it. Everything, everywhere. There is so much I want to share with you. And I don't believe that it matters precisely where we are. Only that we search out children in need. In distress. And provide some care to them.

ANDROULA

Yes.

Claus sits up, indicating for her to do the same.

CLAUS

Androula, there are some things you need to know. Some things I need to tell you.

ANDROULA

This sounds serious. Is it serious?
Did they find out I left Jerusalem
alive?

CLAUS

(shaking his head)
Androula, how old are you?

She playfully smacks his wrist.

ANDROULA

Husband! It's not polite to ask a
woman her age!

Claus takes her hand and brings it to his lips.

CLAUS

Please.

ANDROULA

I'm twenty-one. I was fourteen when
I was taken from here.

Claus kisses her hand again.

CLAUS

I'm sixty-five.

ANDROULA

(laughing)
But how can this be? That would
make you older than my father.
(thinking some more)
Older even than my grandfather!

CLAUS

Our angel told me this. So long as
men celebrate the Christ's
birthday, while gleeful children
praise my names at the season of
the winter solstice with generosity
and good cheer abounding, I would
not taste death, that I would live
immortally in every heart.

ANDROULA

He told you that? When?

CLAUS

When the child Christ's life was
being threatened by King Herod the
Great's thug-soldiers.

ANDROULA
You saved him? When he was a child?

CLAUS
A toddler.

ANDROULA
And you believe that I too, will
live-

CLAUS
The angel also told me that I would
not be journeying alone.
(pause)
Androula, how you look right now is
how you will always look.
(at her blank stare)
This will be both a blessing...and
a curse. When next we return
here...I mean, after we've stayed a
while, then gone away...everyone in
your family will have aged. Not so,
you.

ANDROULA
So in five years...

Claus nods.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)
Ten years...twenty years...

CLAUS
In time, your grandparents, your
parents, your brothers and
sisters...will pass. Your nieces
and nephews will have children,
they will have children...and all
will pass.

ANDROULA
(slowly)
Children. What of us? Will WE have
children?

Claus shakes his head.

CLAUS
The angel told me that the sons and
daughters of the world will be our
children.

ANDROULA

(devasated)

This is cruel. If what you say is true-

CLAUS

My love, I will NEVER lie to you.

ANDROULA

(weeping now)

If what you say is true, it is a cruel fate. When I was taken, I thought I had lost any chance at having a family of my own. As the years passed, the pain faded. But then we were brought together, and we came here...

(letting it all sink in)

Oh, my heart is heavy...and my head is spinning.

CLAUS

I have an idea.

ANDROULA

Will it make the spinning less so?

CLAUS

It will undoubtedly make it worse! But it might lessen the weight of your heart. Will you take me as your husband once more? According to your people's practices? Here, in front of your family, your village?

Androula squeals, hugging him.

ANDROULA

(wiping her eyes)

Wait! His birthday? The 'winter solstice'? When will these come to pass?

Claus has no answer.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

And your NAMES...?

This time, a shrug.

EXT. VILLAGE OF LIMASSOL - DAY

The wedding is joyous, exuberant, the entire village in attendance. Claus drinks wine for Androula, for her family, her village.

During the festivities, Androula sends her nieces and nephews to Claus, asking him to sing. He looks at her, smiling through her tears. He begins to sing a song in a foreign tongue, but stops. He then sings the song his mother sang.

INT. SMALL LIMASSOL HOME - DAY

It's morning inside the honeymoon couple's dwellings. It's dark. Androula is spooning Claus.

ANDROULA

Husband...

There's a pause, then Claus shoots out of bed and out the front door.

EXT. SMALL LIMASSOL HOME - CONTINUOUS

He hurls into the bushes. Passersby laugh. The bright sun bothers him more than the embarrassment. Claus re-enters the home off-balance.

INT. SMALL LIMASSOL HOME - CONTINUOUS

ANDROULA

Are you all right, my love?

Claus grasps his head with one hand while reaching out with the other as if to steady himself.

CLAUS

It's my head.

ANDROULA

Oh. The drink.

CLAUS

Yes, the drink. For the record, THAT was my wedding gift to you.

ANDROULA

(trying not to laugh)
And I can see now at how high a price. Come back to bed. More sleep will help.

(MORE)

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

Later, I'll fix you a curative. I have my own concoction. It's a family-

CLAUS

No. I need fresh air...and my knife. I will still my innards, cease the relentless pounding in my head, focus my spirit with the balm of small movements. I-

His need to vomit returning with a vengeance, he's out the door once more in a flash.

EXT. VILLAGE OF LIMASSOL BEACH - DAY

Claus sits under the cover of a tree near the shore. He's putting the final touches on a piece, for which a boy is waiting. Off to the side, another child watches. Claus notices her, but the BEACH GIRL keeps her stare on Claus's handiwork. When Claus gives the boy the piece, he looks up to see that his observer has vanished. He closes his eyes, sits quietly reciting names.

He's brought to by a tap on his knee. It's the Beach Girl girl. She holds a piece of driftwood out to him.

Claus's shift to 'joyous' is instant.

CLAUS

Now THIS is what I would call a fine piece of wood!
(examining it)
What would you like me to release from it, Iria?

The girl frowns.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

(whispering)
Inside the wood, a creature awaits. To be released. But you have to tell me what it is? What's IN THERE? What is your wish?

BEACH GIRL

A dolphin.

CLAUS

A handsome creature! A wonderful choice!

The girl reveals another piece of driftwood from behind her back.

CLAUS (CONT'D)
 (laughter filling the air)
 Don't be greedy!

BEACH GIRL
 Not for me. For the next child. To
 release THEIR creature.
 (thinking)
 A GIFT.

Claus is touched.

EXT. VILLAGE OF LIMASSOL BEACH - DAY

Our previous villagers approach Androula, who is staring out to sea.

VILLAGER #1
 What is your husband doing?

ANDROULA
 I don't know. What is he doing?

VILLAGER #1
 He's-

VILLAGER #2
 He's COOKING SOMETHING.

VILLAGER #1
 He has gathered this and that-

VILLAGER #3
 He has some ingredients-

VILLAGER #2
 He brought ingredients with him.
 Did you know that he brought some
 ingredients with him?

VILLAGER #1
 I've never seen some of them.

ANDROULA
 Jerusalem is a big city. Its market
 is enormous. Bigger than our
 village. Bigger than the capitol.
 Claus HAS travelled the world,
 remember. So he's come across food
 that none of us could imagine.

VILLAGER #3

It's not the ingredients that are most strange.

VILLAGER #2

Men...don't...cook.

MONTAGE:

Claus is making his pics. The children are entranced. He's singing. At one point, he whispers to two of the older kids. We see them dash away. We see them miking a goat. We ultimately see Claus laying out the items on a table. The kids arrive with the jug of milk. Claus pours each a mug. He then offers a pic to each. They watch him inhale the smell of one, beatific. One of the kids brings his to his mouth, but stops when he sees Claus dip his in his mug, then eat it. One-by-one, the children follow suit. They're all in love with the taste.

END MONTAGE

ANDROULA (V.O.)

(laughing)

Claus is different!

VILLAGER #3 (V.O.)

He has a name for what he's cooking.

VILLAGER #2 (V.O.)

Baking. He's not cooking it. Them.

VILLAGER #1 (V.O.)

Is it bread? Some kind of bread with fruit in it? Because it has fruit in it.

VILLAGER #3 (V.O.)

I couldn't pronounce what he calls them. In his native tongue.

VILLAGER #2 (V.O.)

He says it's something his mother used to make.

VILLAGER #1 (V.O.)

Did you KNOW he cooks?!?

VILLAGER #3 (V.O.)

Bakes.

EXT. VILLAGE OF LIMASSOL BEACH - CONTINUOUS

ANDROULA

The things I know about my
husband...

(picks up a handful of
sand)

THIS is how much I know of them.

(now spreading her arms
wide, indicating the
entire beach)

And THIS is how much I don't know
about him. YET.

VILLAGER #1

I'm not sure I'd want my husband to
be THAT much of a mystery to me.

VILLAGER #2

It sounds DANGEROUS.

VILLAGER #3

You may never know ALL his secrets.

ANDROULA

We're going to have a very long
life together.

VILLAGER #1

You might still not know all his
secrets, even if this is so.

Androula simply smiles.

MONTAGE:

Claus calls over some adults who have been watching from a
distance. They partake...cautiously...and instantly become
fans. Androula goes to Claus, and he dunks one for her...then
feeds her. The women watch, whisper to each other...then
blush.

END MONTAGE

EXT. VILLAGE OF LIMASSOL STREETS - DUSK

Claus and Androula bring some items back from market.

ANDROULA

You've grown quite fierce in your
cheer. Your laughter. Watching you
make those around you laugh
too...it makes my heart sing.

(MORE)

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

And my features crimson. So say my sisters.

CLAUS

Aye, I often feel enormous mirth of late. Especially when I'm with you. To laugh is to love.

ANDROULA

Are all of your kind so quick to laugh? So full of mirth?

CLAUS

My people- We're fierce in everything we do. Fierce in living, fierce in dying, in eating, in celebrating...and in our mirth.

Androula considers this.

ANDROULA

Do you suppose HE laughed? The Christ?

CLAUS

Well, again, to laugh is to love.

(beat)

I believe he loved all. Even those who killed him.

(smiling)

He laughed bundled in his mother's arms in Bethlehem when I gave him the tiny fish I'd carved. He was a jovial old soul even then.

ANDROULA

Do you see him in them? Children?

CLAUS

I've never thought of that before. I don't SEE him in them, but I think I SENSE him in them.

They continue.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

You're doing some carving of your own.

ANDROULA

Hmm...?

Claus gently knocks heads with her.

CLAUS
 Inside. Carving out thoughts.

ANDROULA
 You'd think me foolish.

CLAUS
 (laughing)
 Speak! I am your husband, not your
 father.

ANDROULA
 I never saw, nor touched the
 Christ.

CLAUS
 No.

He waits.

ANDROULA
 But you did, twice. And in loving
 you, I feel your contact with him.
 I feel him through you. In the way
 you speak with people, how a mere
 conversation with you raises their
 spirits, leave them a little more
 joyous, I suppose.

MONTAGE:

As their life together unfolds, Claus and Androula live life in innumerable locations doing innumerable things: working in a wide range of jobs; tending to children, caring for them, teaching them, defending them; witnessing some of history's recognizable events; visiting notable places; at the courts or residences of monarchs and rulers, usually delivering something, even if just a message; All of these show the bond between these two immortals.

Peppered within these images, we hear the recitation of names by both Claus and Androula now, in various situations in various setting over the next three hundred years, sometimes overheard by someone in the vicinity. This is their own tiny world, a 'moving feast of names', a memory exercise, another expression of love for each other.

High above the Earth, we zoom to one famous city after the other, showing their rise and falls, the names of cities and countries changing as well.

END MONTAGE

TITLE CARD: NICAEA, BYTHNIA, 325 C.E. FIRST COUNCIL OF NICAEA

EXT. CITYSCAPE OF NICAEA - SUNRISE

From above, we get a good look at this city as it wakes up.

Chatter and declamations rise, a cacophony of yelling and arguing.

INT. COUNCIL OF NICAEA - CONTINUOUS

We travel through a vast chamber filled with an equally vast assemblage of wizened old men in religious garb, the differences of which indicate that all present are from the four corners of the Christian world. The exchanges run the gamut from patient discussions to animated arguments.

MAJESTIC VOICE (V.O.)

You have something that many emissaries, heralds, ambassadors, envoys and the such don't, in the main, have at their disposal. It's not your patience, your intelligence, any wiles you possess...which I'd wager are substantive...any inclinations towards cunning manipulations or facility with terminological inexactitudes. Do you know of what I speak?

INT. THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Claus stands in front of a throne. Grinning.

We now see the person on the throne, the owner of the majestic voice.

TITLE CARD: Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, Constantine I, Roman Emperor.

CONSTANTINE

(cheering)

Precisely! That smile! A tiny sun unto itself, it lights up a room! And its genuine nature, its pure authenticity instantly disarms...but just as quickly reassures. I've seen you smile at the most hardened of men and watch them fall under your spell.

(MORE)

CONSTANTINE (CONT'D)

They become children! Children
eager to tell you their secrets!

CLAUS

I do not ask them to, your grace.
Seeking a truth is not my intent. I
am nobody's spymaster. It's not
like I bid them sit on my knee to
be dandled, having state secrets
whispered in my ear.

Constantine considers this notion. It's clear he likes Claus.
That he's fascinated by him.

CONSTANTINE

You are entrusted with truth, yet
you do not seek it. In a world
where suspicion and wariness season
each and every diplomatic, every
instance of commerce, every
financial exchange,
you...are...trusted. I trust you
more than I trust even the most
pious of holy men, and I can't
claim to know you well, despite our
dealings over the years.

(shaking his head at his
own candour)

Is this some form of sorcery?
Indeed, you speak as if you are a
man of faith, and yet you are not a
holy man. You do not behave as a
priest might. Are you a man of
faith? To what god do you offer up
sacrifices? At whose altar do you
worship?

(pausing)

Are YOU a Christian?

CLOSE on Claus's face: it is a storm of emotions, perhaps the
most we've seen.

CLAUS

Your grace, I am no holy man. I
know nothing of the scriptures. I
only know of the importance of the
Christ having been
born...crucified...and resurrected.
I understand you have convened this
council towards clarifying the
specifics of His very being. That
is not my domain. Nor my beloved
wife's.

ANDROULA (V.O.)

Then are we disciples? We have no
'fever' as those who go to church
and worship do. (Some names
spoken.)

EXT. NICAEA - NIGHT

High on a rooftop, Claus and Androula watch an evening
procession to a church. Lots of lit torches, candles, incense
and general grandeur. The attendant crowds kneel. Throughout
their exchange, we take a tour of the solemn migration.

CLAUS

Are we honouring the calling our
angel charged us with? Are we
living within the spirit of his
expectations? (Some names spoken.)

ANDROULA

Yes. (Some names spoken.)

CLAUS

Are our day-to-day actions infused
with Love and devotion? (Some names
spoken.)

ANDROULA

Yes. (Some names spoken.)

CLAUS

Do you greet each breaking day with
excitement, looking forward to
being of service, aiding the
children? (Some names spoken.)

ANDROULA

You know that to be true, dearest.
(Some names spoken.)

Claus gestures to the performance.

CLAUS

I suspect there is a difference
between religion, my love, and
spirituality. That...

(gestures to the
performance)

...is religion. A construct.

(MORE)

CLAUS (CONT'D)

A creed that in many instances, has more in common with military campaigns and all their strategizing and sacrifices of the ground troops, the beatification of the captains and colonels and generals and all their mighty egos than with- Than with the heart's goodness, its language, love. Spoken by the soul. Spirit moving through us.

Androula considers this.

ANDROULA

Our angel.

CLAUS

What of it?

ANDROULA

Spirit in its very being.

Claus takes her hand, kisses it slowly, gently.

CLAUS

Let us continue the spiritual journey of our souls, to live according to the angel's request, finding comfort in it, taking strength from it, leaving others to subscribe to their beliefs as they feel they are compelled.
(beat)
While loving all.

MONTAGE:

We rise up from Nicea, and as time fast-forwards, different cities light up on the globe, and we trace their adventuring.

We watch as decades, centuries pass. Their arrival in a new city. Claus and Androula visit the ruler's court, presenting something of value, a delivery, a message, et cetera. Always leaving hosts happy, guards and assistants touched by their presence.

Claus teaches warfare, horsemanship, languages, sciences, et cetera. Androula tutors, nannies, teaches some cooking...and dancing.

END MONTAGE

TITLE CARD: Yelang Province, China 1023 CE

EXT. DESOLATE LANDSCAPE - NIGHT

War has come and gone, scouring the landscape; everything reduced to scorched timbers and rubble. While Claus digs graves and recites names, Androula gingerly carries the body of a child. She lays it beside others on the ground. As she peers down in them, CLOSE on a face; Chinese and innocent. Androula steps back, stumbles onto her bum, trembling as she shakes her head at the bodies.

ANDROULA

Claus, please.

Claus continues to dig and recite.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

Claus!

The effort cripples her. Claus looks up. He walks to her.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

I don't want-

(shaking off her trance)

I don't want to just be offering up clothing and food, trinkets, baubles and the odd bath, cradling sick and dying youngsters, each and every one fated to perish, always waiting for the next calamity, the next catastrophe, the next war, the next plague, the next pestilence-

Claus half-kneels to her, taking her under the arms, easing her back onto her feet.

CLAUS

What DO you want, my love?

ANDROULA

I want to- I want us to raise some children, Claus. To love and care for as if they were our own. I don't believe that our angel...or God...would deny us that. We will never have children from our own blood. Over the centuries, it has been a torture to reconcile myself with this. Surely wanting to love so much more isn't forbidden.

(MORE)

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

Surely we can still obey and honour
the expectations of the journey set
out for us.

CLAUS

Androula-

She affixes herself to him, kissing him in the process. When she begins to pull away, he eases her into a hug, and she weeps on his shoulder.

ANDROULA

I know why you move us around in
the ways that you do. Departing one
place to another tremendous
distances away. And it's not just
to prevent talk of magic or demonic
machinations, the root of our non-
aging. It's also to keep me from
getting too attached. But it's in
my nature to become attached.

MONTAGE:

We now see them moving into battered homes with excitement and expectation, fixing them up, and over time, filling a home with children, then over more time these children growing up, leaving home, on and on, the villages where they are changing, each time eventually leaving town to relocate elsewhere, clearly more content.

And still, the recitation of names continues.

END MONTAGE

TITLE CARD: Venice, 1500 CE

EXT. VENICE STREET - DAY

Androula opens a shop door. Its 'announcement bells' at the top of the jamb ring. She looks to Claus; the warmth of their smiles could stave off even the fiercest of weather. He steps over the threshold with a jaunty flourish, ubiquitous red sack slung over his shoulder.

INT. PRINTING SHOP - CONTINUOUS

There's a fire in the hearth. Claus looks around at the shelves of books, inhales and smiles.

PRINTER (O.S.)

Hello!

This voice also softly instructs someone. MATTEO, a seven year old boy arrives tentatively at the counter.

CLAUS

(dropping to one knee)

Well, hello there! You must be Matteo! My name is Claus, and this is my wife Androula.

MATTEO

(frown mixed with wonder)

How did you know my name?

ANDROULA

He has a way with them. He thinks it makes him appear important.

CLAUS

(coughing)

Talented.

Matteo's father, the PRINTER, in his early thirties, joins them from the back. Ink on his fingers, sweat on his brow, tired expression above his smile.

PRINTER

Hello.

ANDROULA

Greetings. We're interesting in having something printed.

CLAUS

A book.

PRINTER

What kind of book?

ANDROULA

A book of names.

PRINTER

Names?

ANDROULA

Names we have accumulated over the years.

CLAUS

We're historians of a sortx. They are the names of children we have encountered. Children who have taken up special places in our hearts.

MATTEO

(charmed)

A book of children's names.

PRINTER

An intriguing project. How big a book are we talking about? How many copies? How many names? And where are they? Did you bring them with you?

Claus eyes Androula taking a good gander at the counter. She shakes her head.

CLAUS

A book as big as is required. Many names. Many, many...many.

Androula assesses the floor, moves some boxes aside, boxes overstuffed with heavy mechanical items. The printer's eyes go wide at the ease with which she manages this task.

ANDROULA

(to Claus)

About there?

Claus opens his sack and begins pulling single pieces of paper out. Then fingerfuls. Finally, he resorts to grabbed bunches in his suitably large hands. The printer and Matteo look on, watching the pile mount; by the end, it's taller than Matteo.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

Almost done.

CLAUS

(victorious)

There.

He pulls out another piece of paper. He reads it, then shows it to Androula with a grin. Though you can't hear them, each issue sighs, heart-filled exhaltations.

PRINTER

That's quite the bounty of names. Are they to be printed in any particular order?

Claus doesn't answer; he's too bemused by Matteo's regard of the enormous mountain just sitting there, waiting to be jumped into.

CLAUS

You have my permission.
Opportunities such as this don't
come around every day.

Matteo looks up at his father, who has no clue as to how to respond.

ANDROULA

Consider it an early Christmas
present.

PRINTER

Christmas?

After waiting for a few beats, Claus makes ready to roll up his sleeves and dive in himself.

CLAUS

Well, if YOU'RE not going to...

Our globe again, trail-marks criss-crossing hither and thither, ultimately leading back to Venice.

TITLE CARD: Venice, 1550 CE

EXT. VENICE STREET - DAY

The same shop, fifty years later. With carriages raising a racket behind them, Claus and Androula stand staring at the shop as people moved around them. Aside from the fashion of their clothing, they appear pretty much the same as before.

CLAUS

It looks...different.

ANDROULA

(teasing)

What doesn't look 'different' after
so long a time? What did you
expect? That the building would be
unchanged?

Claus turns to Androula.

CLAUS

(whispering)

But YOU haven't changed.

(MORE)

CLAUS (CONT'D)

You are still the same Cypriot
Amazon I fell in love with a
millennium-and-a-half ago.

ANDROULA

(laughing)

Stop! You're going to make me
blush.

CLAUS

Choose my weapon! My endless
compliments highlighting your
endless loveliness...or these
wiggledy-fingers...

(over-the-top display of
rascally charm)

...making you-

Androula performs her own schtick as she dances away from
Claus...while somehow remaining in place.

ANDROULA

Don't you DARE tickle me!

INT. PRINTING SHOP - CONTINUOUS

From inside the store through gauzy windows, a wizened man
watches this display of loving coupledness. CLOSE on a 57-year
old Matteo. Retrieving an awesomely oversized book, he opens
the door.

MATTEO

Items left beyond reasonable time-
frames incur additional charges.

EXT. VENICE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Androula falls onto her husband.

ANDROULA

Late fees?

MATTEO

And I'll have to charge you rent.
For the book and the years' worth
of accumulated dust.

Claus takes him in a swift hug.

CLAUS

Matteo! You definitely look like
your father.

MATTEO

And you two... How is it possible that you don't look as if you've-

ANDROULA

We eat well, stay active and get lots of sleep.

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)

Papa! We have a deadline!

ANDROULA

Sounds like quite the taskmaster.

MATTEO

(grinning)

Come out, daughter!

An eleven-year old girl appears in the doorway. Tow-headed and tall, especially long of limbs. She wipes her ink-stained fingers on her apron. This is ARIANA.

ARIANA

Paying customers, Papa?

CLAUS

And we tip very well. Hello, Ariana.

Ariana does not hear this; she's staring at Androula.

ARIANA

(disarmed)

You're VERY tall.

ANDROULA

And apparently, YOU'RE quite the businesswoman.

ARIANA

I've never seen a woman as tall. Do you like it? Being so tall?

ANDROULA

I like that I'm the perfect fit for my husband.

ARIANA

(the penny having dropped)

Oh! You're the name-book people!

CLAUS

That would be us.

Androula watches as the wheels in Ariana's head move silently but purposefully.

ANDROULA

In the sack. What you're wanting to ask about.

MATTEO

More names?!?

CLAUS

(winking)

We might not be back until you have children of your own.

ARIANA

Ew.

ANDROULA

I understand completely. I didn't want to have much to do with boys at your age. But about a decade later, I met this fine one.

Once again, a trail of adventuring across the globe, extending farther and farther out.

TITLE CARD: Venice 1570 CE

INT. PRINTING SHOP - DAY

Claus keeps the bell silent this time with a long reach of his hand; they manage to get through the front door undetected. He waggles his eyebrows at Androula.

A tiny child appears from out of the back of the shop, pulling to a stop, almost not catching herself, barely avoiding a tumble onto the floor.

CLAUS

(dropping to a knee, arms wide)

Marguerite!

Androula smiles as the child leaps up for a hug.

ANDROULA

Just ONCE, I'd like you to get a name wrong.

An older Ariana appears from the back. She has a child in each arm and one latched onto her leg.

ARIANA

As I live and breathe...

(beat)

And I won't charge you rent this time, by the way.

Androula moves to her, hauling the solo child up into her arms. The girl instantly gives her a kiss...and then a hug of her own.

ARIANA (CONT'D)

(lost in a stare)

Every time I was missing my father...or my grandfather...I'd pick up the book. Not so much to read it, but to remember Papa tooling the leather, the care he took in choosing just the right paper, how careful he was in printing the names. So I thank you for that.

ANDROULA

Are any of these little ones going to be following in your footsteps?

ARIANA

I'm so glad you've come by. We're moving. Well, what I mean is that we're selling the shop. And moving. To Florence.

(rolling her eyes at herself)

Apologies; I often feel my brain is being turned to mush. Every time I have a new one...

(dandling the pair)

...my mind feels like it's a little more...mushy.

CLOSE on Claus's regard of his wife. Her reaction to these sentiments. Only love and laughter have prevented emotional scar tissue from forming.

ARIANA (CONT'D)

(placing the children on the ground)

I'm sorry. Your custom has been a wonderful family tradition. I wish we could keep it going. But my husband is taking over his father's business.

(MORE)

ARIANA (CONT'D)

The gentlemen assuming ownership of the shop are very nice; I'm sure they could do almost as good a job as we've been doing.

CLAUS

It might be best to vary our patronage.

Ariana hesitates, looking to one...then the other.

ARIANA

I'm not going to pry about...well, how neither of you...you know...age...

Claus and Androula wait.

ARIANA (CONT'D)

But may I ask you one question?

BOTH

Of course!

There's relief on the woman's face before she's even asked the question.

ARIANA

Are you working in the service of our Lord? On some kind of mission that provides you-

CLAUS

Yes.

FADE OUT.

TITLE CARD: Village of Tween, Kingdoms of Almaguer and Requena 1631 CE

EXT. OUTSKIRTS VILLAGE OF TWEEN - MORNING

Early one hot summer morning, Claus and Androula look out onto a valley. They're on horseback, and a donkey pulls a small wagon behind them. Claus's thick hair is now wonderfully braided, including his beard. Androula's skin is a deep bronze, hair streaked with gold. Directly in the distance, bracketed by two enormous trees, a waterfall, and from it, a river running through the middle of the village Tween.

CLAUS
Eleven children in all.

ANDROULA
Yes. Five from King Prosper and
Queen Arlet in the Kingdom of
Almaguer-

CLAUS
Alba, Caterina, Estel, Arnau,
Gulliem and Iker...

ANDROULA
-and six from King Arenau and Queen
Noa in the Kingdom of Requena-

CLAUS
Oriol, Pascual, Flor, Jacinta,
Aleix, Dídac and Jaume.

ANDROULA
The kings, twins.

CLAUS
As are the queens.

ANDROULA
This should be fun!

CLAUS
I think it's good every once in a
while to do something different.

ANDROULA
While still thinking of the
children.

After looking carefully at Claus, Androula pulls out a rag
and wipes his glistening forehead.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)
Christmas in July?

EXT. VILLAGE OF TWEEN - LATER

They take in the sights, shopping in the village open market.
They purchase items; Androula buys mostly fabrics, Claus
picks up some small hardware items and gets his knives
sharpened. The discussion opens up; everyone is captivated by
this odd-yet-wonderful couple. Androula hangs back a little;
she likes to watch Claus interact, the moments to her small
gifts in themselves.

VILLAGER #1

Is he your husband?

ANDROULA

Yes.

VILLAGER #1

He's a terribly handsome man. I've never seen the likes of him before. And we do get some unique sorts passing through.

ANDROULA

He's from far away. Long ago and far away.

VILLAGER #1

I'm sorry? He appears a vital man. Certainly younger than me!

ANDROULA

People from his part of the world age differently.

VILLAGER #1

And you?

ANDROULA

I like this leather. Could I have an arm's worth?

(holding her hands this far apart)

And this fabric...two, please?

VILLAGER #1

No offense intended, but we don't offer credit to-

Digging into her pocket, Androula presents a few coins in her outstretched palm.

VILLAGER #1 (CONT'D)

(bowing, with a smile)

Apologies. Fascinating outsiders with money. I'm sure we'll be enjoying your visit. No matter how brief it might be.

ANDROULA

It will be an extended stay. What can you tell me about the poor in the village?

(MORE)

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

Especially those children who have lost their parents, who are left to fend for themselves...

EXT. VILLAGE OF TWEEN MARKET - LATER

Claus and Androula now have villagers gathered all around them. None are shy about speaking up.

"You'd think they were children!" "My children are better behaved." "I'd wallop mine, if they acted that way." "I'd take mine by the ear-" "A good spanking. That's what they both deserve." "Royalty should know better." "And the saddest thing of all is that the cousins are not allowed to play together." "It's like they put up a wall between the two families!" "You know, each kingdom will only purchase goods from certain vendors. But what they don't know is that we often help each other out, trading items to fill orders." "We consider ourselves citizens of the village, not subjects of either kingdom." "It's far too silly, this feud between the brothers," "The idiot kings!"

There are gasps...silence...then laughter.

VILLAGER

This never-ending tiff isn't even an honourable ancient one! This bickering doesn't deserve any lore!

Claus and Androula commiserate silently.

CLAUS

We would like your help in organizing a special event in a week's time. For the two kingdoms and your village. A festival. I'll provide you a list of what we'll require.

VILLAGE MAN #1

Who's paying for this?

VILLAGE WOMAN #2

Are you rich?

VILLAGE WOMAN #3

You don't look rich.

VILLAGE MAN #2

You can't expect either kingdom to pay for it!

CLAUS
I'll wager we'll get BOTH to.

VILLAGE MAN #3
Impossible!

ANDROULA
My husband never lies.

VILLAGE MAN #1
He can speak his truth until the
sheep come home, but he'll still
lose-

ANDROULA
I'll take that bet.

Claus reaches into a battered old leather satchel and pulls out a small bag of coins. Then a piece of paper, which he hands to Androula.

CLAUS
Who's the smartest assistant in
your market?

Everyone points to a girl, about 14 years old.

VILLAGE WOMAN #1
Sally, the butcher's daughter.

VILLAGE WOMAN #2
She's got a good head on her
shoulders.

CLAUS
Sally!

The girl is in front of him in a heartbeat.

CLAUS (CONT'D)
Can we borrow you from your father
over the next few days? Better yet,
CONTRACT you, so he doesn't lose
out on any enterprise?

SALLY
I'd have to check with him, but I'd
imagine so.

A younger girl beside her...seven-or-so...tugs on Sally's trousers.

SALLY (CONT'D)
This is Emily. My sister.

CLAUS
 Is Emily YOUR assistant? Might she
 be for hire, as well?

Both girls are thrilled.

As the villagers look on, Androula posts a notice announcing
 the fair.

VILLAGE WOMAN #3
 What does it say?

SALLY
 (stepping forward to the
 notice)
 Few of us can read.

ANDROULA
 (softly)
 THAT has to change.

EXT. VILLAGE OF TWEEN MARKET - LATER

Claus and Androula are ready to head out. With them, Sally
 and Emily.

CLAUS
 Sally, do you understand the
 instructions? Can you remember
 enough to get started?

SALLY
 Yes, Mr. Claus. I believe I do.

CLAUS
 Good.
 (turning to Androula)
 Shall we away to the two kingdoms?

ANDROULA
 (looking down at Emily)
 Well? Are you ready?

Androula reaches down and -without effort- hauls her up.

EXT. ROAD TO KINGDOM OF ALMAGUER - LATER

They ride out. Emily sits in front of Androula. As they ride,
 she and Claus work on items. Handicrafts. Occasionally, they
 pass them back and forth; a mini assembly line. A playful
 dance, intimacy that only a couple together for a very long
 time possesses. Emily watches all this with great interest.

When Androula asks her to hold something, it's the best thing that's ever happened to her.

EMILY

What are they? Those things you're making?

CLAUS

Knick-knacks.

ANDROULA

Oojahs. Bibolets. Curios.

CLAUS

Mustoesines, sierads, bichlimpidis, whim-whams, doobries, bijoux, baratijas...

Androula rubs her nose in the child's scalp, inhaling. She sees that Claus is smiling gently at her.

ANDROULA

One can NEVER have too many gifts to give.

During the journey, Claus and Androula sing a song in an endless stream of languages. Eventually, Androula manages to teach Emily to sing the chorus with them.

N.B. Within our castle visits, we go back and forth between each kingdom's gate, the two throne rooms, et cetera; two essentially identical interludes.

EXT. CASTLE GATES - LATER

The guards step out officiously, but when they look up at Claus and Androula, their challenges melt away, and greet them with smiles, waving them inside. Emily gives something she has made to one of the guards.

INT. CASTLE THRONE ROOMS - CONTINUOUS

The Kings are indeed twins. Ditto the Queens.

CLAUS

We bring you greetings...from the children of the world.

KING PROSPER

Could you be a little more specific?

KING ARNAU

The children of the world sent you?

KING PROSPER

Do you bring any particular message
from them?

ANDROULA

Truthfully, the message was for
YOUR children. Are they here?

KING ARNAU

Why?

CLAUS

We come bearing gifts, as well.

ANDROULA

For YOUR children.

KING PROSPER

OUR children?

CLAUS

Are they here?

KING ARNAU

OUR children?

The ROYAL CHILDREN are lined up. Claus grabs what is clearly a very heavy chair, hauling it effortlessly to the middle of the floor in front of them. Everyone is in awe of his strength. He notices this, and balances it on his forehead. Sitting at last, he pats his knee, gesturing for the first child to come forward. ESTEL, a five-year old.

CLAUS

Well, Estel, are you having a good
day?

ESTEL

(reaching out to tug on a
braid)

How do you know my name?

CLAUS

(tapping his nose)

That's a secret.

With Claus's sack before them, Androula kneels with Emily. They're regarding the child on Claus's knee. After some whispering, Emily reaches into the sack, retrieving a toy. Androula nods, and Emily delivers it to Claus to give to the child. This is repeated.

The children don't run back to their parents, but rather, stay in the vicinity of Claus and Androula. The regents marvel at this bubble that's been created.

INT. CASTLE THRONE ROOMS - LATER

All the gifts have been given out.

CLAUS

We are also here to invite you to a festival in the village in a week's time. On the Saturday.

KING PROSPER

And this festival's purpose?

CLAUS

Why, to celebrate children!

KING ARNAU

OUR children?

ANDROULA

All children, actually. But certainly, the royal children.

KING PROSPER

Saturday next.

CLAUS

That one, indeed. With an early start.

ANDROULA

So we have the entire day to celebrate.

JACINTA

Will there be fireworks?

ANDROULA

(In Cantonese, subtitled)
It will be of a magnificence of a degree unimaginable. Dragons and serpents wrestling across the sky before a backdrop of shooting stars, streaking comets and exploding suns.

JACINTA

What does that mean?

CLAUS

(winking)

That they will be of a kind you
only see in the best of your
bestest dreams.

As they're preparing to leave, Claus hoists Emily into the air, plunking her on his shoulders to ride up top. He addresses the monarchs one last time.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

A final request?

(pausing)

Might I borrow a pair of your best
cows?

EXT. VILLAGE OF TWEEN - DAY

MONTAGE:

-The construction of a stage as well as arrangements made for various other features.

-Claus works with cooks, trying out recipes, some liking them, some not.

-Androula works with some children; costumes are involved, with Claus as tailor.

-Throughout all of this, Sally and Emily assist.

END MONTAGE

EXT. INTERSECTION OF TWO KINGDOM ROADS & MAIN ROAD - MORNING

Claus leads one royal train to the fête, Androula, the other, from opposite directions. The intersection is blocked off by a big sheet comprised of many others of many different sorts. Once the trains stop, Sally and Emily pull back the sheet, revealing the groups. Each king makes to break away back home, but Claus prevents this.

CLAUS

(effectively hypnotizing
the Kings)

Your graces...

Excited, the gaggles of royal children move to meet one another.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

Today, we gather to celebrate
children!

(MORE)

CLAUS (CONT'D)

Children of House Almaguer and
House Requena, children of the
village and children everywhere.

Androula opens her arms to the children. She hoists up two
while the others flank her, and they leave.

The four heads of state remain until the queens finally go to
the other. Reunited. All tears and laughter, they too head
off to the fête. Which leaves only the Kings and their
aides...who Claus indicates should join everyone else,
leaving the two men behind. They trust him implicitly, even
waving goodbye.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

(gesturing)

I heard tell of something at the
waterfall. A relic, a monument of
sorts. A marker of two brothers,
two sisters, two husbands and two
wives, created long before they'd
taken their wedding vows, so long
had they been betrothed. I was told
that this quartet were, while they
were growing up, inseparable.

Silence.

CLAUS (CONT'D)

Apparently, something happened
along the way.

The two kings immediately shout at each other.

Claus proceeds to sing a song.

CLOSE on Androula's smiling face. Though she is a ways away,
Androula hears Claus's voice floating on the wind.

EXT. CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL - LATER

MONTAGE:

- Various games of skill, such as horseshoes, bean-bag toss,
three-legged races, paper boat racing
- Donkey rides
- Kites
- Magic
- Juggling
- Clowns (Claus in costume, Androula, Sally and Emily in
makeup and outfits)
- Theatre featuring village children
- Claus and a stand where he 'sells' his pics and milk.

-Androula bonds with the Queens, Claus regales the Kings with tales of adventures
 -The Royal children are on Cloud 9 playing with their cousins and all the village kids

END MONTAGE

CLAUS (V.O.)

That is a song my beloved wife and I learned in our travels. The journeys that have had us witnessing war. Strife. Disaster. It's about the importance of children. How they should be protected from harmful grudges, resentments or animosities, that they should be given as many opportunities as is possible to embrace life, to live in awe of the wonders of the world before assuming its burdens as adults. A wise man once told me 'Life sends so many things our way that are beyond our control, it behooves us to do something about those things we're able.' Your majesties, I beseech you: put aside your petty squabbles, no matter how time and tide have swollen them in your minds, and think about the children.

EXT. VILLAGE OF TWEEN - AFTERNOON

As the Kings and Queens walk out of the village hand-in-hand towards the waterfall, once again the Royal bodyguards are conflicted. None of the men know what to do.

ANDROULA (O.C.)

I've often found that accepting 'No' for an answer is a righteous path to take.

They turn to find Androula standing behind them, Emily affixed to her hip, holding what could pass for a cigar box.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

Come; we need to keep you good gentlemen occupied.

Emily lifts the lid and Androula removes playing cards.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

Surely at least SOME of you have a gambling streak...?

EXT. APPROACHING WATERFALLS - LATER

The regents are all sombre...but good cheer bubbles. The waterfall is astonishingly ginormous, a wall of crashing water. It roars, obliterating hearing. As they make their way to it, the quartet are rendered minuscule, the bookend trees dwarfing any ancient Redwood.

En route, they strip off clothing down to basic under garments. Each removed item lightens their moods more.

Using a secret access point, they disappear inside the waterfall.

INT. THE WATERFALL - CONTINUOUS

We are there with them. There's no roaring, instead, perfect calm. It's as if they're cocooned.

A huge tree trunk stretches from one side to the other of the outcropping; it connects the two trees. It's covered with moss.

The Kings work at removing a section of growth. Revealed are two hearts carved into the wood. Inside each, the names of each couple. The two hearts are connected by intricate ivy.

The couples embrace; their wives smile through their happy tears.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL - NIGHT

Fireworks as none there have ever seen. Explosions in the sky that fill the heavens with fusillades of phantasmagoria, cacophonies of colour, explosions of excitement.

Everyone present...bodyguards included...are enraptured. Save for Claus and Androula; they're watching the reactions with equal result.

EXT. CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL - LATER

The royal parties prepare to embark on their return trips home with sleepy children, one of the Kings approaches Claus.

KING PROSPER

I'll have my paymaster arrange for the funds for this celebration.

KING ARNAU

Actually, I'LL be paying for it.

KING PROSPER

Actually, no! It'll be coming out of OUR coffers!

Just as they're about to go at it, the Queens step in.

QUEEN NOA

Actually, we are ALL going to settle the bill.

QUEEN ARLET

(smiling Androula's way)

That's not all! We have something additional to announce.

QUEEN NOA

An orphanage. Right here, in the village.

QUEEN ARLET

That's not all!

QUEEN NOA

We even have a name for it!

QUEENS ARLET & NOA

The Four Hearts Home for Children.

QUEEN NOA

That's not all! Androula has agreed to tutor our children!

QUEEN ARLET

She'll teach half the time in one kingdom, half in the other!

QUEEN NOA

Or all of them together! In Tween!

KING PROSPER

What, with the villagers?!?

KING ARNAU

That's absur-

Both Kings are the royally stink-eyed by their wives.

ANDROULA

(winking at Claus)

If only my husband had marketable skills. If he were a passable teacher of languages, or history or sciences, of the arts of war or animal husbandry or gardening, the planting and harvesting of crops, a juggler, a clown, playwright, musician, actor, magician-

CLAUS

Prestidigitator.

ANDROULA

(now rolling her eyes)

Prestidigi-

CLAUS

(holding up a finger)

No. CONJUROR.

(thinking)

Yes, conjuror says it best.

(bowing to Androula)

ANDROULA

CONJUROR, or experience captaining marine vessels, or running a successful business, or a translator of great renown, or emissary or courier...

CLAUS

Alas, I am merely a carver of simple gifts.

PASCUAL

And baker of sweet nibblies.

EMILY

(holding up her hand)

And milker of cows.

MONTAGE:

Yet another run-down home moved into. Claus working with ROYAL ARCHITECTS and TRADESMEN. Claus and Androula teaching the children. The orphanage being established. Sally and Emily growing older. The Royal children growing older. Claus and Androula embedded in the community. Claus continuing his pics and milk tradition.

END MONTAGE

TITLE CARD: Some years later.

EXT. FOUR HEARTS ORPHANAGE - DAWN

Sally and Emily say goodbye to Claus and Androula.

A villager runs over to Claus and goes in for a hug.

VILLAGER

Bless you! You truly are a saint!

Teary-eyed, she squeezes Androula's arm and walks away.

Claus smiles, but shrugs, a little embarrassed.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF VILLAGE OF TWEEN - MORNING

We now see them at the same vantage point we did at the beginning of this interlude. The village has changed. It's grown. Flourishing. Even the two trees have clearly increased in stature. Sally and Emily can just be seen waving goodbye.

Claus and Androula look at each other. She's a little surprised at what she sees; she reaches over and wipes a tear off his cheek. There's a long pause.

ANDROULA

(laughing)

SAINT Claus?!?

Once again, a trail of adventuring across the globe, extending farther and farther out...only now, we venture to North America.

TITLE CARD: Limoges, France, 1729 CE

MONTAGE:

Androula is a nanny. Very close to the mother/employer. A baby falls ill. Androula is very affected by this. She's there, day and night. The child is dying. We see physicians come and go, dispensing all manner of medicinals, all to no effect.

END MONTAGE

INT. CLAU AND ANDROULA'S LODGING - EVENING

Fatigued, Androula returns home. Claus guides her to the floor, gets her to sit cross-legged. He sits down in front of her, finessing how she's sitting.

ANDROULA

(absently protesting)

Claus... I know what you're- I
cannot remove all thoughts from my-

Claus places his hands on her knees.

CLAUS

Let us sit and simply CONSIDER, my
love. Just as we would with the
masters of the mountains and of the
deserts.

(beat)

Let us invite our angel to join us.

And so they meditate; their faces are slowly illuminated,
smiles consuming their serious expressions.

INT. CLAUS AND ANDROULA'S LODGING - LATER

Claus and Androula are asleep in their bed. This time Claus
is the spooner. There's a banging on their door.

PERSON (O.S.)

A miracle! A miracle!

EXT. CLAUS AND ANDROULA'S LODGING - CONTINUOUS

Androula and Claus depart with this person.

INT. NURSERY - CONTINUOUS

The child has begun to recover. Its mother cries with joy as
she embraces Androula.

MONTAGE:

Another parade of various locations; various efforts of Claus
and Androula; various historic moments interspersed; the
amount of time of each vignette appears on-screen shortening,
shortening, until at last, there is a burst of white. Out of
this:

END MONTAGE

TITLE CARD: Colmar-Berg, Luxembourg, 1817 CE

EXT. CAMPFIRE - EVENING

White gives way to a blizzard, which gives way to a picturesque wintery, snowy landscape. Claus and Androula sit around a fire, a lean-to behind them. Once again, they are happily reciting names.

BELLS.

Claus stops. Androula follows. Alerted, Claus listens. Nothing. He listens some more. The sounds of mournful, dirge-like singing rises in the distance. It gets louder as it passes nearby. Both raise an eyebrow.

Claus whistles a short excerpt of his mother's song.

Out of the brush comes a procession of several dozen elves, walking ON TOP of the snow. They are a mix of male and female, none more than knee-high, and all wearing packs and sporting caps that allow their pointy ears to poke out into the fresh air. They present themselves in an arc of disciplined, serried ranks.

CLAUS

Waes hael to you, my aelfmen!

They consider Claus, softly conferring with each other.

ELF #1

You know of us.

ELF #2

That we are neither the figments of
someone's addle-brained
imagination...

ELF #3

...nor the stuff of wary-minded
fable.

ELF #4

Are you friend or foe?

CLAUS

Good aes sídhe. Variously named
across the known and unknown lands
alike as daoine síth, Tylwyth Teg,
Ellyllon, haltija, jinn, Mrenh
kongveal, diwata, orang bunian,
patupaiarehe and several score
more.

(nodding dererentially)

Vos mundi originale earumque
artifices extiterunt.

ANDROULA
 (translating with a smile)
 The world's original magicians.

CLAUS
 (squeezing Androula's
 hand)
 We are friends. As we are with all
 good-spirited creatures under the
 sky. Why do you go so sadly,
 doleful and dreary-headed?

The elves reply in a fashion reminiscent of handbell choirs,
 one speaker after the other in no particular order.

"The folk whom we did help aforesaid now cry out upon us and
 say we are creatures of devilry-" "-and set no pan of milk or
 barley bread beside their doorsteps for us as was the custom-
 " "-nor do they tell the tales their fathers told of kindly
 deeds done by we Little People-" "-only freshly forged
 stories of terror and wickedness." "For this we are no longer
 able to come out and play upon the earth's good ground-" "-
 nor dance and sing by moonlight in the glades-" "-whether it
 be by bulbous face-" "-or even slim, silvery crescent."
 "Worst of all, our human neighbours have no use for our good
 offices-" "-but drive us hence with curse and chant, bell,
 book and candle." "For countless generations, our traditions
 have seen us as great artificers-" "-in wood and metal,
 fabric and stone." "There are no smiths like unto us-" "-not
 any who can fashion better crockery-" "-or the finest gold or
 silver filigree-" "-jewellery made of rare and precious
 stones-" "-stitching and weaving, brother and sister arts-" "-
 delicate embroidery and embossery-" "-tapestry and ruggery."

"Long has it been our purpose and our pride to shape things
 for men's service-" "-and bestow them on the goodmen of the
 farms and villages, cities and town-" "-but now they will
 have none of us or of our gifts!" "Nor those fashioned by
 cousins of ours!" "Why, to say a present is a fairy gift is
 to insult the giver in these days!"

Claus and Androula consider all this.

CLAUS (CONT'D)
 We too, know of rejection and
 persecution. It is the stuff of
 heartache, indeed even a crushing
 of soul when you mean well, but
 others bend and mangle the truth so
 much by way of pretzeled dogma that
 your good intentions are
 misconstrued.

ANDROULA

And damned.

ELF #24

It is said that the road to Hell is built with the best of intentions.

ELF #25

It is also said that no good deed goes unpunished.

ANDROULA

Aye, 'punished' is often what those who persecuted us have aimed at.

CLAUS

Sometimes to the most painful degree possible.

One of the elves looks to his corps for approval.

ELF #26

(brightly)

We would hear your tale.

ELF #27

It suggests some familiarity.

ELF #28

Its sounds...it stirs within us...the sense of it...

ANDROULA

Because to what my good husband alludes RESONATES with you, the similarities of our collective pains endured?

ALL ELVES

Yes!

CLAUS

Gather, then. And we will tell it.

They settle in around the fire.

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY - DAY

We look down on a city.

CLAUS (V.O.)
One Yuletide some years back, we
were lodged in a small Bavarian
city.

INT. BAVARIAN CITY STORES - DAY

Store shelves are empty.

CLAUS (V.O.)
The harvest was not plentiful that
year Want and famine stalked the
streets, an enemy laying siege to
the town.

INT. BAVARIAN CITY FAMILY HOMES - DAY

Large families sit at dining tables with very little to eat.

CLAUS (V.O.)(CONT'D)
The feast of Christmas neared, but
in the citizens' homes there was
little merriment. Scarce food had
they to keep starvation from their
bellies, and none at all to make
brave holiday.

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY - DUSK

Claus and Androula walk the streets witnessing all this.

INT. CLAUS AND ANDROULA'S BAVARIAN LODGINGS - DAY

Claus is depressed. We see Androula go to him and talk. As
she does, Claus brightens, and they rush out into the city.

ANDROULA (V.O.)
We could not leave things this way.
Not when we felt we could remedy
the situation to at least a small
degree.

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY - DAY

Claus and Androula purchase supplies at shops, stalls and the
market, tools and knives sharpened.

ANDROULA (V.O.)(CONT'D)
And so my husband and I conspired
to construct this remedy by way of
the necessary materials and some
wily industriousness.

EXT. OUTSIDE BAVARIAN CITY ENVIRONS - DAY

Claus and Androula cut branches from fir trees, gather
berries, pine cones and other natural decoratives.

INT. CLAUS AND ANDROULA'S BAVARIAN LODGINGS - DAY & NIGHT

Claus carves items, Androula knits and works materials.
Claus's projects...including small sleighs...pile up as time
passes. So do Androula's.

CLAUS (V.O.)
And so we worked and worked away,
our spirits rising with each
present completed, so that in no
time, our dark minds had melted
away, the rightness of our project
driving us on night and day, day
and night.

INT. CLAUS AND ANDROULA'S BAVARIAN LODGINGS - DAY

Androula notes their larder and ingredients shelves. Claus
hugs her from behind, then turns her around. Foreheads
pressed together, they consider the situation.

ANDROULA (V.O.)
Though our supplies were scant,
somehow we were able to bake an
abundance. I like to believe that
our angel was with us.

Androula and Claus bake and bake and bake, the pies
accumulating beyond all possibilities. Obviously, Claus
prepares his pics, too.

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY - NIGHT

Claus and Androula deliver gifts under a full moon; they are
dancing spectres.

ANDROULA (V.O.)

It was bitter cold on Christmas Eve, and the members of the night watch hid themselves in doorways or crept into cellars to shield them from the snow that rode upon the storm wind's howling blast; so none saw us as we made their rounds, leaving on each doorstep of the poor a little sleigh piled high with fruits and sweets the like of which those children of that northern clime had never seen before.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - CONTINUOUS

The elves raise a rousing cheer. Then check themselves and quiet down...but not before Claus winks at Androula.

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY HOME - NIGHT

Amidst Claus and Androula's deliveries, a small child peers out through a second-story window.

CLAUS (V.O.)

But one small lad whose empty belly would not let him sleep, looked out from his garret window.

INT. BAVARIAN CITY HOME - CONTINUOUS

The lad witnesses their actions.

CLAUS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He espied us in the scarlet cloaks we both wore, for we went dressed as mighty persons of valour might, those who walk in confidence with princes and emperors.

ANDROULA

(conspiratorially)

We do so to lend to the acts a certain 'ceremonial import'.

INT. BAVARIAN CITY HOME, BEDROOM - DAYBREAK

The lad awakes, excited for a moment...then burdened with sadness.

ANDROULA (V.O.)

When he waked he knew not if it
were a dream he dreamt, or if he
really had seen us pass through the
storm all muffled in our clothes
and our driven, almost feverous
intent.

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY - LATER

Church bells ring.

ANDROULA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But when the church bells called
the folk to prayer and praise next
morning...

INT. BAVARIAN CITY HOME - CONTINUOUS

A family moves about, morose.

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY HOMES - CONTINUOUS

People open their front doors.

ANDROULA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...and the house doors were
unbarred...

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY HOMES - CONTINUOUS

The citizens discover the deliveries.

ANDROULA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...the people found the sleighs all
freighted with their loads of
comfits on their thresholds, and
great and loud was the rejoicing,
and children who had thought that
Christmas was to be another day of
fasting, clapped their hands and
raised their voices in wild shouts
of glee.

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Claus and Androula witness all this.

CLAUS (V.O.)

We went privily about the streets
and saw the result of our work, and
knew that it was good.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - DAY

CLOSE on elves; they listen as our tale's elflings do.

ANDROULA

And our hearts beat faster and our
eyes shone with the tears of
happiness for we had brought joy
where sorrow had been.

INT. CLAUS AND ANDROULA'S BAVARIAN LODGINGS - LATER

Claus and Androula arrive back home...then realize that
they've returned to a mess...and little to eat in
celebration.

ANDROULA

And returned to our home. Though we
had not made any plans for our own
Christmas feast, we were in fact
sated by the thought of the joy we
had brought to the children of the
town.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - DAY

At first, silence. Then:

ELF #29

Ah. Those were the previously
mentioned 'good intentions'.

ELF #30

(grumbling)

In the distance, Hell awaits.

ELF #31

For certain.

INT. BAVARIAN CITY, CHURCH - DAY

The clergy are told of these 'miracles' by its citizens.

CLAUS (V.O.)

But when the clergy of the town were told about the miracle of fruits and other delightfults that came unmarked upon the doorsteps of the poor they were angry, and swore this was no Christian act, but the foul design of some fell fiends who sought to buy men's souls away by bribing them with Satan's sweetmeats.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - DAY

An elf reacts as if wounded...and then composes himself.

ELF #32

It is EVER thus!

INT. BAVARIAN CITY, CHURCH - DAY

Our spying lad regales clergy and citizens with his tale.

ANDROULA (V.O.)

The lad whose waking eyes had seen us told his tale, and all the poor folk praised who he had witnessed at work the night before as those who had compassion on the sufferings of childhood.

INT. BAVARIAN CITY OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

The churchmen visit the High Minister.

ANDROULA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But the churchmen went to the High Minister of the city saying, 'Go to, this man and his wife foment rebellion; they have sought to buy the people's loyalty away by little gifts made to their children.

Silence.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - DAY

Claus continues.

CLAUS

When they heard this the clerics murmured one to another, and finally put forth the saintly pastor of the High Minster to make answer for them all. He was a very learned man and skilled in disputation. He knew how many angels could dance on the head of a pin, and whether traveling from one place to another, they actually passed through intervening space. Moreover, he was deeply versed in demonology, and could smell wizardry or witchcraft as easily as the beagle scents the rabbit. Or so he maintained, according to his arrogance.

EXT. BAVARIAN CITY STREETS - DAY

The High Minister and clergy and trailing citizens march to the military barracks.

CLAUS (V.O.)

So off to they went to the city's military commander. And when the High Minister spake, he spake with great authority, and thus he said to him:

INT. BAVARIAN CITY MILITARY BARRACKS - DAY

The High Minister talks to the Military Commander.

HIGH MINISTER

The poor we have with us always. Did not Jesus say as much, aye, and wrathfully rebuke His disciples who would have had Mary Magdalene's embrocation sold to buy bread for them? It is no work of merit to give bread unto the poor. If it were Heaven's will that all men should be fed then we should have no poor, but it is stated most explicitly that the poor we shall have with us always.

(MORE)

HIGH MINISTER (CONT'D)

It is the well-considered thought of this most reverend company that it is little less than a defiance of divine purpose to alleviate their condition. If wise all-seeing Heaven had not willed them to be poor they had not been so, but since their poverty is obviously by divine decree, whoever makes them less poor, even though it be by giving them no more than a dry crust, thwarts Heaven's will, and is therefore no better than a contemnor of the Holy Gospel. And as all wizardry is a species of heresy, it follows as the night the day that heresy is also a form of witchcraft, and Holy Scripture saith expressly, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.'

EXT. CAMPFIRE - DAY

ALL THE ELVES

Boo! Hiss!

ELF #33

Many an elf has encountered witches!

ELF #34

And NONE deserved such treatment!

ANDROULA

'Look ye to it, then,' said the High Minster to the Commander.

INT. BAVARIAN CITY MILITARY BARRACKS - DAY

As before.

ANDROULA (V.O.)

'For if you permit this man and woman, who are no better than a witch and warlock, to remain at large you are not friend of true religion, nor of the Landgrave from whom you hold this city as a fief. I have spoken.'

'Amen,' said all the others in attendance.

(MORE)

ANDROULA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

'Our reverend brother speaks most sound doctrinal advice, which you will take to heart if you are truly righteous,' one added.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - DAY

The elves await the conclusion of the tale.

CLAUS

The commander would have put us into prison on a charge of witchcraft and treason, an interlude to consumption by fire, but certain townsmen came to us and warned us of the net the churchmen wove; we escaped before the men-at-arms came clamouring at our door, and we fled across the winter snows. Behind us swept a raving tempest, so that those who sought to follow were engulfed in drifting snows and lost their tracks upon the road, and finally turned round and fought their way back to the city with the tidings that we had surely perished in the storm.

Utter silence.

ANDROULA

This was not the first time we had been chased out of a village, town or city. These occasions greatly exceed your numbers, unfolding as they have over the centuries.

Claus stands and goes to the elves. They're captivated by his size...and yet not afraid. He kneels before them. As this gesture is one of respect and not idle indulgence, clearly no intent to insult, the elves swell with pride.

CLAUS

Would you come with us to a place of safety and there work diligently to craft things that children are joyous to have in all corners of the world, known and not-yet known, providing endless smiles and comfort? If you will do this, I'll see that your gifts are put into the hands of those innocents.

ELF #7

Your purpose seems much greater than merely the efforts of two such as yourselves.

ELF #11

There be an air of HOLINESS about you.

ELF #19

This much is plain.

ANDROULA

Indeed, it has been our calling for innumerable lifetimes.

ELF #1

Yes. Yes we will accompany you on this journey, be a part of your endeavours.

CLAUS

You don't have to discuss this?

ELF #1

(without turning to his brethren)

All those in favour, say 'Aye!'

ALL THE ELVES

AYE!

Elf #1 bows a little, then shrugs happily.

ELF #1

There's hardly any greater thrill to an elf than the casting of votes.

CLAUS

(grinning)

Excellent. Then I have your first commission for you.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - DAYBREAK

Claus and Androula sport freshly-made snowshoes. They hold especially long straps of leather. Reins.

ELF # 22

You're sure you don't mind? We can walk.

(MORE)

ELF # 22 (CONT'D)

Though we do not move as quickly as humans. Even with our quick paces atop the snow.

We now see that the elves sit within a sleigh. It's not terribly large, but it also isn't plain; clearly, the elves have been busy, for the vehicle has been lovingly crafted.

ANDROULA

(laughing)

There would have to be a thousand of you for my good husband and I to be overly burdened!

As they set out, the elves sing a song, this time not a doleful one at all.

MONTAGE:

Claus, Androula and the elves venture north, ever north, Claus's heart-compass directing them. Joviality and laughter bounteous as they trudge through bush, along abandoned pathways, up and down mountainous stretches, climbing through valleys, sometimes having to correct course when the way is blocked. Nevertheless, their bearings remain consistent. The elves listen to Claus and Androula sing in perfect, intricate harmony. That they might not understand the languages being used doesn't seem to matter one whit; they're still transfixed. It takes a while, but eventually they join these two human voices, lending to the choir an other-worldly thrill.

En route to their eventual destination, our future North Polers continue their gifting inclinations, fashioning toys and the such for children. Not wanting to put at risk their mission as their ultimate destination called out to them, only Claus and Androula enter the towns and villages, while the elves remain hidden on the outskirts for safety's sake. Within these images, Claus's beard and hair turn grey...then silver...then white.

END MONTAGE

TITLE CARD: Borlänge, Sweden 1819 CE

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - DUSK

In a heavy snowstorm, Claus, Androula and the elves continue on their journey. The elves listen transfixed as Claus and Androula sing in their perfect, intricate harmony.

BELLS.

Claus stops. Listens. He drops his reins and walks up a rise in the landscape. We see him in profile as he looks out onto something. He makes a clicking sound with his mouth.

EXT. GLADE - CONTINUOUS

In a broad glade, a herd of reindeer in the distance looks up at Claus. (From their POV)

Claus walks slowly down the hill. We hear him whistle.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - CONTINUOUS

Androula and the elves look on, curious, then head to where Claus had been standing.

EXT. GLADE - CONTINUOUS

The eight reindeer make for Claus. They're not racing, but they're not taking their time, either.

The elves are excited. Practically jumping up and down.

Seen from above, the reindeer move about Claus in a circle, so that he is the hub in their wheel. Finally, they slow, then stop. He goes to each one, whispering in its ear.

Androula begins to walk down into the clearing, but stops.

ANDROULA

(to the elves)

Are you able to bring the sleigh to him?

One elf snaps his fingers as if to properly task himself, and heads back to the sleigh, while the others catch up to Androula.

She moves about the reindeer to get to Claus, scritchng under their chins and on top of their huge heads, between their ears. As she does, wonder and awe fill her expression just as tears-of-happiness fill her eyes.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

These are THEY! The glorious creatures of your youth!

Claus merely nods.

ANDROULA (CONT'D)

What were you whispering to them?

CLAUS
Their NAMES.

The elf retrieving the sleigh arrives back with it carted on his shoulder; it's now no bigger than a breadbox.

CLAUS (CONT'D)
(pointing)
Right there is PERFECT.

Walking with one on either side of him, Claus guides two of the reindeer forward, arms over their necks, leading them into place. He doesn't have to repeat this; the others line up in pairs unbidden. When he's done, we can see that the sleigh is now big enough to fit everyone in...and then some.

The elves run along the backs of the reindeer, attaching leather harnesses to each. The reindeer react as if having their fur gently scritch'd; already there is clear kinship between the species.

All is now set.

Squatting, Claus confers with the elves one last time. They dash to the back of the sleigh as he climbs up into the 'driver's seat'.

ANDROULA
What now, husband?

Against the faint sound of metalwork, Claus explains.

CLAUS
I've told you of the sounds I have sometimes heard. Mostly in the distant past, but in latter days, as well.

ANDROULA
That set you on your journey from your home and long have given you notice of times of import. Sounds reminiscent of your mother's necklace. Your BELLS.

CLAUS
Close your eyes, my love.

We get the impression that the elves are hurrying about, making final touches on something. They assess the situation, look to Claus, then scamper into the sleigh.

Claus snaps the reins, and as he begins to exit out of frame, ascending, the loud jingling of bells now fills the air.

CLAUS (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 You can open them now.

As Androula does, we rise above the blizzard, through the dense clouds, and as the sky opens up, the Northern Lights are revealed.

ANDROULA
 (dazzled)
 Home?

CLAUS
 Home!

He snaps the reins a final time.

CLAUS (CONT'D)
 Ho-ho-home!

The steady jingling of bells, in force, fading into the crystal-dark.

INT. NORTH POLE COMPLEX - NIGHT

Santa pulls his wife in for a one-armed hug.

SANTA CLAUS
 And THAT'S how my good Androula and
 I became Santa and Mrs. Claus!

The elflings cheer. And chirp. Save for Luna; she sits quietly crying.

Mrs. Claus
 (gesturing for Luna to
 come forward)
 What's the matter, sweet one?

In one fell swoop, Santa has reached out, plucked her out of the bunch, and brought her back to the bench. She sits on his knee, somehow looking even tinier than the tiniest child.

SANTA CLAUS
 It's OK. The story's over now.
 We're back in the present.

Luna buries herself in his chest. Her elfmates say nothing.

Jangling his slippers, Claus sings his mother's song and everyone waits.

Luna finally sniffles her way out of her tears...even though her eyes are still pooled. She stares at the ground.

MRS. CLAUS
What's made you so sad?

SANTA CLAUS
(brightly, cheerily)
Our story ends happily! We're all
here! Safe and-

LUNA
You ATE a reindeer!

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END