

Characters:

Jerome- male; mid-to-late 20's

Kringle- AKA Santa Claus, St. Nicholas; male; ageless figure of legend, he exists only in Jerome's mind; this is not a secret to the audience or a twist.

Time: During the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade

Location: On top of a roof, overlooking the parade, New York City

(LIGHTS UP on the empty roof of a tall building. The sound of music and cheering crowds below. It is a little windy. The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is in full swing. JEROME enters, dressed in a coat, gloves stocking cap, and scarf. He is carrying a rifle, wrapped like a Christmas present. He is either whistling or mumble-singing *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*. He looks around the rooftop, and peers over the ledge. He watches the parade below for a moment and then turns away. He sets down his parcel and begins to unwrap it and set the gun up. The sound of sleigh bells ringing fills the air. KRINGLE enters from offstage, carrying a bag of toys. JEROME glances up and goes back to work.)

KRINGLE

So you're still going through with this, eh, Jerome?

(JEROME doesn't reply, but takes a scope out of his pocket and sets it up on his rifle.)

KRINGLE

What a shame. It looks like it'll be the Naughty List again for you this year.

(JEROME doesn't reply)

KRINGLE

This'll probably put you on the Naughty List for life.

(JEROME doesn't reply)

KRINGLE

I must say, Jerome, I'm very disappointed in you. You used to be such a good boy.

JEROME

Yeah, well, things change, Kringle.

KRINGLE

I suppose they do, don't they? I suppose they do.

(JEROME finishes setting up his gun. He looks through his scope. KRINGLE walks over to the ledge and looks out.)

KRINGLE

Look at that. Woody Woodpecker.

JEROME

Woody Woodpecker? What the hell's Woody Woodpecker doing in the Macy's Day Parade? He wasn't even popular when *I* was young; I doubt any of those kids down there'd even know who he was.

KRINGLE

Well, you know the parade is not just for today's children, my boy. No, this parade is for children of all ages.

JEROME

Shut up.

(Pause.)

KRINGLE

It sure is a cold one today.

(KRINGLE gives an exaggerated shiver)

KRINGLE

How about we forget about this silly scheme of yours, go downstairs, and duck into that little coffee shop around the corner? A cup of hot chocolate sure would hit the spot in this weather. The shop probably isn't too crowded, with everyone standing outside and watching the parade. Yes, a nice cup of hot cocoa sounds wonderful, doesn't it? I remember a little boy that used to

enjoy that. With whipped cream and maybe a little sprinkle of candy cane on top? Doesn't that sound yummy? MmmMmm.

(JEROME doesn't give a response)

KRINGLE

Though, I imagine you'll be putting a little something else in your cocoa, too. A splash or two of vodka, maybe?

(KRINGLE steps closer to JEROME and sniffs.)

KRINGLE

Hmph. Seems like you've already had a few pulls of vodka this morning. It isn't even noon yet. You really shouldn't touch that stuff, Jerome. It's no good for you. It makes you behave badly. And bad behavior gets you nothing but a lump of coal on Christmas morning.

(JEROME looks at his watch and sits down alongside his gun. He pulls out a cigarette, lights it, and starts to smoke. He looks up at KRINGLE. Beat.)

JEROME

You don't got any problem with smoking, do you, Kringle?

KRINGLE

Hmm? Oh, no, no, no. No objections to that. In fact, I think I'll join you for a little puff, if you don't mind.

(KRINGLE sets down his bag of toys. He reaches into his coat pocket and takes out a pipe. He pats himself for a match. After a fruitless search, he speaks.)

KRINGLE

Say, Jerome, my boy. Can I get a light? I seem to have misplaced my...

JEROME

...No.

KRINGLE

Hmph... Well, I guess that's that then. I shouldn't smoke anyway. I guess Santa Claus smoking tobacco in this day and age is akin to Ronald McDonald snorting cocaine off a toilet seat, eh? Kids shouldn't see that sort of thing.

(KRINGLE puts the pipe away.
KRINGLE briefly watches as
JEROME smokes his cigarette.
KRINGLE looks down at the parade.
A version of *Here Comes Santa
Claus* plays in the street below.
Jerome glances down, looks away
and double takes.)

JEROME

Shit! Already?

KRINGLE

Language, language.

(JEROME scrambles to his gun and
takes aim.)

VOICE (*faint, in street below*)

Ho ho ho! Merry Christmas!

(Beat. JEROME angrily gets to his
feet and stomps around.)

KRINGLE

Couldn't take the shot, huh?

(JEROME doesn't answer, but paces
back and forth a moment in
agitation.)

KRINGLE

I knew you wouldn't go through with it, Jerome. I knew that deep down you were...

JEROME

...it wasn't him.

KRINGLE

What?

JEROME

It wasn't him!

KRINGLE

Wasn't him? You saw him. You saw the suit. You heard the "ho ho ho..."

JEROME

...yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm not deaf. And I'm not fucking blind either. It wasn't him!

KRINGLE

Who was it then?

JEROME

Ah, I can't remember his name. He's that one asshole. That actor...

KRINGLE

...Well, wouldn't he do? You want to send a message, after all, and he was dressed like the man, was he not?

JEROME

It wouldn't send a message if I shot *that* guy. If I shot *him*, they'd think I was just some psycho with a bug up his ass over those comments he made about the president or something.

KRINGLE

As opposed to some psycho who decided he should shoot Santa Claus during the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade? Correction: a man *playing* Santa Claus.

(JEROME glares at KRINGLE, then looks out over the ledge and watches the parade. He turns from the ledge and flicks his cigarette away.)

KRINGLE

It won't change anything, you know. If you shot Santa Claus. What you hope will happen won't happen...

JEROME

...Do you know how many people watch this parade, Kringle? Look at 'em all down there. Millions. Millions *more* watching at home! It's an American tradition. They just love the spectacle. They tune in every Thanksgiving and watch Santa Claus, sitting on his chariot like Julius Caesar riding into Rome. And the children just eat it up. They love it. They *believe* it.

KRINGLE

Well, where's the harm in believing in something every now and then?

JEROME

It's believing in a *lie*. And who keeps this lie going, huh? The parents. They feed this cock and bull story to their kids, of some mystical fat guy sliding down chimneys, and giving out presents to children as long as they behave themselves. In this day and age, if a kid can't trust their parents, who the hell *can* they trust, huh? Why do they lie about Santa Claus? What do they have to gain? Why don't they just tell the truth, instead of letting all the kudos go to someone who doesn't even exist? Who never existed.

(Beat.)

JEROME

If millions of people—all those kids, all over the country—see Santa Claus killed—*live*, in New York City, on national television—what do you think that'll do? It would end it. All the lies. Parents will have to sit their kids down and tell them the truth. *He isn't real*. He was *never* real. Christmas will still come. The guy that got killed wasn't Santa Claus. It was just some guy in a costume.

(Beat. KRINGLE shakes his head)

KRINGLE

You used to be such a good boy, Jerome.

JEROME

Yeah! And what did it get me, huh?

(JEROME waits for an answer.
KRINGLE hangs his head. JEROME
looks out at the parade and then
checks his watch.)

JEROME

Looks like we got a little time to kill, so how about I tell you a little story, Kringle?

KRINGLE

A Christmas story?

JEROME (sighing)

Sure. Whatever. A Christmas story. So, the other day, I was working at the mall back home. Got myself a job as a Christmas elf.

(KRINGLE seems amused by this.)

JEROME

Don't read too much into it. It was just a one-time gig. I found it on Craigslist.

KRINGLE

I'm sure you cut quite the figure in that elf costume! Ho ho ho...!

JEROME

...Fuck off, Kringle....

KRINGLE

...Ho ho ho...!

JEROME (*tersely*)

...I needed the money to buy the ticket out here, okay? And they didn't require a background check or drug test. I guess they needed somebody fast, 'cause their regular guy slipped on some ice and injured his back? It's...kinda screwed up, now that I think about it. These "elves" deal with children all day long. They should at least require a list of references or something. They could've hired a real fucking creep and wouldn't even know it until the Amber Alert got issued. All they asked me to do was make sure that I "didn't look like a goddamn hobo and show up on time" and I'd get paid at the end of the day. Hell, they even invited me to come back, but I had to catch a Greyhound.

(JEROME shakes his head, realizing he was getting off track)

JEROME

So yeah, they had some asshole dressed up as Santa Claus, right? The guy really took his job seriously; treated me like he was the one signing my paycheck—kept telling me to smile and not slouch...all that shit—in a very cheerful tone, of course, because he's fucking Santa Claus, right? Guy played it like he was trying to win an Oscar and wasn't just some schmuck at a shitty-ass mall, getting paid whatever to play dress-up. I didn't even know the geezer's real name, 'cause he insisted on being called "Santa" or "Mr. Claus" or "St. Nick" or "Mr. C." if I felt I had to be informal about it. He introduced himself to *me* as Jolly Old St. Nicholas. Heh.

Anyway, we were kept busy. Had a steady stream of kids all day long. I don't remember a lot about it, frankly—it was kind of a blur—but I do remember this one kid. This little blonde girl—had to be about six or seven—she was a dead ringer for Drew Barrymore's character from ET. A real cute kid. She must've waited in line for half an hour. She came up to "Santa" and sat on his lap, and asked for a new bike. And you know what that guy said? He patted her shoulder, looked her in the eye and said, "well, if you're a good little girl, I'll see what I can do." She hugged him, they took a picture, and she skipped on off to her mother, happy as a goddamn clam, thinking that new bike was as good as hers. The nerve of that asshole, right? Making promises like that?

KRINGLE

Ah, but Jerome, he didn't exactly *promise* her that bike, did he?

JEROME

Well, it was as good as a promise, wasn't it? What if that kid does all her chores, helps her mom do the dishes, does her homework...goes above and beyond the call of duty? Then Christmas morning rolls 'round, she runs down to the tree and...where's that fucking bike, huh? That girl's mom and dad may not even be able to afford heat this winter, for all that mall Santa knew, yet he tells her that she might be getting a brand new bicycle!

(JEROME looks out over the ledge.)

JEROME

All those kids down there...standing out in the cold and freezing their asses off: just waiting to see Santa Claus, hoping that maybe they'll catch his eye and he'll give them a smile and a wave—maybe, just maybe, there'll be a special look of recognition. How many of those kids wrote him a letter? Telling him how good they've been all year and how they would really like such-and-such a toy or game or whatever? If they only knew. The postman probably takes all those letters addressed to the North Pole and just tosses them into a dumpster, without a second glance at 'em. It's just a big fucking joke. And their parents are all too happy to keep the joke going on, aren't they?

(Beat.)

KRINGLE

Is that what this is all about, Jerome?

JEROME

Huh?

KRINGLE

Your parents. Is that the real reason you're doing this?