

THE NAUGHTY LIST

A New Play

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CAST

(in order of appearance)

Mrs. C

Plush McGee

Santa

Scene One

As the audience enters they see a festive, holiday-themed house curtain. Houselights fade while the overture is played by an unseen live band. MRS. C enters stage left with purpose and is picked up by a spotlight. She's an attractive, confident woman of a certain age dressed in a fabulous, elegant ensemble in shades of wintry white including a full-length, fur-lined coat and fur Cossack hat. She strides across the stage – obviously on a mission – when she suddenly notices the audience and stops center stage.

MRS. C: *(to the audience)* Oh, hello. You startled me. If you knew where I lived you'd realize how difficult that is to do. Let's just say I'm constantly surrounded by mischief makers. And I do mean, constantly. Surprises are part of my daily existence. Does that sound fun? It's not. *(pause)* I'm not complaining mind you. Actually, I am complaining and there shouldn't be anything wrong with that. See, this is part of the problem. There are so many unspoken rules I have to follow. I feel like I can't be me. I'm not even sure I know who the real me is anymore. I tried online therapy but as soon as the therapists found out who I was all they wanted to do was talk about him; not me. What's he really like? Is he jolly all the time? Who's his favorite reindeer?

Will he put me on the Naughty List if I cheat on my taxes? If I cheat on my diet? Can he really see me when I'm sleeping? (*aside*) Is it just me or is that kind of creepy? (*pause*) I'm done with all of it: baking cookies, wrapping presents, singing carols, wearing red and green. In a way this might mean I'm done with him. I know he's not going to change. I don't even know if it's possible for him to change. I don't think anyone can help me and frankly, I'm scared. Who do you turn to when the person you've always depended on to solve your problems becomes the problem?

Ambient sounds of laughter, glasses clinking, loud conversations begin to be heard.

MRS. C: This guy I'm on my way to see is the only one I can talk to, the only one who can relate to our unique situation. I also know I can trust him not to blab our secrets. Not because he's particularly discreet. He's not. But he understands the sanctity of the job.

The house curtain flies out for the surprising and hilarious reveal that MRS. C has been referencing PLUSH MCGEE a.k.a. The Easter Bunny. PLUSH is leaning against a nightclub bar, nursing a drink, taking a break from performing, dressed in a flashy blazer with his tie untied. The fact that he's a rabbit is accomplished solely through makeup, whiskers, and bunny ears; otherwise he's human in all other respects. MRS. C joins PLUSH at the bar and begins taking off her coat and hat.

PLUSH: (*oozing charm*) I knew you'd be back.

MRS. C: The last time I was here was over fifty years ago. This place was a disco then. You were doing covers of Donna Summers songs.

PLUSH: Looking for some hot stuff baby this evening?

MRS. C: Can't you turn it off? Even for a moment?

PLUSH: I'm a rabbit. Frisky is my business.

MRS. C: How about getting me a drink?

PLUSH: Something warm and frothy?

MRS. C: Something cold and stirred, not shaken.

MRS. C takes a seat on a stool while PLUSH moves behind the bar and makes her a drink. He holds it up to the light; it looks like a glass of water.

PLUSH: Try this. I call it Snowball in July.

PLUSH gives the drink to MRS. C who takes a healthy gulp.

PLUSH: I haven't seen you drink like that since Father Time's Y2K bash.

MRS. C: I'm stressing. I need some advice. Maybe not advice. I need someone to talk to. A sounding board.

PLUSH: I'm all ears.

MRS. C: I'll pretend you didn't say that. (*Beat.*) I'm having problems with him, and you're the only one I know who comes close to understanding what it's like to be him. The pressure. The responsibility. Juggling the public and private personas. Being a legend. Being more than a legend; being a myth. It gets to be too much sometimes and he takes out his frustration on me, but I feel like I shouldn't complain. It's more than that. I feel like I'm not allowed to complain. Maybe I shouldn't. He's kind and generous . . .

PLUSH: Santa's a prick.

MRS. C: How can you say that?

PLUSH: He can be a real jerk sometimes.

MRS. C: Sometimes.

PLUSH: I've known him a lot longer than you.

MRS. C: I know him better.

PLUSH: Do you? I'm not talking about having an acquaintanceship with his wee wee.

MRS. C: You're so crude.

PLUSH: Do you know how he started out? Before all that snow white beard, twinkly eyes, and ho ho ho shit? Jolly old elf, my ass. Best PR that man ever had was Clement Moore making up that Night Before Christmas crap for his kids.

MRS. C: It's one of the most beloved poems of all time.

PLUSH: House/mouse. Cap/nap. Soot/foot. A five year old could write that stuff. "A wink of his eye and a twist of his head soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread." You have something to dread people. Believe me. I'll tell you what you have to dread: him finding you awake and talking to you. You can't shut him up. If I have to hear one more time about how he invented the candy cane or about the time Sinatra invited him to his birthday party.

MRS. C: He has a gregarious nature. He likes to share.

PLUSH: He's a blow hard.

MRS. C: He is not and by the way, I do know how he started out. He was a pagan creature. An imp. He's been around since prehistoric times causing chaos. He used to *scare* children before he got his act together.

PLUSH: You said it, Sweet Cheeks. St. Nick is no saint.

MRS. C: Neither are you.

PLUSH: Yea, but I don't pretend to be.

MRS. C: Yes, you do.

PLUSH: Oh, sure. For the kiddies. That's the job. But I don't pretend to be all goodness and light once the curtain goes down.

MRS. C: He's not perfect. He has flaws.

PLUSH: Look, I feel for the guy. What we do isn't easy. We're both secular icons for religious holidays. Easter and Christmas: these are two big days for Jesus, the fat man, and the rabbit. Nick's got the kid's birthday; I've got him coming back from the

dead. And I tell you what; I got the better gig. Nick can have all that peace on earth good will toward man malarkey. Shining star in the sky. Wise men bringing gifts. How nice is that? Easy peasy. No challenge there. Me -- on the other hand -- I've got to sell a sadistic torture and murder, then zombie Jesus, then "Beam me up, Scotty." It's like someone stuck George Romero, Gene Roddenberry, and Eli Roth in a room and said come up with a holiday. Oh, and throw in some chocolate bunnies, psychedelic hardboiled eggs, and a honey baked ham. God, I love my work.

MRS. C: I'll let you in on a secret. He never liked that poem. He could never get past the part where he was described as having a round belly that shook when he laughed like a bowl full of jelly.

PLUSH: I love that part.

MRS. C: It was the beginning of his modern day image -- the red velvet suit, the beard, the boots -- then Coca Cola stepped in and started using him in their ads without his permission. We're still in a lawsuit with them for copyright infringement. They may have originated a few of his defining features, but they didn't make him up. They don't own him.

PLUSH: Tell me about it. Me and Cadbury. They think by calling it The Cadbury Bunny they can get past intellectual property laws. It's obviously a rip off of me.

MRS. C stares into her drink looking upset.

PLUSH: Hey, he loves you. I know he does.

MRS. C: I know he loves me. I love him. So what? Is love enough?

PLUSH: I love my wife. I don't know what I'd do without her. Not a lot of people know she's a ferret.

MRS. C: Isn't it nice you finally live in a world where you can be open about it?

PLUSH: Oh, hell yea. The stuff going on nowadays. Nobody notices a rabbit and a ferret holding paws. We're devoted to each other, but we've had a lot of problems over the years. For one thing, rabbits aren't known for monogamy. I've got 438 kids.

MRS. C: That's nothing to be proud of.

PLUSH: Just saying the equipment works. It's not just rabbits I'm talking about. You wouldn't believe the women I've been with. Pocahontas. Madame Curie. Oprah. *(aside)* That woman's got some kink in her. *(pause)* What I'm trying to say is my wife and I have had some tough times and some knock down drag out fights, but we always come back to each other because we're connected on some deeper level I don't really understand.

MRS. C: Well, Santa and I don't seem to connect at all anymore. We fight over the smallest things. He takes me entirely for granted. I think he's bored with me and honestly, I'm kind of bored with him.

PLUSH: (*leering*) Really?

MRS. C: Back off, Eveready. Here it is: the first day of December. He used to look forward to the excitement and energy of putting on the show. Now all he does is complain.

PLUSH: Maybe it's time for him to hang up the suit. Permanently.

MRS. C: He can't do that. The world needs Santa Claus.

PLUSH: Then I guess it's up to you.

MRS. C: What do you mean?

PLUSH: As far as I know, you're the only creature – real or imaginary – who holds any sway over him. You're the only one who can keep him going.

MRS. C: So it's still all about him. It's up to me to keep Santa happy. It's up to me to put up with his ego, his neediness, his tantrums. What about me? Who's taking care of me?

PLUSH reaches for MRS. C's hand.

PLUSH: I'm here for you.

MRS. C: Stop it.

PLUSH: Come on, baby. You know what they say: Once you have the rabbit, it becomes a habit.

MRS. C: That's it. You're impossible to talk to.

MRS. C stands to go.

PLUSH: Wait. I didn't mean any disrespect. Come on – stay. I have another set to do then we can pick up where we left off.

MRS. C: I should go.

PLUSH helps MRS. C slip into her coat.

MRS. C: I can't say you've helped me, but in some weird way you've made me feel a little better. You've taken me out of my head for a moment, reminded me there's more to me than just being part of him. I needed that.

MRS. C gives PLUSH a kiss on the cheek and exits. PLUSH bounds to center stage where he's picked up by a spotlight as lights go down on the bar. During his introduction THE BAND is revealed.

PLUSH: *(to the audience)* Thank you, thank you. I've got a great set coming up for you. Some Stevie Wonder. A little Luther – yea, baby, Luther; knew you'd like that. Maybe some Lionel Richie. Nah, I'm messing with you. But before I get into all that, I have another song I'd like to do. I was visiting with a lovely lady during the break. A close, personal friend of mine. She's famous, so famous I'm not even going to tell you who she is because it would blow your minds. I will tell you this much: if you knew who she was you'd think she leads a charmed life, but I'm here to tell you even she has problems. One in particular and it's a big one. I mean, big. In a way, it's a problem we all have this time of year.

PLUSH sings "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." He finishes to applause and exits.

Scene Two

The opulent bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Claus on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. This is the domain of a confident power couple that also happens to be the spirit of one of the most important holidays throughout the world. A bed dominates the set along with a view of a North Pole winter wonderland outside the windows. SANTA and MRS. C were in the middle of a heated discussion before SANTA escaped into the shower. We hear the sound of water running off stage. MRS. C waits for him impatiently. She's dressed casually but with style. Her outfit has no red and green in it.

SANTA: (*belting out "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" offstage*) You better watch out.

You better not cry.

MRS. C: (*shouting in the direction of the bathroom*) Real mature! You think you can hide from me in the shower?

SANTA: (*singing offstage*) You better not pout. I'm telling you why.

MRS. C: You can't stay in there forever. I'll be here when you get out!

SANTA: (*singing offstage*) Santa Claus is coming to town.

MRS. C: Shut up! I hate that song!

The shower turns off. SANTA enters wrapped in a Christmas themed bathrobe wearing a shower cap and a pair of festive slippers.

MRS. C: What kind of man sings songs about himself?

SANTA: The kind of man who has songs written about him.

MRS. C: Did you hear anything I said to you?

SANTA: Is that what you're wearing?

MRS. C: Don't change the subject.

SANTA: You think I haven't noticed the way you've been dressing lately? No red, no green, no glitter.

MRS. C: I'm amazed you've noticed anything at all.

SANTA: It's Christmas Eve.

MRS. C: I know. I've noticed.

SANTA: You always do this right before I have to go to work.

MRS. C: Do what?

SANTA: Make things difficult.

MRS. C: I make things difficult: me? Your wife? It's not the job that has you on edge, or the state of the world, or the elves threatening to form a union ---- which they do every year.

SANTA: I think they're serious this time. (*over his shoulder*) Alexa, play Dean Martin, "Marshmallow World."

MRS. C: Alexa, stop!

Alexa begins playing "Marshmallow World."

MRS. C: Even Alexa ignores me.

SANTA: I know. No one appreciates you. No one hears you.

MRS. C: Stop trivializing my feelings.

SANTA: I'm not trivializing your feelings. I'm ignoring them. (*preening in front of a mirror*) I'm looking good. All my hard work is paying off.

MRS. C: Giving yourself a daily injection is hard work?

SANTA: The shots don't make the weight magically disappear.

MRS. C: That's exactly what they do. In your case they're also making it come off insanely fast. You've lost forty pounds in a month.

SANTA: That's from all the exercising I've been doing.

MRS. C: Let's see you do a push-up.

SANTA gets down on the floor and comically tries to do a push up. He abandons the idea. He picks up his phone and takes a selfie instead.

MRS. C: You're so vain.

SANTA: I'm not vain. I lost the weight for my health.

MRS. C: You don't have to worry about your health. You're going to live forever. I'm the one who's mortal.

SANTA: We don't know about that anymore. You've got to admit something weird is going on. You'll be 392 next month.

MRS. C: Bite your tongue.

SANTA: Stop being so sensitive about your age. They say four hundred is the new three hundred.

MRS. C: Who says that?

SANTA: The elves.

MRS. C: (*disgustedly*) The elves. (*pause*) I've noticed you checking out younger women lately. I saw how excited you got when Cher performed at the Christmas tree lighting.

SANTA: She's not that much younger than you.

MRS. C: You went to her house twice last year.

SANTA: I told you I accidentally put her bedazzled fishnet catsuit under Billy Porter's tree. I had to switch it back.

MRS. C: I'm not stupid.

SANTA: I don't think you're stupid. I think you're neurotic.

SANTA exits to get dressed in an unseen part of the room.

MRS. C: (*shouting after him*) You think I'm neurotic? I'm neurotic? I'm not neurotic! (*to herself*) God, I sound neurotic. (*shouting again*) If I'm neurotic it's because you made me this way. Keeping me cooped up in a winter wonderland. Making me feel insignificant and useless. I could've done something meaningful with my life.

SANTA returns dressed head to toe in red and green; it's not time yet to put on "the suit." He stands for a beat while MRS. C rolls her eyes at the over the top holiday outfit. SANTA picks up his phone again and will continually check it throughout the scene.

SANTA: When I met you in 1632 you were a fair maiden running around Romania being chased by some vampire. How meaningful was your life going to be?

MRS. C: He wasn't *some* vampire. He was *the* vampire. He had quite a reputation. He was very feared.

SANTA: Would you prefer to be a vampire's wife? You think Count What's-His-Name would pay more attention to you than I do?

MRS. C: He never lied to me about who he was. You told me you were a goat herder when I met you.

SANTA: You would've never gone out with me if I told you I was Santa Claus.

MRS. C: You and Zeus slumming with the mortals. At least you didn't turn into a bull or a swan to try and seduce me.

SANTA: You would've loved that.

MRS. C: What's that supposed to mean?

SANTA: You spend a lot of time with the reindeer, babe.

MRS. C: You're disgusting. Can you please stop looking at your phone?

SANTA: I'm trending.

MRS. C: Of course you're trending. It's Christmas Eve and you're Santa Claus.

SANTA: I'm getting more hits than *Wicked*. (*to his phone*) Take that Goldblum.

MRS. C: He can't hear you.

SANTA: I can't find the disco dancer emoji.

MRS. C: (*helping Santa with his phone*) Here it is, Boomer.

SANTA: You smell good.

MRS. C: Get away from me.

SANTA: Like gingerbread.

MRS. C: I've had it. You never take me seriously. I'm upset. I'm legitimately upset, and you don't care. The only thing you've noticed about me in the past month is that I've stopped wearing your team colors. And do you know why that's the only thing you've noticed? Because it's about you. You and your overrated holiday.

SANTA: It's not my holiday. It's everybody's holiday.

MRS. C: It's not *everybody's* holiday.

SANTA: Okay. It might not be everybody's holiday, but everybody knows who I am.

Everybody likes me.

MRS. C: Not everybody.

MRS. C takes a suitcase out of a closet and begins packing.

SANTA: What are you doing?

MRS. C: I'm going on an actual holiday where I can relax and feel good about myself, and not feel like I'm a total loser, and not be at the beck and call of a self-absorbed, tyrannical windbag.

SANTA: (*still not getting it*) What are you saying exactly?

MRS. C: I'm taking the reindeer and I'm leaving you.

SANTA: You're not taking the reindeer.

MRS. C: The reindeer should be with me. They love me best.

SANTA: That's because you spoil them.

MRS. C: You're too hard on them.

SANTA: They need discipline. If it were up to you they'd be frolicking in the tundra all the time.

MRS. C: And what's wrong with that?

SANTA: For one thing I wouldn't be able to deliver the freakin' presents.

MRS. C: The presents. The reindeer. Do you hear yourself? You don't care about me at all.

SANTA: (*distracted by his phone*) That's not true.

MRS. C: Give me that phone.

MRS. C rushes at SANTA and tries to take his phone away. They chase each other around the room and over the bed. She manages to grab his phone. He rushes to the dresser and picks up her phone.

SANTA: What's this? (*enraged*) You're texting with The Easter Bunny!? (*reading off the phone*) Hey, Angel Face. If you're feeling unloved tonight come hang out with me while Captain Ho Ho Ho Hum drags his lard ass around the world delivering gifts to kids who don't believe in him anymore.

MRS. C: He texted me.

SANTA: Why would he text you?

MRS. C: I don't know. Is it inconceivable that there are men out there who find me attractive?

SANTA: He's not a man. He's a bunny.

MRS. C: He's a rabbit. An attractive, successful rabbit.

SANTA: And I'm not successful?! Who's more successful than me? Is that where you're going? Are you going to meet him? Are you choosing Easter over Christmas? Nobody does that.

MRS. C: I'm going away by myself.

MRS. C snatches her phone away from SANTA.

SANTA: We couldn't have this fight in June?

MRS. C: I'm sorry if the timing of my misery is inconvenient for you.

SANTA: According to you, you're miserable all the time. I don't understand why you don't do something about it? It's the 21st century. Get a job. You could be a stewardess or a secretary.

MRS. C: (*appalled by his chauvinism*) They're called flight attendants and administrative assistants now. Why didn't you suggest I be a firefighter or a nuclear physicist?

SANTA: That's hilarious.

MRS. C: You're such a misogynist.

SANTA: And you're a fat shamer.

Beat.

MRS. C: I didn't mean it.

SANTA: Yes, you did.

MRS. C: I just thought . . .

SANTA: I know what you thought.

MRS. C: It's possible . . .

SANTA: I don't want to talk about it.

MRS. C: Did you go on the shots to slim down for me?

SANTA: No.

MRS. C: For Cher? Jennifer Coolidge?

SANTA: I don't care about Jennifer Coolidge.

MRS. C: You practically drool over her in those Discover Card ads.

SANTA: I'm not drooling over her. I get excited about the Discover Card. They have excellent customer service.

MRS. C: We have to talk about this.

SANTA: No, we don't.

MRS. C: It's not going to go away.

SANTA: It already went away. It never showed up to begin with.

MRS. C: See! You're upset, too. It's still bothering you.

SANTA: No, it isn't.

MRS. C: I only mentioned your weight because they say weight can be a factor, so
can stress, age . . .

SANTA: Throw in beards and a hearty laugh, and I'm never getting a stiffy again.

MRS. C: (*exasperated*) Stiffy? This is a grown up problem. Can't you use grown up
words?

SANTA: Here's a grown up word for you – fiduciary.

MRS. C: What does that have to do with anything?

SANTA: I thought there wasn't a problem. You said there wasn't a problem.

MRS. C: You said there wasn't a problem, too, but you obviously don't feel that way.

SANTA: There's no problem.

MRS. C: Then why have you been avoiding me? Why are you mad at me all the time?

SANTA: *(forgetting Mrs. C's distress, talking to himself)* Of course it was stress related. I always get terrible insomnia once Thanksgiving rolls around. Now it starts in October. As soon as Halloween's over everyone starts dragging out Christmas decorations. What's that about? And those goddamned Hallmark movies. Seems like they run all year round.

MRS. C puts her anger aside and falls back into her familiar role of placating SANTA.

MRS. C: Some people want to feel Christmasy all the time.

SANTA: Why? I don't. One of the things that makes Christmas special is that it only comes one day out of the year. Having too much of something diminishes its power. Why can't people understand that?

MRS. C: They used to. People are spoiled now. Everything is about instant and constant gratification.

SANTA: Remember when there were only four Christmas specials and they were only on once? Every child in America sat in front of their TV that night with their families. The whole country was united, full of love and hope watching the Grinch and Charlie Brown.

MRS. C: And Frosty the Snowman.

SANTA: And don't forget Rudolph.

MRS. C: You know I've always had issues with Rudolph. Mrs. Claus was completely miscast. Some old lady in an apron with a German accent toddling around saying, "Eat, Papa, eat." Is that what people think of me?

SANTA: I've been telling you to get a new agent for centuries.

MRS. C: Could you please put down your phone?

SANTA: I'm checking the forecast. Remember when it was just snow? People would wake up, put on a coat, scrape it off their cars, and go to work. Now news stations have Severe Weather Teams and town officials hold press conferences and issue red alerts. Do we really have to scare people all the time about everything?

MRS. C: When people are afraid, they're anxious. When they're anxious they buy things to feel better. The world is controlled by consumerism.

SANTA: What does that say about me?

SANTA flicks his hand at the ceiling and a shower of glittering snowflakes falls to the floor. MRS. C watches entranced by the beauty of it.

MRS. C: (tenderly) That has nothing to do with you. You're the spirit of giving.

SANTA and MRS. C share a sweet moment and it seems like there may be hope for a truce and mutual understanding then SANTA turns gruff again. When his mood changes, the snowflakes stop abruptly.

SANTA: The *fat* spirit of giving.

MRS. C: Why can't you let anything go?

SANTA gets his Mac, stretches out on the bed, and begins working on The Naughty List.

SANTA: Alexa, play Madonna, "Santa Baby."

MRS. C: Alexa, stop!

SANTA: Madonna gets me.

Alexa plays "Santa Baby." MRS. C is ready to fly into a rage -- she's had it with Santa's childish attitude -- but she manages to calm herself.

MRS. C: (*imitating Madonna*) You like that song, Santa baby? Where's my sable underneath the tree? And my convertible, light blue?

SANTA: You haven't been an awful good girl all year, have you?

MRS. C: What are you implying? Say it. Come on, say it!

SANTA ignores her.

MRS. C: You think I don't know. But I do. I know. When were you going to tell me?

SANTA: Tell you what?

Beat.

MRS. C: (*finally losing her temper*) You put me on the Naughty List!

SANTA slams his Mac shut and jumps up from the bed.

SANTA: (*aghast*) How do you know that? Who told you?

MRS. C: How could you put *me* on the Naughty List? Me!

SANTA: Was it Steve? That elf has a mouth on him . . .

MRS. C: Do you know how embarrassing this is for me?

SANTA: How did you find out?

MRS. C: It doesn't matter how I found out.

SANTA: Did you hack into the Naughty List?!

MRS. C: I don't know how to hack!

SANTA: How did you find out?

MRS. C: I figured out the password, you idiot. Like it was hard: Hohoho.12.25.

SANTA: You looked at the Naughty List without my permission? This is the worst thing you could possibly do.

MRS. C: Worse than putting me on the Naughty List in the first place?

SANTA: This is unforgivable.

MRS. C: Unforgivable. Please. You and your stupid list.

SANTA: Take that back.

MRS. C: It's stupid. And it's obsolete.

SANTA: It is not. It's as powerful as it's ever been. Do you know how many people are being good right now, who are being kind, who are behaving decently because they don't want to end up on the Naughty List? It's a tool in the fight against immorality.

MRS. C: You're a tool.

SANTA: Listen to yourself. You really think you should be on the Nice List?

MRS. C: Well, that's part of the problem with the list, isn't it? I'm a good person. I'm kind. I'm decent. But I hurt Santa's feelings so I get put on the Naughty List? Is that fair? Define nice. You can't. Because it's subjective and your opinion is the only one that matters. A lot of times it comes down to your personal preferences. You put people on the list not because they were bad but simply because they did something that upset you.

SANTA: That's not true.

MRS. C: I noticed the Mets are on the list.

SANTA: They were naughty.

MRS. C: The entire team?

SANTA: Yes.

SANTA grabs his Mac from the bed and sits down in a chair in a huff.

MRS. C: What are you doing?

SANTA: Changing my password.

MRS. C: What is it now: CandyCoatedControlFreak? SelfRighteousSnowJockey?

(Beat.) I know what this is really about. You said it wasn't my fault, but you were lying. You blame me.

SANTA: I don't blame you.

MRS. C: I don't excite you anymore.

SANTA: Do I excite you?

MRS. C: Why is everything always about you? We're talking about me.

SANTA: It happened to me.

MRS. C: It happened to me, too. I was there in case you've forgotten wearing that ridiculous French maid outfit. I still don't know where you found one in red and green.

SANTA: It was custom made.

MRS. C: (*mocking Santa*) It was custom made.

SANTA: What's the problem? You looked amazing.

MRS. C: I'm surprised you remember; you were so strung out on egg nog.

SANTA: If you hated it why did you wear it?

MRS. C: I wanted to make you happy.

SANTA: How can I be happy if you're not happy?

MRS. C: You thought I'd be happy pretending to be a domestic servant?

SANTA: A sexy domestic servant!

MRS. C starts packing in a frenzy. She throws clothing out of drawers and the closet onto the bed. Much of it is red and green. She makes an obvious show of not taking these items.

SANTA: Stop this. We both know you're not leaving.

MRS. C: Yes, I am.

SANTA: You're leaving *me*? On Christmas Eve?

MRS. C: You won't even notice I'm gone. You'll be working late tonight.

SANTA: Of course I'll be working late tonight, but I need you to be here when I get home.

MRS. C: Why? So I can rub your tired feet, and bring you hot chocolate with extra marshmallows, and tell you (*seductively*) "You're the man, ooh baby, you're the big red velvet man. You're the gift that keeps on giving?"

SANTA: Yes!

MRS. C: You should've thought of that before you put me on the Naughty List.

SANTA: You were naughty.

MRS. C: I was *not* naughty. Apparently I wasn't naughty enough. Get over yourself! It can happen to anyone.

SANTA: Not Zeus.

MRS. C: You're not a god like Zeus; you're a spirit, a spirit inhabiting a man's body.

SANTA: I can do anything a God can do.

MRS. C: Oh, really? Conjure up a plague of locusts. Make fire and brimstone rain down on the elves. Summon a Kraken out of the sea.

SANTA moves to center stage and gathers himself up in order to perform some amazing feat of magic. He closes his eyes, raises his arms, and stands in frozen silence while MRS. C watches. A few moments pass then an adorable puppy wearing a bright red bow dashes on stage.

SANTA: (*abashed*) Dammit.

MRS. C gleefully scoops up the puppy.

SANTA: (*into his phone*) Yea, it's Santa. We've got a Christmas puppy in the master bedroom. Mm hm. Right. I'll put him in the hall. Thanks.

SANTA tries to take the puppy away from MRS. C. They tussle. The puppy breaks free. They both chase him around the room. SANTA catches the puppy and deposits him off stage. He doesn't notice losing the puppy makes MRS. C even more upset.

SANTA: I don't know what you expect from me. You want me to cancel Christmas for you?

MRS. C: Of course I don't want you to cancel Christmas. How can you even ask that? What are you saying? That I don't care about Christmas? That I don't put as much blood, sweat and tears into this holiday as you do? That I don't care about the children?

MRS. C returns to packing.

MRS. C: Our lives aren't all mistletoe and holly. I've seen how the fruitcake gets made. But unlike you – I don't get credit for anything. Do you realize it took Macy's fifty-four years of parades before they thought to add Mrs. Claus to the float and to this day she has to sit in the back.

SANTA: Here we go. I have no control over Macy's.

MRS. C: Liar.

SANTA: Where are you going?

MRS. C: I don't know.

SANTA: How are you going to get there? (*with urgency, into his phone*) Code red lockdown on the deer. No one gets in or out of the stables and that includes Mrs. C. Especially Mrs. C. (*to himself*) Look at the time. I have to get down to the workshop.

MRS. C: We know where your priorities lie.

SANTA: Christmas has to come first.

MRS. C: Not for me anymore.

MRS. C finishes packing and grabs her bag. She pauses on her way to the door as she realizes this is the last thing in the world she wants to do, but she believes she has no choice. She looks back at the man she loves, gathers her resolve, and exits.

SANTA realizes too late the gravity of the situation. He sits on the edge of the bed, heartbroken.

SANTA: (*seeking solace*) Alexa, play Cher's new Christmas album.

Alexa begins to play the chorus of "DJ Play A Christmas Song."

SANTA: Alexa, stop.

Lights slowly fade to black.

Scene Three

Plush's private dressing room at his nightclub. The furnishings include a sofa, a rack of flashy suits, a bar cart, and a full-length mirror. He's a show off and shameless self-promoter. The walls are hung with photos of him posing with famous people and posters of his nightclub act.

PLUSH primps in front of the mirror as he prepares to go back onstage.

PLUSH: *(to his reflection)* Looking good, Cottontail. Looking fine.

SANTA enters barging in aggressively dressed incognito in a dark trench coat, fedora, and sunglasses, but his beard is a dead giveaway as to his identity. Laughter from the nightclub fills the room before he closes the door behind him.

PLUSH: *(startled)* You.

SANTA: *(disgusted)* You.

PLUSH: How did you get past my bodyguard?

SANTA: It wasn't hard.

PLUSH: (*sighing*) What'd you promise him?

SANTA: A pony.

PLUSH: A six-foot-four, two hundred eighty pound ex-MMA fighter asked for a pony?

Why do people revert to their childhoods when they talk to you?

SANTA: I'm Santa Claus.

PLUSH: Yea, yea, and I'm the Easter Bunny. Oh, wait. (*smugly*) I am.

PLUSH moves to the bar and busies himself fixing a drink.

PLUSH: What are you doing here? Isn't this the one night of the year you have something to do?

SANTA: I have lots to do on lots of nights.

PLUSH: That's not what I hear.

SANTA: What's that supposed to mean?

PLUSH: Let's just say I got the inside scoop from the one person who knows how you spend your nights.

SANTA: (*angrily*) What's going on between the two of you?

PLUSH: Dude, she came to me.

SANTA: (*shocked*) You saw her? She came here?

PLUSH: Don't lose your jelly beans. All she wanted was advice about you.

SANTA: What advice could you possibly give her about me?

PLUSH: She seems to think we have something in common. You know the whole holiday icon doomed to assist mankind by eternally pushing good will and cheer once a year while doling out candy and toys to rug rats thing. You want a drink?

SANTA: Can't. I'm driving tonight. (*pause*) There's nothing going on between the two of you?

PLUSH: What would you do if there was?

SANTA tosses away his hat and rips off his coat revealing his earlier red and green holiday ensemble. He holds up his fists.

SANTA: You wanna go?

PLUSH stands back and critically eyes SANTA'S ensemble.

PLUSH: There's part of the problem you're having with your woman. Look what you're wearing. Red and green aren't the only colors in the rainbow.

SANTA: She loves red and green.

PLUSH: Does she? Does she really? All the time? She wants to see it all the time?

SANTA: I'll tell you one thing. She prefers candy canes over chocolate eggs.

PLUSH sets down his drink and meets SANTA center stage. They stand nose to nose.

PLUSH: Nobody prefers candy canes over chocolate eggs.

SANTA: She likes peppermint.

PLUSH: Word on the street is she likes marshmallow Peeps.

SANTA throws a punch at PLUSH who easily hops out of the way. SANTA pursues PLUSH around the room throwing a few more haymakers that PLUSH continues to dodge. The fight ends when SANTA'S PHONE PINGS.

SANTA: (checking his phone) This is crazy. I've gotta go.

After a moment of indecision, SANTA sits on the sofa, deflated.

SANTA: I don't even know what I'm doing here. I'm not thinking straight.

PLUSH: (hesitantly) Do you want me to ask you what's wrong?

SANTA: I don't know. Maybe.

PLUSH: (wincing) Okay. I'm here if you want to talk.

SANTA: What did she say about me?

PLUSH: That you're a great guy. You're sexy, and funny, and good with kids.

SANTA: What did she really say about me?

PLUSH: She might feel a little neglected, unappreciated. Maybe her needs aren't being met.

SANTA: (*defensively*) I meet her needs. Her needs are being met. There's no problem there.

PLUSH: Calm down, Big Red. There are needs outside the boudoir. When's the last time you made a romantic gesture?

SANTA: I brought her a cup of hot tea with honey the last time she had a cold.

PLUSH: Not romantic.

SANTA: I asked her opinion on the latest design for the Itty Bitty Baby Bike recommended for ages one to two.

PLUSH: Not romantic.

SANTA: I took her bowling. I mean, I didn't actually *take* her bowling. The bowling alley's in our castle.

PLUSH: When's the last time you drank champagne and fed her chocolate covered strawberries in front of a blazing fireplace and told her she's the most beautiful woman in the world?

SANTA: Never done it.

PLUSH: The last time you took her on a tropical island getaway?

SANTA: Never done it.

PLUSH: The last time you took her to Paris?

SANTA: Never done it. (*losing his patience*) You know what? She's not perfect either. She's no walk in the park to live with. She has a bad temper. She's always making problems with the elves. She hates tinsel. She sings the wrong words to Christmas carols on purpose. Sometimes I feel neglected and taken for granted. My job is all about giving, giving, giving. Listening to what everybody else wants. Sometimes I feel . . . I feel trapped.

PLUSH: I hear you, Kemo Sabe. We're in this for the long haul. Retirement is out of the question, and nothing can kill us. Willie Nelson has the same problem.

PLUSH sits down next to SANTA on the sofa.

PLUSH: What helps me feel less trapped is having a life away from being the Easter Bunny. Look at me. I own a successful nightclub. I have my singing career. I have my charity work. My foundation, R-cubed.

SANTA: R-cubed?

PLUSH: Rescue Rabbit Rescue. It's a rescue league for rescue rabbits that get returned after being rescued and need rescued again. It's a real problem.

SANTA: I had no idea.

PLUSH: You never wanted to do something else? Be someone else? Not once?

SANTA: No. You?

PLUSH: I've thought about it. It's easier for you. You don't have any competition. There's a lot of famous rabbits out there: Bugs, Harvey, Peter, Roger, Thumper, Flopsy, Mopsy, that annoying shill for Trix cereal. (*mimicking the commercial*) "Trix are for kids." I hate that silly rabbit.

SANTA: I do have this one fantasy. You know how I sneak into malls sometimes and replace the Santas without anyone knowing? Just to get a firsthand sense of how people are feeling each season.

PLUSH: Yea, I know.

SANTA: Sometimes when I'm sitting there listening to the little ones on my lap chattering away about what they want for Christmas I imagine what it would be like for me to sit on someone's lap and tell them what I want for Christmas.

PLUSH: What would you ask for?

SANTA: World peace. Electric socks.

PLUSH stares blankly at SANTA not knowing what to say.

SANTA: I don't want you to think I have that fantasy because I resent the children. The kids are great.

PLUSH: Are they? Really? All of them?

SANTA: Yes.

PLUSH: Right. Of course they are. Anyone ever catch you? Figure out you're the real Santa?

SANTA: Not at the malls when people are expecting Santa. They just think I'm the best Santa they've ever seen. That's because I am.

PLUSH stares blankly again.

SANTA: But I've accidentally surprised people in their homes. That always goes badly.

PLUSH: Same for me. One time this woman caught me in her house when I was hiding Easter baskets. She was carrying a coffee pot and dropped it. (*trying to suppress his laughter*) Coffee went everywhere. Then she slipped and fell in it when she tried to run away. Her legs flew up and she landed on her . . . (*bursts into laughter*) It was like she slipped on a banana peel in a Tom and Jerry cartoon.

SANTA: (*joining in the laughter*) One time this man caught me putting presents under the tree in the middle of the night. He turned around to run and smashed right into the wall. Knocked himself unconscious.

PLUSH: (*laughing*) I had a delivery guy catch me in a backyard hiding eggs and he rode his bicycle into a tree. Broke his arm.

SANTA: (*laughing*) I've caused a few heart attacks.

Their laughter dies away as they realize these memories aren't exactly "funny."

PLUSH: Good times.

SANTA and PLUSH sit in silence for a few moments before SANTA drops the bombshell.

SANTA: She left me.

PLUSH: What?

SANTA: (*incredulous*) She left me! Me! Santa Claus!

PLUSH takes out his phone and starts to text.

PLUSH: She left you on Christmas Eve? That is cold.

SANTA: (*eyeing Plush's phone*) You're not . . .

PLUSH puts his phone away.

PLUSH: Why did she leave?

SANTA: I don't know.

PLUSH: You want me to make a few guesses?

SANTA: She's unhappy, okay? She's unfulfilled. I think she might even be bored with me.

PLUSH: Nooooo.

SANTA: Maybe I'm bored, too.

PLUSH: I kind of got the impression she thinks life with you is all about you.

SANTA: There is no me! I am the job.

PLUSH: You think she doesn't get that? Doesn't she support you one hundred percent? You couldn't ask for a better wife that way. Think of all the Christmas traditions that began just because she was thinking about your well-being. The sleigh was her idea.

SANTA: I was using a wheelbarrow when she met me.

PLUSH: The milk and cookies.

SANTA: She couldn't stand the thought of me working all night on an empty stomach.

PLUSH: She agreed to live at the North Pole.

SANTA: We needed a lot of privacy. We looked at a few islands, but I'm not a beachy person. I freckle.

PLUSH: She gets that you and Christmas can't be separated. I'm sure she doesn't expect you to make a choice. (*pause*) Is there something else you're not telling me?

Beat.

SANTA: I put her on the Naughty List.

PLUSH: You did what?! Are you out of your elfin' mind? What could she have possibly done to get put on the Naughty List? Don't tell me; I don't want to know. Damn, Nick. You need to fix this.

SANTA: I don't know how.

PLUSH: Here's an idea. How about taking her off the list?

SANTA: It's too late. It's Christmas Eve. The list is sealed.

PLUSH: Who says?

SANTA: The rules.

PLUSH: Ah, the rules. But there's nothing in the rules that says you can't go after her and apologize.

SANTA: I can't tonight.

PLUSH: Yes, you can

SANTA: No, I can't.

PLUSH: Yes, you can.

SANTA: You don't get it. I can't. I don't have a choice. Christmas has to come first and I am Christmas. That's the biggest rule of all.

PLUSH: I don't know what to tell you. We don't have free will like humans do. We do in small ways like I can pick out what songs I'm going to sing tonight and you picked out that...

PLUSH gestures at Santa's sweater.

SANTA: (*looking at his sweater*) I'm not sure how much control I had over this.

PLUSH: But the big stuff – that's been decided for us. Does that ever bother you?

SANTA: Only when it hurts her.

SANTA gathers up his coat and hat. He and PLUSH meet center stage.

SANTA: You're going to find out soon enough but I'll tell you anyway. I finally took you off the list. I thought 200 years was long enough.

PLUSH: (*wide eyed*) Really?

SANTA: What do you want for Christmas?

PLUSH: (*reverting to his childhood*) A Mr. Potato Head.

SANTA smiles and exits as PLUSH stares after him in awe. Once SANTA is out of sight PLUSH shakes himself out of his reverie returning to adulthood.

PLUSH moves downstage into a spotlight. Lights fade to black on the dressing room as lights come up on THE BAND.

PLUSH: *(to the audience)* Just finished talking with a friend of mine. He's stressing out about Christmas. He does the same thing every year. He gets so preoccupied with trying to make sure everything's perfect for everyone else that he forgets about taking care of the person he loves the most. I think we're all guilty of this from time to time because one of the great ironies in life is how easy it is to take for granted the ones we love. You know why that is? Because they let us because they love us back. They allow us the space to mess up hoping we'll figure it out on our own. I can't tell you how many times my wife used to nag at me that it was my turn to do the dishes and when I'd finally do them, she'd still be in a bad mood. I didn't understand why. She got what she wanted. The dishes were clean. Then one night I *volunteered* to do the dishes. Well, that got a whole different response. Figure it out, Big Red. This one's for you.

PLUSH sings the original song, "It Isn't Really Christmas." Applause. PLUSH exits.

Scene Four

A drab, nondescript hotel room in Paramus, New Jersey. MRS. C lies on the bed talking on her phone to a divorce lawyer.

MRS. C: *(on her phone)* I appreciate you talking to me considering it's Christmas Eve. I assumed even lawyers took the night off. Oh. I guess that's true. But you're a divorce lawyer. Oh, I guess that's true, too. *(pause)* Yes, I know the North Pole isn't a community property state, but I have to be entitled to something. I've been married to him for 375 years. *(pause)* Do we have children? Seven billion of them. And elves. And reindeer. And a couple kennels full of Christmas puppies. He has this problem with magic sometimes. A sort of premature . . . never mind. *(pause)* No, he's never been abusive. He's Santa Claus. I mean, he can say some pretty hurtful things sometimes but in all fairness, I can give as good as I get. So we fight. All couples fight. No, I don't know what the company is worth. No, I don't know if it's an LLC or an S Corp.

A knock sounds at the door.

MRS. C: (*on her phone*) I'm sorry. I'm going to have to call you back. (*calling out*)

Who is it?

SANTA: (*offstage*) Room service.

MRS. C: There's no room service here.

SANTA: (*offstage*) Uber Eats.

MRS. C: I'm not opening the door.

SANTA: (*offstage*) I slip into billions of homes across the globe in a single night lugging a huge sack of presents with me. You think I can't get through a motel room door?

MRS. C: Do it.

Beat.

SANTA: (*defeated*) Can you open the door?

MRS. C gets up from the bed and unlocks the door. She stands back as SANTA enters dressed in full Santa Claus regalia. He looks amazing. She tries to act unimpressed.

MRS. C: (*nonchalant*) You look good.

SANTA: God, I hate GPS. It sent me over the Catskills. I knew it was the wrong way to go. Too many birds.

SANTA pulls out his phone.

MRS. C: Are you kidding me?

SANTA takes a selfie.

SANTA: I've never been in a Hampton Inn before.

SANTA begins to empty his pockets of candy bars tossing them on the bed.

SANTA: I stopped by the vending machine.

MRS. C watches skeptically.

SANTA: I know you like Snicker's bars. And Kit Kats. And Junior Mints. And Gummi bears. I pay attention.

MRS. C doesn't take any of the candy.

MRS. C: What are you doing here?

SANTA: You know what I'm doing here.

MRS. C: No, I don't.

SANTA: Kind of a risky move. Taking two of the deer in training. They don't have the stamina of the A Team.

MRS. C: I found that out. You don't think I planned to end up in Paramus, do you?

SANTA: Where are you planning to go?

MRS. C: I don't know. Some place tropical.

SANTA: Do you ever wish we settled on one of those islands we looked at instead of the North Pole?

MRS. C: No, but that doesn't mean I wouldn't like to vacation on one of them from time to time.

SANTA'S PHONE PINGS. MRS. C gives him a disgusted look.

SANTA: You can't possibly expect me to turn off my phone tonight. I'm kind of in the middle of something here.

MRS. C: Then get on with it. I didn't invite you here. I don't want you here. I don't need you here. You think you can show up being all that and have me swoon and say everything's fine. Not happening.

SANTA: Can't I get a little credit for making an effort?

MRS. C: You call this effort? This is completely self-motivated. You're dropping in here for a few minutes expecting to patch things up so you can get on with your night and not have to think about me.

SANTA: That might be partially true, but I'm concerned about you.

MRS. C: I don't believe you.

MRS. C picks up a Snicker's bar, unwraps it, and takes a sensual bite while SANTA watches.

SANTA: There's got to be something that can make you feel more fulfilled.

MRS. C: Mmmm.

SANTA: Maybe not more fulfilled than that Snicker's bar.

MRS. C: Why do you think I'm not fulfilled?

SANTA: You're unhappy, aren't you? You're mopey and irritable.

MRS. C: You're mopey and irritable.

SANTA: Maybe you should see a shrink to deal with your feelings of inadequacy.

MRS. C: Maybe you should see a shrink to deal with your delusions of grandeur.

SANTA: This is getting us nowhere.

MRS. C: Then go. You're dying to go.

SANTA: I'm not dying to go. I have to go.

MRS. C: I don't see anyone holding a gun to your head.

SANTA plops down defiantly in a chair.

SANTA: Okay. I'm not going.

MRS. C returns to the bed.

MRS. C: Okay, don't go.

A few tense moments pass. Both SANTA and MRS. C understand the seriousness of SANTA even considering taking off Christmas Eve. He checks his phone and looks concerned.

MRS. C: What's wrong?

SANTA: It's these trolls.

MRS. C: How many times have I told you to ignore that stuff? You should stay off social media altogether. There will always be haters.

SANTA: No, actual trolls. The kind that live under bridges. There's an angry tribe moving north. They eat elves you know.

MRS. C: Goody.

SANTA: What would the world do without the elves to make the toys?

MRS. C: Order from Amazon?

SANTA: (*appalled*) What did you say?

MRS. C: Amazon. There, I said it again, Amazon. Amazon.

SANTA: (*covering his ears*) Stop it.

MRS. C: Amazon! Amazon! Amazon! Overnight delivery. Same day delivery. Any day of the year delivery. And you don't have to put out milk and cookies for the drones, and you don't have to be good. You can be naughty all the time.

SANTA: You really want to hurt me.

MRS. C: You hurt me first.

SANTA: You hurt *me* first.

MRS. C: Enough! I feel like we're trapped on one of those stupid toy choo choo trains that just go around and around in the same circle over and over again.

SANTA: (*distressed*) How can you say choo choo trains are stupid?

MRS. C loses it. She screams in frustration into a pillow. She rips the comforter off the bed and wraps up in it. SANTA watches calmly as if he's seen this all before.
MRS. C is now a lump beneath the comforter.

MRS. C: (*from underneath the blanket*) Do you ever feel like you have no control over your own life?

SANTA holds out in his arms in a helpless gesture.

SANTA: Every minute of every day.

MRS. C sits up and lets the blanket fall down around her shoulders. She pulls it tightly around her.

MRS. C: Everything seems totally random to me. Like no matter how hard you work at something or how much you care about something, it can be gone tomorrow. We all just live and die and what we do in between is ultimately meaningless.

SANTA: Wow. Sounds like someone might be suffering from some post-Pandemic blues.

MRS. C: The Pandemic didn't affect us.

SANTA: Speak for yourself. You're not the one who had to deal with the elves politicizing the face mask issue, and Prancer and Vixen refusing to get vaccinated.

MRS. C: You know what I mean. We've always lived a fairly isolated existence.

SANTA: But we've always kept a close watch over what's going on everywhere else. In some ways we know more about the world than the people walking around in it.

MRS. C: It just seems like human kindness has run its course. Empathy is gone. Civility is gone. Cancel culture and avarice thrives. People are doing everything they can to distance themselves from one another.

SANTA: There have been plenty of other times throughout history that we've thought humanity had reached its lowest level: world wars, genocide, reality TV.

MRS. C: True.

SANTA: Despite all that I continue to believe in the innate decency of mankind and the simplicity of their needs. I believe they want to be loved and to love in return. They want peace, and joy, and yes, presents underneath the tree.

SANTA moves to the bed and sits next to MRS. C leaving his phone on the chair.

SANTA: You're right; a human life *is* finite and fleeting just like the promise of a Christmas morning but that's what makes it precious; not meaningless.

MRS. C: That was a grown up thing to say.

SANTA: What made it grown up?

MRS. C: It was very wise.

SANTA: Children are wise; grown ups just know more.

SANTA puts his arm around MRS. C

SANTA: I admit it. I put you on the Naughty List because you hurt my feelings; not because you were bad. I know I'm not as young as I used to be. I know I need to lose a few pounds.

MRS. C: You look exactly the same way you did when I first met you.

SANTA: But I was somebody new then. I was fresh and exciting. I was fascinating . . .

MRS. C: Let's not get carried away.

SANTA: I've been thinking you might be getting bored with me. There are some people who would say I'm sort of one-dimensional. Take away the suit and the beard and what have you got?

MRS. C: I know you've been feeling inadequate lately. I mean in other ways besides the obvious way you were recently inadequate.

SANTA: Thank you for bringing that up again.

MRS. C: I know you downloaded your resume on Indeed.

SANTA: I've had some interesting offers: personal shopper, CEO of Disney . . .

MRS. C: You can't quit being Santa. No one else can do what you do.

SANTA: It's a lot of pressure.

MRS. C: I'm under a lot of pressure, too. The other night when you couldn't . . . you know.

SANTA: And let's bring it up one more time.

MRS. C: It was the final blow my self esteem could handle. It made me feel like I'm no longer good at the only thing I'm supposed to be good at.

SANTA: What's that?

MRS. C: Taking care of Santa Claus.

SANTA: You think that's your only purpose in life? (*Pause*) Not that it isn't a good purpose.

MRS. C nods sadly.

SANTA: This is something I've never understood about people.

MRS. C: What's that?

SANTA: Why they have to be so hard on themselves?

MRS. C: It's because we have emotions. We feel too deeply and take things too personally.

SANTA: You're definitely human in that department, but I also think there are things about you that make you more than human. Remember? We talked about it the other night. I said some pretty romantic things.

MRS. C: (*dubious*) You compared me to Spock.

SANTA'S PHONE PINGS. *He stands up and walks to the chair to retrieve it then realizes he's neglecting his wife again. He returns to the bed and takes MRS. C's hands in his own.*

SANTA: I couldn't do what I do without you.

MRS. C: You did it for thousands of years before you met me.

SANTA: I did. But now that I've found you, I could never go back. These have been the best 375 years of my life.

MRS. C: Do you mean that?

SANTA: I remember the first time I saw you. There was this glow that clung to you. At first I thought it was snowflakes glimmering in the moonlight but then I realized it was your spirit shimmering all around you. I'd never seen that happen with a mortal before. I promised myself I'd come back to meet you in the summer

MRS. C: That's when you told me you were a goat herder. We spent a few weeks together then you had to go away for a while. I didn't think I'd ever see you again. I figured you were a typical shepherd; they were all a bunch of players. Then I got your letter telling me you wanted to see me on Christmas Eve. You said you had something to show me. I thought you meant . . . you know.

SANTA: You thought that's how I was going to bring up the subject of sex -- I have something to show you?

MRS. C: Instead what you wanted to show me was how you snuck into people's houses and left gifts for them.

SANTA: I took a risk doing that. You could've thought I was crazy.

MRS. C: I did think you were crazy. But crazy in a good way.

SANTA glances behind him at the bed.

SANTA: We've never been in a hotel room before.

SANTA takes MRS. C in his arms. They lean back against the headboard.

MRS. C: Remember how you used to let me sneak a peek at the Naughty List with you? Back when it was still on paper. We'd snuggle up in bed just like this and read through it. A lot of the names were obvious but some were real shockers. Dear Abby. Donny . . .

SANTA and MRS. C: *(in unison)* . . . and Marie.

MRS. C: Gandhi.

SANTA: He was so surprised.

MRS. C: Earlier when I was mad I said you're not a god. You're better than a God. Gods and religions can bring people together but only at the expense of excluding others. They can be the cause of as much bad as good. Tomorrow people will put aside their differences and be kind to one another. Even if it is for only one day. No God can make that happen. Only Santa can do that because Santa is pure good.

SANTA and MRS. C engage in a lingering kiss.

MRS. C: I didn't *hate* the maid costume. It was actually pretty sexy.

SANTA: You'd be sexy in anything.

MRS. C: Would you dress up for me?

SANTA: Of course.

MRS. C: Something really naughty? Like a UPS driver?

SANTA and MRS. C kiss again. SANTA'S PHONE PINGS.

MRS. C: (*pulling away*) We can't do this.

SANTA: Yes, we can.

MRS. C: No, we can't. You're already running late.

SANTA: I don't care.

MRS. C: It's Christmas Eve!

SANTA: It will only take a minute. I mean, really, it will only take a minute.

MRS. C extricates herself from Santa's embrace and rolls off the bed. SANTA reluctantly gets up, too. He considers the situation for a moment then holds out his hand to her.

SANTA: Come with me.

MRS. C: (*shocked*) You've never taken me with you before. It's against the rules.

SANTA: I'm making a new rule.

MRS. C: Can you do that?

SANTA: We'll find out.

MRS. C: But I'm not dressed. I can't ride with you looking like that and me looking like this.

SANTA works some magic and makes a gorgeous, glittering RED and GREEN Christmas cloak descend slowly from the rafters. He drapes it over her shoulders.

SANTA: I want you back on the team. Our team.

MRS. C: I feel like Cher.

SANTA: When we're finished, I'm taking you to Paris.

MRS. C: (*not into the idea*) Really? Paris? After staying up all night delivering presents --- can't we just go home?

SANTA: (*greatly relieved*) I love you so much. To the sleigh!

SANTA and MRS. C link their arms together and close their eyes trying to conjure the magic needed to transport them to the sleigh. They try several times then look at each other, shrug, and head for the door. Before exiting, SANTA flicks his hand and makes snowflakes fall from the ceiling. SANTA and MRS. C walk out the door together.

After a beat that gives SANTA and MRS. C adequate time to leave the hotel PLUSH enters through the door and walks around checking things out. He picks up a candy bar, eyes it, and tosses it back onto the bed.

PLUSH: (*scoffing at the candy*) Amateurs. (*to the audience*) You don't have to thank me --- for orchestrating this whole reconciliation thing. Felt I owed it to the world. Believe me you do not want a distracted Kris Kringle running around the world trying to deliver billions of presents in one night while worrying about his woman and the amount of marshmallows waiting on top of his cocoa when he gets home, if you know what I mean. That's how major gift screw ups happen: you could find your neighbor's new chain saw under the tree while he gets your tickets to a JLo concert. None of us want an unhappy Mrs. Claus, either, because she's the glue that keeps this holiday together. She's a kind of super hero: The Santa Wrangler. (*pause*) But more importantly, those two are my friends and I wish them well. That's what this day is all about. Connection. Spreading love to others. Helping others in need. Getting a little of that love back yourself. I admit it. I have a sentimental side. Every time I see the kiddies' faces light up when they're dying their Easter eggs or pulling chocolate bunnies out of baskets, I get a little misty. And I've been doing this a long time -- not nearly as long as old Nick at Nite -- but I've paid my dues, so to speak. And do I care that people think Bugs Bunny is funnier than me, or Peter Rabbit is cuddlier than me, or Roger Rabbit has sold more t-shirts? Yea, yea, I do, but I don't let it get me down because I know life isn't meant to be a competition; it's a collaboration. Keeping that in mind . . . Happy Easter everybody.

PLUSH begins to exit then turns and addresses the audience a final time.

PLUSH: And, oh yeah . . . have a Merry Christmas.

PLUSH exits and the bows begin. The bows are accompanied by a recorded version of the original song "& To All A Good Night" creating a festive, party like atmosphere to conclude the evening.

** Director's option would be to have the cast sing "& To All A Good Night" instead of using a recording of the song.*