

SILVERBELL

A Christmas Tale

Screenplay by
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Based on an Original Story
by Timothy Willms

Registered WGAw

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FADE IN:

EXT. SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO - STAR-FILLED SKY - NIGHT

A starry night over silhouetted mountains. Among the stars is a distant brilliant galaxy. SOUNDS of BURSTS OF STATIC intertwine with MUSIC OF THE SILVERBELL MELODY.

EXT. SILVERBELL GALAXY - CLOSER - NIGHT

The BURSTS OF STATIC SOUNDS follow the rhythm of a vibrating, high-speed light that traces the stars of a constellation in the form of a rearing mustang.

Two shooting stars blaze a path near the rearing mustang constellation. The BURSTS OF STATIC become CLEAR ENOUGH TO DISTINGUISH THREE VOICES.

SPIRITUS' VOICE

(male)

Are you coming with us, or are you planning to play it safe twinkling off and on in indecision for all eternity?

SILVERBELL'S VOICE

And if I t-take this assignment, it will b-benefit the child?

BOREALIS' VOICE

(female)

Oh, yes! And you can find your true purpose and beam it beyond the galaxy.

SILVERBELL'S VOICE

Beyond the galaxy? Okay, I... I j-j-just... I want to do it... p-p-perfectly.

SPIRITUS' VOICE

So stop holding back and start taking a chance on yourself.

BOREALIS' VOICE

And don't forget the rhyming. It'll benefit both you and the child.

SILVERBELL'S VOICE

(no stutter when rhyming,
only clear conviction)

I said all right! Just follow my light... I don't have all night!

A JINGLING OF BELLS as the stars of the mustang-shaped constellation move out of their positions and join with the tail of the shooting stars to form a tornadolike funnel. It speeds toward Earth's atmosphere.

EXT. SANTA FE - CANYON ROAD - NIGHT

The shooting stars become the flicker of a match held by a LOCAL MAN who lights a farolito -- a candle stuck in sand in a paper bag. Hundreds more farolitos festively adorn a narrow, hilly street of art galleries, boutiques, and historic adobe homes.

GROUPS OF THREE OR FOUR PEOPLE stop to get warm around small bonfires and SING CHRISTMAS CAROLS.

The star-filled sky above can be SEEN through the lightly falling snow. A MOM, DAD, and TWO YOUNG BOYS walk up the narrow street.

YOUNG BOY

(looks up to see
tornadolike shooting
stars)

Hey, Dad! You see that?!

DAD

What? C'mon, we need to pick up the
pace or we'll be late for Nana's.

EXT. CANYON ROAD - NANA ROMERO'S CASITA - NIGHT

The Dad, Mom, and Two Boys walk to a small house or casita. There's a Christmas wreath on the door with a tin kokopelli figure in the center. The Husband opens the front door.

INT. NANA ROMERO'S CASITA - NIGHT

The Husband, Wife and Two Boys enter the casita. TEN ADULTS, TEENS, and CHILDREN sit on couches or the floor of a cozy living room. Carefully wrapped gifts are under the sparkling Christmas tree. A magical hush fills the room, except for pinion logs CRACKLING AND POPPING in the fireplace.

NANA ROMERO, 80, with silver hair and a twinkle in her eye, speaks in the storyteller style of the American Southwest.

NANA ROMERO

So... Santa Fe, New Mexico wasn't
necessarily a magical town, or at
least no more magical than any other
remote mountain town during the joyful
holiday season.

A TEENAGE BOY and TEENAGE GIRL exchange shy glances.

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

Yet, this Christmas time of year
seemed even more wonderfully special
than usual.

(MORE)

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

The night air shimmered with Christmas lights that sparkled like shooting stars.

TWO CHILDREN look at each other and stifle giggles. A 4-YEAR-OLD BOY mischievously tries to peek into one of the gifts under the tree.

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

(a twinkle in her eye)

Watch it, Luis!

The Boy quickly leans back.

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

And the very next day... a late afternoon wind welcomed the whisper of winter...

As if feeling the wind, two listening GIRLS shiver.

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

... as girls and boys spilled down the front steps of the elementary school. They were all joking and laughing, except for one girl named Maria. Maria tugged on a faded red scarf, making sure it was covering... well, we'll get to that. Suddenly, Maria heard happy Mariachi music.

(sings in Spanish to
Mariachi beat)

Felice Navidad! Felice Navidad!

The listeners share grins in the glow of the fire, as we...

CUT TO:

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

A MARIACHI BAND on horseback moves slowly past the school. MARIA, 10, watches, fascinated. She has blue eyes and dark hair tucked into a winter cap. She wears a dark green coat and a faded red scarf.

A light snow falls from the blue-grey winter sky. More SCHOOL KIDS spill out of the doors and watch.

DARK-HAIRED BOY

The Winter Fiesta is here!

A circus wagon rolls past, trailing LLAMAS and a variety of happily BARKING CIRCUS DOGS. Brightly colored bumbling CLOWNS jump on and off the wagon, throw confetti in the air, and pretend to be in a race.

SCHOOLBOYS snicker and laugh. SCHOOLGIRLS giggle.

The clown wagon is followed by a long truck carrying JUGGLERS in Christmas costumes. The Jugglers toss balls and batons.

Four sleek, white horses CLIP-CLOP as they pull another wagon. The horses have feathered headdresses and are guided by an ANGEL-MAN who wears a tuxedo with angel wings.

Fascinated, Maria stares at the magnificent horses. More circus wagons and trucks roll past. Maria sees BEAUTIFUL WOMEN in sparkling white dresses and feathers in their hair.

The circus caravan is trailed by a lovingly restored pickup truck -- a 57 Chevy -- shiny apple red. It has a magical glow that sparks Maria's curiosity.

The pickup contains tools, weathered Western-style crafted leather suitcases, an old wooden barrel filled with gleaming red apples and, hidden under a blanket, something that MYSTERIOUSLY SEEMS TO MOVE.

Maria is bumped hard and has the wind knocked out of her by the large body of blonde-haired, 12-year-old MALCOLM HUTTON.

MALCOLM

Hey, Maria, there's the circus.

Maybe you wanna join the freak show!

Maria stumbles and drops her books. OTHER KIDS point and laugh.

MARIA

Shut up, Malcolm!

Her eyes suddenly red, Maria quickly collects her books.

EXT. ALAMEDA STREET - DAY

Maria runs, her heart beating fast. The MUSIC from the Winter Fiesta BECOMES DISTANT until it FADES AWAY.

EXT. CLOSSON STREET - DAY

A narrow street with small, snow-dusted adobe homes. Catching her breath, Maria walks carefully, avoiding patches of ice. When she approaches a big sheet of ice, she slides across it, expertly maintaining her balance.

EXT. MARIA'S STREET - DAY

Maria turns a corner and is startled. The red pickup truck is stopped in front of a small adobe house. She again notices something in the back of the pickup, hidden under a blanket. It moves slightly.

EXT. MARIA'S HOUSE - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

As she walks closer to the front of the truck, Maria sees her mother, ANGELA, 29, a raven-haired Hispanic woman, with a beautiful face and dark eyes tinged with sadness. Angela is simply yet carefully attired.

ANGELA

Maria, this is Hannah and Henry.

HANNAH smiles. She's slender with gray-hair and a faded, dress of soft flowing dark material.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

They're having engine trouble.

HENRY, a kindly-looking older man with white hair, fiddles with wires on the Chevy engine. He smiles at Maria.

MARIA

Señor Henry, what's in back under the blanket?

ANGELA

Questions, questions. Always curious.

(kisses the top of
Maria's head)

Don't be so nosy.

Angela opens the gate in the fence and walks with Maria toward the house.

The nose of a little boy is pressed against a windowpane. Maria's brother, RUDY, 6, makes faces at her. Maria sticks her tongue out at him, then looks up at her mother.

MARIA

Mama, those people... can I watch them? Until it's time for us to work?

ANGELA

Sure, sweetheart, but remember about strangers. Stay inside the gate, okay?

Maria skips back to the gate.

Henry wraps tape around an engine wire. Maria cranes her neck to get a better look and doesn't notice when her faded red scarf slips. Henry and Hannah see a cloud-shaped birthmark on Maria's neck, and exchange a nod, as if this is what they had expected to see.

Now Maria quickly pushes her scarf back into place.

HANNAH
It's okay, precious one.

HENRY
With us, you don't have to worry
about the little cloud on your neck.

HANNAH
We're not like other people. We
won't make fun of you.

Maria takes a step back, her expression dubious. These people seem a little weird. Yet, she's disarmed by the love and kindness in their eyes.

MARIA
Want a bischochito?
(pulls cookies from her
pack)
Mama made them.

Henry and Hannah each take a cookie.

HENRY
Thank you, amigo.

HANNAH
He says "amigo" but means "amiga."
(makes a funny face)
Thank you so much for the bischochito!

Maria laughs. A sudden gust of winter wind and Maria notices the secret something under the tarp in the back of the truck move for an instant, bobbing up and down. Maria hears mysterious TINKLING BELLS.

MARIA
What's making that sound?

Henry and Hannah exchange a tiny look of surprise.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Can I see?

HENRY
Not... yet.

MARIA
Is it alive?

Henry walks to the back of the truck, tilts his head to one side, thinking how to answer. He glances at Hannah who raises her eyebrows slightly.

HENRY
Alive?
(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Well, if you're willing to take a chance, and you need its help, it might become alive.

MARIA

Become alive? How?

HENRY

By having a heart that's, well, open... a generous heart.

Maria glances toward the house, then back at Henry and Hannah. Her eyes show doubt, as if maybe these two are a little loco.

MARIA

So... are you with the circus?

HENRY

I need to find employment, little one. I shape wood. I'm a carpenter.

MARIA

A carpenter? Really? My Aunt Gertie owns a furniture store.

Henry walks back, climbs into the driver's seat. The truck SPUTTERS, SPUTTERS, STARTS and HUMS PERFECTLY.

MARIA (CONT'D)

The store, it's near the plaza. Hutton's Furniture.

HANNAH

Gracias, Maria.

Henry gets out of the truck, takes a lustrous apple from the barrel and hands it to Maria.

MARIA

And Aunt Gertie, she doesn't always act so nice. She's been kind of... well, we've all been kind of... since dad...

(confidential tone)

A big war explosion.

Hannah nods, taking a deep breath.

MARIA (CONT'D)

(nods)

Thanks for the apple.

HENRY

All right then.

Henry and Hannah get into the truck. It slowly moves down the street.

Maria waves, takes a bite of apple, and walks toward the house.

Just before the pickup disappears around a corner, whatever is hidden in back under the blanket shifts position.

EXT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - PALACE AVENUE - DAY

Henry and Hannah get out of the parked Chevy. Henry very carefully picks up the object covered by a blanket.

INT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - SHOWROOM - DAY

At an antique desk near the back of the store, AUNT GERTIE, 35, frowns. She has helmet-like blonde hair, wears a little too much makeup and more jewelry than most people own in a lifetime. She nudges UNCLE BILL, 37, tall and balding.

AUNT GERTIE

If they're selling something, Bill,
get rid of them

UNCLE BILL

It's Christmas season, Gert. It
won't hurt to be--

AUNT GERTIE

Just get rid of them.

Henry and Hannah walk past wooden dining tables, Southwest couches, and Santa Fe-style chairs with turquoise painted touches and carved designs.

UNCLE BILL

May I help you?

Without a word, Henry removes the blanket revealing a hand-carved wooden rocking horse.

Awed by its simple elegance, Aunt Gertie stands and walks to the rocking horse. Its skin is partially painted a dark silvery gray. The rocker base is bright red with the name "Silverbell" in white letters. It has a leather saddle with silver fittings and silver bells.

HENRY

I have a small ability to shift the
shape of wood. Rocking horses.
Furniture.

Under the horse is a panel with carved clouds and stars that sparkle like diamonds.

HANNAH
 (unrolls a poster)
 A drawing created for a contest.

Impressed, Aunt Gertie raises her eyebrows.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
 You could have a similar contest
 here in Santa Fe, along with the
 Winter Fiesta.

In bold script the poster reads: CHRISTMAS TALENT CONTEST,
 and in smaller letters: CELEBRATE THE MAGIC OF CHRISTMAS
 THROUGH THE MAGIC OF LOVE. The location is in Yorkshire,
 England. The year is 1856.

UNCLE BILL
 It says "England, 1856"?

HENRY
 Hmm. Time is so... here nor there.
 Anyway, we, um... we ran into your
 niece, Maria.

AUNT GERTIE
 (dismissive)
 Maria?!
 (as if it's her idea)
 A talent contest for children. With
 the Christmas spirit. Yes.
 Advertising for the store. With the
 rocking horse as the prize.

HENRY
 Along with a bit of cash.

UNCLE BILL
 We have two children of our own.
 Our Elizabeth is wonderful at ballet.

AUNT GERTIE
 Oh, yes. Our Elizabeth is the very
 best.
 (glances at poster)
 We'll have signs printed. And my
 father -- he owns a bank -- will put
 up the prize money.

UNCLE BILL
 There's not much time. And I can
 use help in the workshop. Can you
 start... now?

HENRY
 All right then.

EXT./INT. ANGELA'S TOYOTA TERCEL - SANTA FE STREETS - DAY

Angela drives. Maria sits in the front passenger's seat. Her brother, Rudy, sits in back, chewing gum. Rudy reaches around the seat to pinch Maria. She glares at him.

MARIA

Mama, can a heart be generous?

ANGELA

Generous what? I'm sorry, mi hija. We need to be at work on time. You know how your Aunt Gertie gets. What did you say?

As Angela steers around a corner, Maria sees the old truck parked.

MARIA

Look!

INT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - WORKSHOP - DAY

At the back the store, past the showroom area, is a workshop. One wall is filled with hanging tools, and shelves with paint, stain, and varnish. Partially finished tables and chairs are pushed into a corner. An old, black, upright piano is buried beneath cans of paint and sealer. Near the piano is the rocking horse, covered by the blanket.

Standing at a workbench, Henry examines a broken slat on a Santa Fe-style chair. At a long table, Hannah sketches a poster for the talent contest.

IN THE SHOWROOM

At her desk, Aunt Gertie watches the clock. The back door opens. Angela, Maria, and Rudy enter. Angela carries cleaning supplies.

AUNT GERTIE

Angela. We need to talk.

Maria immediately notices Henry and Hannah in the workshop. She excitedly waves.

ANGELA

Go do your homework like you usually do, okay?

Maria glances back and forth between her mother and Aunt Gertie. She frowns, takes Rudy's hand, and pulls him into the workshop.

Angela stands opposite Aunt Gertie's desk.