

THE COUSINS CLAUS

Written by

Mary Haarmeyer & Judy Pennell

ACT ONE

FADE IN.

EXT. PLAZA - (RUIDOSO, NM) - LATE AFTERNOON

Main drive; street-lights adorned with snowflakes light the way to the town square. Within a gazebo, dripping with twinkling lights, sits Santa, who waves from his festive chair, inviting the children to come and make their wishes.

A group of children, all wearing matching AUTISM AWARENESS SHIRTS stand excited in line with their parents and caregivers.

NATALIE STERLING, 28, waits with her mother, **ROBYN BOWSER**, 60s, and Natalie's adorable son, **ZACK STERLING**, 6. Zack pulls at his autism awareness shirt while nervously clutching a toy horse with the other hand.

Reaching the front of the line, Natalie kneels down before Zack.

NATALIE

It's your turn, sweetie.

Zack squeezes Natalie's hand and swallows hard.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Nana and I will wait right here.

Smiling at Zack, Robyn kneels down in front of him.

ROBYN

You don't want your Christmas wish to go to waste, do you?

Zack shakes his head no.

ROBYN (CONT'D)

Then you'd better go and tell Santa what you'd like. He has to get back to the North Pole.

Zack looks up at Santa, who motions him forward.

Disguised as Santa, **DUANE BOWSER**, 60s, Zack's gentle-natured grandfather, winks at Natalie as he reaches out to Zack.

NATALIE
Think Zack knows?

Natalie stands and Robyn puts an arm around her.

ROBYN
Santa's secret should be safe a
little while longer.

NATALIE
Hope you're right. I sure would
hate it if Zack ousted Dad in front
of the whole village of Ruidoso.

Zack, to everyone's relief, crawls up into Santa's lap.

DUANE
What a fine looking pony you've got
there.

Eyes drifting to the crowd, Zack focuses on a daddy scooping
up his son, cradling him in his arms for a good tickle.

DUANE (CONT'D)
Does he have a name?

Zack sighs and Duane follows his gaze.

Coming to her son's rescue, the boy's mom playfully swats at
her husband's arm. Laughing, the man hoists his son up on his
shoulders as they join the line to see Santa.

DUANE (CONT'D)
I hear you've been extra good this
year.

Zack turns his focus back to his toy horse.

DUANE (CONT'D)
Is there something special you'd
like for Christmas?

Zack hesitates for a moment then shows Santa his horse.

ZACK
Save the ponies?

DUANE
The therapy horses you ride at
Ray's ranch?

ZACK
Uh-uh, the wild ones.

DUANE

That's a fine wish, son. One I'll most certainly look into--

Zack smiles as he takes his horse for a ride in the air.

DUANE (CONT'D)

But, isn't there something you'd like for yourself? Maybe a bike, a new video game...or how about--

ZACK

--A new daddy.

Zack searches out the happy family.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Have I been good enough for two wishes?

His hopeful gaze swings back to Duane.

DUANE

Of course you have.

Duane puts a loving hand on Zack's head.

ZACK

Mommy's sad sometimes. Maybe a new daddy would make her happy too.

Duane hugs Zack to him.

DUANE

You and your mommy deserve a wish like that, and more.

Fighting back emotions, Duane signals to Natalie and Robyn.

DUANE (CONT'D)

I'll see what I can do about your request, but for now, run along with your Nana and Mom, okay?

Approaching the gazebo, Natalie's gaze narrows in on Duane as he helps Zack down.

NATALIE

Everything alright, Santa?

DUANE

(brightening)

Like bells on bob-tails. You ladies better get busy shopping.

(MORE)

DUANE (CONT'D)

Christmas is less than a week away
and there's a noticeable lack of
packages for Zack's grandpa under
the tree.

NATALIE

(laughing)

Is that so?

DUANE

Curiously enough.

Robyn gives Duane a mischievous wink, loops her arm with
Natalie's and leads them out of the gazebo.

DUANE (CONT'D)

Hey Zack, don't forget to leave my
favorite peanut-butter cookies by
the fireplace!

A YOUNG GIRL, next in line to meet Santa, looks up at her
MOTHER.

YOUNG GIRL

But Mom, you said sugar cookies
were Santa's favorite?

The Mother glares at Duane, who gives a hearty "ho-ho-ho" as
he smiles to the Young Girl.

EXT. STABLES - (NORTH POLE) - EVENING

Handsome-cowboy **COLTON WADE**, 30's, leads **DASHER**, Santa's lead
reindeer into a stable. He's assertive but gentle, and the
animal follows his every command.

He stables Dasher, taking off his harness and patting him
gently.

COLTON

There you go, Dasher. Christmas Eve
flight in T-minus three days.
Feeling ready?

Dasher snorts at Colton and he smiles.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Thought so.

Colton pulls out an APPLE and offers it to Dasher, who begins
eating.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Listen. I've been wanting to tell you something. I think maybe... well, I think this might be my last year hitching Santa's sleigh.

Dasher looks straight up at Colton, the apple falling comically out of his mouth.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Don't give me that look, buster. It's time I move on! I'm just a normal guy.

Dasher gives Colton a "look."

COLTON (CONT'D)

Well, okay. Maybe being one of Santa's cousins doesn't make me *completely* normal, but you get the point. I didn't inherit any of my cousins' elven magic. And after Amber...

Head low, Dasher inches closer and nuzzles Colton in a sign of affection.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Thanks, Dash. Let's face it. This place is magical... and I'm not.

Heart heavy, Colton steps outside the stable and takes in the familiar scene:

A short distance from the stables, a charming log-cabin sits on top of the rise; Santa's home, magically glowing with glittery white lights, ice and snow.

Tiny elf homes dot the hillside; no two are alike.

COLTON (CONT'D)

(to himself)

I don't belong here.

Colton is about to leave, when--

POP! A flurry of sugar and spirals twist in a tiny cyclone as GILBERT the elf appears. Mischievous and taller than the average elf, Gilbert busts at the seams of his two-sizes-too-small uniform.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Gilbert! Why can't you wear bells on your shoes like the other elves?

GILBERT
 (smirking)
 Oops! Didn't mean to startle you.
 Just popped over to remind you that
 Santa wants everyone at the house.

The song of "Jingle Bells" blares as the front door of Santa's cabin opens. Cheers go up from the party-goers inside, then are once again muffled as the door closes.

COLTON
 I'm not going to make it to the
 party this year.

GILBERT
 What? You can't miss a *Wrap!* Think
 of Santa... your cousins!

COLTON
 They'll understand. Tell Santa the
 herd is healthy, happy and will be
 ready for flight Christmas Eve.
 After that...

GILBERT
 After that WHAT, mister?

COLTON
 Nothing.

Colton side-steps the elf and stomps off in the opposite direction of the houses.

GILBERT
 I know you're not much of a party
 animal. But you're not getting out
 of this one. Santa is announcing an
Assist tonight.

Laughing, Colton turns back to Gilbert.

COLTON
 That cinches it.

GILBERT
 Excuse me?

COLTON
 There's no way Santa would pick me
 for an *Assist*. He never has before.

Folding his arms across his puffed out chest, Gilbert straightens to his full height.

GILBERT

Colton Claus Wade, don't make me transport you into that party. You know your "Sugar-Shifts" never go smoothly.

COLTON

You wouldn't dare.

Gilbert smiles mischievously as he grabs Colton's arm and-

POP! Both he and Gilbert disappear in the same flurry of sugary spirals.

INT. SANTA'S HOUSE - (NORTH POLE)- NIGHT

Sitting at his desk, a plate of pretty, red cookies in front of him, a sweating SANTA CLAUS downs a glass of water. Coming into the room, MRS. CLAUS takes note of Santa's pained expression then shuts the door behind her.

MRS. CLAUS

Oh, good! You tried my newest culinary concoction! A bit of cayenne pepper to add a kick!

Nodding, Santa fights for air.

SANTA

I know I'm known for Milk and Cookies, but even I have limits! Please tell me you haven't given any of these to the elves. These are Ho-Ho-HOT.

MRS. CLAUS

Your Christmas-crew is safe, dear.

She places a glass of MILK on the table and Santa gulps it down, satisfied.

SANTA

Thank you my love. You always think of everything.

Mrs. Claus gives Santa a worried look.

MRS. CLAUS

Speaking of which, how did Colton take the news?

SANTA

Oh, I sent Gilbert to fetch him.

He gets up and walks around his desk.

SANTA (CONT'D)

They should be arriving right...
about...

Santa scoots a chair to the center of the room just as--

--POP! Sugar spirals everywhere as Gilbert and Colton appear out of thin air. Gilbert remains standing, but Colton is caught by the chair.

Santa wipes some sugar off his front as Mrs. Claus chuckles and dusts some out of his beard.

SANTA (CONT'D)

Colton! What a pleasant surprise.
The Missus and I were just talking
about you.

Colton knocks sugar off his well-worn cowboy hat.

COLTON

You know, there are easier ways to
get my attention, Cousin.

Colton jabs a thumb toward Gilbert.

COLTON (CONT'D)

This one took me to the Sugar Plum
Forest and back before we made it
here.

GILBERT

So maybe my calculations aren't
always exactly correct. But I had
no choice! He was leaving!

MRS. CLAUS

Not before the wrap party!

SANTA

And certainly not before you hitch
up my sleigh in a few days time.

COLTON

I was thinking... maybe someone
else could handle that this year.

GILBERT

WHAT!?

COLTON

It doesn't take a genius, Santa. I mean, an elf with half a brain could do it.

He turns to Gilbert.

COLTON (CONT'D)

No offense.

GILBERT

Some taken.

Colton turns back to Santa, the rumble of the joyous party continuing downstairs.

COLTON

Every one of our cousins was given a special gift... except me. I don't fit in here. I've never even helped with one of your-

Santa pulls out a gold-trimmed SCROLL tied with a red bow.

SANTA

-Santa Assists? Funny you should mention that.

Stepping up to Colton, Santa offers the scroll to him.

SANTA (CONT'D)

I was going to make this announcement at the party tonight, but, seeing as how you're in such a hurry to leave, I guess this will have to do.

Colton looks down at the scroll.

SANTA (CONT'D)

I have a very special request from a little boy named Zack. A request that requires *your* expertise.

Hesitant, Colton takes the paper, unrolls it and reads.

COLTON

Zack wants us to save a band of horses?

MRS. CLAUS

Oh, Colton! That's perfect for you!

GILBERT

A band?

COLTON

It's what they call a family of wild horses.

SANTA

Trouble is, they only have until midnight, Christmas Eve to raise the needed funds or their permit expires.

COLTON

That's not much time.

SANTA

So, you understand why I need someone with your particular gifts. You'll be working directly with Ray Stuart, a local rancher, who runs a therapy horse ranch for special needs children like Zack.

Colton continues to scan the document.

COLTON

Santa, I'm honored, really, but I'm not good with people.

SANTA

I wouldn't have chosen you if I didn't believe you were the best cousin for the job. Now, Colton Wade, do you accept this Assist?

Searching the anxious faces about him, Colton swallows.

COLTON

I'll do my best?

Smiling, Santa slaps a hand to Colton's shoulder

SANTA

Excellent!

GILBERT

(clearing his throat)

Um, Santa, aren't you forgetting something?

Colton's gaze narrows on Gilbert, then shifts to Santa.

SANTA

Oh, right. Yes... there is a second part to Zack's wish that didn't get written down.

COLTON

Which is?

MRS. CLAUS

You must help Zack's mother, Natalie, find her true love.

COLTON

Wait... what? Love? I can help with horses, but--

MRS. CLAUS

(dreamy)

--Oh, Colton. Love is the greatest gift of all. You are so lucky to have this mission!

COLTON

But--

SANTA

You'll do splendid, Colton! Now get out of here before the Missus makes you try her newest recipe.

COLTON

Santa, let's talk about this--

SANTA

Gilbert, mind getting Colton down to New Mexico on the double?

COLTON

(to Gilbert)

You wouldn't dare.

GILBERT

Sorry, buddy. I take my orders from the Big Man.

COLTON

Santa, maybe we could--

POP! Colton and Gilbert disappear.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**EXT. CONVENTION CENTER - (RUIDOSO, NM) - DAY**

Nestled in a valley with a background of beautiful snow-capped mountains sits the large, adobe colored event center with a red tiled roof.

Preparations for the annual Christmas Jingle-Bell Jubilee are in full swing. Vendors scurry in and out of the jam-packed building, armed with decorations and supplies.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (BOOTH) - DAY

Dressed like an elaborate ornament, with a blinking necklace and a fluffy Santa hat, Natalie admires her massive display.

MORGAN WELSH, 28, Natalie's, cute, life-long friend, with candy-cane-red and white hair, steps up beside Natalie and offers her a hot cocoa. Natalie takes the mug.

NATALIE

Ta-da! Take a look, Morgan. Think it's too much?

MORGAN

Depends... are you trying to take on Macy's?

NATALIE

Very funny. I want to make sure the spirit of The Christmas Shop is fully represented.

MORGAN

Your mom and dad are going to flip on this. Trust me.

NATALIE

I just love this time of year. There's a magic in the air, like anything is possible.

Natalie spots **BENJAMIN HARPER**, 33, tall, confident, dressed in an expensive suit. Benjamin meanders their way, shaking hands and kissing babies like a practiced politician.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Speaking of magic, this could be the year Benjamin finally pops the question.

Following Natalie's gaze, Morgan spots Benjamin and sneers.

MORGAN

Ugh! Seriously Nat, Benjamin Harper is so not your guy.

NATALIE

What? He's perfect.

Benjamin smiles at Natalie as he nears.

MORGAN

Nat, Benjamin may cross all your T's and dot those I's, but that doesn't make him the one.

Waving to Benjamin, Natalie's smile falters as she spots **SOPHIA WILLIAMS**, 20's, Benjamin's hyper-efficient, overly-dedicated assistant, trailing behind him.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Maybe I'll finally give him a piece of my mind-

Morgan spots Sophia and sinks further back into the display.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Never mind, I won't be coming out any time soon.

Natalie brightens as they reach her booth and leans in for Benjamin's usual peck on the cheek.

BENJAMIN

Wow, Natalie, your booth is really--

Sophia's smile doesn't quite reach her eyes as her gaze rounds the decorations and settles in on Natalie.

SOPHIA

--Something.

NATALIE

Thank you?

BENJAMIN

Sorry I haven't been around to help you finish the jubilee setup.

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Between meetings and phone calls,
the week has gotten away from me.

NATALIE

(clearing her throat)
Always happy to help.

BENJAMIN

You're a real asset to the team.

NATALIE

I appreciate your confidence-

Sophia checks her watch, butting in.

SOPHIA

Fifteen minutes until your next
meeting, Mr. Mayor.

Distracted, Benjamin turns toward the entrance.

BENJAMIN

Why is there an empty booth? And in
the main entrance?

NATALIE

It isn't empty. Not exactly.
It's reserved for the Wild Horse
Rescue. The organizers have been
working the details out with Ray
Stewart.

BENJAMIN

Ray is cutting it a bit close for
comfort, isn't he?

NATALIE

I have no doubt someone will show
up soon. He told me he'll be
sending us the contract for the
sleigh rides today.

Excited, Sophia holds up her ever-present iPad.

SOPHIA

Speaking of horses, Mr. Mayor, I
have a great idea; one that will
draw attention to our jubilee from
all over the state.

BENJAMIN

Ruidoso could benefit from the
added publicity. Go on.

SOPHIA

One of my contacts in Roswell has generously agreed to bring his magnificent Clydesdales for the petting zoo on Saturday.

BENJAMIN

That is a fabulous idea!

SOPHIA

I bet he would even allow us to use a couple for the sleigh rides, if--

NATALIE

(alarmed)

--No!

SOPHIA

Excuse me?

NATALIE

You can't do that. The sleigh rides fund Ray's therapy horses. It not only helps our vets, it provides a valuable service for--

SOPHIA

--This is a jubilee to promote our city, not a charity.

NATALIE

It can be both. Benjamin, you can't cut Ray's--

BENJAMIN

--Ladies, I'm sure we will come to a compromise that pleases everyone. We just have to--

Benjamin spots a couple of PHOTOGRAPHERS across the plaza.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Oh look, it's the press! Sorry, Natalie. Gotta go make an appearance, you understand.

Natalie waits for a peck on the cheek, but Benjamin sweeps past her with Sophia right behind him.

Duane, back in regular clothes but still wearing his fake beard, steps up beside Natalie.

DUANE

Did someone yell 'campaign
donation?'

NATALIE

Very funny, *Santa*.

Duane notices the beard and pulls it off with a smile.

Across the plaza, Benjamin races toward the **REPORTERS** as Sophia tries to keep up. But suddenly--

--POP! Gilbert appears out of thin air in a bursting-at-the seams booth, sending items and decorations flying everywhere.

A startled VENDOR yells and stumbles back, bumping the edge of his booth... which knocks over a massive CANDY CANE... that then falls directly into Benjamin's path.

BENJAMIN

I suppose I could stand for a few
photos-

NATALIE

Look out!

SMACK! Everyone watches as Benjamin trips, careens out of control and disappears into a pile of garland, stuffed elves and presents.

Holding tight to her iPad with one hand, Sophia begins to dig for her boss with the other.

In a panic, Gilbert grabs the bell on his hat and talks to it like it is a police radio.

GILBERT

Frosted sugar plums!

Behind Gilbert, Colton emerges from a bush, brushing leaves and broken twigs off of himself.

COLTON

I swear, Gilbert. You and your
Sugar Shifting...

GILBERT

Hey, it's not an exact science.

Colton opens his mouth to argue, but-

POP! Gilbert vanishes in a puff of sugar.

Colton groans to himself, but spots Natalie making her way toward the fray. He takes a deep breath and walks over, trying his best to put on a confident smile.

COLTON
 (holding his hand out)
 Excuse me, do you know where I
 could find-

NATALIE
 Benjamin, are you okay?

Natalie brushes right past Colton without a second glance, leaving Colton, hand outstretched, looking like a total dummy.

EXT. CONVENTION CENTER - (RUIDOSO, NM) - LATER

Benjamin is loaded into an ambulance with a broken foot. With a few on-lookers, Sophia, Natalie and Duane stand by. Grimacing, Benjamin looks at the trio.

BENJAMIN
 I'm not sure how long I'll be out
 of commission. I'll need someone to
 take charge while I'm gone.

SOPHIA
 Of course. You needn't worry about
 a thing, Mr. Mayor, I'll make sure--

BENJAMIN
 --Natalie, you can do it. Right?

Mouth snapping shut, Sophia pouts.

NATALIE
 Benjamin, I'm pretty busy already-

BENJAMIN
 There are more important things
 than your decorations, Natalie.
 This event is important.

NATALIE
 Of- of course-

BENJAMIN
 Once I'm situated, I'll just be a
 phone call away.

NATALIE

But-

But before she can protest further, the EMTs load Benjamin into the back of the ambulance and close the doors.

Natalie watches the ambulance drive away, the daunting task ahead finally hitting her.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

This just turned into a disaster waiting to happen.

SOPHIA

No, it didn't, just don't screw up and everything will be fine.

Sophia heads off, leaving Natalie hanging.

NATALIE

...thanks a lot.

Natalie brushes her hair out of her face as she walks back to her booth. But she's startled to find--

--Colton there, helping to clean up some of the mess that Gilbert caused.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Uh, can I help you?

Colton looks up, seeing Natalie looking frazzled and covered in glitter.

COLTON

Whoa... easy there, Tinsel-Town.

Natalie picks tinsel out of her hair but continues to stomp toward Colton.

NATALIE

It's not that I don't appreciate the help. It's just I'm not really used to, well, Cowboys in my Christmas booth.

Colton removes his hat and puts on a confident smile.

COLTON

Apologies, I saw the mess and thought I could help. Name's Colton Wade.

NATALIE

Pleasure.

Natalie immediately begins cleaning up the booth, paying Colton no mind. Colton tries to help.

COLTON

Sorry about your, um, friend?

NATALIE

Thank you. This couldn't have happened at a worse time.

COLTON

(holding out his hand)
I suppose there's never a good time... Mrs, uh...

NATALIE

It's Miss, but please, call me Natalie.

Natalie takes his hand.

COLTON

Wait, Natalie Sterling?

Natalie releases his hand, suddenly suspicious.

NATALIE

Have we met?

COLTON

No--um, but, Ray said I might run into you. He asked me to get this contract signed?

Colton holds out a paper and Natalie takes it, still studying him.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Also, I'm supposed to meet someone about the booth for the Wild Horse Rescue?

NATALIE

Oh, I see. Ray has been working with a "Kris K." to put the whole thing together. Guess you're the one who's gonna man the booth?

COLTON

To be honest, my marching orders were pretty vague.

(MORE)

COLTON (CONT'D)

Only thing I do know is that I
don't know the first thing about
jubilees and booths.

NATALIE

My specialty. I'll be happy to show
you the ropes. Follow me.

Natalie turns to go.

COLTON

Uh, actually-

Natalie turns back to him.

COLTON (CONT'D)

(sheepish)

Might want to clean up a bit first,
Tinsel-Town.

Natalie lets out a sigh, her breath rustling a bit of the
tinsel in her hair.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. SANTA'S HOUSE - (OFFICE) - DAY

A new PLATE OF COOKIES is put down on Santa's desk. Mrs.
Claus looks at Santa with glee on her face as Santa stares at
the plate with suspicion.

SANTA

And what did you say this batch was
made with, Dear?

MRS. CLAUS

Oh, go on and try them! If I told
you it would ruin the surprise.

Santa reaches down with hesitation and picks up a cookie, but
before he can take a bite--

BZZZZZ BZZZZZZ BZZZZZZ

His desk rattles as something begins buzzing, almost like the
sound of a cellphone. Along with the vibration, an elevator-
music version of Jingle Bells plays like a ringtone.

Santa drops the cookie and digs in his desk, relieved.

SANTA

That'll be Gilbert with an update!
Sorry, Dearest, duty calls.

Mrs. Claus gives Santa a smile and heads for the door.

MRS. CLAUS

Don't think you're getting off that
easy, Kris Kringle. I'm off to the
kitchen to try out a few more of my
ideas...

Mrs. Claus winks and exits as Santa pulls out a bright red
ETCH-A-SKETCH that doubles as a viewing device. The buzzing
ringtone stops as Santa scribbles across the page, the image
appearing slowly as if he was fixing the antenna on an old
TV.

The image finally becomes clear as Gilbert appears, who seems
to be squashed into a small cabinet space.

GILBERT

Jolly Stocking, come in. Do you
read me, Jolly Stocking?

SANTA

Gilbert, do we really have to use
code names?

GILBERT

Affirmative, Jolly Stocking.

Santa rolls his eyes.

SANTA

Alright then. Mission report...
Mistletoe-Mischief.

Like an excited child, Gilbert huddles close to his own Etch-
A-Sketch and whispers.

GILBERT

Mistletoe-Mischief is happy to
report that the package has been
delivered to the ranch and is
currently with the assignment's
mother.

SANTA

That's great!

GILBERT

(guilty)

However, there was a slight issue
with the Mayor... I may have, well,
the thing is...

SANTA

You're doing great, Mistletoe
Mischief.

GILBERT

I am?

Santa smiles and picks up a cookie absentmindedly.

SANTA

Everything's going as planned.

Santa takes a bite from the cookie, his expression instantly
morphing into one of a child who just drank sour milk.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (BOOTH) - DAY

Natalie leads Colton to his booth.

NATALIE

There's a box here under your
table. So cute that it's postmarked
from the North Pole.

Natalie tugs on the box and Colton reaches down to help.

COLTON

Let me get that.

NATALIE

Hope you don't mind, but I took the
liberty of peeking inside--

Colton gives Natalie a look and she shrugs.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Desperate times. We are down to the
wire. Anyway, there are posters to
decorate the booth with and flyers
to hand out.

COLTON

That's a relief.

NATALIE

I'll ask Morgan to bring tape and a few other supplies from the store-

Suddenly Morgan appears, two bags in each hand.

MORGAN

No need! I'm he-re!

Natalie takes a few bags from Morgan and begins emptying them onto the table: everything Natalie needs, and then some.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

After the disaster earlier, I figured you might need some reinforcements.

NATALIE

Have I ever told you you're the best friend ever?

MORGAN

Not nearly often enough.

The three of them begin fixing up the booth. Natalie immediately begins to string up more lights.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Seriously, Nat? More lights?

Natalie smiles and shrugs.

COLTON

(to Natalie)

I think you've got a condition.

Approaching Morgan, Colton offers her his hand.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Hi, I'm Colton Wade. Here on behalf of Ray and the Wild Horse Rescue.

MORGAN

Morgan, nice to meet you. So where are you from, Colton?

COLTON

Up North.

MORGAN

Wow, specific. How'd you end up working at Ray's ranch?

COLTON

I volunteered to coordinate the wild horse roundup. I'm also responsible for the safe delivery of the band onto the parcel of land that Ray has so graciously donated.

MORGAN

So you're, like, some kind of horse rescuer super hero?

COLTON

(chuckles)

I wouldn't go that far. Just get along well with animals.

MORGAN

Hmmm. Man of mystery, I like that.

COLTON

Let's just say I owed a favor to a friend of mine.

Colton turns to see Natalie struggling to hang the lights.

COLTON (CONT'D)

I'll grab the ladder, ma'am.

Colton grabs a ladder from across the aisle. Morgan leans in close to Natalie as she watches him.

MORGAN

(whispering)

Nat! Colton is hot! If you had told me how handsome he was, I would've gotten back here sooner.

NATALIE

Why don't we focus on the decorations, shall we?

MORGAN

Fine, boss lady.

Natalie continues her decorating, but can't help stealing a sideways glance at Colton across the way.

EXT. RANCH - (RUIDOSO, NM) - LATE AFTERNOON

Pens, barns, cattle and corrals dot the landscape.

Colton walks beside, **TRIPP**, (30's) a stocky, dependable cowboy, leading his horse to a trailer.

TRIPP

Sorry, Colton, I can't work the booth, but I will help you finish the corrals when I get back.

COLTON

When will that be?

TRIPP

A week, ten days.

COLTON

I appreciate it, Tripp, but by then I'll be long gone.

TRIPP

Why don't you ask the new hand to help?

COLTON

New hand? Thought I had met everyone.

TRIPP

Guy arrived just after you left for town. He's the odd one over there with the big hat.

Colton spots Gilbert, dressed as a cowboy in an oversized hat, ducking into the barn. Gritting his teeth, Colton stomps over to the barn.

Gilbert pokes his head out and motions frantically to Colton.

GILBERT

Psst!

COLTON

I'm coming, I'm coming...

INT. RANCH - BARN -(RUIDOSO, NM)- SAME

Colton enters the interior and finds the barn empty.

COLTON

What the-?

POP! Gilbert appears right next to him, startling Colton.

COLTON (CONT'D)
OH FOR- I was coming over, Gilbert!
What's with the smoke and mirrors.

GILBERT
Sorry, force of habit.

Colton closes the barn door, checking to see if anyone saw this little bit of magic.

COLTON
--Do you have any idea how much trouble we'd be in if someone saw an elf running around the ranch?

GILBERT
(offended)
Do I look like an elf?

Giving him the once-over, Colton scoffs.

COLTON
Yes, and a goofy one at that.

GILBERT
Rude. I'm here because you need backup! I promised Santa I would help you in this Assist. I've never let him down once.

COLTON
What about the magical snowball fight? The decorating debacle last year? The incident with the figgy pudding? The--

GILBERT
--Okay, okay! So, I've messed up a few times. But I'm not screwing up this one!

Gilbert adjusts his hat over his ears.

COLTON
You already have! You sent Miss Sterling's boyfriend to the hospital!

GILBERT
Technically, I didn't trip him. You have a very large candy cane to thank for that--

COLTON
 If it's all the same to you, I
 think it best if I handle this
 Assist on my own.

Gilbert stomps over to the barn door and begins to exit.

GILBERT
 Alrighty then. Guess you won't want
 my help finding Dasher.

COLTON
 Exactly. Wait, what? Dasher's
 missing??

Colton hurries out after Gilbert.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (RUIDOSO, NM) - LATER

Natalie dashes between booths, helping Morgan with customers
 and collecting the Wild Horse Rescue donations. Colton rounds
 the corner and spots Natalie.

NATALIE
 (to customer)
 Thank you so much! We appreciate
 your donation.

Morgan nods toward Colton; hat in hand, head dipped.

MORGAN
 You've got company. Hot and studly
 company coming your way...

Morgan sneaks off toward the back of Natalie's booth.

NATALIE
 (to Colton)
 I wasn't sure you were coming!

COLTON
 I'm so sorry I'm late. I'll take it
 from here.

Colton takes the flyers from Natalie, their hands touching.

Hesitant, Natalie releases the papers and turns to go.

COLTON (CONT'D)
 I was speaking to Tripp down at the
 ranch to see if he could man the
 booth.

NATALIE

Oh, no. You're not getting out of it that easy, mister. I expect you here with bells and bobtails on.

COLTON

(laughing)

Don't worry, I'll be here.

Grinning, Natalie steps aside and makes room for a couple who want to talk with Colton.

Natalie returns to her booth and sees Morgan watching Colton.

MORGAN

You're really gonna ruin his whole rugged vibe thing by putting him in elf ears.

Eyes trained on Colton, Natalie smiles.

NATALIE

As much as I'd like to, I don't see myself being able to convince him to try on a pair of tights. Being in charge of something this big means some compromise, right? Maybe he comes as he is, a boring ol' cowboy.

MORGAN

(looking at Colton)

Honey, boring is not the word I would use.

NATALIE

Oh, trust me. I can imagine some of the words you might use.

Morgan laughs as she scans her phone. Colton approaches.

MORGAN

Yeah, Colton doesn't look like a green-tights kind of man.

COLTON

Green tights? Wait, you're not talking about a costume, are you? I don't do costumes.

NATALIE

Don't worry. We won't force the issue.

COLTON

Hey, Natalie. Something's come up with a, uh, friend. And I might have to-

Excited, Morgan squeals in delight and holds up her phone.

MORGAN

--Natalie! You'll never believe this!

NATALIE

What is it?

MORGAN

(giddy)

It's a reindeer.

Showing Natalie her cell phone, Morgan laughs.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

And it is here in Ruidoso.

Natalie grabs the phone and peers down at the photo.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

This is so crazy, I wonder how it got here?

NATALIE

It doesn't matter, all that does matter is that we catch it. We've got to upload that picture to all of our social media asap.

COLTON

Wait... what?

Colton and Morgan both look at one another.

NATALIE

I'm going to catch that reindeer and he's going to be front and center of our Jingle-Bell Jubilee!

COLTON

Natalie, what are you talking about?

NATALIE

Look, Benjamin is counting on me. I begged them not to hire those Clydesdales, so I have to deliver.

(MORE)

NATALIE (CONT'D)

And this reindeer is the key to
doing it!

Natalie rushes off, excited.

Off Colton, trying to mask his obvious concern-

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. RANCH - (RUIDOSO, NM) - DAY

Busy, Colton hooks up a horse trailer while Gilbert blows warm air into his palms and rubs his hands together.

GILBERT

You sure this is a good idea?

COLTON

I was a little hesitant at first,
but I thought it over. Dasher
headlines the festival, which will
help raise money to save the wild
horses. Wish #1 granted.

GILBERT

With you so far...

COLTON

Then, Benjamin will be so impressed
with Natalie that he'll propose on
the spot, leading to Natalie
finding her true love. Wish #2
granted.

GILBERT

See, that's where you lose this
little elf. I'm not so convinced
that Benjamin is-

COLTON

I just gotta find Dasher, the old
runaway.

A laugh escapes Gilbert.

COLTON (CONT'D)

What?

GILBERT

You really think you can catch him?

Wearing a knowing smile, Colton leans up against the truck.

COLTON

I do. And I have to, in order to make Zack's wish come true. I don't think just the horse rides will raise enough money.

GILBERT

Can I make an observation, Colton?

COLTON

What?

GILBERT

You might have an easier time fulfilling Zack's wishes if you actually met him.

The fine layer of new snowfall crunches under tires as Natalie's vehicle starts up the road.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

Weeeeeell, look who's here. Gotta go!

Gilbert disappears as Colton waves Natalie over to park beside his truck.

NATALIE

Hi! You ready to go?

COLTON

I am, but, if you don't mind, I thought we'd take my truck instead. I've already got the trailer hooked up and the heater on.

Natalie opens her door and gets out.

NATALIE

That's a great idea. Thank you! Zack and I brought some hot cocoa for the humans and apples for the reindeer.

Zack exits the car, timidly holding onto an apple.

ZACK

They like apples, don't they?

Colton kneels down to be eye level with Zack.

COLTON

I have it on good authority that they do.

Zack looks away, shy.

COLTON (CONT'D)

You must be Zack. I'm Colton. Think you can help me find this reindeer?

INT. SANTA'S HOUSE - (OFFICE) - DAY

Santa speaks into his magical Etch-A-Sketch, his desk now covered in platters of cookies of various shapes and sizes.

Santa looks at them suspiciously out of the corner of his eye as he speaks again to Gilbert.

SANTA

I'm telling you, Gilbert. The Missus has been baking non stop lately.

GILBERT

(through device)

Lucky you! Mrs. Claus's baking is top notch.

SANTA

Normally it is, but she's been trying some pretty strange cookie combinations lately: Cayenne Pepper-mint. Sugar and Soy Sauce. Salted Caramel WITHOUT the Caramel!

GILBERT

At least your hat fits. Mine was obviously not made with an elf head in mind. Can you believe that?

SANTA

How goes the Assist, Gilbert? I mean- Mistletoe Mischief?

GILBERT

All according to plan, Jolly Stocking. But are you sure getting Dasher involved was a good idea?

SANTA

Oh, trust me, he was more than eager.

A sing-song Mrs. Claus pops her head inside the office door.

MRS. CLAUS (O.S.)
Fresh batch of Peanut Butter
Vinegar cookies coming up!

SANTA
(pained)
Oh, wonderful. Thank you, Dear.

INT. TRUCK - (ROAD) - DUSK

Zack, silent, intent on the hunt, is buckled into the backseat. Natalie looks over at Colton.

NATALIE
Thank you for letting me bring
Zack.

COLTON
Of course. We need his help
spotting this elusive reindeer.

Unsure, Colton smiles at Zack from the rear view mirror.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Ray told me you are really good
with horses.

Distracted with the scenery, Zack shrugs.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Think you could show me some of
your techniques tomorrow when you
come out to the ranch?

Letting out a sigh, Zack shrugs again.

Colton looks across the cab and finds Natalie studying him. Her radiant smile has him rolling his window down a bit.

COLTON (CONT'D)
My ears feel like they could melt
icicles.

Natalie's eyes widen and she giggles. Colton hits a pot-hole and jars himself back to his senses.

Snapping to attention, Zack bolts up in his seat.

ZACK
(yelling)
There!

Hitting the breaks, Colton brings the truck to a stop.

COLTON
Where?

Brimming with excitement, Natalie unbuckles her seatbelt as she looks to where Zack is pointing.

NATALIE
Oh, my goodness! I see it!

COLTON
(to Natalie)
Maybe you should wait in the--

Natalie jumps out.

COLTON (CONT'D)
-truck.

NATALIE
(to Zack)
Maybe you should wait in the-

But Zack has already unbuckled and exited, apple in hand.

Colton and Natalie share an embarrassed smile before following Zack outside.

Flashlight in hand, Colton takes the lead.

COLTON
Let me lead the way, Zack. Wild
animals can be unpredictable.

NATALIE
Good idea.

Kneeling down, Colton runs a hand over a set of large tracks.

COLTON
Looks like something big came this
way all right. Want to track him?

ZACK
(happy)
Yeah.

Colton flips on his flashlight and leads them into the woods.

After several minutes, Colton comes to an abrupt halt.

NATALIE

What's wrong?

COLTON

The tracks stop here.

NATALIE

What do you mean they stop? The reindeer didn't just disappear.

She steps up and takes a look for herself.

COLTON

(under his breath)

You'd be surprised...

A branch snaps in the undergrowth. Natalie swings her flashlight toward the sound. Thick brush stirs as a MARE bursts into the clearing.

The mare rears up, tosses her head in a threatening manner and lands a few feet away, pawing the ground. Jumping into action, Colton puts himself between the horse and his two charges.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Don't move.

Natalie clutches Zack to her and nods. Colton turns his focus to the startled horse and holds out a soothing hand.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Hey, girl. You're alright...

Tossing her head with less force, the mare huffs.

COLTON (CONT'D)

(reassuring)

No one is going to hurt you. Zack?

Zack silently hands Colton an apple.

Colton holds out the apple to the mare. Hesitant, the mare paws at the ground one last time before inching forward.

COLTON (CONT'D)

See there, nothing to be afraid of.

Cautious, the mare stretches her neck out, reaching for the apple. Colton allows the horse to take it, then gently strokes her muzzle with his free hand.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Looks like we missed you when we
were gathering the band.

NATALIE
(whispering)
Is she one of the wild horses?

COLTON
It would appear so... I'm sure
she's afraid out here all on her
own. They're not solitary
creatures.

Zack steps in front of Natalie, but does not let go of her.

ZACK
Are you gonna rescue her?

COLTON
Not just me. I'll need your help.
We will get her back with the rest
of her family on Ray's ranch.

Tugging on Natalie's shirt, Zack smiles.

ZACK
See Mommy? It's happening!

NATALIE
What is honey?

ZACK
My wish. I asked Santa to save the
wild ponies, and Santa sent Mr.
Colton to help.

COLTON
Kiddo, there are a lot of folks...

Colton suddenly quiets as a tiny COLT appears by the tree
line. On wobbly legs, the baby scampers to the mare.

COLTON (CONT'D)
(to the mare)
Oh, now I see why you were so
upset.

Natalie and Zack inch closer.

NATALIE
But that's impossible, mares don't
have their babies in December.

ZACK
 (gleeful)
 It's a Christmas Miracle!

Colton looks from the mare and colt, to Zack, and then to Natalie. A smile comes over his face.

COLTON
 I think it just might be.

EXT. RANCH - (BARN) - SUNDOWN

Natalie and Zack watch Colton lead the mare out of the trailer toward the barn. The colt follows the mare down the ramp then stops, sniffs the air and looks at the field where other horses have bedded down.

ZACK
 Is he looking for his daddy?

NATALIE
 I don't know, maybe.

Colton clicks his tongue, getting the colts's attention. The pony gives the herd one last look then hurries after his mother. Zack and Natalie follow the trio into the barn, where Colton leads the mare and foal into a clean stall.

ZACK
 (to Colton)
 Why can't they be with the others?

COLTON
 It's pretty cold out. It'll be better for the foal to stay inside for a few days.

ZACK
 But his daddy can't find him.

Closing the stall door behind him, Colton latches the lock.

COLTON
 He'll be all right, he has his momma right there beside him.

Peering out at the other horses, sad, Zack sighs.

ZACK
 They were out there alone 'cause his daddy doesn't want him.

Natalie drops to her knees in front of Zack.

NATALIE

Sweetie, no--

ZACK

Just like me. Our daddies don't
want us because we're different.

Tears brimming, voice breaking on a pent-up sob, Natalie looks up at Colton as she gently gathers Zack to her.

NATALIE

Baby, there's nothing wrong with
you or that colt.

Head nestled on Natalie's shoulder Zack looks at the pony, then back to Colton.

ZACK

Then why are they alone?

Zack breaks from his mother and runs a few feet away.

Natalie looks to Colton, unsure of what to say.

NATALIE

Michael- Zack's dad... well he
decided not to be a part of his
son's life. I was silly to marry
him. Somehow I always knew he
wouldn't stick around, and I was
right. Just means I get Zack all to
myself, but... it's left a hole in
him. And in me.

COLTON

Any man who would leave you two
isn't worth the ground he stands
on. If you don't mind my saying.

Natalie smiles through her sadness.

NATALIE

I don't.

Natalie forces a smile.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

You have anyone special in your
life, Colton?

Colton is taken aback, but takes a breath.

COLTON

I- I did. Her name was Amber. She was even better with animals than I am.

NATALIE

That's hard to believe. Where is she now?

COLTON

Just... gone. Guess it left a bit of a hole in me, too.

Colton offers Natalie a reassuring smile, then walks over to Zack and kneels down next to him.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Did you know that, with horses, the daddy's job is to guard the *whole herd*? He keeps all the mommy's and babies safe.

ZACK

Even if they're different?

COLTON

Especially if they're different.

Zack looks up at him.

ZACK

I wish I was a pony, then.

Standing a few feet back, Natalie wipes a tear.

Reaching out to Zack, then thinking better of it, Colton offers the boy a reassuring smile.

COLTON

I like you better as the special little boy that you are.

ZACK

Think another daddy might someday, too?

COLTON

I know one will.

Zack launches himself at Colton for a hug. Looking up at Natalie, Colton winks as she mouths the words, 'thank you.'

NATALIE

Hey, Kiddo, we better get going,
we've got to be back here at the
ranch early tomorrow.

Zack releases Colton and bolts out of the barn. Rising to his feet, Colton watches Zack clamber into the car as Natalie regains her composure.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Thank you for, ah, taking us
reindeer hunting.

Natalie starts for the car with Colton trailing behind.

COLTON

Glad we found these horses.

After buckling Zack's seatbelt, Natalie turns to Colton.

NATALIE

But I still have a reindeer to
catch. Could we try again tomorrow,
after Zack's morning session?

Colton holds the door open. Natalie slides into the car.

COLTON

Sure, but it's gonna be tougher
than I thought.

NATALIE

We have to. I have that animal's
picture all over social media.
Benjamin has been promoting it all
over town, I swear he's this close
to putting a reindeer on his next
campaign poster. If I don't
deliver...

COLTON

Hey, I'm not giving up. We'll find
him.

Natalie smiles, reassured. But the moment she turns away, Colton's confident smiles disappears.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**EXT. SHOP - (RUIDOSO, NM)- MORNING**

A calm morning as the sun creeps over the snowy sidewalks.

POP! Gilbert appears out of nowhere, sending sugar flying and nearly slipping on the icy sidewalk. He stumbles around a bit, flailing, until finally finding his footing.

He looks into the shop window behind him, seeing a few MANNEQUINS wearing Christmas-y clothing. Gilbert thinks to himself, then-

POP! He disappears and reappears-

INT. SHOP - (RUIDOSO, NM)- MORNING

-inside the shop, nearly knocking over the row of mannequins. He pulls the Santa hat off one mannequin, then screws his face up tight in concentration.

POP! A BASEBALL CAP appears in his hand out of thin air. But Gilbert isn't satisfied.

POP! A SKI MASK. Nope. A SOMBRERO. Nah. A TOP HAT. Definitely not.

Finally, Gilbert thinks really hard and-

POP! A child's size COWBOY HAT appears. Gilbert places the hat on the mannequin, proud of his work.

But from outside--

ROBYN (O.S.)

Zack, sweetie, why don't you pick something out here. It'll be my before-Christmas-treat.

ZACK (O.S.)

Thanks Nana!

Gilbert has just enough time to POP! out of there right as Zack appears outside, nose pressed against the glass.

He instantly stares up at the cowboy hat with delight.

INT. RANCH - (BARN) - MORNING

Tossing fresh hay into a stall, Colton glares at Gilbert, who is twirling his cowboy hat on his finger, elf ears exposed.

COLTON
You're really telling me you can't
find Dasher?

GILBERT
No... I'm saying he doesn't WANT to
be found. And I'm not the animal
expert- you are.

COLTON
This is ridiculous.

Running into the barn, Zack heads straight for Colton and flings himself against his legs, knocking off his small hat.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Whoa there! Where'd you come from,
Zack Frost?

Colton dusts off Zack's hat as the child smiles up at him.

ZACK
Mine's just like yours.

COLTON
(surprised)
Wow, I guess it is.

Zack's eyes cut to Gilbert and go wide as dinner plates.

ZACK
Your ears- you're a- a-

GILBERT
Rollicking Reindeer!

Gilbert smashes the hat on his head just as Natalie hurries into the barn.

NATALIE
I'm so sorry. Zack spotted you and
took off before I could stop him.

COLTON
Oh, that's okay I could, uh-

Frantic, Colton eyes Gilbert, who has one ear poking out.

COLTON (CONT'D)
-EAR you coming.

Gilbert stares back, completely oblivious.

ZACK
Momma, Colton's friend is a--

Colton sweeps over to Gilbert, physically smashing the hat down to cover his entire face.

GILBERT
--Gilbert, a new hire... yep, just another cowboy, like all the other cowboys working here on the ranch.

NATALIE
Nice to meet you, Gilbert.

Gilbert, face covered in hat, holds his hand out in the complete opposite direction of Natalie.

GILBERT
(muffled by the hat)
The pleasure is all mine.

Gilbert wanders off, still unable to see, as Colton replaces the hat on top of Zack's head.

ZACK
Can we go see the pony?

COLTON
Sure thing, Zack Frost.

NATALIE
(laughing)
Zack Frost?

COLTON
A nickname... kinda thought it fit.

Natalie watches as Zack looks up at Colton with admiration.

Attention back to Colton, Natalie's smile fades.

NATALIE
Colton, I'm so sorry. I wasn't able to get our booths covered. We won't be able to hunt again until tomorrow.

COLTON

That's all right. I can look a little on my own time. Meanwhile, Gilbert here can go out and search. He's very-

Everyone looks back at Gilbert who, hat still over his face, walks right into a wall with a loud THUD.

COLTON (CONT'D)

-capable.

GILBERT (O.S.)

I'm okay!

EXT. RANCH - (BARN) - DAY

Children, wearing matching Autism Awareness shirts, cowboys, therapy horses and parents mill about. A NEWS VAN sets up some cameras.

Natalie works with a LOCAL REPORTER, gathering kids for the photo in front of a corral of horses.

Another CAR arrives and Sophia exits in a frenzied huff. She opens a door and helps pull Benjamin out, who is now on crutches.

SOPHIA

These fundraising events are such a drag.

NATALIE

Hi, Benjamin. Did you get my flowers?

BENJAMIN

I did, thank you. Very thoughtful. Shall we get this done? Sophia, hold my crutches.

Sophia takes the crutches and steps off to the side as the kids gather around Benjamin. They're loud and shuffle around, visibly annoying Benjamin.

At the last moment, Benjamin moves Zack right in front of him and plasters on a perfect, rehearsed smile.

The photo is taken and Benjamin shuffles out from the kids, ruffling Zack's hair in a forced attempt at affection.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

There. All done. That was fun,
wasn't it Zack-

But Zack takes off across the yard without a glance.

Sophia hands Benjamin his crutches.

NATALIE

Benjamin, I was wondering if I
could-

BENJAMIN

Can we talk later, Natalie? Have to
rub elbows. Show how down-to-earth
I am. Do I look down-to-earth?

SOPHIA

Extremely, sir.

Benjamin pastes his smile on again and approaches the group
of REPORTERS with Sophia in tow.

The crowd scatters and Natalie scans for Zack. She smiles as
she spots her son running circles around Colton. The sound of
their laughter fills the air.

RAY STEWART steps up beside Natalie and tips his hat.

RAY

Mornin', Natalie.

NATALIE

Ray! How are you?

RAY

Can't complain. It's nice to see
the ranch so full of kids. How's it
going with Benjamin?

Natalie looks toward Benjamin with the press.

NATALIE

He's been more mayor than boyfriend
lately, but I suppose I understand.
He's ambitious, and that's what I
like about him. He's a serious man.
And that's what Zack and I need
right now.

RAY

Speaking of Zack, he seems to
taking to my new ranch hand.

Natalie takes another glance toward Colton and Zack and smiles.

NATALIE

I've never seen Zack take to anyone like he has to Colton. Zack doesn't allow anybody but me or my parents to play with him like that.

RAY

Guess he's as good with kids as he is with horses. And you know what they say about animals and children...

Ray smiles as he watches the two play.

RAY (CONT'D)

Both are a great judge of character.

Ray winks and walks off. Natalie's eyes move from Colton and Zack over to Benjamin. He tries to pet a horse while talking to the reporters, but the horse sneezes at him and he stumbles back in fear.

Off near the barn, Gilbert pulls out his Etch-A-Sketch and swirls a few patterns on it to make it adjust.

GILBERT

This is Mistletoe Mischief. Jolly Stocking, are you there?

The fuzzy image clears, but instead of Santa it's-

GILBERT (CONT'D)

Mrs. Claus! So sorry to disturb you. Must've got my channels mixed--

MRS. CLAUS

--Gilbert! Wonderful. When will you be back? I've got some fresh Chocolate Chip and Garlic cookies ready. Santa usually tries my experiments, but I can't seem to find him?

Gilbert's eyes go wide in fear.

GILBERT

Sorry, you're breaking up! Chhhhh chhhhh bye!

Gilbert frantically shakes the Etch-A-Sketch, disappearing Mrs. Claus.

He turns a few more dials, accidentally calling an elf and a reindeer, before he finally finds-

GILBERT (CONT'D)

Santa!

Through the screen, Gilbert can see that Santa is hiding out back in the elf workshop with cookie crumbs all over himself.

SANTA

Mistletoe, what's the report?

GILBERT

Phase One is under control, but I'm a little worried about Phase Two. I just don't think Benjamin's the one for Natalie, but Colton won't listen to me. Mind doing me a favor?

SANTA

Anything to get me away from this culinary chaos I'm in. What do you need?

GILBERT

I need you to look up a name.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (RUIDOSO, NM) - DAY

Rushing into her booth, Natalie buzzes past Morgan.

NATALIE

Sorry, I'm late.

Taking in Morgan's expression, Natalie stops.

Elbows perched on the counter, head resting in her palms, Morgan watches Tripp manning the Wild Horse Rescue booth.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

MORGAN

Taking in the view.

Smiling, Natalie nudges her friend.

NATALIE

Why don't you go ask the VIEW if he'd like to get some hot cocoa? I owe you. You've been doing all of my work plus yours.

Shaking off her dreamy expression, Morgan sobers.

MORGAN

From my experience, viewing is a lot simpler than talking. Where's Zack?

NATALIE

He and my Mom are around here somewhere, looking at all the booths.

MORGAN

And the reindeer? Everyone for a hundred miles can't stop talking about it.

NATALIE

I know, I know. I should have thought about that before I posted that picture everywhere. Benjamin won't stop asking me about my progress.

Taking a deep breath, Natalie calms herself.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

No worries. I'm on it, Colton and I will track him down and--

MORGAN

(teasing)

--hunky Colton, again? You really think he can find that creature?

Busy restocking, Natalie avoids Morgan's stare.

NATALIE

If anyone can, it'll be him. He's amazing with animals. After last night, I can see why Ray hired him.

MORGAN

Aside from returning empty-handed, what happened last night?

NATALIE

While we were tracking the reindeer, we stumbled across a wild mare, and her new foal.

MORGAN

New foal, mares don't--

NATALIE

--I know. Zack called it a Christmas miracle.

Morgan's eyes widen as she nods.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Colton was bold, but gentle; and before I knew it, he had that wild mare eating out of the palm of his hand, easily leading them both into the trailer. The mare trusted him. And don't even get me started on how incredible Colton is with Zack.

Morgan takes a seat behind the register.

MORGAN

Incredible? Like 'High-and-Mighty' Benjamin incredible?

Natalie frowns.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

What? What's bothering you.

NATALIE

It's nothing, just--

MORGAN

--Just what?

NATALIE

During the photo shoot Benjamin--

MORGAN

--Benjamin what?

NATALIE

Never mind.

Over at the Wild Horses booth, Colton arrives to find Tripp already working.

COLTON

Tripp! What are YOU doing here?

TRIPP

(shrugs)

Heck if I know. Ray came in and told me some guy from the "Kris K." Ranch, a place I ain't ever heard of, came in early this morning and offered to haul the cattle for us. That's weird, right?

COLTON

(nervous)

Yeah, strange.

TRIPP

Anyway, with the cattle on the move north, it freed me up to come help you. So here I am.

The doors to the event center open. As if someone rang the dinner bell, a stampede of WOMEN rush down the aisles and surround Colton's booth. Tripp takes a step back.

Back at their booth, Morgan smiles.

MORGAN

(smiling)

Word about your hot cowboy booth is out. Every single lady in the county must be here. Looks like you've got competition, Nat.

NATALIE

(scoffs)

I'm not competing with anyone. Colton is free to... Wait! I've got a great idea of how to harness all of this estrogen. Watch and learn, my friend.

Hurrying out of her booth, Natalie grabs a stool, drags it next to Colton's booth and climbs up on it.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Ladies! May I have your attention? By now, you're all aware of the Wild Horse Rescue program, and the very attractive gentlemen who have so graciously volunteered their time.

COLTON

--Natalie, what are you doing...

NATALIE

Working my own bit of magic.
Anyway, ladies, I'd like to
announce that we will be hosting
our very first 'Cowboy Dance
Auction' at this year's Jingle-Bell
Jubilee Dance.

Cheers go up from the women and they squeeze in.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Listen! Each cowboy will have ten
dances. Put your bids in before the
dance and you may just get a dance
with a hunky cowboy like Tripp
here...

Tripp blushes and waves to the crowd shyly.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Or maybe... Ray Stewart?

Natalie points to Ray a ways away.

RAY

Happily married, Natalie. I'll sit
this one out.

Natalie looks around frantically.

NATALIE

How about, uh, you sir?

She points to another MAN in the crowd, who goes completely
white and sprints away in fear.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Okay, guess not. How about... how
about...

Morgan grabs Colton and yanks him over.

MORGAN

Colton Wade will also be available
for bids!

Excited murmurs go up through the crowd as Natalie looks at a
stunned Colton Neither know how to feel about this, but
Natalie quickly recovers.

NATALIE

You heard her, ladies! There're
only two cowboys, so make sure you
don't miss your opportunity!

(MORE)

NATALIE (CONT'D)

The proceeds will be split between Ray Stuart's Therapy Ranch and the Wild Horses Rescue, both winning causes. So don't hold back.

Colton helps Natalie down from her impromptu platform.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Well, this should be interesting.

TRIPP

(stunned)

How'd I get roped into this?

COLTON

Same way I did.

MORGAN

All for a good cause, boys.

She smirks and runs off, leaving Natalie and Colton alone together.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

INT. CONVENTION CENTER -(BOOTH) - NOON

Natalie and Colton carry drinks and food to their booths. Benjamin is there waiting with Sophia. He smiles broadly at Natalie and makes an unusual show of affection with a hug.

BENJAMIN

I am so sorry I'm not able to help you with everything.

Benjamin squeezes her hand then looks at Colton.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I don't believe we've had the pleasure. Benjamin Harper.

COLTON

Colton Wade. Just helping out.

BENJAMIN

Well, thank you for assisting my Natalie.

COLTON
Trust me, Mr. Mayor, helping
Natalie has been my-

Benjamin seems to eye Colton suspiciously, but before he can say anything else-

GILBERT
Psst!

Colton turns to see Gilbert hiding behind the booth, waving him over.

COLTON
Excuse me. My, uh, friend needs a
word.

Colton tips his hat to the group and heads over to Gilbert.

COLTON (CONT'D)
What, Gilbert?

GILBERT
I see you've met Benjamin.

COLTON
Yeah, and he seems like a perfectly
nice guy. Maybe a little self
involved, but no one's perfect.
Phase Two is on track.

GILBERT
I wouldn't be so sure. Got some
intel from The Big Man up north.
And it's... well...

COLTON
Gilbert, just spit it out already.

GILBERT
Benjamin is on the Naughty List!

Colton starts to argue, but spots Zack standing beside Gilbert. Gilbert turns, sees Zack and jumps as the boy folds his arms across his chests and huffs.

ZACK
I knew it.

COLTON
Hey, Zack Frost. Gilbert is just
messing around, Benjamin isn't on
the naughty list.

GILBERT

Yes, he is.

Colton glares at Gilbert.

COLTON

Why don't you get back to the ranch
while Zack and I go find his Nana.

Motioning for Zack to follow, Colton leads him away.

GILBERT

(calling to Colton)

I checked on another name if you'd
like to know where it was located.

COLTON

(over his shoulder)

Not interested.

GILBERT

Really, cause I was stunned! Right
there in bold-red ink, Colton Wade,
smack-dab in the middle of the Nice
Column. Nowhere near the Naughty
List.

Beaming, Zack hurries over to Colton, looks up at him then
takes his hand in his.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (BOOTH) - SAME

Benjamin, Natalie, and Sophia continue talking.

BENJAMIN

Natalie, about the reindeer...
Everyone is buzzing about it.

NATALIE

(sheepish)

It's a work in progress.

Sophia's gaze narrows in on Natalie.

SOPHIA

Wait. You don't have it yet, do
you?

NATALIE

The operative word is, yet. I don't
have one, YET. But I'm--

BENJAMIN

Natalie I've been promising a reindeer to everyone I talk to! Please tell me you've got a plan.

NATALIE

I do.

BENJAMIN

And you'll keep me posted.

NATALIE

Yes, of course.

SOPHIA

Say the word and I'll have those Clydesdales here for the Christmas Eve finale.

Benjamin casts a wary glance at Natalie.

BENJAMIN

It wouldn't be the worst idea to have them brought in, a couple at least, to hedge our bets.

NATALIE

What?

BENJAMIN

Let's just put the Clydesdales on standby.

Sophia smirks toward Natalie, pulling out her phone and walking off.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I'm sure you'll make it work. Oh, and I need another favor. We haven't had any sign-ups for the bake-off so I need you to enter.

NATALIE

Benjamin, I can't! I have so much to do, and I don't have the time to get together a whole presentation.

BENJAMIN

After Ruidoso's own Martha Stewart, Lorilee, threw her hat in the ring no one else would. This is important, Natalie. Do this for me?

Natalie sputters. Benjamin sees some Press across the way.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Ooh, sorry. Gotta go-

NATALIE
-rub elbows, I know.

Benjamin shuffles off, leaving Natalie alone.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (BOOTH) - SAME

Zack, seeing Robyn, runs over and gives her a hug. Colton waves, then sees Natalie working her booth nearby. She seems stressed, distraught.

Colton starts toward her, but Ray catches him instead.

RAY
The chaos of a ranch doesn't seem so bad compared to a jubilee, does it?

COLTON
I'd take an angry horse over a smiling bureaucrat any day.

RAY
Ah, I see you've met Benjamin.

COLTON
He seems nice enough. I'm sure he and Natalie are very happy together. He can provide a lot. Too bad he's on the naughty-

But Colton stops himself.

COLTON (CONT'D)
-uh, how's the ranch?

RAY
Better since you've been there. Any chance I could convince you to stay on permanently?

COLTON
I'm flattered, honestly... but, I can't stay. I was recruited for a brief mission here.

RAY
You don't say... Well, you change your mind, the offer still stands.

COLTON
Thank you, sir.

Ray heads off and Colton heads toward Natalie.

NATALIE
What were you and Ray talking
about?

COLTON
Offered me a job full time, but I
turned him down. I'm not sure I'm
gonna keep ranch handing.

NATALIE
That's a shame, you have a real
gift. Plus this town looks good on
you. I thought, maybe, you liked...

Natalie changes her mind mid-sentence.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
...Ruidoso.

Wishful, Colton looks at Natalie.

COLTON
I do. I like, uh... Ruidoso a lot.

They share a silent moment before Natalie turns away,
nervously biting at a fingernail.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Hey, you okay?

NATALIE
Oh, just swell. There are only four
days until Christmas Eve, and no
reindeer in sight. I haven't had a
chance to go shopping for Zack, my
parents, or Morgan. And somehow
through all of this madness,
Benjamin is asking me to enter the
cookie bake off.

Smiling, Colton places gentle hands on Natalie's shoulders.

COLTON
Natalie?

NATALIE
What?

COLTON
Take a deep breath.

NATALIE
I'm not one of your horses.

Colton gently squeezes her shoulders before releasing her.

COLTON
Just do it, alright? C'mon now,
you've got this. Forget about the
reindeer. I'll take care of him.
And your parents, your friends,
they will understand. Christmas
isn't about gifts, it's about
family and friendship.

Settling, Natalie inhales then exhales. Natalie opens her eyes and finds Colton staring back at her.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Better?

NATALIE
(awkward)
A little. Sorry, there is just so
much--

COLTON
--Pressure? Yeah, from where I'm
standing, it looks like you've got
more going on than ten people
should. No wonder you're so
stressed out.

Biting her lip, Natalie blushes and shrugs.

NATALIE
I know, but--

COLTON
--but, what?

NATALIE
I just don't want to let people
down, you know?

COLTON
That's admirable... but, Natalie,
you don't have to make the world a
better place for everyone else all
of the time. It's okay to focus on
yourself occasionally, to do
something that makes you happy.

NATALIE
You're right.

COLTON
What would make you happy?

NATALIE
Well, if I have to enter this
cookie baking competition... I'd
like to win it.

Colton cracks a smile.

COLTON
You're gonna bake the apron off of
Little Miss Perfect.

NATALIE
Got any recipes that are guaranteed
to blow away the judges?

COLTON
I'm not much of a baker...

A lightbulb goes off in his head.

COLTON (CONT'D)
But I know someone who is. You get
started and I'll catch up. Gotta
ask a favor.

Natalie smiles and heads off. Colton looks around to make
sure no one is looking.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Uh, Gilbert?

POP! Gilbert appears out of nowhere in a swirl of sugar.

GILBERT
At your service!

COLTON
I'm gonna help Natalie win that
baking contest, but I'm gonna need
some help.

INT. SANTA'S HOUSE - (OFFICE) - DAY

Santa sits in his office, which is now completely covered in
cookies. Every surface is piled high with brightly colored
treats, nearly trapping Santa in his own office.

Santa picks up a cookie and sniffs it suspiciously.

The door opens and Mrs. Claus enters with a new tray.

MRS. CLAUS

Hope you're hungry for my next batch!

SANTA

Darling! I appreciate the kindness, but I'm not so sure about some of these new recipes you've been trying.

MRS. CLAUS

By the looks of it, you just haven't tried most of them.

SANTA

This room will be more cookie than office if you keep going at this pace. Why are you so intent on this, My Love?

Mrs. Claus sighs, puts down her newest batch.

MRS. CLAUS

Remember Christmas last year? You had just come home from delivering your last present and you couldn't stop raving about the cookies that were left under the chimney. "Best I've ever had!" you said.

SANTA

Oh, dear...

MRS. CLAUS

And well, I always pride myself on being your one-and-only, most favorite baker in the world. I guess I was just trying to impress you again...

Santa smiles and gets up. He takes her hands.

SANTA

Mrs. Claus. If you think little Timmy Parker's cookies came within one mile of your baking, then you are sorely mistaken.

MRS. CLAUS

Really?

SANTA

I don't need fancy new recipes or
strange ingredients. You forever
know the way to my heart.

Mrs. Claus blushes and they share a sweet kiss.

MRS. CLAUS

So none of these were any good?

SANTA

Not even one, my Sweet.

They laugh together.

BZZZZZ BZZZZZZ BZZZZZZ

Santa pulls out his Etch-A-Sketch again and Colton appears
with Gilbert peeking in behind him.

COLTON

Hey, Cousins!

SANTA

Colton! How goes the mission?

COLTON

Good, but I need your help.

MRS. CLAUS

I'll leave you boys to it-

COLTON

Actually, it's your help I need.

Mrs. Claus smiles and leans in.

MRS. CLAUS

How can I assist your Assist?

COLTON

Well, there's this bake off--

MRS. CLAUS

Say no more! You're in New Mexico,
right?

Colton nods.

MRS. CLAUS (CONT'D)

Have I got a recipe for you.

END OF ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN**INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (FOOD COURT) - DAY**

Arms loaded with groceries, Colton struggles to place the supplies on the kitchen counter.

With Zack in tow, Natalie rushes into the kitchen and snags an apron for herself and for Zack.

NATALIE

You sure you've got a winning recipe?

COLTON

Trust me. This one comes from an expert.

ZACK

(to Colton)

Hi.

COLTON

Hi, Zack. You here to help your momma and me win this thing?

Zack nods and mimics Natalie as he pulls the apron over his head and struggles to tie it.

COLTON (CONT'D)

There ya go, Zack Frost.

Colton ties the apron and stands back.

COLTON (CONT'D)

You look like a pro-baker to me.

Beaming, Zack scurries to climb onto a chair and begins inspecting the ingredients. Natalie offers Colton an apron which he rejects.

NATALIE

I'm so nervous! Lorilee wins every time.

COLTON

Not today.

Nose crinkled, Zack holds up a bag of roasted green chilies.

ZACK

What are these?

COLTON
It's our secret weapon.

NATALIE
Oh, no! You're joking. Please tell
me you're joking.

Placing his hands on Natalie's shoulders, Colton leans down,
looks her in the eyes and smiles.

COLTON
Trust me. Your cookies will be
amazing, just like you.

Colton joins Zack at the counter, organizing ingredients.

ZACK
Do you like kids?

Taken back, Colton looks at Natalie.

COLTON
Yes... I do.

Handing Colton the bottle of vanilla, Zack smiles.

ZACK
You'd make a great daddy.

Natalie chokes on her water as she avoids Colton's gaze.

LORILEE RICHLAND, 28, brunette, breezes in wearing a
professional chef's jacket embroidered with her name. She
pauses at Natalie's kitchen station.

LORILEE
Love your backup bakers.

COLTON
We prefer 'team members'.

LORILEE
Well, Natalie needs all the help
she can get.

Lorilee heads off and Natalie takes a deep breath.

NATALIE
It's just a little holiday baking
competition.

COLTON
Oh we're taking her down. But, you
know, in a Christmas-like-way.

Leaning in, Colton whispers to Natalie.

COLTON (CONT'D)
So keep your head in the game and
kick her butt.

Wearing their official 'Jubilee-Judges' badges, two JUDGES
stop before the large kitchen behind the food court.

JUDGE
Good morning, bakers. Are you ready
to begin?

Lorilee and Natalie nod their agreement.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
Once the timer starts you will have
exactly one hour to mix, bake and
plate your original cookies.
You'll be scored on originality,
taste, and presentation. Any
questions?

NATALIE AND LORILEE
(in harmony)
No!

Pulling out a stop watch, Judge two hits the button.

JUDGE
Begin!

Lorilee begins issuing orders to her crew while Natalie
rushes over to Colton and Zack.

NATALIE
Okay where do we start? Where's the
recipe?

COLTON
It's right...

Colton pulls out the Etch-A-Sketch.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Here.

Natalie looks at it suspiciously.

NATALIE
What is that?

COLTON
Our family has kind of a history
with toys. Just trust me, yeah?

NATALIE
(with a smile)
Let's do this.

COLTON
You and Zack go gather the bowls,
measuring cups, baking sheets and
other supplies while I read over
the recipe.

NATALIE
(taking a breath)
On it.

Natalie and Zack hurry off as Colton looks down at the blank device.

COLTON
Come on, Cousin. Don't fail me
now...

Then, magically, fancy CURSIVE WRITING begins to appear on the surface. Colton smiles.

INT. SANTA'S HOUSE (KITCHEN) - MONTAGE

[The following scenes between Colton/Natalie and Santa/Mrs. Claus are intercut in an uplifting MONTAGE:]

In Santa and Mrs. Claus' cozy kitchen, they prepare the same ingredients as Colton and Natalie.

MRS. CLAUS (V.O.)
The traditional Biscochito is a
crisp butter cookie flavored with
sugar, cinnamon and anise seed.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (FOOD COURT) - MONTAGE

Colton, Natalie, and Zack follow the instructions, having a joyous time together.

Zack gets batter all over himself and Colton throws a playful bit at Natalie.

MRS. CLAUS (V.O.)
But this recipe requires a special
touch...

INT. SANTA'S HOUSE (KITCHEN) - MONTAGE

Santa and Mrs. Claus both dip their hands into their bowl of ingredients and begin to soften it together.

MRS. CLAUS (V.O.)
A special touch that requires two
people working in tandem together.

Santa and the Missus share a sweet smile together.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (FOOD COURT) - MONTAGE

Matching Santa and Mrs. Claus, Colton and Natalie both dip their hands into the bowl as well.

MRS. CLAUS (V.O.)
The lard needs to soften fast, but
not liquefy. So, no microwaves
allowed. Only the heat of your
hands will do the trick.

Colton and Natalie's fingers brush together in the bowl and they both blush.

Zack dumps in a cup of flour and a blob of the mixture pops onto Natalie's cheek. With a gentle caress, Colton slowly wipes it away, his finger tips lingering on her soft cheek.

Eyes on Colton, Natalie blushes, but does not pull away.

INT. SANTA'S HOUSE (KITCHEN) - MONTAGE

Santa and Mrs. Claus put their cookies in the oven together and toast each other with a cup of tea as the MONTAGE ENDS.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (FOOD COURT) - LATER

Back to the hustle and bustle of the convention center, the bake off is in its final moments.

Lorilee plates her shimmering cookies on a crystal, snowflake etched platter, her dishes already soaking in a sink of soapy water.

In contrast, Colton, Natalie and Zack, dusted in flour, rush around frantically, but joyfully.

Sitting at a nearby table, the three judges watch with anticipation.

JUDGE

Two minutes to go.

Pulling out a red and green chile shaped platter, Colton rushes it over to Natalie, who puts the finishing touches on their cookies. Zack jumps up and down, excited.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Ten-nine-eight-seven-six...

NATALIE

I'm so nervous!

JUDGE

Five-four-three...

COLTON

We've got this!

After sliding the last cookie in place, Natalie throws her arms into the air and Zack copies her.

JUDGE

Two-one! Contestants, step away from the cookies!

Colton, Natalie and Zack all hug each other in triumph.

As the three judges approach her booth, Lorilee beams before her masterpiece cookies.

LORILEE

I've baked a sugar cookie, featuring secret ingredients from a recipe that has been held in my family for generations. I've added my signature vanilla-butter-cream frosting, with silver and gold, pure sugar cane sprinkles. Enjoy.

Each judge takes time to examine, then tastes the confection. With smiles all around, the judges move on.

Natalie looks on, suddenly worried.

NATALIE
 (to Colton)
 What if they don't like them?

COLTON
 They will.

NATALIE
 But, what if they're too hot?

COLTON
 (with a smirk)
 I thought New Mexicans could handle
 some heat?

The Judges approach their table.

JUDGE
 Tell us about your cookies.

Colton nudges Natalie.

NATALIE
 Right... Okay. We have made the
 traditional Biscochito. However,
 we've added a mix of candied green
 chilis and a few other spices, to
 give it an authentic New Mexico
 flare.

JUDGE
 That certainly sounds interesting.
 You said green chiles... are they
 hot?

Natalie looks to Colton, then back to the judges.

NATALIE
 I'm sure you can handle the heat.

Each judge chooses a chile shaped cookie and takes a bite.

JUDGE
 Very nice, a great blend of sweet
 and savory. A nice twist on a
 classic...

Judge begins sweating from the heat.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
 You weren't kidding about those
 chiles. Thank you, ladies. Give us
 a few minutes to determine the
 winner.

Moving back to their table, the judges huddle together, their voices muffled.

Natalie rings her hands, while Lorilee checks her manicure. Colton scoops Zack up and sets him on the counter.

COLTON

Hey, they're struggling to make a call. Miss Glitzy over there obviously didn't cinch the deal.

NATALIE

(nervous)

Yeah, but, I'm not sure making the judges overheat was a good idea.

COLTON

No matter what, we did a great job and made an awesome team, right?

ZACK

Right!

They exchange a high-five as the Judges reemerge.

JUDGE

We have reached a decision. Best presentation, Lorilee Richland. On originality, Natalie Sterling.

Colton puts an arm around Natalie as they wait. She notices.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

And this year's Jingle Bell Jubilee Christmas Cookie Bake Off winner, in both taste and originality is, Natalie Sterling!

The room erupts with excitement. Natalie throws herself into Colton's arms. Colton spins her around, then scoops up Zack.

As the cheering dissipates, we get one final look at--

INT. SANTA'S HOUSE (KITCHEN) - SAME

--Santa and Mrs. Claus, heads together and eyes closed, as they smile and share a quiet moment together.

END OF ACT SEVEN

ACT EIGHT**INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (DANCE FLOOR) - EVENING**

Country music fills the event center. Dressed in a crisp white button down shirt and pressed blue jeans, Colton stands next to a fidgeting Tripp.

TRIPP

What if no one bought a dance on my card?

COLTON

You kidding me? Did you see those women?

TRIPP

Yeah, they were all looking at you.

COLTON

Not all of them, buddy. Not by a long-shot.

Gliding into the room, Natalie, dressed in a candy-cane red sweater featuring silvery, glittered icicles and a slim fitting pair of jeans, catches Colton's eye.

Across the room, Morgan flashes Tripp a sheepish grin as she tries to get around a group of people to reach Natalie.

COLTON (CONT'D)

(toward Natalie)

Beautiful.

TRIPP

(toward Morgan)

She sure is.

Colton turns a sharp eye on Tripp; finds his new friend watching Morgan, and he smiles.

COLTON

Something tells me her name is somewhere on your dance card.

TRIPP

(hopeful)

You think so?

Colton nods and gives Tripp a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (DANCE FLOOR) - CONTINUOUS

Fanning her face, Natalie throws up her hands, spins around and collides with Morgan.

NATALIE

There you are. I've been looking everywhere for you.

MORGAN

And I've been chasing you all around the building. Would you slow down?

NATALIE

Have you seen Colton and Tripp?

MORGAN

You passed right by them. They're right over there.

Pointing to the two men, Morgan gives Tripp a wave.

NATALIE

Thank goodness, I was afraid they wouldn't come. Wow, Colton looks--

MORGAN

--Hot, as in sexy, hunky, cowboy hot.

NATALIE

I should have set a higher minimum bid on those dances.

Laughing, Morgan pulls out her phone and opens the dance cards from the website.

Natalie looks up at the clock.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Oh, it's time!

MORGAN

And we're off!

Grabbing Morgan's arm, Natalie drags her to the microphone. Natalie taps it, waits for the resounding hum, then begins.

NATALIE

Everyone, I'd like to welcome you to the annual Jingle Bell Jubilee Dance.

Cheers go up.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

And now the moment we've all been
waiting for: The Cowboy Dance
Auction!

Morgan motions for Colton and Tripp to come up. Eager, Tripp jumps into action. Colton looks around, then follows.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Your early bids have gotten us
closer to our goal, but we're still
far off! So keep bidding for our
Christmas Cowboys!

Happy shouts go up as Colton and Tripp make it to the stage and turn to face the crowd.

Morgan takes the mic.

MORGAN

Our first bidder is Nancy Evens!
You have won dance number one with
Tripp Austin.

Giving a loud cheer, a WOMAN hurries to the front, grabs Tripp's hand and starts for the middle of the dance floor.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

And the highest bidder of the first
dance with Colton Wade...

Giving Natalie a knowing smile, Morgan waves her phone.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Natalie Sterling.

Colton's grim countenance brightens as Natalie's fills with surprise. She leans in to whisper to Morgan.

NATALIE

Something's wrong. You know I
didn't bid. I don't have that kind
of money.

MORGAN

Well, someone didn't want you to
miss this opportunity. They just
donated a hefty sum.

NATALIE

But who?

Morgan points across the room, but her eyes narrow in confusion.

MORGAN

Jolly looking guy with a big beard.
Huh. Weird, he was just here.

Colton approaches.

COLTON

Well, how about that?

Colton offers Natalie his arm.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Shall we?

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - (DANCE FLOOR) - CONTINUOUS

Colton and Natalie take the stage as the lights go down.

Colton takes Natalie's hand and spins her into his arms. They are momentarily absorbed with each other.

COLTON

Congratulations on a successful
jubilee. You did it.

NATALIE

Thanks. Except for the reindeer.

COLTON

There's still time.

Natalie looks around the room and Benjamin catches her gaze.

NATALIE

I shouldn't have promised something
I couldn't deliver.

COLTON

Your heart was in the right place.

NATALIE

Yeah, well, the heart is not to be
trusted.

COLTON

Come on now, things aren't that
bad. After all, we're here,
dancing, enjoying the evening.

Pulling her closer, Colton lays his chin on her head.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Thank you for bidding on me, I'm flattered. Or, I guess I should be thanking this mysterious Mr. and Mrs. K?

NATALIE

I'm just glad I got to dance with you.

COLTON

Me too.

NATALIE

Plus, it gives me a chance to thank you again for the cookie win. I really needed that.

COLTON

My pleasure, trust me.

NATALIE

And, you've really made an impression on Zack.

COLTON

I do hope he's not the only person I've impressed.

Natalie nods, ducks her head and clears her throat.

NATALIE

The entire village is impressed with the mysterious Christmas Cowboy.

Colton gives Natalie a twirl.

COLTON

To be honest, I mostly care if you are.

Natalie looks up at him, as if she wants to say something. The music begins to wind down.

NATALIE

I-I really wish--

COLTON

(hopeful)
Wish for what, Tinsel-Town?

Morgan's voice echoes over the loud speakers and Natalie quickly puts some distance between herself and Colton.

MORGAN

Ladies, listen up! Our next winners are...

Morgan reads from her phone.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Bridgett Simpson, you've won the second dance with Tripp.

Grinning from ear to ear, Tripp allows the willowy brunette to take his arm and lead him back to the dance floor. Morgan looks down at Natalie, a warning smile on her face.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Seems someone was high bidder for the second, and third dance with Colton.

NATALIE

What?

The crowd of expectant bidders gives an audible groan of disappointment.

MORGAN

(shrugs)

Sophia Williams, come get your cowboy.

Running her slender arm through Colton's, Sophia butts into his and Natalie's dance.

SOPHIA

(to Natalie)

Cowboy Dance Auction. Best idea you've had so far.

Natalie starts to reply, but is interrupted when Benjamin takes her hand and leans his crutches against the podium.

BENJAMIN

May I have this dance?

NATALIE

But your foot.

BENJAMIN

I have you to lean on.

Natalie puts on a forced smile and accepts Ben's hand.

Benjamin slides Natalie into the mix of dancers.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

You've done an amazing job with the jubilee. I didn't expect as much, but wow, you sure pulled it off.

NATALIE

Um- thank you?

BENJAMIN

Christmas magic and all that nonsense, right?

NATALIE

Something like that.

Benjamin pulls her close and steers her around the floor. He makes sure to position them near a PHOTOGRAPHER, but Natalie just glances back to Colton who is across the dance floor.

Back with Colton and Sophia...

SOPHIA

I'm glad the mayor insisted on making a contribution. It's a win-win. I get to dance with the best looking cowboy here and the charities gain as well.

COLTON

That was very generous of him.

Colton's gaze narrows as he spots Benjamin and Natalie.

SOPHIA

I suppose he may be a bit threatened by you.

COLTON

What? Me? Why?

SOPHIA

(shrugs)

All I know is that he wanted to keep you busy. His words.

Giving Natalie a smug smile, Sophia scoots closer to Colton.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

But let's be honest, Colton. A ranch hand can't really compete with a soon-to-be Senator.

Colton looks down at a pouty Sophia.

Upset by how close Sophia and Colton are dancing, Natalie tiptoes and brushes Benjamin's lips with a quick kiss.

Colton stops dead in his tracks, overwhelmed with emotion.

COLTON
(to Sophia)
I'm sorry, I just...

Colton quickly leaves the dance floor.

BENJAMIN
What are you doing, Natalie? We agreed to keep public affection off the table.

NATALIE
Benjamin, I'm not one of your business deals.

BENJAMIN
Well, if you're going to insist on it, at least make sure the photographer gets a good shot.

Appalled, Natalie looks around to find Colton but only sees a smirking Sophia looking her way.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
It's fine, Natalie. As long as this event ends with a bang, I'm happy. Can you imagine the press we'll get from topping off the jubilee with a real-life reindeer?

NATALIE
The thing is, I haven't actually found the reindeer yet-

Benjamin stops dancing and Natalie stumbles into him.

BENJAMIN
What?? Natalie, are you joking?

NATALIE
No, but I-

BENJAMIN
I hope it isn't too late to get those Clydesdales. I've got to talk to Sophia.

NATALIE

Wait- I'll find it! I'll-

BENJAMIN

Then find it, Natalie. You're making us look foolish. No more excuses.

Benjamin stomps off.

Zack, nearby, waves up at him.

ZACK

Hi, Benjamin-

But Benjamin brushes right past Zack without a second glance.

EXT. RANCH - (CORRAL) - NIGHT

Colton squints against the first rays of sunlight streaming across the ranch, glittering across the frosty fields as he leads the mare and her colt out of the barn.

COLTON

(to mare)

Come on, girl. It's time for you and your little one to join the herd.

Colton leads the pair to the adjacent field where the wild band of horses are bedded down. Opening the gate, Colton leads them inside and disconnects his lead.

Alert, watching over the herd, a lone stallion calls out. Nervous, the mare shuffles closer to her colt and snorts. Other mares circle in, greeting the mare with nickers. Colton slips out of the corral.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Good girl.

Gilbert walks up beside Colton. Colton smiles down at the elf as he tightens his collar against the chill.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Thank you for not flashing in and scaring the horses.

GILBERT

I won't make *that* mistake twice, let me tell ya.

They both watch as the colt greets the other mares, all the while the stallion keeps watch from a safe distance.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

You alright there, Cowboy?

Jaw tight, Colton looks at the ground as they reach the barn.

COLTON

Swell. Phase One is almost complete. And Phase Two should be a done deal as well.

GILBERT

How so?

COLTON

I saw the way Benjamin and Natalie were holding each other. I saw their kiss. I wouldn't be surprised if he popped the question right then and there.

GILBERT

Are you so sure she'd say yes even if he did?

COLTON

What do you mean-

Frowning, Gilbert's eyes fix on a figure emerging from the line of trees edging the corrals.

Colton follows his gaze to find--

--Natalie staggering out of the clearing, hair disheveled and snow and mud clinging to her boots.

COLTON (CONT'D)

What the... Natalie?!

Gilbert backs away and heads for the house.

GILBERT

I'm gonna go feed the hay. Or, I mean bale the chickens. Uh, I'll be over here.

Natalie looks at Colton, then picks up her speed as she stomps to her vehicle.

COLTON

Natalie, hold up!

Colton gives chase and catches up to her and takes hold of her arm. Natalie snatches it away and stands glaring at him.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Natalie... what are you doing out here?

NATALIE

What does it look like?

COLTON

Well, from the looks of things, I'd say you'd been in a mud-wrestling-in-snow-boots-match, but I know that can't be.

NATALIE

I've been looking for that reindeer. Okay?!

COLTON

Out here, by yourself? Why didn't you ask me to help?

NATALIE

Well, I would have, but you were intently occupied with Sophia.

Turning her back on Colton, Natalie continues her march toward her vehicle.

COLTON

Sophia? Wait a minute, you're the one who auctioned me off to anyone with a checkbook. So why are you mad at me?

NATALIE

You didn't seem to mind.

COLTON

Fine, okay, so I was busy. Why didn't you ask your knight in shining armor to go? Heck, I'm sure the all-knowing Benjamin could have tracked that reindeer in no time!

EXT. RANCH - (CORRAL) - SAME

Reaching her car, Natalie yanks the door open, pitches her flashlight inside and spins around to face Colton.

NATALIE

Benjamin has a broken foot, I
wouldn't put him in harms way just
to--

COLTON

--Would he protect you? Or worry
about YOU being in harms way?

NATALIE

(unsure)

Of course he would, I mean he--

Lip quivering, Natalie gets into her car and slams the door.
Jaw tight, Colton draws in a deep breath and looks away.

COLTON

Natalie, I'm sorry, I shouldn't
have said that. It's just--

NATALIE

--It's just what, Colton?

Eyes sad, Colton pulls off his hat and runs his hand through
his hair.

COLTON

It's just the thought of you,
alone, traipsing through the woods
over some stupid jubilee and a
reindeer, just to please a man who
doesn't deserve you...I mean, that
doesn't deserve your respect. What
if something would have happened to
you? What would Zack do?

NATALIE

What gives you the right to dictate
what I do with my life? You can't
just fly down here and pretend you
know me. At least Benjamin will be
here for me. He's dependable. I
can't get distracted by some
Cowboy, no matter how much I-

Colton leans in and looks down at her.

COLTON

Natalie...?

NATALIE

This isn't your problem, Colton.
I'm sorry I dragged you into all
this.

COLTON

You haven't dragged me into anything. I'm here to help— because I chose to be.

Natalie smiles at him as she starts the engine.

NATALIE

I really appreciate what you've done for Zack and the village. But you've wasted enough time here. You should go, get on with your life.

Natalie drives away, leaving Colton alone.

Somberly, Gilbert approaches from behind. After a moment, her car rounds a corner and is out of sight.

COLTON

Gilbert?

GILBERT

(sadly)

Yeah, Colton?

COLTON

I think I finished my Assist. Time to go home.

GILBERT

Are you sure? Maybe we could—

COLTON

Gilbert. It's time.

And with a POP! they disappear.

END OF ACT EIGHT

ACT NINE

EXT. PLAZA - (RUIDOSO, NM) - CHRISTMAS EVE NIGHT

The town square is packed with revelers. Natalie stands with her parents and Zack. Her gaze wanders to the corral, festively adorned with pine-boughs and red-ribbons. But it's empty. Zack takes Natalie's hand and smiles up at her.

ZACK

It's okay, Mommy... the reindeer had to get back to Santa to help deliver the toys.

NATALIE

Yes, yes he did. Thank you for understanding, sweetie.

Duane puts a comforting arm around Natalie's shoulder as they walk to the podium across from the unlit Christmas Tree.

DUANE

You did a fantastic job... I couldn't be more proud.

ROBYN

He's right, honey, everything is perfect.

NATALIE

Well, almost perfect.

ZACK

(puzzled)
Mommy, where's Colton?

NATALIE

He- I think he left.

ZACK

But-

DUANE

-Zack, I'm chilly. Let's go get a cup of hot cocoa before they light the tree.

Zack walks off with Robyn, sad. But Duane remains behind.

DUANE (CONT'D)

Did Colton really leave?

Natalie looks off, wistful.

NATALIE

I guess he did. Do you know where Benjamin is? He said he'd meet me.

DUANE

You know Natalie, you haven't been my little girl for awhile now.

(MORE)

DUANE (CONT'D)

You're a grown woman who can make her own decisions. But would you indulge your father for a moment?

Natalie looks to Duane.

NATALIE

What, Dad?

DUANE

Zack's growing up quick, and it won't be long before he sees right through my Santa costume. He's gonna ask questions. Questions about life. And he needs a father who can answer them.

NATALIE

I know. Benjamin-

DUANE

-a father who's interested in more than flashy photos and campaign donations. Someone who treats you both with respect. I'm not telling you who that has to be, but ask yourself this question: who is gonna love you and Zack the way you deserve?

Natalie is silent.

INT. SANTA'S HOUSE - (NORTH POLE) - SAME

Colton, bag over his shoulder, walks out of the stables. But before he can get too far--

--Santa is right in front of him.

SANTA

Going somewhere? As you might recall I have a certain journey to make tonight. I'll need my reindeer hitched and ready.

COLTON

Someone else can do it, Cuz.

SANTA

What about my Assist?

COLTON
Completed as well.

SANTA
Really? The money is still being raised and I don't seem to recall Natalie finding true love yet.

COLTON
She and Benjamin are going to work it out. He'll be a fine dad to Zack. She told me that I should leave.

Colton tries to continue walking, but Santa stops him.

SANTA
Colton. Do you know how Mrs. Claus and I have remained strong all these years?

Colton listens.

SANTA (CONT'D)
By remembering that our actions speak louder than our words. Natalie may have said she chose Benjamin, but in her heart, she knows that is not what she wants.

COLTON
I don't understand...

SANTA
I didn't just send you to Ruidoso because of your gift with animals, and trust me when I say, it is a special magic that your Cousins don't share. I sent you to New Mexico not just to show Natalie her true love... but to find your own as well.

COLTON
Love and me don't mix, Santa. After Amber, I just can't...

SANTA
Tragedy happens, Colton. Her passing impacted you deeply. But do you think she would want you to close yourself off forever? I certainly don't.

COLTON
But finding my true love? What are
you talking about?

Santa puts a reassuring arm on Colton.

SANTA
How did you feel when you saw
Natalie and Benjamin together?

COLTON
It was like a gut punch every
single-

Understanding dawns on Colton as he tries to swallow past the
lump in his throat.

COLTON (CONT'D)
I'm such a dummy.

Santa chuckles.

SANTA
A little clueless maybe, but don't
be so hard on yourself. Sometimes
we have to make a few mistakes
along the way to figure out our own
heart.

In a panic, Colton spins around, searching.

COLTON
Gilbert!

POP! Gilbert appears in a puff of sugar.

GILBERT
Back to New Mexico?

COLTON
Yep, "Sugar-Shift" on the double!

Colton smiles at Santa.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Thanks, Cousin.

Santa winks as POP! Colton and Gilbert disappear.

EXT. PLAZA - (RUIDOSO, NM) - NIGHT

Natalie approaches the stage where Benjamin and Sophia wait.

BENJAMIN
Natalie, you ready?

Natalie jumps and turns to face them.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Time for the lighting ceremony.

NATALIE
(to Sophia)
Please tell me you were able to get
the Clydesdales?

SOPHIA
They'll be arriving momentarily.
You're lucky I was here.

Turning to Benjamin, Sophia lays a hand on his shoulder.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
Perhaps next year we should
consider someone with more
experience and connections to host
the event.

BENJAMIN
I have to agree with Sophia,
Natalie. You dropped the ball.
I'm not going to be the one to
break the news to our community.
You'll have to handle that.

Head held high, Natalie straightens and faces the crowd.

KID
Where's the reindeer?

PARENT
Yeah, let's get him out here!

Brave, Natalie takes the mic.

NATALIE
(into the mic)
Hello, everyone. Thank you all so
much for coming out to celebrate
with us. I want to say a few words
before we move forward.

She takes a deep breath, steadying herself.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

I would like to thank Ray Stuart,
who donated the land needed for the
rescue of our local wild horses.

A few cheers go up.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

And I also want to thank my best
friend and right arm, Morgan Welsh.

Morgan waves from her position in the audience.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

And to our Mayor, Benjamin
Harper...

Benjamin straightens up, smiles.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

I'd like to say Merry Christmas and
good luck in your future endeavors.
I just won't be a part of them.

BENJAMIN

Wait- what?

NATALIE

Yep! Not as your organizer, and
especially, definitely, never
again, as your girlfriend.

Silence among the crowd. Then:

WOMAN IN THE CROWD

Did the mayor just get dumped?

The crowd erupts in LAUGHTER. Benjamin sputters, trying to
find the right words, but it's no use.

Sophia grabs the mic, pushing Natalie out of the way.

SOPHIA

Stop laughing! Um, uh... we're
excited to present, all the way
from Roswell, the incredible
Clydesdales!

Sophia motions grandly to her right and everyone looks, but
instead of a band of magnificent horses--

--a squat FARMHAND holds onto a single DONKEY that has been
dressed to look like a Clydesdale.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

Wait, but-

The crowd erupts into even more laughter as Sophia stares, slack jawed.

Natalie takes the mic back.

NATALIE

Wow, Sophia, your Clydesdale is really--

The crowd laughs.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(to Sophia, with sarcasm)
--something.

The laughter subsides, but everyone is still buzzing and having a good time.

Natalie smiles down at her beautiful community.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(into mic)

And even though he isn't with us this evening, Colton Wade deserves our gratitude. He was only here for a few days, but he made quite an impression on this community...

Natalie smiles, a lightbulb finally going off in her head.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(to herself)

He certainly made an impression on me.

KID

Bring out the reindeer!

WOMAN IN THE CROWD

Yeah!

NATALIE

Unfortunately, there won't be a reindeer tonight-

But before she can finish her sentence--

--Colton, dressed head to toe in a festive costume (complete with green tights!) steps up next to her and smiles.

COLTON

Well then, what do you call *that*,
Tinsel Town?

Natalie looks at Colton in shock, then follows his gaze to the back of the crowd. She smiles from ear to ear.

NATALIE

Merry Christmas, Ruidoso! I give
you your holiday reindeer!

The crowd turns to see Gilbert walk triumphantly through the crowd with Dasher in tow.

The crowd erupts in applause.

Joy bursts to life on Zack's face as he runs up to Natalie onstage.

ZACK

(to Natalie)
You did it Mommy!

Morgan runs up and whispers excitedly in Natalie's ear.

MORGAN

(to Natalie)
Go ahead.

Natalie, beaming, grabs the mic again.

NATALIE

And on top of everything, I can
officially announce that we've
blown past the previous years
donations by raising TWICE the
amount we needed!

Natalie hugs Zack.

ZACK

Can we go see the reindeer?

MORGAN

Why don't I take you, Zack?

ZACK

Is it okay, Mommy?

NATALIE

Of course, Baby.

Morgan heads off with Zack as Natalie turns to Colton.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(joyful)

You came back... I don't know how to thank you...

COLTON

That twinkle in your eyes is thank you enough.

With the crowd distracted by the reindeer, Gilbert, in his original elf attire, gives a wave of his hand. Magically, the wild mare and her colt are in the center of the corral feeding on a large bale of hay.

Cupping his hands over his mouth, Gilbert shouts.

GILBERT

Folks, we have a Christmas miracle right here in Lincoln County.

Curious, the crowd abandons Colton and Dasher and makes its way to the corral.

GILBERT (CONT'D)

This wild colt was born just a few days before Christmas, which is an impossible event in itself, but... she was also born with a very beautiful holly marking on her hind quarter.

The colt prances and jumps, happy to be the center of attention. Gilbert gives Tripp a tap on the shoulder and the cowboy takes over.

TRIPP

Everyone, gather round.

Morgan approaches Tripp with a pair of mugs.

MORGAN

Hey, Tripp. Would you like some hot cocoa?

TRIPP

I would. Care to join me?

MORGAN

It would be my pleasure.

Morgan takes Tripp's arm and they smile.

Back up on the stage:

Zack heads off with his grandparents, leaving Natalie and Colton alone.

NATALIE

Where in the world did you get that costume?

COLTON

You wouldn't believe me if I told you. Listen...

He turns to face Natalie, suddenly serious.

COLTON (CONT'D)

There's something I've been wanting to tell you. But as you've probably noticed, I'm not much for--

Natalie takes Colton's face in her hands, pulls him close, then kisses him. Colton looks down at her, rests his forehead against hers and smiles.

COLTON (CONT'D)

(breathless)

--Words.

Laughing, Natalie flicks one of the tiny jingle-bells on Colton's hat, he smiles bright, then gathers her close and kisses her back. They're lost in the moment together.

Zack looks up from his spot next to the reindeer and smiles at the happy couple.

EXT. PLAZA - (RUIDOSO, NM) - LATER

The crowd is thinned now, but the celebration is still going.

Colton and Natalie, arm in arm, approach the reindeer with Tripp and Morgan.

COLTON

I'll take it from here.

Tripp smiles and he and Morgan head off.

Colton, Natalie, Zack and Dasher walk through the plaza.

COLTON (CONT'D)

I'm really starting to love Ruidoso. I think I might stay a bit longer and accept Ray's offer.

NATALIE

Really?

COLTON

I've been so lost. Feeling like I didn't belong. Turns out, I just needed to look in the right place and for the right people.

Casting a wishful look at Natalie and Zack, Colton smiles. Happy, Natalie hugs Colton's arm to her.

NATALIE

You're a little odd Colton, but I think we'll keep you anyway.

Squealing, Zack runs to Colton and hugs him around the waist.

ZACK

My wish came true.

Natalie beams down at her son.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Can I come help sometime at the ranch?

COLTON

Anytime, pal. But here's the thing: This reindeer and I have to get going for a little bit.

NATALIE

Get going? What do you mean?

COLTON

Well, we both have a pretty important job to complete tonight.

NATALIE

What are you talking about?

POP! Gilbert appears as sugar rains down upon them.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Where did you come from?

COLTON

I'd like to tell you that you get used to that, but you don't.

GILBERT

You haven't figured it out yet?

NATALIE

And IT would be what, exactly?

Colton smiles at Gilbert.

COLTON

I have a second job. I help my
Cousin out during the holidays.

NATALIE

Doing what exactly?

GILBERT

Uhhhh, transport?

COLTON

And baggage. My family comes with a
lot of... *baggage*.

Gilbert chuckles. Natalie looks worried. Giving her a
reassuring grin, Colton wraps an arm around her shoulders.

COLTON (CONT'D)

I think it would be best if you
just met him yourself.

(to Zack)

What do you think, Zack Frost?

Colton wraps his other arm around Zack and pulls them close.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Gilbert, one express 'Sugar-Shift'
please.

GILBERT

Comin' right up!

NATALIE

Sugar-what-a? Colton?

Kissing the top of Natalie's head, Colton smiles.

COLTON

Hold on tight, Tinsel-Town.

Colton kisses Natalie as sugar begins to swirl in a spiral
around them until finally-

POP! They all disappear.

THE END