

The Last Santa

by

Michael Rhodes

Managed by: IAN KENNEDY :: talent@atalentscout.com
London :: Los Angeles :: (+1) 310 299 2788
264 S. La Cienega Boulevard, Suite 1132,
Beverly Hills, CA 90211

FADE IN:

INT. FOOD PANTRY AUSTIN, TEXAS - DAY

Skillful adult fingers play a jaunty accordion 'Jingle Bells.' A dark brown toddler hand joins into the frolic on the keyboard. First it probes and touches, then it bangs for the appropriate sonic response.

MIKE REILLY (40s), Anglo in a sleazy Santa suit, his own straggly brown-grey beard, and plastic boots continues playing while he bends over to smile at the beaming SUDANESE TODDLER(2) playing the duet with him.

Mike gestures to the SUDANESE MOTHER (30) with FOUR additional cute CHILDREN, all in traditional garb, that he enjoys the assistance.

The line of diverse, mostly immigrant families are all fascinated by this strange being in red. The children are awestruck.

In the background of the large, forsaken store the staff of the pantry hand out food, clothes and information.

ALEJANDRO ALVAREZ (30s), a wild-haired intellectual with a blinking light bulb necklace, and GABRIELA ALVAREZ (30s), his fierce, dramatic wife, hand out immigration flyers nearby.

GABRIELA

Thank you for doing this on short notice, Mike.

MIKE

My Dad would be so proud. He was Santa every year at the Elks Club.
(considers the audience)
But it appears that Santa is unknown or out of fashion here.

ALEJANDRO

White male. Cultural imperialist.
Even in Texas he's obsolete.

MIKE

Remind me to thank Marie for the invitation.

ALEJANDRO

She's sentimental. We couldn't deny her.

MARIE HERNANDEZ (40s), a soulful, colorfully-clad musician with a guitar on her back, enters bearing trays of tacos.

Mike perks up momentarily at her entrance.

DANNY RYAN (40s), a slender, long-haired, Anglo musician with a fiddle case accompanies her a moment later. They kiss, and he exits.

Marie waves to Mike, then joins the others at the table.

Families immediately queue for food and drinks.

Alejandro brings Mike a taco, which he props on his accordion between bites. They both survey the unimpressed crowd.

MIKE

The Christmas story has a lovely message of hope for the downtrodden. Hope is underrated.

ALEJANDRO

I like the lights. How's your Mom?

MIKE

Difficult. That's why I'm back early. Theresa put her in a home.

ALEJANDRO

There's a shocker.

MIKE

It's okay. Thought I'd make money on the road. Nope. And the music wasn't fun. Think I'll teach again this spring.

The doors bang open and an ICE OFFICIAL and her two armed colleagues barge in and surround the Sudanese family.

Marie and Gabriela rush to intercept them.

OFFICIAL

We have papers to remove this family.

She hands papers and photographs to Gabriela.

GABRIELA

Can't this wait? They have an attorney.

OFFICIAL

No.

The ICE agents rudely gather the terrified mother and her children, then herd them toward the door.

Most of the other families scatter out rear doors in fear.

Stunned, Mike unconsciously lifts several presents.

Marie intercepts the ICE agents before they can leave, and hands an information sheet to the Sudanese mother.

MARIE

Call this number.

Even though disoriented and frightened, all of the children turn back, and wave goodbye to Santa.

Mike waves back, then starts toward them with the presents. Marie gently dissuades him.

JAMAL (6), a thoughtful Black child, approaches Mike with SUSAN MOORE (60), a sympathetic public servant in a suit.

Mike somewhat regains his composure, and sets down his accordion.

MIKE

Hi. What's your name?

JAMAL

Jamal. I wrote down what my friends want.

MIKE

That's very nice of you, Jamal. Read some of them to me.

JAMAL

My friend, Martin, wants a new skateboard. Carlos wants an electric motorboat for the pool, if they ever put water in it again. Jada wants a karaoke machine.

MIKE

May I see your list? Why didn't your friends come with you?

JAMAL

They moved out, but I know you can find them.

MIKE

From?

JAMAL
Our foster center.

MIKE
Jamal, that's so thoughtful of you.
I'll do my best to find your
friends. Do they write to you?

JAMAL
They're probably really busy with
their new families. Going places.
Putting up trees. Singing carols.
Taking care of their new dogs.

MIKE
I'm sure you're right. I think you
deserve a very special Christmas
present. What would you like?

Jamal begins to cry.

JAMAL
I want someone to take me home.

Embarrassed, Jamal runs out of the building.

Mike dabs his eyes on his sleeve as Susan hands him her card.

SUSAN
Thank you for your kindness. Have a
Merry Christmas, Santa.

MIKE
Thank you. You too.

Mike looks unnerved, as Marie sits down beside him.

MARIE
How was the road?

MIKE
Lonely. I was looking forward to
seeing Henry for the holidays, but
he's not coming home.

MARIE
Your mom?

MIKE
Exasperating. Theresa put her in a
home.

MARIE
Alice?

MIKE
Getting fitted for her next
wedding.

MARIE
I'm sorry.

MIKE
The world has changed while I was
away. Maybe it's just me.

MARIE
No. It's everyone I think.

MIKE
I need a few days to recharge.

MARIE
We all rely on you for that.

Mike looks pleased at her praise. Marie takes his hand in sympathy, and they both stare out at the families hurriedly exiting the facility.

MIKE
I feel like I'm part of a tapestry
that's unraveling. Family, friends,
community.

INT. ALAMO RETIREMENT LOBBY - NIGHT

Mike, still woefully attired as Santa, cheerfully greets STAFF MEMBERS and their CHILDREN while he plays 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town' on his accordion. Many of the children sing along as they take gifts off a table.

A gaggle of elderly women wait in line, fluttering their hands as they flirt with Mike.

MARTHA REILLY (70s), a bitter pill with old-age dementia, observes these proceedings with a growing annoyance. THERESA (40s), Mike's stern older sister, superintends nearby.

Martha belligerently gestures to an aid to turn the damned music down. The frightened aid disappears.

Mike notices the exchange, and stops playing. He waves goodbye to the families, then walks over to greet her.

MIKE
Hi, Mom. What would you like for
Christmas?

Martha looks him up and down with disgust. She speaks with a slight Irish accent.

MARTHA

Do you have a job?

MIKE

I'm a teacher, Mom. Remember? Your staff invited me for their kids.

MARTHA

The German doctor in Heidelberg looked at you when you were born, and said ...

Mike interrupts with a thick German accent.

MIKE

"...his sister will be a great success, but this number two will be very troubled."

THERESA

He was very wise.

He sticks his tongue out at his sister.

MIKE

I was two months old.

CLARA (20s), a kind staff attendant pulls Mike aside.

CLARA

Do you have your certificate? It might work again today.

Mike nods yes, and removes a crinkled piece of paper from his wallet.

MARTHA

Have you been to Mass?

MIKE

Look, Mom.

Mike unrolls the certificate, and hands it to her. It has a large gold seal at the bottom.

Martha views the document, then Mike with skepticism. Theresa rolls her eyes.

MARTHA

(reads)

"Teacher of the year. \$3000 bonus!"
Mike did this? My Mike did this?

She stares at this interloper in disbelief.

MIKE

Pretty neat, huh?

Confused, she sets the certificate down on a table, and promptly forgets about it.

MARTHA

Are you still married?

Mike smiles and nods. Theresa frowns.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

She probably supports you.

Martha gets distracted by an old black and white photo of Thomas Reilly (at 40), Mike's handsome dad, that's fallen out of her opened purse. She speaks to the picture with disdain.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

You gave away all our money. Now
I'm locked up in the poor house.

She turns, and startles to see Mike sitting there. She looks at his costume with revulsion.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

How long have you been there? Are
you working?

Mike sighs, and once again hands her the certificate.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

(reads to herself)

"Teacher of the year. \$3000 bonus!"
My Mike did this? He could put a
downpayment on a house.

She sets the certificate down, and promptly forgets it. Once again she's distracted by the photo, but now she doesn't seem to recognize her husband.

MIKE

Do you think about him often?

She looks up, startled.

MARTHA
What?

MIKE
Do you think about Dad often?

MARTHA
Who?

MIKE
(points)
Dad.

MARTHA
No.

Theresa gets up to leave, and Mike catches up to her.

MIKE
What happened?

THERESA
I can't deal with her. I've got to
get back to Dallas. She's fine
here.

MIKE
How...?

THERESA
She put me in charge of her
finances. I've sold the house in
Wyoming. I gave the squatters until
December twentieth to move out.

MIKE
They're called renters.

THERESA
We emptied the house. I thought Dad
had more stuff. Do you know
anything about that?

MIKE
No.

She whirls and disappears. Mike ponders.

INT. MIKE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mike opens a storage box on the floor. He scans the
photographs, stopping every now and again to smile.

Mike carefully checks out a photo of a beautiful antique box sitting on top of a large desk.

MIKE

Here it is.

Mike hurries through the pile of photos until he stops at a closeup of the box.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Dad's pipe box. Something to do with ... Zhu Xi? Or a disciple? How do I remember that?

He touches the picture.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Beautiful. I wonder what happened to it?

(reflects)

Dad sent me an email.

Mike opens his emails, and types in 'Thomas.'

An array of emails from his father fills the screen. He scrolls through them.

MIKE (CONT'D)

(reads)

"I have a gift for you. You always liked it. Sorry it smells like tobacco. Then again, you might like that. I'm going to hide it. You'll find it. Keep practicing. Love you, Dad."

Mike wipes a tear from his eyes.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Dad.

Closeup of the antique box in the photo.

(MIKE O.S.)

December twentieth?

INT. GABRIELA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mike hands the antique photo to Gabriela and Alejandro. They both study it.

MIKE

I have a plan.

His two friends look at each other and smile.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I'll work with Alejandro until the twentieth of December, then go to Wyoming and find the box. A Chinese philosopher owned it.

ALEJANDRO

(in Spanish)

"The Search for the Philosopher's Box." A great quest! A fortune in gold!

MIKE

I don't know about 'fortune.' It's a pretty box. It reminds me of dad. I haven't been to Wyoming since Mom bought a headstone.

GABRIELA

What will you do if you find it?

MIKE

Probably sell it. Use the money somehow. That's what dad would do.
(recollects)
It had a wonderful smell. Wood. Tobacco.

ALEJANDRO

Who is the philosopher?

MIKE

(mispronounces)
A disciple of Zhu Xi.

ALEJANDRO

(corrects him)

'Zhu Xi.'

Mike and Gabriela give him a look of astonishment.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)

I substituted in Chinese last year.

GABRIELA

Where did your dad get it?

MIKE

A Chinese industrialist gave it to him for sponsoring his son's internship.

GABRIELA

And if you don't find the box?

MIKE

Teach. Give accordion lessons.

GABRIELA

They're hiring for the spring at the high school, but I'll warn you. They've made a lot of changes since you taught last.

EXT. JOHN WAYNE SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS - DAY

School buses slowly drive into unloading docks.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

MR. REYNOLDS(50s), the principal, a fidgety, misplaced accountant, removes his glasses, and folds them neatly on his desk. He has several stacks of comic books on the desk in front of him that draw Mike's attention.

MR. REYNOLDS

I'm Mr. Reynolds, the new principal. Mrs. Johnson was let go.

MIKE

Did she win too many awards?

MR. REYNOLDS

All staff will be asked to comply with the legislature's educational guidelines as we transition to a charter school. She chose not to.

MIKE

What are the history guidelines?

Mr. Reynolds lifts five comic books labeled, 'World History,' and plops them in front of Mike.

MR. REYNOLDS

World history will emphasize how God's blessings and riches have blossomed in our capitalist garden.

MIKE

Heavens.

The principal then drops two comic books labeled 'Texas History.'

MR. REYNOLDS
Texas history will emphasize the
inspired role our Anglo forefathers
played in the Texas Miracle.

MIKE
Slavery?

MR. REYNOLDS
We will emphasize that those people
were more like 'indentured
servants,' and were taught helpful
life skills.

MIKE
Native peoples?

MR. REYNOLDS
People awaiting enlightenment.

MIKE
Hispanics?

MR. REYNOLDS
If documented, Christian
contributors to the miracle.

MIKE
Do you have an educational
background?

MR. REYNOLDS
My wife does. Because you're an
award winner we are willing to
offer you a probationary position
for this spring.

MIKE
If...?

MR. REYNOLDS
You sign this loyalty and
compliance agreement.

MIKE
As tempting as that is...

Mike stands, and walks out.

EXT. JOHN WAYNE SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS - DAY

Mike exits the school, and walks toward the parking lot just
as a beat-up truck swerves into view.

Two wheels come up over the curb as the truck THUNKS to a stop in front of Mike.

Alejandro rushes to console Mike with a hug.

ALEJANDRO
Gabriela knew you'd need a ride
after your rejection.

Mike sings a persuasive imitation of Hank Williams Jr..

MIKE
"I got a shotgun, a rifle and a
four-wheel drive. And a country boy
can survive. Country folks can
survive."

Several students walking by LAUGH at Mike's outburst.

ALEJANDRO
I'm not familiar with that song,
but your country is much more
sophisticated than Mexico.

MIKE
Have I hit bottom yet?

Alejandro lifts both hands to weigh the scales of universal fortune. One arm falls lower than the other.

ALEJANDRO
No. I would say, no.

INT. TEXAS EMPLOYMENT CENTER - DAY

Gabriela affectionately considers her two achievement-challenged clowns, Mike and Alejandro, from behind her desk in the crowded center.

GABRIELA
We need to establish a temporary
employment path for each of you.
This is problematic because you
both have serious issues with
employers.

To the amusement of onlookers, the two seated child-men pulverize, butt, kung fu and noogie imaginary bosses.

Gabriela calmly raises her hand for them to cease their antics. Her grin suggests she enjoys this standard silliness.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Now that the pandemic is over we have a broad array of options.

(to Alejandro)

You need interim jobs to promote empathy before law school elitism defines you.

(to Mike)

He can be a little snooty.

MIKE

She's good.

GABRIELA

(to Mike)

You are on some quixotic spiritual quest. I don't have any current openings for shamans, zen accordion masters, or knight errants.

ALEJANDRO

(to Mike)

Knight errants! She's really good.

GABRIELA

The gods be willing - Alejandro, Marie and I are going to law school next fall. Assuming you do find the box, what is your dream?

MIKE

Good question.

ALEJANDRO

You could marry Marie!

Gabriela looks surprised at this pronouncement. She studies Mike, who is embarrassed at his friend's lack of discretion.

She critically appraises the two, then scrolls through some papers, and hands them a job description.

GABRIELA

Mike, being from Wyoming, will be a natural feeding cattle, while you, My Beloved, will thrive on the dramatic potentialities.

Mike and Alejandro turn to leave.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Don't forget your recording session with Jerry, and this week you're helping out at the antique store.

ALEJANDRO

Isn't he in trouble with the
authorities?

GABRIELA

Not your problem. It's just for a
day, and he pays well. Besides,
Mike can get his father's box
appraised.

Mike perks up.

Gabriela watches Mike exit, then considers Alejandro's
pronouncement with a smile.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Marie.

INT. INTERIOR NEW TRUCK - DAY

Mike drives a pickup loaded with hay. Alejandro rides
shotgun. Mike halts at a four-way stop.

MIKE

Can you ride a horse?

ALEJANDRO

I don't think I should.

Mike gives him a look, but doesn't pursue the question.

MIKE

We finished with an hour to spare.
We could be cowboys. If we rode.

Mike pulls out into traffic.

A truck barrels through the stop sign, and ploughs into them.

The DRIVER, in a cowboy hat, waves his beer at them, backs
up, then speeds off without exchanging information.

Mike attempts to open the door, then gives up.

ALEJANDRO

Are you alright?

MIKE

Yes. How do we explain this?

ALEJANDRO

He'll understand, or he won't.
Either way, I will be a great
lawyer. While you...?

MIKE

You are a snoot.

ALEJANDRO

We can always tell his wife, then
skulk away. No, let's visit the
bulls one last time.

EXT. TEXAS RANCH - DAY

PEDRO, an enormous old bull, stares at the camera and snorts steam on the frosty day. As Pedro moves his jowls, Mike and Alejandro (O.S.) NARRATE his tragedy. Mike speaks with a Spanish accent.

PEDRO (MIKE O.S.)

I'm sorry, Lucy, but I am
preoccupied with mortality themes
today. I can't perform up to my
usual magnificent standard, but I
do love you.

LUCY, an apparently fetching cow to Pedro, turns her head toward him.

LUCY (ALEJANDRO O.S.)

Oh, Pedro! I love you too, but I
want to have a calf this spring.
You have not, you know, been
yourself for some time.

BILLY, a rambunctious, young bull, agitates nearby behind an open gate.

BILLY (MIKE O.S.)

Let me loose, Goose! I can relieve
your desperate longing for union.

Pedro looks at Billy, GRUNTS in annoyance, then charges at him until he retreats.

Pedro approaches Lucy, but doesn't mount her. Instead he turns and walks toward the pasture alone.

PEDRO (MIKE O.S.)

I must hide my head in shame.

Lucy innocently turns toward Billy.

LUCY (ALEJANDRO O.S.)
 Billy, do you have any plans for
 today?

BILLY (MIKE O.S.)
 Whoa! Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!

Billy practically knocks over the fence separating them as he hops over towards her, and through the gate.

Alejandro and Mike both turn away from the bulls. Bundled up for the cold, they've been narrating the drama from behind a fence.

ALEJANDRO
 (frowns)
 I noticed you used a Spanish accent
 for Pedro. Very amusing.

Mike grins, then stares at him.

Alejandro wears over-the-top, gaucho-inspired, winter apparel.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
 What?

MIKE
 Your gaucho ensemble is very
 dashing.

ALEJANDRO
 Thank you.

Mike sighs.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
 (in Spanish)
 What's up?

MIKE
 The precarious balance between the
 forces of life and death have been
 disrupted with the loss of Pedro's
 sexual powers.

ALEJANDRO
 So you think it's time for us to
 saddle up, and mosey down the
 trail?

Mike seems distracted.

MIKE

Do you think I'm a pathetic excuse
for a man?

ALEJANDRO

I suspect we both are.

An outraged FOREMAN (50s) approaches with an ICE official.

Mike, on alert, removes his phone to video the exchange.

FOREMAN

What the hell happened to my truck?

ALEJANDRO

We told your wife about the
unfortunate accident, and gave a
statement to the insurance company.

FOREMAN

She doesn't believe you.

The foreman looks at the two slackers, then at the bulls. He
looks back at Alejandro a second time, then shakes his head.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

Get your pay, and get out!
(to the official)
Check his credentials.

Alejandro glowers at the foreman as Mike videos.

ALEJANDRO

No. I'm a citizen. Expect a visit
from my attorney. I have one or two
rights.

The foreman and official freeze. They exchange a look of
reconsideration, then step aside as Mike and Alejandro exit.

Mike makes a point of slowing to take closeups of both
oppressors.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO ONE - DAY

FORTY SECOND SKANDALS, a ska group with six male and female
members, LEAD VOCALIST (30s) out front, thrashes and BANGS
out, "I'm not a Fireman."

Mike accompanies them with dramatic accordion licks.

LEAD VOCALIST

(singing)

I'm not a fireman. I can't stop you
from burning. I'm not a fireman. I
can't stop you from burning.

(plaintive cry)

I'm not a fireman. No, I'm not a
fireman.

INT. CONSOLE ROOM - DAY

JERRY NORTH(65), a cute Black engineer in a pork-pie hat,
mixes the band's music on a console in the funky room with
worn Christmas remnants on the walls.

Alejandro, still in gaucho attire, bobs to the beat alongside
Jerry. The band can be seen through the studio window.

JORGE SALAZAR (50), an impeccably attired bully in black with
a gorgeous necktie, watches the band with growing
displeasure.

The song CLANGS to an end. The musicians wander out of view.

Mike emerges from studio one with his accordion. He takes
note of Jorge's scowl.

MIKE

Great song.

Jorge looks skeptically at Mike.

Mike sizes Jorge up, then nods toward his fancy tie.

MIKE (CONT'D)

A seven-fold?

Jorge nods as if impressed.

Mike mimics making a tie with his hands.

MIKE (CONT'D)

(in Spanish)

One perfect piece of silk folded
precisely seven times, then tied
with an elegant knot. Beautiful.

Jorge looks toward the band, then back at Mike.

JORGE

You like that song?

MIKE

It's a classic for the sensitive modern male.

JORGE

Modern male?

MIKE

He's saying that in this perplexing modern world he's not macho, not a hero, not a fireman. He's just a frightened kid in love.

(to Jerry)

Raise the vocal levels.

Jorge appears intrigued with the critique. He starts toward studio one.

JORGE

(to Jerry)

Alright, one more.

Jorge exits. Mike follows him.

ALEJANDRO

Where did you learn about ties?

MIKE

My father gave me one.

JERRY

Thank you, Mike. You should be a producer.

The band begins the song again, and Jerry mixes.

Alejandro mimics taking Jorge's head in a headlock, and bashing it with his fist.

ALEJANDRO

I'd like to pop his head like a melon!

JERRY

Shh!

ALEJANDRO

You don't need to work with that pompous asshole.

JERRY

If he doesn't pay for the sessions I can't pay my mortgage, so behave yourself.

Alejandro raises his hand to touch Jerry's bolo tie, and Jerry slaps it.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO TWO - DAY

Alejandro and Mike share a microphone and script as they record a commercial in an outrageous, over-the-top Spanish.

Jerry works at the console on the other side of the window in the next room.

ALEJANDRO

My friend! This is a once in a lifetime opportunity!

MIKE

Tell me more!

ALEJANDRO

Deals like this you have never seen! Cars of thrusting, awesome power and beauty!

MIKE

And the women?

ALEJANDRO

The women will swoon with desire for you and the car!

MIKE

Where can I buy such a car?

ALEJANDRO

Manuel's Used Cars on Lamar.

MIKE

Manuel's.

ALEJANDRO

These cars are hot, hot, hot!

Jerry gestures "thumbs up" through the window.

INT. CONSOLE ROOM - DAY

Mike and Alejandro join Jerry.

Jerry sighs as he pays them a pittance for their work. They both look disappointed, but attempt to smile.

JERRY

I'm sorry.

The five members of the band wait their turn to shake hands or hug Jerry on their way out.

Mike and Alejandro both look at Jerry with respect and affection.

Marie, looking very fetching, enters with a guitar.

MARIE

Hi, guys.

Mike smiles, then Danny enters behind her with his fiddle, and subtly asserts his relationship with her.

Mike and Alejandro nod and exit.

INT. TEXAS EMPLOYMENT CENTER - NIGHT

Gabriela takes the pathetic wages from Alejandro's hand, then humorously shrugs.

GABRIELA

Jerry needs our support.

Gabriela appraises Alejandro's gaucho outfit with approval.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

(in Spanish)

You're on your own tonight, Mike.

INT. BRIAN'S ANTIQUE STORE - DAY

Mike studies the pictures of his elegant box.

Alejandro approaches with a feather duster, and notes the pictures.

ALEJANDRO

(in Spanish)

Beautiful.

A NOISE at the back of the store draws their attention.

Two very suspicious, heavily TATTOOED MEN clumsily move large boxes. They both look nervously up, then disappear behind the shelves.

Mike and Alejandro, burgeoning detectives, share a look of intrigue.

BRIAN (50), a sophisticate with a hint of larceny, peeks out from behind a wall.

BRIAN
Mike, your box will bring a
substantial price from a reputable
dealer.

Alejandro slightly recoils at the word 'reputable.'

MIKE
Thank you.

BRIAN
Do you know if it has a marking
inside it?

MIKE
It does. My Dad showed me.

BRIAN
Better yet.

MIKE
How much?

BRIAN
Let me ask around.

MIKE
Where's Kyle?

BRIAN
He got detained.

MIKE
"Detained?"

BRIAN
Did I say, "detained?" I meant
"delayed."

The men in back drop something with a LOUD CRASH (O.S.).

Brian smiles, then nonchalantly moves away to inspect.

Suspicious, Mike and Alejandro observe him as he moves toward the back of the room. TIRES SCREECH (O.S.).

They turn toward the front window.

FOUR AUSTIN POLICE OFFICERS, accompanied by TWO ICE thugs, crash through the front door.

OFFICER ROBINSON (40s), an easy-going, Black facilitator, politely holds up a warrant for Mike to see.

OFFICER ROBINSON
We have a warrant to search these facilities.

MIKE
For what?

OFFICER ROBINSON
Narcotics.

ALEJANDRO
Gabriela was right!

OFFICER ROBINSON
About what?

ALEJANDRO
She made me watch a rerun about an antique store that smuggled drugs.

OFFICER ROBINSON
Top Cops! That gave us the idea. They had top dogs sniffing out drugs.

ALEJANDRO
Five dogs.

OFFICER ROBINSON
You're right. Five top dogs.

MIKE
Where are your top dogs?

OFFICER ROBINSON
(laughs)
Getting wormed.

OFFICER CISNEROS (40s), a rotund, easy-going public servant, approaches.

OFFICER CISNEROS
Officer Robinson, did you read them their rights?

ALEJANDRO
My children go to Sacred Heart!

OFFICER CISNEROS
My wife teaches at Sacred Heart!
Rosa Cisneros?

ALEJANDRO

She taught my daughter, Laura
Alvarez.

OFFICER CISNEROS

Really?

(to Mike)

I know you! Cinco de Mayo.

Officer Cisneros suddenly begins to sing 'Somos Novios' (It's Impossible) by Armando Manzanero in Spanish, and pretends to play an accordion.

OFFICER CISNEROS (CONT'D)

(sings)

"Somos Novios..."

Mike, Alejandro, and Officer Robinson HARMONIZE with him.

OFFICER SESSIONS (60s), an uptight Anglo, approaches in a huff.

OFFICER SESSIONS

What the hell's going on?

OFFICER CISNEROS

His daughter, Laura, goes to Sacred
Heart, and he plays accordion.

(to Mike)

You're really good.

OFFICER SESSIONS

Shut up!

Just then four police dogs BURST through the door dragging
TWO more POLICEMEN.

The dogs HOWL, and tear up the store. Chaos.

Mike's PHONE RINGS. He attempts to hear through the din.

MIKE

What...?

Mike listens, then looks crestfallen.

EXT. BUSY AUSTIN STREET - DAY

Mike stands by his rusted, blue Ford Festiva, which he
lovingly pats on the hood.

MIKE

I'm sorry, old friend. I forgot to fill your tank, and I know your motor needs work. We'll add a radio when we do.

(reflects)

No. No radio.

A glowing Cadillac Escalade screeches to a halt in front of him.

ALICE SMITH (40s), a well-healed martinet, gets out, grabs a can of gasoline from the back, then marches on Mike with a fury. Her hair is hacked off in what is either a classic 'penitent' look, or a fashion statement gone wrong.

ALICE

This is the last time I'm putting up with your crap. You can't even put gas in your tank.

MIKE

Mom's been rushed to the hospital. I had no one else to call.

ALICE

I'm sorry. Is it serious?

MIKE

Yes.

Mike takes the can from her, and pours it in the car.

ALICE

Are you going back to teaching?

MIKE

No, it's under new political management.

ALICE

It's a wonder you taught as long as you did with your lack of computer skills, and your inability to discipline anyone.

MIKE

Henry turned out alright.

Mike can't take his eyes off her alarming hair cut.

ALICE

What?

MIKE
Your hair is dramatic.

ALICE
Thank you.

MIKE
My students had me take a DNA test to explain my ineptitude with computers. It turns out I have a very high Neanderthal quotient.

ALICE
Amazing.

MIKE
You know, recent studies say they were a very soulful, creative people. They did score low on computer skills.

Alice looks at the slumped, pitiful being before her, and softens.

ALICE
I was going to call you.

Mike sets the can down, anticipating bad news.

ALICE (CONT'D)
I'm getting married.

MIKE
Isn't that bigamy?

ALICE
Sign the papers.

MIKE
Why didn't we have more children?

ALICE
You were lucky we had one.
(softens)
You were a good dad.

Alice picks up the can.

ALICE (CONT'D)
Did I ever apologize?

Mike shakes his head 'no,' then waits for her apology. And waits.

ALICE (CONT'D)

When are you moving out of the house? I want to sell it.

MIKE

Spring. You could give it to Henry when he moves back.

ALICE

Henry's not moving back.

She abruptly leaves.

Mike watches her get in the car, and drive out of his life.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A NURSE (40) tends to Martha's infusion as Mike enters the room. Martha looks very fragile.

The nurse finishes.

NURSE

She had a bad fall, but she's surprisingly very clear tonight.

Martha startles. She looks over at Mike, then scrunches up her nose at the gasoline smell.

She lowers her oxygen mask slightly each time she talks.

MARTHA

What have you done?

MIKE

I spilled gasoline.

MARTHA

Are you working?

Mike starts to remove the certificate from his pocket, then doesn't bother.

MIKE

No. I didn't get a teaching contract for next year.

Martha studies him.

MARTHA

I'm sorry, I'll bet you're a good teacher.

Mike's taken aback by her praise.

MIKE

I think I am. My kids all stayed in school, got jobs, went to college, or the military. They write me nice letters.

MARTHA

How's your family?

MIKE

Good.

MARTHA

Paris. Henry.

MIKE

Yes.

MARTHA

Good for him. And um... your wife?

MIKE

Alice. She just asked me for a divorce. She's met someone more deserving of her boundless ambition.

Martha gives Mike a very complex look. It starts negative, probably about the divorce, then she frowns as she looks at his apparel, then ultimately, she settles on sympathy.

MARTHA

I think you were a good husband and father.

MIKE

(surprised)

Thank you. I hope I was a good son.

Martha fidgets with the flowers in a nearby vase. She's obviously forgotten the flow.

MARTHA

In my school in Boston all the girls were told to marry young, have lots of babies, clean house, and shut up.

Martha pulls out a daisy and studies it.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I held off domestic bliss for a few years while your dad served in the army. I loved Paris. London. Seeing my family in Ireland.

(wistful)

Nobody gets what they want in life.

MIKE

What did you want, Mom?

MARTHA

(big smile)

To be governor.

They both laugh.

MIKE

You would have been a great governor.

MARTHA

I would.

She looks at Mike with genuine affection.

The nurse comes in, and gestures for Mike to step outside for a minute.

MIKE

Can I bring you anything, Mom?

MARTHA

I'm fine.

Mike starts toward the door.

MIKE

I'll go get my accordion, and play you some Irish classics.

Martha grins, and for the first time we see two big, beautiful dimples. Her eyes twinkle. This woman once dazzled the boys.

Martha speaks in a very soft, tentative voice.

MARTHA

I love you.

Mike looks stunned.

MIKE

I love you too, Mom!

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mike talks on SKYPE with HENRY REILLY (20), a mop-haired, Mike clone with glasses, who's eating pastry in a PARIS BOULANGERIE where it's morning. INTERCUT WITH HENRY.

HENRY

I'm sorry I missed Thanksgiving,
Dad. Mom'll be here for Christmas.

MIKE

I just saw her. She didn't say a
thing. Just asked for the divorce
papers, and drove off.

HENRY

They're staying through the spring.

MIKE

They?

HENRY

She and Bob.

MIKE

She hated Paris. Is he loaded?

HENRY

Big time. I'm going to call him
'Dad,' and fawn all over him. How's
Grandma?

MIKE

Not well. She fell. I'm at the
hospital. I'll let you know.

HENRY

I called her last night. I spoke
French. Grandma loved it. She
sounded like her old self.

MIKE

That's why she was talking about
Paris. How's the internship?

HENRY

Great. I think they want me to stay
on. Look where I am, Dad.

Henry moves his phone to show the interior. Several French bakers wave at the camera.

Henry scrolls the camera over a large, dotted map of Paris on the wall behind the counter.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Your food map. They kept it! They think you'll be in the Pantheon. You sampled every pastry in the bakery. They love you.

MIKE

Say hello for me. That was your grandfather's last gift to us - a trip to Paris. Your grandmother went berserk when she heard.

Henry bites into a pastry.

HENRY

(in French)

Macaroon, Papa! Raspberry! And Coconut!

(in English)

I don't know how to say, 'are you growing your beard out again?'

MIKE

Gabriela's looking for Santa gigs for me.

HENRY

In your honor I'm learning the name of every pastry in Paris.

A DOCTOR rushes past Mike in the hallway.

Mike glances after her, concerned.

MIKE

I have to go, Henry. I'll call you back. Love you.

HENRY

Sorry I'm not coming. Love you, Dad.

Henry hangs up.

The nurse exits Martha's room, and approaches Mike with a very sad expression.

EXT. TOWN LAKE BENCH AUSTIN - DAY

Mike sits alone playing 'I'll take you home again, Kathleen' on his accordion.

Boaters row past in the background. Autumn-like weather. Joggers in summer apparel run past him on the park trail.

A young COUPLE stops to listen for a moment. Not seeing a cup, they place a dollar on the end of the bench under a rock.

Mike continues to play.

INT. ALEJANDRO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Mike, with tears in his eyes, sits dazed in a chair with RAUL (3), a mini Alejandro, on his lap. Raul pats Mike's hand while Gabriele lovingly tidies his now white beard.

Alejandro brings a tray with tea and cookies.

Raul immediately takes a cookie and dips it into Mike's tea with a splash. Mike laughs.

INT. SAINT PATRICK'S CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Mike sits in a pew with Alejandro, Gabriela, LAURA (8), their awkward, lanky daughter, and Raul, who bounces on dad. Marie and Jerry sit in a row behind them.

Mike's disheveled suit is rescued by a beautiful, seven-fold tie.

EIGHT HOMELESS PEOPLE converse in two nearby rows as they assess their surroundings.

Theresa storms up the center aisle, and makes an exaggerated display of looking for the coffin.

She reaches Mike's pew, and nods to Mike's friends.

THERESA
Where's my mother?

Mike stands, and gestures for her to speak softer.

MIKE
She was cremated.

THERESA
What! She's a devout Catholic.
She'd never agree to that. Why
didn't you call me?

MIKE
I did call you. You didn't answer.

THERESA

I thought you were calling for money. By the way, she didn't leave you any.

MIKE

I left a message.

THERESA

She would hate this. Where are her friends? Did you write an obituary?

MIKE

Yes. She was old, and didn't have many friends. Any friends.

THERESA

Where are her remains?

MIKE

At the urn garden. She said she'd never go back to Wyoming.

THERESA

I see Alice isn't here, or Henry.

Theresa apparently recognizes Mike's tie, but doesn't comment.

MIKE

Where's your husband?

THERESA

Making money.

Theresa reaches into her purse.

THERESA (CONT'D)

She left you something.

She hands Mike a rosary.

THERESA (CONT'D)

She said she hopes you find your way back into the flock.

Mike looks at the rosary.

THERESA (CONT'D)

The layman who sold it to her said it belonged to one of the 'pre-ecumenical popes,' and it has miraculous powers.

MIKE

I thought The Church outlawed that sales pitch in the Middle Ages.

They both laugh. She sympathetically appraises her brother's disheveled outfit.

THERESA

Are you working?

MIKE

It's really good to see you, Theresa. Please join me.

Alejandro's family scoots over. Theresa joins Mike at the end of the pew. She checks her watch.

FATHER JUAN (30), a frazzled priest, rushes onto the altar with TWO ALTAR SERVERS, one boy and one girl, struggling to keep up. He gestures for the audience to sit down, and be quiet.

FATHER JUAN

We won't have Mass today, and we won't have an honor guard.

Puzzled, Theresa leans toward Mike.

THERESA

What's he talking about?

MIKE

Apparently the Knights of Columbus are still at the wake.

THERESA

Did she know any of them?

MIKE

I doubt it.

Father Juan looks down at his notes. He futilely attempts to make his expression upbeat.

FATHER JUAN

Martha was angry. No, Martha was ferociously pissed off.

The AUDIENCE TITERS.

Father Juan discards his notes.

FATHER JUAN (CONT'D)

I could never talk to her. She was angry about everything and everyone - especially her husband, her son, and her daughter.

Theresa bristles.

FATHER JUAN (CONT'D)

Personally, I think Mike is delightful. Sorry I couldn't reach you by phone, Theresa.

Father Juan waves at Mike.

FATHER JUAN (CONT'D)

The last time I spoke with Martha she looked me up and down, then asked if there were an 'Irish' priest she could talk to.

CARL (40), the tousled spokesperson for the homeless, approaches Father Juan.

CARL

Are you serving wine today?

FATHER JUAN

Hi, Carl. No, but we'll have some sandwiches in the recreation center after the service.

Carl walks back, and explains the situation to his friends.

Three people get up and leave, Carl and the other four remain.

Father Juan patiently waits for them to resolve their dilemma.

FATHER JUAN (CONT'D)

I was taught to believe God is loving, merciful, and deeply sympathetic to the plight of his people.

(sighs)

These days of endless disease and despair I'm thinking God is really a mystery.

(to Mike)

I hope your mother finds happiness in the next world. I hope we all do, because in this life it's sorely lacking.

The ORGAN begins to play "Happy Trails."

Father Juan gestures 'one minute' to the organist in the balcony, but he is ignored.

FATHER JUAN (CONT'D)
I'm very sorry for your loss.

He blesses the congregation, then speaks over the loud organ.

FATHER JUAN (CONT'D)
Go in peace. Please allow the
family to exit first.

MADGE (60s), the daffy organist, who's inexplicably wearing a cowgirl hat, PLAYS and SINGS "Happy Trails to you."

The perplexed CONGREGATION attempts to follow along.

Father Juan waves to Madge to stop.

FATHER JUAN (CONT'D)
Madge, that's for tomorrow.

Madge is apparently riding alone, far out on a distant prairie. She continues to sing as the congregation departs.

Father Juan shrugs, and walks off the altar.

Alejandro gives Madge a 'thumbs up' before he catches up with Mike.

EXT. SAINT PATRICK CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Mike thanks the priest, then waves goodbye to several of the homeless people.

Alejandro's beat-up truck swerves into view, then stops.

A spectacular mural of a joyful Cesar Chavez eating ice cream now graces the side of the truck.

Alejandro drives. Raul and Laura are packed in the middle. Gabriela sticks her head out the window.

Mike is riveted by the mural.

MIKE
Gabriela, this might be your finest
work.

GABRIELA

I'm trying to inspire Alejandro.
Meet us for barbecue.

Alejandro drives away.

Theresa approaches with two cups of coffee.

THERESA

The squatters won't move out 'till
the twentieth.

MIKE

Why did Mom give it to you?

THERESA

She felt guilty treating me like
her scullery maid. It's not worth
much. Dad literally gave away the
ranch.

MIKE

He was generous.

Theresa looks down at Mike's shabby clothes.

THERESA

It's good you don't have any
pressing needs. Still, maybe you
need a share.

MIKE

Thank you. Why don't we get along
better?

THERESA

You remind me of Dad.

INT. JOE BOB'S BBQ DINING ROOM - DAY

Marie suffers the indignity of serving lunch to EIGHT
babbling SOCIETY WOMEN in the large room.

A frantic WAITER gestures for Marie to join him in the
adjacent room, the cloak room.

WAITER

Marie!

Marie gracefully backs up to the corner.

The waiter points to the ceiling of the cloak room.

A giant rat noses its way out of a hole.

MARIE
(in Spanish)
Oh, my God!

The rat brazenly steps out on the crown molding, and checks out the room.

WAITER
What do we do?

Marie steals a glance at her detested guests.

MARIE
Let it go.
(they both LAUGH)
Get the manager!

The rat blithely strolls toward the corner.

Marie grabs a broom, and SMACKS the wall ahead of the rat. The rat runs back into its hole.

SOCIETY WOMAN ONE (60) glares at Marie.

SOCIETY WOMAN ONE
Could we have some wine!

Marie props the broom near the corner, and grabs the wine bottle from a nearby stand. She pours wine while monitoring the rat's progress.

The rat reemerges from his hole.

Marie grabs the broom just as SOCIETY WOMAN TWO (65) calls to her.

SOCIETY WOMAN TWO
What was in the salad?

Marie backs up against the corner - the broom in her left hand, the wine bottle in her right.

The rat starts toward the dining room.

MARIE
Well, let me see ...

Marie BANGS the broom in front of the rat's path.

The rat grabs the broom with its creepy little fingers and starts chewing.

Marie tugs the broom free.

MARIE (CONT'D)

It has raspberry balsamic
vinaigrette, tomatoes, red onions,
Greek olives, and crumbled
Gorgonzola.

The rat lets go, and backs towards its hole.

The inebriated MANAGER (60) and the waiter bluster into the dining room with a tremendous COMMOTION. The manager drags a pipe wrench the size of a small tree.

MANAGER

Good afternoon, ladies!

SOCIETY WOMAN TWO

Is there a problem?

MANAGER

Just a little plumbing.

Marie steps into the dining room as the manager rushes by her to the cloak room. She nonchalantly clears the women's table while she watches the ceiling.

The women cease their chatter at a LOUD BANGING (O.S.).

The rat comes racing around the corner on the molding.

The manager follows hot on the rat's tail recklessly SMASHING the ceiling as he goes.

SOCIETY WOMEN

A rat! Rat!

All hell breaks loose as the WOMEN SCREAM and knock over furniture in their panic to exit.

EXT. JOE BOB'S BBQ PATIO - DAY

Mike and Raul look in the doorway as a large rat scoots under them.

Mike lifts Raul to dissuades him from chasing the rat, then protects him as the women crash past them.

Amused, Alejandro and Gabriela watch the chaos unfold from their table. Their plates are mostly empty.

Marie exits the tavern with her guitar in one hand, and a bottle of wine in the other. She joins Alejandro and Gabriela.

Marie takes a deep slug of wine from the bottle, then lifts her guitar, and sings in a lovely voice as Mike and Raul rejoin the group.

MARIE
 (sings in Spanish)
 Senor Rat, thank you for saving me.
 I will gladly join your merry band.

GABRIELA
 Salud! Lunch and entertainment.

MARIE
 Business was just getting back to normal.

Marie lifts her bottle for a toast. They all join her.

MARIE (CONT'D)
 To the Texas Miracle!

GABRIELA
 (in Spanish)
 Health care! Women's rights!
 Housing! Workers' safety!
 Immigration reform! Respect!

MARIE
 (in Spanish)
 No ICE! Clean out the rat's nest!

Everyone laughs. The firebrands give each other a high five.

MARIE (CONT'D)
 Are you guys recording this week?

Alejandro rubs his fingers together in the money gesture, followed by a shrug that he doesn't know.

MIKE
 Marie, what happened to that family from Sudan?

MARIE
 They're still here. We established they're in danger back home. A momentary success.

GABRIELA
 (to Marie)
 Come see me for a job.

MARIE
 (in Spanish)
 Can you take me to San Antonio
 tomorrow? I'm performing a duet
 with my sister at the college.

GABRIELA
 (in Spanish)
 I can't get off.

MIKE
 If I can borrow the truck I'll take
 you. The Festiva's in the shop
 again.

ALEJANDRO
 I want to go.

GABRIELA
 You have the kids.

Alejandro pours apple juice for Raul to toast. He encourages
 Raul to name someone.

ALVIN
 Daniel Tiger!

ALL
 Daniel Tiger!

Everyone CLINKS glasses, then grows silent.

Mike starts to sing Danny Boy with tears in his eyes.

MIKE
 Oh, Danny Boy, the pipes, the pipes
 are calling you...

The others make a lovely effort to join in with a halting
 knowledge of the lyrics.

INT. ALEJANDRO'S TRUCK - DAY

Mike and Marie drive on Interstate 35 South. Both of them are
 eating ice cream cones.

They pass a large sign with San Antonio exits listed.

MARIE

I'm sorry your Festiva is sick.
They're very popular in my
neighborhood.

MIKE

Your community has a great sense of
style.

MARIE

And no money.

They both laugh. She notices the pictures of the antique box
on the seat between them.

MARIE (CONT'D)

What an elegant box. Is it yours?

MIKE

Maybe. I need to go to Wyoming and
find it.

MARIE

Chinese?

MIKE

Ming Dynasty, late seventeenth
century. The wood is Huanghuali.
Yellow flowering pear. Brian
appraised it before his arrest.

MARIE

That was overdue. Well, it's
beautiful. I hope he liked it.

MIKE

He did. It was my father's. He hid
it for me so Theresa wouldn't take
it.

Marie smiles at the intrigue.

MIKE (CONT'D)

She's selling the house so I need
to go up and find it. He kept his
pipes in it so it smells like him.

MARIE

What was he like?

MIKE

Funny. Generous. Enigmatic. A
loner.

(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

He made cookies at Christmas for the whole town, then he'd play his accordion, and everyone would sing door to door.

MARIE

Where was your mother?

MIKE

She was home alone, playing the piano. The secret life of parents. How about your family?

MARIE

My mother adjusted the best she could to dad's life on the road with his band, then he stopped coming home.

MIKE

I quit the band when we had Henry, stayed with him until kindergarten. You can imagine how that improved my resume for Texas employers.

MARIE

How unmanly!

MIKE

Women were the most disturbed.

MARIE

But lucky Henry.

Mike stares out the window, deep in a reverie.

INT. COLLEGE ORCHESTRA CLASS - DAY

ERICA MARTIN (30s), Marie's talented, outgoing sister, finishes a solo cello piece for her CLASS OF THIRTY.

ROSA HERNANDEZ (65), Erica and Marie's humble mother, and CHARLES MARTIN (30s), Erica's serious Black husband, watch the performance from their classroom seats.

The door BANGS open, and Marie and Mike rush in. Marie waves to the students and her family.

MARIE

Sorry, we had to stop for ice cream. This is Mike.

Erica steals a curious look at Mike as he finds a seat, then she announces to the class.

ERICA

This is my sister, Marie. She'll
join me in Beethoven's Sonata in G
Minor for cello and piano.

Marie sits at the piano, and they begin to PLAY a duet.

Inexplicably, Marie begins to joyfully HUM.

Erica smiles, then she also starts to HUM.

Marie abruptly breaks into song.

MARIE

(sings)

He stares out the window and
dreams. Oh, what are his thoughts?

Erica laughs, and plays along.

MARIE (CONT'D)

(sings)

Does he dream of me? I love him so!

Mike and the class appear to love this new approach to the classics.

MARIE (CONT'D)

(sings in Spanish)

I want him! I need him!

(smoldering)

Oh baby, baby, baby! Oh! You
enflame my heart! Oh baby! Oh! My
heart!

Marie finishes with a passionate flourish at the piano and a torrid SIGH.

Mike is enchanted. Everyone else erupts in APPLAUSE.

ERICA

(to class)

Ten minute break to find out what
my sister had to drink, then we'll
actually play the piece.

The class exits laughing.

Charles, with an exaggerated look of disdain, and Rosa join Erica and Marie.

CHARLES

I was going to buy you lunch, but
after that travesty I've changed my
mind.

Erica laughs.

ERICA

(in Spanish)
Bad girl.

MARIE

Perhaps if you played with us again
we'd behave ourselves.

CHARLES

Someone has to make a living.

They all laugh. Marie playfully slugs her brother-in-law on
the arm, then reaches over and straightens her mother's wig.

MARIE

You look beautiful, Mama.

Rosa studies her, then considers Mike favorably.

ROSA

Are you ... ?

Erica interrupts her.

ERICA

Don't get any ideas, Marie. Mom's
staying with us. Move here, you can
have the duplex.

MARIE

That's very appealing. I just lost
my job.

ROSA

I'm hungry. Take me to lunch.
(to Mike)
I love going to restaurants again.

ERICA

After we perform for the students.

Rosa shrugs, takes Mike by the arm and leads him back to
their seats.

INT. ALAMO FOODS - DAY

Mike, with a net for his beard, and a gray apron, works on a 'Summer Fun' display in the prepared foods section.

Alejandro maintains an extensive salad bar across the aisle.

Mike admires his carefully aligned daily specials in his display case.

Team leader RICK (22), an obnoxious, Anglo kiss-ass, stops in front of the case and points. Rick and all of the mid-level leaders wear red aprons.

RICK

Put the chicken in the middle row.
That'd be really cool.

Rick leaves. Mike does as he's told.

Team captain SARAH (26), an Hispanic energizer bunny in an orange apron, races by, giving directions over her shoulder.

SALLY

Potato salad's the special today.
Put it in the middle, refrigerate
the chicken, and get some greenery
for the sides.

Mike does as he's told, just as Rick returns.

RICK

Where's the chicken?

Supervisor BOB (40), the Black Commissar of Foods in a yellow apron, interrupts the discussion.

BOB

Walk through today. Fill this case
with salami and cheese.

RICK

Great idea!

Mike diligently unloads the case from behind. Alejandro peaks over the top.

MIKE

Team leaders. Team captains.
Supervisors. It's like the Soviet
Army. And I don't like gray.

Alejandro affectionately considers his lost friend, then returns to his salad bar.

A moment later he returns.

ALEJANDRO
Whatever happens, we must keep
these indoor jobs. It's too hot.

MIKE
Agreed.

A disoriented WOMAN (65) in a slip and fur coat walks
alongside the bar, sampling. Alejandro sympathetically
approaches her.

ALEJANDRO
Excuse me, you must purchase the
food before you eat it.

WOMAN
This food is swill!

She tosses the plate at his chest, and the salad splashes all
over him.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Swill!

She storms off. To add insult to injury, she flags down a
supervisor, then points at Alejandro.

Alejandro looks over at Mike, who's observing the
interaction.

Mike raises his fist in solidarity.

Alejandro swears under his breath in Spanish.

INT. EMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY

Mike and Alejandro both plead with Gabriela for new jobs.

ALEJANDRO
I was defiled.

MIKE
I was harangued.

GABRIELA
There are no other job openings.
(to Alejandro)
What have you learned so far?

ALEJANDRO

(in Spanish)

Workers are treated like doo-doo,
and can be fired without cause.
Bosses have no soul. None of this
is news.

GABRIELA

(to Mike)

And you?

MIKE

Santa doesn't have a boss. Any
openings?

Gabriela shakes her head, 'No.'

GABRIELA

Not yet. What did you bring home
for dinner?

Alejandro and Mike both frown.

INT. ALAMO FOODS - DAY

Customers, employees, even the Soviet generals seem to be in
a festive mood in their Christmas costumes.

Alejandro and Mike, both dressed as elves, watch
disinterested.

Alejandro's sampling woman returns in autumnal attire. She
begins to sample with impunity, even putting food in her coat
pockets.

Alejandro frowns, but ignores her. He gives Mike the 'c'est
la vie' gesture, then walks across the aisle to join him.

Alejandro carefully scrutinizes Mike's bright white, coiffed
beard.

ALEJANDRO

(in Spanish)

Very compelling. Distinguished.
You're ready for Christmas.

MIKE

Gabriela's mastery. She says I
might be making a seasonal upgrade
soon.

FORTY TEAM PLAYERS gather with BARB (45), the unctuous store manager up near the cash registers. She wears a green cap in addition to her green apron.

BARB

Union organizers have been buzzing around lately.

Barb flutters her fingers like busy little bees.

BARB (CONT'D)

Let's not listen to them. We like our jobs just the way they are.

Alejandro takes off his costume, and turns toward Mike.

Mike had already removed his costume, and is walking away.

INT. ALEJANDRO'S TRUCK - DAY

Alejandro and Mike drive home from work with food splotches on their clothing.

Alejandro stops at a red light in back of a Suburban.

EXT. ALEJANDRO'S TRUCK - DAY

JULIO (30s), a Guatemalan panhandler in a native shirt, approaches the Suburban. Julio carries a plump Vietnamese pig in one arm.

The Anglo OWNER (50s) rolls down his window.

SUV OWNER

Get a job!

Julio turns the pig so that his tail faces the man, then he squeezes the pig slightly around the middle.

The pig lifts its tail, and FARTS at the man on command.

SUV OWNER (CONT'D)

Asshole!

The Suburban SQUEALS around the corner.

Alejandro pulls alongside Julio.

Alejandro gives a bottle of water to Julio, then a treat for the pig.

ALEJANDRO
(in Spanish)
Julio, how are you?

JULIO
(in Spanish)
Good, with God's help.

A menacing, black SUV, with flashing lights, stops nearby.

Julio gives the SUV a look of cosmic resignation.

The light turns green.

INT. ALEJANDRO'S TRUCK - DAY

Alejandro drives through the intersection, watching in his rear-view mirror.

He pulls over to the curb, and he and Mike both look out the rear window.

ALEJANDRO
All immigrants should go on strike
for a month, then they'd see what
fuels the Texas Miracle.

THREE ICE THUGS take Julio and his pig into custody.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
They're going to hassle him, even
though he has his papers!

MIKE
You guys are going to be busy.

ALEJANDRO
So will you.

Mike looks confused.

ALEJANDRO (CONT'D)
Managing the office, teaching night
school. You and Marie handing out
brochures at your gigs.

Alejandro smiles at his friend.

MIKE
I wish.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - NIGHT

Marie sits with Gabriela on the bench observing the sparse CROWD of twenty.

MARIE

I have to go back tonight. I guess
it's good to be working.

Gabriela opens her purse, pops a beer top, then discreetly pours into two paper cups.

GABRIELA

Here.

Laura backs in so her mom can put her hair up in a pony tail for the game. The rest of the TEAM warms up nearby.

Gabriela kisses Laura, and launches her toward the field.

Mike, Alejandro, and Raul approach from the opposite end of the long bench.

Laura kicks a ball near Marie.

MARIE

I'll get it, Laura.

Marie hands her beer to Erica, then lifts the front of her skirt, and forcefully kicks the ball back to Laura.

Marie distracts Mike. She's very beautiful in a white summer dress.

ALEJANDRO

Mike, would you like to officiate?

Mike keeps his eyes on Marie.

MIKE

No, not tonight.

Marie checks the time on her phone.

MARIE

I haven't seen you guys at Jerry's.

MIKE

No ad money. He's shutting down at
the end of the year. What will you
do?

MARIE

Odd jobs in San Antonio, then law school next fall. We all just got accepted today.

MIKE

(stunned)

Congratulations. That's wonderful. They've talked about it. I guess I've been in denial it would ever happen.

MARIE

Got to run.

Mike watches her run off.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - NIGHT

Alejandro and Gabriela look subdued as Mike joins them in the stands, carrying three melting ice cream sandwiches, which he distributes, before he salutes them.

MIKE

I heard. Congratulations. That's wonderful news.

Gabriela looks over at Alejandro.

ALEJANDRO

We start in the fall. Dallas.

MIKE

That's great. And Marie.

Mike raises his sandwich to toast Gabriela.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Your painting worked.

GABRIELA

I'll be a judge, Alejandro and Marie will be immigration and labor attorneys, and you can run our office in San Antonio.

MIKE

You'll be formidable. Are you still going to your folks' this week for the holidays?

ALEJANDRO

Actually, my father isn't doing well. My Mom asked if we could stay with them now through the summer.

MIKE

Oh. That would be good for your parents.

ALEJANDRO

We've got a few things to pack tonight, then we'll put everything else in storage.

MIKE

I'll help you.

GABRIELA

Thank you. I'm sorry we're leaving on such short notice.

(in Spanish)

Shit! I forgot to tell you. They need a Santa at Hank's for a few days.

MIKE

Good. I need repair money for the trip.

The ice cream sandwich melts in Mike's hand.

INT. MIKE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

In the sparsely furnished room, a small trophy topped by an angel holding a victory wreath has a place of honor on a bookshelf.

A small, artificial Christmas tree lights up the room.

Mike signs some formal papers, then tosses them on the floor.

MIKE

Ho. Ho. Ho.

EXT. AUSTIN NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

Mike helps Alejandro and Gabriela load the last of their suitcases into their car.

In the background TWO TRUCKERS load a large cube into the back of their big truck, then climb in and drive away.

Mike hugs Raul and Laura. Each of them tugs on his beard in a goodbye gesture, then climb into the car.

Alejandro and Gabriele emotionally embrace Mike, then quickly hop in the car and drive away.

Mike turns in a slow circle, looking completely disoriented.

He sits down on the curb and sighs.

INT. SANTALAND - DAY

Off to one side of Big Hank's extensive tree warehouse is an impressive Santaland set.

Mike nods his approval as he enters in his new Santa suit.

His white beard is brushed and fluffy. Chairs for children and their families are near Santa's throne.

CINDY (22), a perky college girl, waves to him from the admitting station, her camera at the ready.

FIFTEEN CHILDREN and their families appear before he even gets a chance to sit. It's a diverse group of children who visit Santa, including several in wheelchairs.

CORNELL, a young Black scholar (7), is first in line.

MIKE

Merry Christmas, what's your name?

CORNELL

Cornell. I want a chess program for my computer.

MIKE

Check.

(no response)

That was a chess joke.

CORNELL

I get it.

Mike looks over at Cornell's mother for validation.

She nods.

MIKE

Cornell, do you like cookies?

CORNELL

Gluten free.

Mike points to a goodies table.

MIKE

We have some. Have a very Merry Christmas, Cornell. I'll find a nice chess set for you.

Cornell reaches the table, and selects a cookie. He turns back to Mike with a disarming smile.

CORNELL

Thank you, Santa.

MIKE

You're very welcome, Cornell.

HANK TURNER (65), the grouchy boss, walks over from the sidelines.

HANK

Remember, we're here to sell trees.

Hank scoots the chair closer to Santa.

HANK (CONT'D)

Why don't you have them sit on your lap? We'll sell more pictures.

MIKE

No, it's creepy. Kids don't want to sit on the lap of an old White guy in a strange red suit.

Hank frowns, then lingers to the side.

TOMMY (4), a very shy child, sits down on the chair.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Hi, what's your name?

TOMMY

(inaudible)

Tommy.

Tommy's young DAD (20s) mouths the word 'Tommy' from nearby. He pantomimes playing with a toy car on the floor.

MIKE

Tommy, let me guess what you want for Christmas. Do you like cars?

Tommy is amazed. He enthusiastically nods, 'yes.'

Mike looks over at Hank.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Tommy, do you have a Christmas tree yet?

Satisfied with Mike's effort, Hank leaves.

Tommy sadly shakes his head 'no.'

His dad frowns, opens his hands, 'no money.'

MIKE (CONT'D)

Tommy, let's make a tree for your house.

Mike walks over to a table with piles of odds and ends.

He unrolls four feet of paper, then kneels on the floor with crayons on the opposite side of the plexiglass from Tommy.

MIKE (CONT'D)

What color is the tree?

TOMMY

Green!

MIKE

What a good idea!

Mike draws the tree.

MIKE (CONT'D)

(CONT'D)

What would you like on the tree?

TOMMY

Lights! And ornaments!

Dad applauds, and mouths, 'Thank you.'

Tommy, now also on the floor, confidently directs Mike as they both color the tree.

SALLY BROWN (40), an aggressive Anglo reporter, skirts the new crowd to stand above Mike. She takes his picture.

SALLY

I'm with the newspaper. Do you mind if I watch you?

MIKE

No, I don't mind.

SALLY

Have you been doing this long?

MIKE
About two thousand years.

Sally doesn't laugh.

MIKE (CONT'D)
About twenty years.

SALLY
What do you do on the offseason?

MIKE
I'm a secondary school teacher.

SALLY
What subjects?

MIKE
Music, math, language arts.

SALLY
All?

MIKE
It's a catch-up program.

SALLY
I see. So you like working with
children year round?

MIKE
Kids are great.

A line of children is forming. Hank returns and gestures to speed the process along.

Sally notices, and backs off.

INT. SANTA LAND - DAY

Cindy shows pictures to a woman and girl at the desk in the background. The line is gone.

ROSA (6), a distraught fairy princess, steps forward with big tears in her eyes.

Mike squats down to be at the same level.

MIKE
Hi, what's your name?

ROSA
Rosa.

MIKE

What would you like for Christmas,
Rosa?

ROSA

Will my Mom come back from Germany?

The woman in the line nods 'yes,' then shrugs.

MIKE

Yes, but I don't know how soon,
Rosa. Do you talk to her sometimes?

Rosa nods.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I know she'll try to call you over
the holidays if she can't be here.
Is there something else you'd like?

Rosa shakes her head, 'No.'

MIKE (CONT'D)

I'll do my very best to see that
she gets home as soon as possible.
You are so nice to worry about her.
She must be really special.

Rosa nods.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Do you like cookies?

Cindy waves to Rosa and her companion from the cookie table.
They join her.

Marie enters, tidies her wind-blown hair, then shakes rain
and leaves off her overcoat. She gallantly struggles to hold
it together.

Mike notes her fragile demeanor.

MARIE

I saw the sign, and hoped you'd be
here.

MIKE

Almost not. The Festiva enjoyed a
day off.

They both laugh, as she sits.

MIKE (CONT'D)

However, while being blasted by the elements I recalled a formative story you might enjoy.

Marie gives a supportive smile to continue. Mike brushes several leaves off her hair.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Sister Marie, our four foot tall, ninety-year-old nun, saw that we were daydreaming, and called us all over to the window on a blustery autumn day.

Enchanted, Marie innocently takes Mike's hand.

MIKE (CONT'D)

(as Sister Marie)

"Class, Saint Theresa was walking down a country road on a day just like today. Suddenly a breeze lifted millions of leaves up into the air."

Mike flutters his fingers like cute little leaves.

MIKE (CONT'D)

"As they fell to the earth Saint Theresa had a vision. She saw that the leaves had changed into the souls of the damned falling into hell."

Mike innocently pauses for emphasis.

MIKE (CONT'D)

(as Sister Marie)

"From that moment on she resolved to live a life devoted to God's love. Never forget this lesson, children!"

Marie guffaws, and releases Mike's hand.

MARIE

And you never have!

Smiling, her expression slowly turns reflective, then somber.

MARIE (CONT'D)

My Elena would have loved you.

Mike waits for her to elaborate.

MARIE (CONT'D)
My daughter. Meningitis.

Marie gets tears in her eyes, and Mike produces a napkin. He empathizes with tears of his own.

MARIE (CONT'D)
I miss my baby.

MIKE
I'm sorry. I can't imagine.

MARIE
Holidays.

MIKE
Can I help you?

MARIE
You already have.
(gasps)
My Mama's sick again. Hospice.
What's the point of this
endless...?

Mike shakes his head in sympathy.

They sit in silence for a long while.

MARIE (CONT'D)
I stopped to say goodbye in case I
don't see you before I move to San
Antonio. I'll still play up here
sometimes, but I'll commute to save
money.

MIKE
And we'll see each other once you
start your firm. I'll be your
clerk. Teach night school. We can
have a band together.

MARIE
That would be wonderful. If it
happens. I thought I had enough
saved up, but I'm not sure, now
that Mom's sick again.

Marie remembers something, and touches his arm.

MARIE (CONT'D)

I'm playing several nights at the Cantina and the convention center the next few weeks. If you get a chance to sit in, the pay's good.

MIKE

I'd like that.

Marie gets up to leave.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about your mom. Call if there's any way I can help you. A ride. Moving your stuff. Anything.

MARIE

Thank you, Mike. Have a Merry Christmas.

SANTA

You too, Marie.

They embrace, then Mike watches her leave.

Cindy walks over to him.

CINDY

She's beautiful.

Mike nods.

CINDY (CONT'D)

Have you told her how you feel?

MIKE

No. She's seeing someone, and leaving soon.

CINDY

You should tell her.

(mischievous)

Too bad, I was going to ask you out, but I see I'm too late.

MIKE

You jest, but that's the nicest thing I've heard in years.

Hank enters the Santaland set, and looks around with annoyance.

HANK

You're not doing anything. Help me
move trees when I get back.

INT. MIKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mike scrounges around his belongings looking for something.
Finally he finds a card.

He sits near the tree, and makes a call.

MIKE

Hello, Susan? This is Mike Reilly.

(listens)

Yes, Santa.

(listens)

You do? Thank you.

(listens)

Yes, I'm at Santaland for the
holidays. I wanted to invite you
and Jamal if you're both free, and
say 'Hi.'

(listens)

Really? That's wonderful! A home
for the holidays. That's the best
news I've heard in ages. Well, let
him know I said 'Hi,' and Merry
Christmas.

(listens)

And to you. Please keep in touch.
He's a really special kid.

Mike smiles at the news, sets his accordion case by the door,
sorts through the laundry for a clean shirt, then heads for
the bathroom.

INT. THE CANTINA - NIGHT

Mike walks into the large bar, spruced up in regular guy
clothes, and carrying his accordion.

FIFTY PATRONS mostly ignore the musicians on stage.

Marie, on guitar, spots Mike at the door. She and Danny, her
fiddler, break into 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town.'

Marie waves to Mike to join them.

He takes out his accordion, and jacks up the tempo to
everyone's amusement. Mike is really accomplished.

The audience starts to cheer and dance.

After several minutes of fun and appropriate crowd response the song ends. Marie whispers the next number into Mike's ear. He nods that he knows the song.

Danny sets down his fiddle, and removes a baso sexto from a case.

Marie sings an intro to a very upbeat conjunto tune in Spanish. Many of Marie's songs have a political message.

Mike and Danny crank up an irresistible, upbeat rhythm.

Everyone dances, and the joint jumps.

Mike is very engaging and skillful. He enjoys several solos.

EXT. THE CANTINA - NIGHT

Toward the end of a tune, Marie gestures over to Mike, 'Do you have your Santa hat?'

Mike nods 'yes.'

The song ends. Marie blows kisses to the crowd.

MARIE

(in Spanish)

We love you! We're going to take a short break. We're very fortunate to have a special guest this evening.

Marie gesture for Mike to put on his hat.

Mike obliges, and sets down his accordion.

MARIE (CONT'D)

(in Spanish)

Santa will take several requests. I think he likes beer.

Marie steps off stage with Sammy guiding her, and holding her hand.

Mike notices their interaction.

Several drunk, very attractive ladies approach the stage. One hands him a beer. He toasts them.

Mike sits on the steps.

YOLANDA (20s), inebriated and scantily dressed, promptly sits on Mike's lap, and kisses him on the cheek. They converse in Spanish.

YOLANDA

Santa, my Dad's getting married again. I hate her. I don't want to go to the wedding. What should I do?

MIKE

Go to the wedding, tell your Dad you love him, and wish him the very best. Be gracious to his new wife.

Mike looks back toward Marie and sighs.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Life is too short. You're a beautiful, grown woman. Let him live his life as he chooses.

She stares at him, then kisses him on the mouth.

YOLANDA

Thank you, Santa. What are you doing tonight?

MIKE

I'm sorry, I have plans.

Marie, watching from the wings, frowns when the woman kisses Mike again.

The woman staggers off. Several other women now push toward Mike.

Marie promptly takes the microphone.

MARIE

Let's have some more music.

Mike kisses several of the disappointed women in parting, then retakes his place on stage.

Marie breaks out a raucous tune.

Mike glances at Marie, smiles, then cuts loose as he allows himself to be swept away by the music.

EXT. THE CANTINA - NIGHT

Marie sings a beautiful ballad in Spanish about two lovers.

She starts by smiling at Danny, but as the song goes on she furtively glances at Mike.

Mike notices, but looks confused.

He and the crowd all sway as if mesmerized by her gorgeous voice.

When the song ends Marie, Mike and Danny take a final bow, and prepare to shut down.

The crowd isn't ready to leave.

CROWD
Encore! Encore!

MARIE
What would you like to hear?

In the midst of many rowdy REQUESTS, one song predominates.

CROWD
Roll out the barrel!

Marie and Hank step aside, and Mike takes center stage.

Mike begins with a great Lawrence Welk imitation that only a few old timers in the audience recognize and cheer.

MIKE
Ah one, ah two, ah...
(sings)
"Roll out the barrel, we'll have a
barrel of fun."

A MAN (65) shouts.

MAN
Lawrence Welk!

MIKE
(points at the man)
Yes!
(sings)
"Roll out the barrel, we've got the
blues on the run."

Everyone SINGS along and dances.

EXT. THE CANTINA PATIO - NIGHT

After several minutes, 'Roll Out The Barrel' ends to thunderous applause. Mike, Marie, and Danny all laugh and bow.

CROWD
Encore! Encore!

The band blows kisses to the audience as they shut down.

Mike puts away his accordion, and turns to Marie.

Marie and Danny, in an embrace, are apparently making post gig plans.

Embarrassed, Mike takes off his Santa cap, then waves goodbye.

MIKE
Thanks, guys, it was fun.

Marie hurries over.

MARIE
You have to leave?

MIKE
Yes.

MARIE
Why don't...?

Marie glances over at Danny, who subtly frowns.

MARIE (CONT'D)
I'll be here two more days. That was fun. Come back.

Mike awkwardly leaves the patio. Several people wave to him.

WOMEN
Goodnight, Santa.

He looks back.

Marie is kissing Danny.

INT. MIKE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Despondent, Mike places his accordion in the closet.

He reclines on the couch, and pulls a blanket over his head.

INT. SANTALAND - DAY

Just two families stand in line as Mike enters. JUAN (6), a shy, delicate child, won't look up at Mike. Mike gets down on his knees.

MIKE
Hi, what's your name?

JUAN
Juan.

Juan suddenly stares up at Mike.

MIKE
Juan, how can I help you?

Mike remains on his knees.

JUAN
Will I get to see my Dad this
Christmas?

Mike looks over at Juan's harried, Mexican-American MOM (25).

Mom vehemently mouths the words, "No fucking way!"

MIKE
I don't know, Juan. I can see
you're a very nice boy. What would
you like me to bring you for
Christmas?

JUAN
I'd like a puppy.

Mom shrugs with an exasperated, 'I give in,' expression, followed by a look of 'okay.'

MIKE
I'll do my best, Juan.

JUAN
Thank you, Santa. I love you.

Mike almost cries.

MIKE
I hope you have a wonderful
Christmas, Juan. Take a cookie with
you.

DOTTY (28), a jarring bullhorn for a voice, pushes GRACE (4), her crying, terrified daughter, up toward Mike.

DOTTY

Stand near Santa and smile! Right now! Or you'll be sorry!

Mike gestures for the woman to cool down.

MIKE

Please.

He kneels down, and consoles Grace, then gestures for Cindy to take a quick picture.

Dotty stops yelling, but scowls.

Cindy rushes over, takes a picture, gives a cookie to the little girl, then gestures to the woman she's got the info she needs. Just please go away.

Mike and Cindy, both deflated, shake their heads as the woman leaves.

CINDY

I don't want to do this anymore.

Mike gasps as despair appears to be galloping onto the set.

Jamal enters, accompanied by a severe, very rigid Anglo couple.

Mike immediately recovers, and gives Jamal a hug.

MIKE

Jamal! It's wonderful to see you.

Mike waves to the couple, who don't respond.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Congratulations, Jamal. I'm so happy for you. How...?

JAMAL

Mrs. Moore told me you were here.

MIKE

What would you like this Christmas?

Jamal glances at his new guardians, then makes an unconvincing smile.

JAMAL

A football.

Mike catches the lack of enthusiasm.

MIKE
Anything else?

JAMAL
I'd like to have music lessons.

MIKE
What's your favorite instrument?

JAMAL
Piano, but that's way too
expensive.

The husband taps his watch as he catches Jamal's attention.

MIKE
I'll do the best I can, Jamal.
You've made my day. Have a Merry
Christmas!

Mike smiles at the couple.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Merry Christmas!

Jamal gives Mike a sudden hug.

JAMAL
Thank you, Santa! I love you.

MIKE
I love you too, Jamal.

Jamal and his guardians rush from the room.

Hank barges in, and notices the line has disappeared.

HANK
Santa, get out on the highway, drag
in some people.

MIKE
It's ninety degrees.

HANK
Root, hog, or die!

Mike attempts to decipher Hank's bizarre order as he exits.

EXT. BUSY AUSTIN STREET - DAY

Mike drapes himself against a stop sign in front of Big Hank's Tree Mall. The front of his Santa suit hangs open. He looks like a bum as he waves at cars.

Mike struggles to wipe the deluge of sweat with his t-shirt. His PHONE rings from somewhere inside his suit.

MIKE

Hello?

Mike waits for a response.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I'm out on the highway in my Santa suit soliciting. It's ninety degrees.

Mike breaks into song, Johnny Cash's version of 'Hurt.'

MIKE (CONT'D)

(sings)

"What have I become, my sweetest friend? Everyone I know goes away in end. And you can have it all, my empire of dirt."

(listens)

Yes, Johnny Cash. Please tell me some good news.

(listens)

Yum! I want to be there.

(listens)

What do the children want for Christmas?

(listens)

Got it. Say 'Hi' to your parents.

(reflects)

Alejandro, have I reached bottom yet?

There is a long pause. Mike eventually shakes the phone.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I'll take that as a no.

INT. SANTALAND - DAY

Mike dances onto the set, then twirls. Cindy laughs.

Hank walks in, reading the paper to himself. He glances around the empty warehouse, and frowns.

HANK

(to Mike)

You're a celebrity, for whatever that's worth.

(reads)

"My children love him, and said he's the best Santa ever, but I have to say, this Santa talks to children more than any Santa I've ever seen."

Hank turns to Cindy.

HANK (CONT'D)

What the hell's she trying to say?

Hank looks at Mike with suspicion, then he scans the empty warehouse.

HANK (CONT'D)

Cindy, move up to the cash register. Mike, I'm going to shut 'er down. This isn't working like I planned. Leave the suit.

Hank walks off. Cindy hugs Mike.

CINDY

I'm sorry, Mike. You'll always be my favorite Santa.

MIKE

Thank you, Cindy. It was nice working with you.

Cindy walks toward the cash registers in the distance.

Mike tosses his cap on the table, then removes his Santa suit.

He solemnly brushes it, folds it, then places it on the throne.

Mike reverently pats the suit one last time.

He walks to the open door. A HORN (O.S.) precedes a friendly yell.

VOICE (O.S.)

Merry Christmas!

INT. CONSOLE ROOM - DAY

FOUR MUSICIANS help Jerry pack up his studio as Mike enters. A stack of boxes line the wall near the door.

Mike gives Jerry a hug, nods hello to the musicians.

MIKE
When's the last day?

JERRY
The thirty-first.

MIKE
How bad?

Jerry shows him a bank statement. Mike cringes.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Any other options?

JERRY
No. I've already put a second mortgage on my house.

MIKE
I'm sorry. I wish I...

Jerry interrupts, and gestures it's okay.

JERRY
Where you off to?

MIKE
Wyoming. See the old sod before my sister closes it down.

Mike hugs Jerry again.

EXT. END OF THE TRAIL CEMETERY - DAY

Mike exits his car with a bouquet of flowers, and goes into the office.

INT. CEMETERY OFFICE - DAY

Mike enters, and smiles at EMILY RUIZ(70), in a wheelchair with gorgeous, long white hair.

EMILY
Nice beard. My husband couldn't grow one.

MIKE

Thank you. Beautiful hair.

EMILY

Thank you. How can I help you?

MIKE

I got a call that my mother's urn site was finished. Martha Reilly.

Emily checks the computer and frowns.

EMILY

She doesn't seem to be entered yet. They just put in a new system. Who called you?

MIKE

Amy? Anne? Anne.

EMILY

Anne. She upgraded our system.

MIKE

I hope they didn't send my mom to Wyoming. That would bring down the wrath.

EMILY

Let's find her.

Emily wheels around the counter. Mike opens the door, and out they go.

EXT. CEMETERY GROUNDS - DAY

Mike and Emily scoot through the beautiful grounds at a goodly clip.

Emily stops at a serene section of urn sites along a burbling stream.

MIKE

This is lovely.

They look at all of the inscriptions. No luck.

EMILY

There's another new site, just down this path.

They scurry down the path. Mike's impressed with the scenery along the way.

They arrive at an even prettier site, waterfall and all.

MIKE

She'll like this.

Once again, he and Emily hunt for Martha's urn.

No luck. Mike's expression turns to concern.

Emily notices.

EMILY

Don't worry. We haven't lost her.
There's one more place. I haven't
seen it yet.

They start off down a path. As they wheel, the foliage becomes noticeably sparse.

They cross a dirt road, and arrive at an incomplete circle of ten urn sites on a barren field. Only two sites have markers.

Mike gets out and checks the markers. No luck.

MIKE

Where's my mother?

EMILY

I'm sure she's here. Her payment's
probably gotten delayed or mixed
up. This site will be beautiful
next time you come.

Mike selects one of the unmarked sites, sets down the bouquet, then surveys the wasteland.

MIKE

How much does she owe?

INT. MIKE'S FESTIVA - NIGHT

Mike pulls up to the front of a duplex.

In front of the duplex is a 'For Sale' sign.

He looks out the window, then sighs.

INT. MIKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mike sits in the dark near his disassembled Christmas tree. Bags, boxes, and suitcases are piled by the door. All pictures have been removed from the walls.

SKYPE BUZZES on his laptop, startling him.

INTERCUT with Henry in his Paris apartment.

HENRY

Hello? Dad? Nice beard. I saw you called. Is everything alright?

Mike suddenly seems hesitant to broach a subject.

MIKE

Henry, I'm making plans. I have a question.

HENRY

Sure Dad, what is it?

MIKE

Are you moving to Austin anytime in the near future?

HENRY

I've been meaning to talk with you, Dad.

Mike slumps his shoulders in anticipation of the bad news.

HENRY (CONT'D)

They've asked me to stay on here in Paris.

MIKE

Congratulations! That's fabulous.

HENRY

Dad, what plans are you making?

MIKE

Not sure yet. Trying to decide what to do this spring. I'm sorry you're not coming, but what a great opportunity for you.

HENRY

Are you alright?

MIKE

I'm fine.

HENRY

What will you do for Christmas?

MIKE

Drive up to Wyoming to close the old house.

HENRY

In the Festiva?

MIKE

I'll be fine.

HENRY

Call from the road, Dad. Love you.

MIKE

Love you, too.

After a long interlude, he turns on a small lamp.

Mike thoughtfully polishes the little angel trophy, then slides it into his jacket pocket.

EXT. U.S. HIGHWAY 25 - DAY

Mike's blue Festiva follows a semi truck across the snow-filled plains of Wyoming.

The semi pulls further away as the Festiva begins to smoke along the sides.

INT. MIKE'S FESTIVA - DAY

Mike drives absent-mindedly down the highway. The small angel trophy balances on the dashboard.

A pickup truck pulls alongside him. A COWBOY (20), holding his hat, hangs out the window, and points at Mike's undercarriage.

COWBOY

(muted)

Your car's on fire!

Mike rolls down the window, and waves back.

He smiles at the cowboy's friendliness, and continues to drive.

Smoke suddenly pours out from under the dashboard.

MIKE

Yeooow!

Mike frantically THUMPS off the highway, and turns off the car.

He grabs the trophy, then jumps out with flames practically licking his ankles.

EXT. MIKE'S FESTIVA - DAY

The fire discourages Mike from opening the hood.

He jerks his suitcase, accordion, and bags out the back of the burning hatchback, then slams the hatch shut.

The fire proceeds to eat his car.

Eventually, a SIREN sounds in the distance.

EXT. MIKE'S FESTIVA - DAY

Mike stands near a snowbank in back of the blackened Festiva.

He shivers, too depressed to put on the sweater he recovered from his propped open suitcase.

A HIGHWAY PATROLMAN (40s) approaches, finishing his report.

PATROLMAN

Sir, you don't seem upset for someone whose car just burned up, and was almost killed. Have you been drinking or using drugs?

MIKE

No, but that's not a terrible idea.

PATROLMAN

Aren't you cold?

The patrolman notices the accordion case at Mike's feet as Mike finally puts on his sweater.

PATROLMAN (CONT'D)

You play?

MIKE

Yes.

He considers Mike with a new level of respect.

MIKE (CONT'D)

My Dad used to play at all the Polish weddings here. He taught me.

The policeman fixates on a whale decal on Mike's rear window.

MIKE (CONT'D)

My son's. He was going to join
Greenpeace and save the whales.

PATROLMAN

What's he do now?

MIKE

He works with the World Wildlife
Fund. His grandfather was a forest
ranger here.

PATROLMAN

You might appreciate this. Did you
have to read Walden in school?

Mike smiles sympathetically.

PATROLMAN (CONT'D)

My son's reading it, and having the
same problem I did. He said, "Dad,
why doesn't he just walk up the
road and have dinner with his mom?"

MIKE

Great question. He'd starve or
freeze his ass off out here.

They both laugh.

PATROLMAN

That guy...Thoreau...did say some
interesting things. Something about
people leading lives of quiet ...
despair.

MIKE

'Desperation.'

PATROLMAN

'Desperation.' He got that right.

They both consider the wreckage.

PATROLMAN (CONT'D)

For the last few years everyone's
blamed their depressing life on the
virus, their job, race, politics,
some damned thing or another.

(deep sigh)

Nope.

MIKE

Nope.

PATROLMAN

By the way, Merry Christmas.

MIKE

It's Christmas.

PATROLMAN

Yep. Great day. Took presents to my kids at my ex's. Met the man of the week. Found out my daughter's run off to Utah with a biker. Now instead of Christmas dinner at my mom's....

MIKE

Sorry.

They both look at the burnt heap.

PATROLMAN

I'll give you a lift to Sheridan.

The wind blows snow across the desolate, brown and gray landscape. The two insignificant men stand off to the side.

INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

Mike prepares to turn left into a dark driveway, when a pickup pulls alongside him. It's snowing.

The NEIGHBOR (70), a suspicious old fart, rolls down his window. He scowls once he gets a good look at Mike, with his wild, unkempt hair and long beard.

NEIGHBOR

You the new owner?

MIKE

No, just visiting before it changes hands. My parents built this place.

NEIGHBOR

Just checking. What did you get for it?

MIKE

Don't know.

NEIGHBOR

You don't know?

MIKE

No. My sister sold it.

NEIGHBOR

It must be nice.

The neighbor drives off.

INT. RANCH HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mike enters the dark room with his backpack, sleeping bag and accordion. He sets them down.

He turns on the light. The kitchen area's off to the right, the empty dining area in front of him.

He turns off the light, sits down on the floor, and begins to sing 'Little Town of Bethlehem' with a touching melancholy.

MIKE

"Oh, little town of Bethlehem. How
still we see thee lie. Above Thy
deep and dreamless sleep the silent
stars go by."

Mike removes a small bag of cookies from his backpack, makes a small gesture of reverence toward the room, then eats.

A BLIZZARD RATTLES the room.

Mike gets up, and looks out the window.

Blinding snow pounds against the pane.

He touches the thermostat, but doesn't adjust it.

INT. RANCH HOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mike enters the unlit living room, carrying his accordion. A wall of windows looks out on the blizzard.

Swirling, dancing snowflakes capture random light from the cars passing on the rural road nearby.

Mike faces an empty corner with tears in his eyes.

He sits, raises his accordion, and soulfully plays Debussy's Clair de Lune.

Faint shadows move along the walls.

INT. RANCH HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mike sits on the floor with his sleeping bag wrapped around his shoulders in the dark.

The house sounds haunted with the MOANING, BANGING, and HOWLING of the wind.

Mike shivers. He rolls up the bag, then checks the time on his phone. The lighted phone reveals the devastation on his face.

He sighs, then unrolls the bag.

Mike climbs into the bag, then buries his head deep inside.

A moment later his head pops back out. He turns on his phone light, and scrambles out of the bag.

MIKE

I know where you are!

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

One side of the empty room is all windows. The storm HOWLS.

Mike turns off his phone light as he enters and looks around the dark room.

MIKE

Where you taught me.

He opens the closet doors. A narrow, built-in bookshelf commands one end of the closet.

MIKE (CONT'D)

And where you built me a hiding place.

Mike struggles, but manages to scoot the bookshelf out from the wall. He turns on his phone light again.

Sure enough, there's the box, wrapped in a small rug on the floor in a crawl space.

Mike removes the box, and makes sure there are no other hidden surprises in the hiding place.

He pushes the bookshelf back in place.

He reverentially unwraps the beautiful, reddish-brown antique box, opens it, removes several pipes, inhales, then sighs.

He turns off his light, then cradles the box in his arms and rocks it as he HUMS.

INT. RANCH HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Mike peeks his head out of the bag. Curious at the silence in the empty house, and the brightness. The box sits alongside him.

He checks the time on his phone.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM - DAY

Mike enters the empty room.

He traces his finger on some ancient crayon markings on the wall, smiles, then looks out.

THE BACKYARD

and the valley in the distance are magnificent, blanketed with sparkling snow in the morning sun.

A brilliant red PHEASANT suddenly steps out from behind a sage bush, and struts pompously across the white expanse.

MIKE (O.S.)
Are you crazy?

The pheasant circles in a leisurely pace to survey his kingdom, then walks into a gully, and out of sight.

BACK TO SCENE

Mike looks up to the sky.

MIKE
No hawks!

Mike laughs at the outrageous bird.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Amazing!

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Still smiling, Mike puts some cream in his coffee at the counter.

JANE (18), a cheerful clerk, looks up from cleaning the counter.

JANE
Are you up for the early specials?

MIKE
Yep.

Mike, sits alone in the corner, opens the antique box and gracefully removes the contents of photographs, letters, coins, marbles, and crystals.

Last, he removes a tobacco pipe, smells it with visible distress, then sets it down.

He closes the box, then addresses it with great emotion.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Old friend. You'll bring happiness to some very nice people. You were never meant to belong to me.

He lovingly cleans the empty box with a cloth.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Dad and I would like you to go out into the world and have a great adventure. Perhaps you'll be a gift to a young dreamer. I'll miss you.

Mike kisses the box, and begins to cry. He reaches for his phone, and punches in a number.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Hi, Brian. It's Mike. You mentioned someone might be interested in the box. I found it, and yes, it has the marking. It's beautiful.

Mike listens, then winces.

MIKE (CONT'D)
That's not enough.
(listens)
No. I also did my research.
(listens)
You need to add a zero.
(frowns)
I guess that's fair on short notice. I'll drop it off tomorrow.
(listens)
Good.

Mike checks his text messages on his phone.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 (surprised)
 Susan.

He reads silently, and critically. After consideration he seems pleased.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 Jamal.

Mike checks the time on his phone, then quickly fires off a text.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 Give her a few hours.

He scrolls, drinking his coffee, then smiles in response to an entry.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 Jerry.

A hopeful expression grows on his face as he reads.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 Marie.
 (puzzled)
 Why is he telling me about Marie?
 (mock frown)
 Alejandro!

Mike quickly looks up a phone number, then calls. He waits to leave a message, but she suddenly comes on.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 Oh. Hi, Marie, I'm up in Wyoming.
 Sorry it's so early.
 (listens)
 Jerry told me you're playing the
 Convention Center tomorrow night.
 Can you use an accordion?
 (listens)
 Tomorrow afternoon. Depending on
 flights.
 (listens)
 Good. I love playing with you too.
 (listens)
 What?
 (listens)
 Yes, I found it. It's beautiful.
 Brian's going to buy it.
 (listens)
 (MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

Truckloads! How's your Mom?

(listens)

Good. She'll be comfortable there.

(listens)

How are you doing?

(alarmed)

What is it?

(listens)

I'm sorry. Are you okay?

(listens)

I'm sorry. You've been together
awhile.

(nods)

Yes. Yes.

(listens)

We'll talk tomorrow. I'm really
sorry, I have to go. I need to make
some quick calls if I'm going to
catch a flight.

(listens)

Me, too.

Mike listens for a moment, then appears surprised, puzzled,
then deeply touched.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I love you too, Marie.

Mike clicks off the phone, then attempts to decipher her
parting words.

EXT. SHERIDAN, WYOMING CEMETERY - DAY

Mike wanders among the grandiose monuments in the older, tree-
blessed section. The ground is dusted with snow.

Every now and again he stops to respectfully touch the top of
a stone.

A beautiful stone angel graces a fenced site toward the back
of the section.

Mike stops, and sing-recites an oldie from the sixties.

MIKE

"Look homeward, Angel. Tell me what
you see. Do the folks I used to
know remember me?"

Mike crosses a dirt road to a newer section with only
saplings. The spectacular Big Horn Mountains rise up in the
background.

Most of the sites have beautiful sculptures, or at the least, stones with ornate decorations. The dates on them are recent.

Mike stops in front of a gravesite with a headstone for two names, but only one name carved. He notices with a start, and winces.

The epitaph simply reads, "Thomas Reilly. 1948 - 2018." No cross. No ornamentation.

Mike takes out his small angel trophy from his pocket, and reads the nameplate.

MIKE (CONT'D)

"Dramatic Interpretation. First Place. Buffalo, Wyoming."

He squats down and places the trophy up against the stone.

MIKE (CONT'D)

You were so proud. I love you, Dad.

Tears fill his eyes as he surveys the beautiful setting.

A RAILROAD HORN sounds in the distance, briefly capturing Mike's attention.

Mike kneels down in the snow, kisses the stone, then walks to his white rental car.

EXT. TEXAS TUNES STUDIO AUSTIN - DAY

Mike, still in his haggard beard, walks up to the entrance.

He takes out a checkbook, finds a ledge, quickly writes a check, puts it in an envelope, seals it, writes 'Jerry' on the front, then goes inside.

INT. TEXAS TUNES STUDIO AUSTIN - DAY

Mike hands Jerry the envelope. There is no sound.

Jerry shakes his head, 'no,' and returns the envelope.

Mike gives him the envelope again.

Jerry begrudgingly accepts the money, and they embrace.

INT. AUSTIN CONVENTION CENTER - NIGHT

Mike, now cleanly shaved and spruced up, walks into a cavernous, empty ballroom with tables and chairs surrounding a dance floor.

He sidesteps intermittent DECORATORS and WAITERS for the night's festivities.

Marie sits alone on a bandstand in the corner. Deep in thought. Her equipment surrounds her, still cased.

She positively glows when she sees Mike.

MARIE

Hi, Mike!

MIKE

Hi, Marie.

They embrace, then she takes his hand and they sit. She's a little giddy, and seems very relieved to see him, the way she continuously pats his hand.

MARIE

I drove by your house after you left and saw the "for sale" sign. I was devastated. I thought I might never see you again. Don't ever leave.

MIKE

I won't.

MARIE

I am ... You and I ... feel ... simpatico. Every time I want to share something I think of you. Is that...?

MIKE

I feel the same.

She bursts into tears of happiness, with a hint of surprise.

MARIE

Wonderful!

Marie can't conceal her joy.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Hi.

Mike now has tears in his eyes.

MIKE

Hi.

Mike helps her up, and they very gently kiss.

They both express their amusement and approval at how nice it was.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Aren't we playing? Let's get set up.

MARIE

Where's your accordion?

MIKE

In the rental. I'll get it.

MARIE

Rental?

MIKE

The Festiva had an heroic demise out on the high plains.

Marie smiles at her noble suitor with love and a deep understanding.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Was I the guy looking out the window in your song?

MARIE

Yes, but I didn't know it yet.

Their kiss gently and soulfully realigns the universe.

EXT. BLUEBONNET FOOD PANTRY - NIGHT

Mike, carrying his accordion, and Marie walk into the large, converted department store that's rocking with throngs of people. A crazy diversity.

Help and info booths are everywhere. People arrive carrying large boxes of food and clothing.

Julio feeds his pig in the background.

Carl and his friends stuff food into their pockets and wave.

Jerry is stage managing bands of every ilk.

MIKE

This is my dream.

MARIE

I know we said our law office would be in San Antonio, but it could be in Austin.

They kiss.

MIKE

Good.

A KLEZMER BAND is having a playful duel with an INDIAN BAND, sitar and all, on a makeshift stage. The bands also have a nice diversity, not your usual male overload.

Forty-Second Skandals members enter with Jorge, who practically knocks Jerry over with a bear hug.

JORGE

Fireman's a hit! We're going to be very busy if you can tolerate me.

JERRY

Every day, Jorge.

Jorge kisses Jerry on the cheek.

JORGE

And Mike will produce?

JERRY

Absolutely. He's my partner.

Mike sets down his accordion as the food bank DIRECTOR (60), an elegant Black woman, approaches.

DIRECTOR

How did you do all this on such short notice, Mike?

MIKE

I really didn't do anything. I play softball with the owner of this warehouse, then I just made a few calls. We all know one another. Like one another.

DIRECTOR

Incredible. Our donations are through the roof. Without advertising!

MIKE

Let's do all four seasons.

DIRECTOR

Let's. About time we had holidays for everyone. What should we call it?

MARIE

Harmony.

Mike and the director respond enthusiastically.

BOTH

Harmony!

Families line up at the distribution tables, or bring food. Mike's Sudanese family recognizes him and waves.

Emily wheels in the front door and waves to Mike. She gives him a 'thumbs up.'

MIKE

(to Marie)

She found Mom. Said her plot will be beautiful.

Mike waves back.

Susan approaches Marie and Mike.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Hi, Susan. Do you remember Marie?

SUSAN

Yes, of course. Hi, Marie. I told Jamal you and Mike were coming. He made me wash his favorite shirt.

MIKE

Where is he?

Susan points to a table across the room.

Radiant with joy, Jamal, in a festive shirt, hands out boxes of food to families. Cindy and Clara help nearby.

Marie looks at Jamal, then back at Mike with tears in her eyes.

MARIE

(to Mike)

I remember him. I see why you love him.

SUSAN

This is the best day I've had in a long time.

(to Mike)

The moment I saw you with Jamal I knew you had a special connection.

Susan looks at Mike with a curious expression.

MIKE

He's innocent. Caring. Lovable. He probably has a hard time understanding why people treat each other the way they do.

MARIE

Like you.

Marie takes Mike's hand, then kisses him on the cheek.

MARIE (CONT'D)

What did Henry say about Jamal?

MIKE

He said it's the best idea ever.

MARIE

Did Henry remember me?

MIKE

Yes! He heard you sing at South by Southwest.

(laughs)

I've risen in his estimation.

Marie smiles.

Jamal seems to sense he's being watched, and scans the room until he sees Susan waving. When he sees Mike, he tells Cindy, and excuses himself from the line. Cindy and Clara both wave.

Mike holds up his arms, and starts toward him.

Jamal leaps into Mike's arms, and hugs him.

JAMAL

I knew you were the real Santa.

MIKE

Susan said you can move in with me as soon as you're ready.

JAMAL

Tonight?

They both look at Susan.

SUSAN

Soon. Once Mike gets settled in his new job with Jerry.

They both make a face at Susan, then laugh.

MIKE

I happen to know someone who'll teach you to play piano.

JAMAL

You do?

Mike turns to Marie.

MIKE

Jamal, I'd like you to meet Marie.

Marie takes both of Jamal's hands, and looks into his eyes.

MARIE

Jamal, it's wonderful to meet you. Mike talks about you all the time. I hear you might want to play in our band.

JAMAL

Yes!

Jamal simply can't believe this is all true. He's frozen. Everyone's crying.

He looks at Marie, then Mike, then a smile spreads across his face.

Group hug.

Jerry approaches, and hands Mike his accordion.

JERRY

Time to host your party.

Mike gives Jamal a fist pump, then starts toward the stage.

Several bands move to guard the entrance.

MIKE

What are they doing?

JERRY
Slowing down any uninvited
officials.

Susan points to several other men and women near the door.

Officers Robinson and Cisneros, both in uniform and with their families, wave to Mike.

SUSAN
Your friends, plus I've added a
couple of my lawyer friends.

Musicians crowd in on Mike, and begin to chant.

ALL
Mike! Mike! Mike!

Jerry takes out his phone, and places a call.

Marie gives Mike one last kiss for encouragement, then gently nudges him toward the stage.

Mike plays a long accordion intro to Stevie Wonders' "Love's in Need of Love Today," if permission is given.

Jerry holds up his large-screened phone toward Mike.

ON FACETIME

Alejandro, Gabriela, Laura and Raul, all cheer and toast Mike with cookies.

BACK TO SCENE

Mike blows them a kiss.

Jerry shows the phone to Marie. She points at Mike, then back at herself, then makes silly kisses toward the phone.

ON FACETIME

Gabriela screams with surprise and joy, then explains to Alejandro. He promptly gives an enthusiastic thumbs up.

BACK TO SCENE

Marie gestures she'll call later, waves goodbye to her friends, then gives the phone back to Jerry.

Mike's somewhere over the moon with happiness as he begins to sing. Marie, Jamal, and Jerry join him on stage.

MIKE

(sings)

"Love's in need of love today.
Don't delay, get yours in right
away."

People link arms, sing, and sway.

EXT. AUSTIN STREET - NIGHT

The Bluebonnet Food Pantry displays the only lights on the dark street as people continue to arrive bearing gifts.

FADE OUT.

THE END