

**SILVERBELL**

*A Christmas Tale*

Screenplay by  
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Based on an Original Story  
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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.

AUNT GERTIE

Because my brother married you, we've tried to be supportive.

ANGELA

I'm studying to be a court stenographer. You know that, Gert. And I work damn hard here.

AUNT GERTIE

Well, all good things... I've hired that new service in town.

Angela reacts, inhaling deeply, her eyes flashing emotion, yet her appearance calm.

AUNT GERTIE (CONT'D)

It's just business, Angela. Two-weeks.

Angela stares at Gert for a long moment. There is no hopelessness in her face, only a sense of nobility. She turns away, and begins dusting a long dining table.

IN WORKSHOP

Henry repairs the leg of the chair. Maria does her homework, but glances over at the corner where a blanket covers the object -- the rocking horse.

IN SHOWROOM

The back door opens and ELIZABETH HUTTON enters. She's 9, slender, blonde, with features similar to her mother.

ELIZABETH

Mother, it's cold. Will you drive me to ballet today?

AUNT GERTIE

I've had a brilliant idea for a talent contest.

ELIZABETH

Okay, but I'm late. I need to go now, Mother.

While Aunt Gertie reaches for her purse, Elizabeth stares into the workshop. Her face shows only the tiniest curiosity about Henry and Hannah. At the small table doing her homework, Maria lifts a hand slightly in greeting to Elizabeth. In reply, Elizabeth nods every so slightly.

AUNT GERTIE

And you, my little prima ballerina, are going to win.

Aunt Gertie goes out the back door with Elizabeth. The door SLAMS shut.

INT./EXT. MARIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Under an intense blue sky, bright sun melts stark white snow which contrasts beautifully with the adobe walls of the small house. Angela, Maria, and Rudy hurriedly leave the house and get into the car.

ANGELA

How was school today, mi hija?

MARIA

Okay, Mama.

ANGELA

Did you bring your homework?

MARIA

History.

ANGELA

And you be good today, Rudy, and not bother Henry and Hannah?

RUDY

Of course, Mama.

As Rudy climbs into the back seat, he finds a piece of gum he had stuck to the side of the front seat. He pulls off the gum and pops it in his mouth.

INT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - WORKSHOP - DAY

Henry, Uncle Bill, and Malcolm (the 12-year-old who pushed Maria outside school) carry a heavy table into the workshop and set it down.

Hannah draws the contest poster. Rudy chews gum and blows bubbles. He sneakily tries to swipe one of Hannah's colored drawing pencils, but she catches him in the act.

MARIA

Rudy! Don't!

A bubble Rudy is blowing POPS in his face. Maria smiles, shuts her schoolbook and goes to watch Hannah.

HANNAH

Do you want to be in the contest?

MARIA

(shrugs)

What could I do in a contest?

MALCOLM

(laughs)

Maria could win the contest for having  
the biggest red blotch!

UNCLE BILL

Malcolm!

Maria glares at Malcolm, her little hands clenched into fists.  
Malcolm smiles in a nasty way as he waddles past her toward  
the door.

Henry purses his lips and silently pushes air out in the  
direction of Malcolm.

Suddenly, Malcolm loses his balance, trips, and falls  
harmlessly into a pile of furniture blankets.

MALCOLM

Dad! Somebody pushed me!

Maria and Rudy giggle to themselves. Uncle Bill stares. No  
one is close to Malcolm.

UNCLE BILL

I don't think so, son. You must've  
tripped.

Malcolm scrambles to his feet and waddles out of the room.

Maria gazes at Henry with a slightly confused expression of,  
"Something a little out of the ordinary just happened here,  
but I'm not sure what."

HANNAH

(works on poster)

What do you think, Maria?

MARIA

What's that under his stomach? It  
looks like clouds and stars.

HANNAH

(explains in her fun,  
clownlike way)

Yes. Because way past the clouds  
are stars -- that's where this horse  
comes from.

MARIA

Stars? Horses don't come from stars!

Maria is startled by the SOUND OF TINKLING BELLS. There's a  
glow around Silverbell which seems to drift into the room.

Maria's eyes dart around. She looks at Uncle Bill who is  
packing a wood-framed mirror for shipment.

Maria can tell he doesn't hear the bells.

Rudy is busy practicing blowing bubbles and tying his shoes. He doesn't hear the bells, either.

Maria glances at Henry and Hannah who smile slightly. She realizes they can hear the bells. The BELLS STOP. Maria reacts unsure. Did she really hear something?

HANNAH

So, you want to be in the contest?

MARIA

(shyly)

Not really. What can I do?

HANNAH

When there's something you truly want, you'd be surprised at what you can do.

Hannah smiles a big clown smile and hops around. Maria laughs.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Angela, Maria and Rudy eat dinner of enchiladas, beans, and rice. The pots and pans on the stove are empty. Rudy speaks with a barely perceptible lisp.

RUDY

(stares at her plate)

Mama, I'm still hungry.

ANGELA

Here, mi hijo.

Angela moves pieces of enchilada from her plate to Rudy's. Rudy quickly eats, then plays with his food flips a piece of rice at Maria.

MARIA

Such a brat!

Rudy giggles, takes his gum from under the table and pops it in his mouth.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Oh, you're so gross.

ANGELA

Henry and Hannah...

MARIA

They're nice, huh?

ANGELA

Yes, but... the contest... what they tell you... I...

MARIA

Mama. You already have enough to worry about. And I'm almost an adult.  
(at Rudy)  
Unlike some... brothers.

INT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - WORKSHOP AREA - NIGHT

Henry sands a spot on Silverbell. Hannah puts finishing touches on the contest poster.

HANNAH

Henry... you always find a way.

HENRY

But you see how hardened Angela is? It's understandable, after what's happened, losing her husband, how her sister-in-law is toward her. But she's passing that on to her daughter.

HANNAH

So? You might need to do a two-for-one.

HENRY

Two-for-one?

HANNAH

You know, two-for-one -- mother and daughter. You have a little time until Christmas. And don't forget the key ingredient.

HENRY

(glances at rocking horse)

Mister Always Wanting To Do Everything Perfect?

HANNAH

Silverbell can help Maria find her special talent.

HENRY

Remember how difficult he was during the training? Always thinking he could do it better?

Henry uses a chisel to carve a design into the back of a wooden bench. He stops, picks up a shiny, red apple.

He leans against the piano and watches Hannah working on the poster.

HANNAH  
 (has an idea)  
 Hmm... That birthmark on Maria's  
 neck?

Over in the corner, under the tarp, Silverbell moves slightly and they hear the mysterious SOUND OF TINKLING BELLS. Hannah smiles.

HANNAH (CONT'D)  
 Yes, I'm coming, Silverbell...  
 (giggles)  
 ... Mi hijo.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Maria is at a desk near the back. Her cousin Elizabeth sits in the front row, a pair of pink ballet slippers perched on her desk near an open notebook. MRS. FISHER -- 40s, warm-hearted, with curly red hair -- smiles at the class.

MRS. FISHER  
 Our speaking assignment for next  
 week is based on a quote from Eleanor  
 Roosevelt. Who knows about Eleanor  
 Roosevelt?

Silence.

MRS. FISHER (CONT'D)  
 Maria?

MARIA  
 (without hesitation)  
 First Lady to President Franklin  
 Roosevelt.

MRS. FISHER  
 A very active First Lady. One thing  
 she said was, and I'm sure she  
 believed this from the depths of her  
 heart: "No one can make you feel  
 inferior without your consent." Who  
 knows what that means?

STUDENT #1  
 Don't let nobody bring you down.

MRS. FISHER  
 That's one way of putting it, Carlos.

STUDENT #2

Other people -- who are stupid anyway --  
can only make you feel bad if you  
let them.

MRS. FISHER

That's another way of saying it,  
Rebecca. So, I want you all to apply  
this to your own life. That's your  
speaking assignment for next week.

At her desk, Maria cringes at the thought. She exchanges a grimace with LUCY, a gawky, too-tall-for-her-age girl at the next desk. Lucy makes an exaggerated face of total fear. Maria grins.

EXT. SANTA FE PLAZA - DAY

Snow sparkles on the trees and the ground. Stores have notices for pre-Christmas sales.

INT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - WORKSHOP - DAY

Henry applies a stain to a table. Hannah paints a delicate turquoise-colored design on a chair. On the floor, Rudy wildly crayons a coloring book. At the small table, Maria concentrates on her homework. She looks up. She thinks she hears a TINY TINKLING BELL.

After a moment, Maria slips away from her school books and over to the corner. She puts a little hand on the blanket covering Silverbell. There are more TINKLING BELLS, then HEAVENLY MUSIC.

Transfixed by the heavenly sounds, Maria listens more closely and hears FAINT DISTANT SOUNDS OF A HORSE NEIGHING.

Henry and Hannah pretend not to notice what Maria is doing.

MARIA

Can I take a peek now?

HENRY

I think it's safe to say "yes."

Maria's bright blue eyes open very wide and she lifts the blanket a little bit from Silverbell's head. What she sees causes her to freeze for a second. She touches the birthmark area on her neck then touches the similar cloud-shape now painted on Silverbell's forehead.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Something the matter?

MARIA

We have the same...

HENRY

Hmm. It could mean that Silverbell will help you.

MARIA

Help me? What for?

HENRY

You want to be in the contest, don't you?

MARIA

It's a talent contest.

HENRY

All right, then. You need to find your special talent.

MARIA

I have a special talent?

HENRY

Oh, yes. And Silverbell can help you find it.

HANNAH

But Silverbell... he likes things done in a certain... perfect order.

HENRY

If you want his help, you must be sure you ask for it in a special way... and with a generous heart.

MARIA

A generous heart?

HENRY

It means giving from the heart to others, and accepting others, no matter how different they are from you.

MARIA

Liking people who are different? People aren't that way to me! Why should I be that way to them?

HENRY

Because they aren't that way to you, it's even more important for you to be that way to them. To show them there's a different way they could be.

Angela enters the workshop area.

ANGELA  
Time to go, mi hija.

MARIA  
Just a minute, Mama!  
(to Henry)  
What else do I have to do?

HENRY  
I'll tell you more next time you're  
here. And we'll sing a song together.

Maria's face lights up. Seeing the hope in her daughter's eyes, Angela sighs.

ANGELA  
Honey, you take Rudy and wait in the  
car. I'll be right there.

Maria and Rudy go out the back door.

Alone with Henry and Hannah, Angela speaks forcefully.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
Do you think it's easy for her not  
being accepted by the other kids?  
Being teased all the time. It's not  
right to get her hopes up.

Henry starts to say something, but catches a glance from Hannah, and stops himself.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
And you know the contest is organized  
by Gertie. So whose child do you  
think is going to win? I just...

Henry says nothing. Angela's eyes are tearing.

ANGELA (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry. I'm sure you mean well,  
I...

HANNAH  
(delicate)  
We know it's difficult, Angela.  
Perhaps you sometimes wish your  
husband was still alive.

HENRY  
Martin is still with you, you know.  
Watching over you and the children.

ANGELA  
I'd like to believe that, but...  
It's just... I'm losing this job  
and... I don't know anymore.

She sighs, "bites" her lip, turns and exits.

Henry stares at the closed door.

HANNAH

Remember, Henry... two-for-one.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY (SEVERAL DAYS LATER)

Kids exit school. Malcolm sees Maria and glares.

She gives him a big forced smile, and walks down the steps.

INT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - WORKSHOP - DAY

Henry carefully places his half-eaten apple on top of the old upright piano in the corner. He removes cans of stain and sealer sitting on the piano keyboard cover. As she watches him, Maria chews a bite of apple.

MARIA

Can a wooden horse really help me win a talent contest?

HANNAH

Oh, yeah. But Silverbell is kind of particular -- picky.

HENRY

We already told her that.

HANNAH

But did we tell you you need to have a rhyme?

MARIA

Rhyme? Where do I get that?

HENRY

You have to create it, and sing it.

MARIA

Sing it?

HENRY

Sometimes, when you're all alone, do you, by any chance, sing to yourself?

MARIA

Maybe. How did you know?

HENRY

This isn't so different.

As his fingers hover above the keyboard, the keys seem to go up and down by themselves, as if it was a player piano.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(sings)

STARLIGHT ANGELS IN THE STARRY NIGHT,  
I WISH TONIGHT I COULD TRULY FLY,  
WITH SILVERBELL AS MY FAITHFUL GUIDE,  
INTO THE GLITTERING NIGHT WE RIDE.

Henry gestures for Maria to sing with him. Maria is shy to start. She listens, fiddles with her faded red scarf, begins to mouth some of the words.

HENRY (CONT'D)

HIGH ABOVE THE FRESH MORNING DAWN,  
MY TEARS AND SADNESS WILL BE GONE,  
BECAUSE SILVERBELL IS MY TRUE FRIEND,  
AND A GENEROUS HEART IS MAGIC WITHOUT  
END.

Henry stops. Maria giggles softly.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Remember, when you sing the magical  
rhyme, it's really important for you  
to have a generous heart.

MARIA

Loving and accepting others.

HENRY

Yes. It might take practice, but it  
will work. I've seen it happen  
before.

Maria nods.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Anyway, that's one song. As I said,  
you need to make up your own magical  
rhyme and sing it.

MARIA

Can't I use that song?

HENRY

If you want Silverbell to help, you  
need to sing a song that is... your  
song.

MARIA

(thoughtful)

My song.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Maria checks that Rudy is asleep in his upper bunkbed. She climbs into the lower bunk and picks up her teddy bear, Pancho.

MARIA

(whispers)

We're going to do it, Pancho. We're going to try until we sing the special rhyme.

In the upper bunk, Rudy stirs and his eyes open.

MARIA (CONT'D)

(softly sings, awkward)

SILVERBELL, SILVERBELL, PLEASE VISIT  
ME, SINCE YOU'RE THE BEST, YOU CAN  
HELP ME FIND MY SPECIAL TALENT, AND...  
AND... AND THEN I CAN... WIN THE  
CONTEST AND EVERYBODY WILL LIKE ME!

Maria stops and glances around the room, as if expecting Silverbell to show up. Nothing happens. Maria hears STIFLED GIGGLES in the upper bunk.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Rudy! I am trying to concentrate!

RUDY

Good for you.

MARIA

Okay...

(sings)

SILVERBELL, SILVERBELL, PLEASE HELP  
ME WIN, SO THE OTHER KIDS WILL NEVER  
LAUGH AT ME AGAIN.

Maria stops. Still nothing happens. She notices her other stuffed animals sitting quietly on the shelf. She gazes toward the bedroom window.

Outside the window, snow begins to softly fall, obscuring the distant twinkling stars in the dark night sky.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Nothing is right. Nothing is right.

Maria helps Pancho nod in agreement.

RUDY

(mimics)

Nothing is right. Nothing is right.

Rudy giggles.

MARIA

Okay, let's just say good-night to  
Papa.

Maria goes to the chest of drawers and stares at the photo of her father in a military uniform. The framed photo is propped on an old chest of drawers.

Another photo shows Angela, Maria, and Maria's dad, Martin, smiling for the camera as they walk down Canyon Road at Christmas time. Farolitos line the street. Angela holds a six-month-old Rudy.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - HALL AT BEDROOM DOOR (CONTINUOUS)

Angela walks up, stops outside the bedroom door, and watches Maria.

MARIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Good night, Papa.

Angela chokes back the urge to cry.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM (CONTINUOUS)

Maria crawls under the covers with Pancho. Angela walks in.

ANGELA

Good night, mi hija.

(stares at Rudy)

I know you're awake, Rudy. Only ten days till Christmas. Are you being good?

RUDY

(sweet innocence)

Yes, Mama, very, very good.

Maria rolls her eyes.

INT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - WORKSHOP - DAY

Henry and Uncle Bill lift a Santa Fe-style table and carry it out of the workshop to the back door. They pass Aunt Gertie who is on the phone at her desk.

AUNT GERTIE

(into phone)

Just a friendly reminder, Angela.  
You have one week left.

EXT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - BACK PARKING AREA - DAY

Henry and Uncle Bill carry a very heavy dining table from the back door of the store to Henry's red pickup.

HENRY

Gertie and Angela -- what's the bad blood between them?

UNCLE BILL

Well... long story short Gertie's parents moved from the East, bringing lots of money. They believed their children were better than... just better than. So, Gertie and her parents were none too thrilled when Martin grew up and fell in love with Angela, a Hispanic.

HENRY

One of the ones they were better than?

UNCLE BILL

Right, and he was totally nuts for her, and she for him. But the family wasn't happy, so long story short they eloped.

HENRY

And Gert and her folks blamed Angela?

UNCLE BILL

Right. Then, well, when the war started, Martin wanted to... I got to hand it to the guy. He really believed in freedom and --

HENRY

And, when he died, Gert and her folks blamed Angela.

UNCLE BILL

Though the truth was Angela didn't want Martin going anywhere.

AUNT GERTIE (O.S.)

(yelling from store)

Bill!

They set the table down near the truck.

UNCLE BILL

Be back in a minute.

HENRY

No hurry, amigo.

Uncle Bill ducks through the back door of the store. Henry looks around to see if anyone is watching. He waves his hand at the table and it lifts up into the bed of the pickup. He shuts the tailgate.

INT. SCHOOLROOM - DAY

Maria sits in class along with other Students. Mrs. Fisher stands to one side of the room. At the front, Maria's blonde-haired, perky cousin, Elizabeth, presents her public-speaking assignment.

ELIZABETH

(as if continuing)

And, because my parents are upstanding members of the local business community. You all know their beautiful store -- voted one of the best in Santa Fe -- Hutton's Furniture on the Plaza.

Elizabeth giggles. A few students laugh with her. On the blackboard behind her are the words: ELEANOR ROOSEVELT ASSIGNMENT: NO ONE CAN MAKE YOU FEEL BAD ABOUT YOURSELF UNLESS YOU LET THEM.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

In terms of someone making me feel inferious... I mean inferior...

Elizabeth puts her hand to her mouth with an exaggerated expression of: Uh-oh, but who cares?

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

... So, there is no reason on earth why I would not feel just as good, or even better, than anyone else.

Elizabeth bobs her head in agreement with herself, smiles widely, tosses her mane of blonde hair and, in perfect ballet form, glides back to her school desk.

MRS. FISHER

(forced praise)

Thank, you, Elizabeth. Who hasn't gone yet? Maria?

Near the back of the classroom, Maria shrinks down in her chair. Lucy, the gawky too-tall-for-her-age girl at the next desk, turns to Maria.

LUCY

(whispers)

You'll do great.

Maria glances at Lucy, gulps, and stands. Wearing a turtleneck, and making sure her scarf is adjusted around her neck to cover her birthmark, Maria goes to the front of the class.

MRS. FISHER

Okay, class, shh, shh, quiet down.  
Now go ahead, Maria.

Maria clears her throat, pulls the scarf around her neck a little tighter, and begins in a low voice.

MARIA

My... I first want to talk about my father. He was in a war in a faraway place and...

A LARGE BOY points at his own neck, pretending to have a birthmark. Students snicker. They stop when Mrs. Fisher glares at them.

MRS. FISHER

Could you speak just a little louder, please, Maria.

MARIA

My father wanted to defend the rights and equality of all people, in all countries, and--

Suddenly, Maria is hit in the face by a wad of paper. She's startled and a panic begins to rise inside her little body. She slowly starts to gasp for air.

Mrs. Fisher's eyes scan the class for offenders.

BOY NEAR FRONT OF CLASS

(loud whisper)

Show us your funny neck!

SECOND BOY

C'mon! What other weird stuff are you hiding?

Maria glares.

MRS. FISHER

Okay, stop it now! Right now! Logan, you're going to detention. You, too, Julio!

THREE GIRL STUDENTS giggle and whisper among themselves, being disrespectful of Maria.

Maria can't take the taunts. On the verge of tears in front of the class, she runs to the door, and rushes into the hallway.

MRS. FISHER (CONT'D)

Maria, wait!

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Maria races down the hall, past lockers and a few students. Her eyes clouded with tears, Maria momentarily slips, and keeps on running.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Maria pushes the doors open and runs down the steps. Now the winter cold hits her. She keeps on moving.

EXT. SANTA FE STREETS - DAY

Maria runs, her face red from tears and cold.

EXT. SANTA FE PLAZA - DAY

Maria rushes past restaurants and stores, decorated for Christmas. Noticing one of the contest posters, Maria has an angry grimace on her cold red face. She grabs a corner of the poster and tears it. She dashes toward Hutton's Furniture Store.

INT. HUTTON'S FURNITURE - SHOWROOM - DAY

Out of breath, Maria bursts into the store in a frenzy. Uncle Bill sees she's upset and reacts, concerned. Before he can even say her name, Maria dashes into the workshop.

IN THE WORKSHOP

Hannah paints a delicate flower on a chair. Henry uses a rag to buff the varnish on the rocking horse. Panting from exhaustion, Maria rushes in and glares at the rocking horse, then up at Henry.

MARIA

This silly wooden horse won't help me!

Hannah sets down her paint brush.

MARIA (CONT'D)

And all you've done is lie to me!

Hannah moves cautiously to Maria, and puts her arms around the girl. Maria initially pushes her away.

MARIA (CONT'D)

(through tears)

And that contest is stupid! And my I'm-so-much-better-than-everybody-else cousin Elizabeth's going to win, anyway!

Maria's eyes become waterfalls. Hannah dabs Maria's tears with a rose-colored handkerchief.

HENRY

Maria, it's early for you to be out of school. Tell us what happened.

MARIA

I give up, Henry. I give up.  
(tears subsiding)  
You said Silverbell could help me. And I believed you. I tried lots of rhymes, but nothing happened. Nothing!

HENRY

Have you looked for clues?

Maria breathes deeply catching her breath after all the tears.

MARIA

Clues? What clues? Where?!

HENRY

Remember how we told you Silverbell likes things in a certain perfect way? Well, here's a clue: The reason why you want to win the contest matters a lot to Silverbell. He cares about intention.

MARIA

What's "intention"?

HENRY

It's the true reason behind what you want.

MARIA

I want the kids in school to stop making fun of me. Is that so wrong?

HENRY

What about having a generous heart?

MARIA

What about it?

HENRY

Okay. Tonight, when you say more rhymes, think about who you love the most.

MARIA

But... maybe Silverbell just doesn't like me.

HENRY

And maybe you need to stop worrying  
whether other people like you and  
start liking yourself.

MARIA

(tiny voice)

I can like myself?

HENRY

It's called having a generous heart...  
toward yourself. Now please look  
for clues, okay?

(beat)

All right then.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Maria peeks over the top of the bunk bed to see if Rudy is asleep. His face is slack, but he could be faking. She watches him closely for a few seconds.

Maria crawls onto her lower bunk bed and snuggles with her teddy bear, Pancho.

MARIA

(whispers to Pancho)

To have a generous heart, we need to  
think... what we care about most.

(makes Pancho nod his  
head in agreement)

Is there anything more important  
than other kids liking me?

Maria hears the FAINT SOUNDS OF CRYING. Holding Pancho, Maria quietly exits the room.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - HALLWAY (CONTINUOUS)

Maria carries Pancho as she walks quietly and stops outside the slightly open door of her mother's room.

MARIA'S POV - THROUGH THE DOOR

Angela sobs softly. On the night table is a photo of Angela and her late husband, Martin.

ANGELA

(tearful)

What am I going to do, Martin? I'm  
worried about the kids, and...

ON MARIA OUTSIDE DOOR

Maria looks at Pancho as if they are silently communicating about a decision. She makes Pancho nod his head "yes." She pushes the door open wider.

INT. ANGELA'S BEDROOM (CONTINUOUS)

Maria enters, carrying Pancho. Angela immediately wipes away her tears and smiles.

ANGELA

What's up, sweetums?

MARIA

Mama, Pancho said he needs to stay with you tonight, okay?

Angela takes Pancho from Maria and hugs him. She smiles at Maria, holding back her tears.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Maria crawls back onto her bed and sits with her little knees held tight to her face. Her eyes dart around, as if looking for an answer.

Rudy peeks over the edge of the upper bunk bed.

RUDY

Are you going to make those stupid rhymes again?

MARIA

Yes, Rudy!

Rudy leans so far over the edge of the upper bunk bed that he tumbles, catches himself on the edge, and swings down onto Maria's bunk bed. He grabs his wad of gum from the bedpost. Maria rolls her eyes.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Okay, Rudy, you sit here with me.

(takes Rudy's hand)

Henry said to feel what I care about most. That's how I can have a generous heart.

Maria closes her eyes and concentrates. Rudy closes his, and scrunches in pretend concentration.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Okay. I know I care most about Mama... and Rudy, even though he can be the world's biggest brat!

Rudy opens his eyes with an innocent look.

Maria sings softly, in an innocent, angelic, heart-filled tone.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 WITH ALL MY HEART, SILVERBELL, I  
 WANT TO FIND A RHYME TO TELL, DOING  
 NOTHING IS WHAT I FEAR, SO I TRULY  
 HOPE YOU WILL HEAR, AND HELP ME FIND  
 A SPECIAL WAY, TO MAKE MY MAMA BE  
 OKAY.

Suddenly, Maria hears FAINT TINKLING BELLS and barely audible DISTANT SOUNDS OF CLATTERING, GALLOPING HOOVES. A HORSE NEIGHS.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 Did you hear that?!

Rudy nods, a touch of fear in his eyes.

HEAVENLY MUSIC MELODY gets LOUDER AND LOUDER as the snow outside the window swirls faster and faster.

Holding hands, Maria and Rudy cautiously slide off the bed and step close to the window. What they see makes them gasp.

Outside the window, a tornadolike flash of whirling, twirling snow, glistening with starlight, hovers in the sky. It gradually begins to resemble a four-legged animal -- a rearing mustang.

Maria cautiously opens the window. Snow swirls. There is a HUGE FLASH OF LIGHT!

Maria pulls Rudy back from the window just in time to avoid the thunderous hooves of a life-sized, dappled gray horse -- SILVERBELL -- his body glowing in silvery light, as if lit from within. Rudy squeals with delight.

Although trying to land perfectly, Silverbell's legs splay in all directions. He pulls them in so he's standing.

SILVERBELL  
 Not exactly a picture-perfect landing.  
 But what matters is... I'm still  
 standing!

RUDY  
 He sure talks in funny rhymes, kind  
 of like you did.

MARIA  
 Shh, Rudy.

On his forehead Maria sees the marking that is a white cloudlike blaze version of the red cloud-shaped birthmark on Maria's neck. It is exactly the same as she had seen on the rocking horse at the workshop.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Are you... the Silverbell?

SILVERBELL

The Silverbell? That's certainly me. Now get ready to go and make history!

Maria reaches to cautiously touch Silverbell, reassuring herself that he's real.

MARIA

Go? Go where?

SILVERBELL

On a quest to pass the rest of the tests, to find your special talent and be your best.

Silverbell glances at the open window. Maria gulps. Rudy's eyes grow huge.

MARIA

What?... I... What?... I'm not sure, I...

SILVERBELL

Christmas is coming, we don't have long. So if you're not going, I'll just be gone.

Silverbell neighs and impatiently moves a hoof across the floor. Maria instinctively puts her hand on Silverbell's neck.

MARIA

No! No! Don't go.

SILVERBELL

We've got a lot to do and discover tonight, And we've got to do it all... just precisely right.

Silverbell neighs and impatiently stomps the floor. Maria suddenly feels weak, and steadies herself by holding onto the chest of drawers. She notices the photo of her father and family. Her face transforms from fear and doubt into clear determination.

MARIA

This sounds dangerous. Rudy, you better stay here.

RUDY

No, no, I want to go!

Maria stares at Rudy, not sure what to do.

RUDY (CONT'D)

I'll be good.

MARIA

Yeah, right.

Maria looks to Silverbell for guidance.

SILVERBELL

This is the first decision of your  
new start, and the way to make it  
is...?

MARIA

With a generous heart?

Maria considers this as she pulls on clothes over her pajamas,  
then her jacket, scarf, and shoes.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Hmmm... Okay, Rudy.

Rudy's mischievous eyes sparkle like Christmas lights as he  
puts on clothes and grabs his jacket and shoes.

Silverbell stands next to the bunk bed. Maria and Rudy jump  
on the bed, then climb onto the beautifully-made saddle with  
stars and clouds carved into the deeply-tanned leather.

From each side of the front lower edge of the saddle, a strip  
of leather with bells attached extends toward the center of  
Silverbell's stately chest. In the middle, where the two  
strips meet right below Silverbell's neck, is Silverbell's  
medallion -- a shining object with cookie-cutter clouds and  
diamondlike stars.

Silverbell stands confident and proud. The bells on the  
leather strips jingle slightly. Maria's heart pounds with  
excitement. She holds onto the saddle and Rudy holds tight  
to Maria.

Silverbell's medallion begins to glow with a bright starlike  
beam of light that seems to shine from the inside out. Maria  
reacts, amazed at how bright it makes the entire bedroom.

As Silverbell turns to the open window, the beam of light  
shoots from the medallion, through the window, and into the  
sky.

At the same time, four tiny stars circle Silverbell's head.  
They rhythmically coordinate with the beam of light and the  
stars and constellations in the night sky.

Gradually, everything comes into alignment.

RUDY  
What's happening?!

MARIA  
He's getting charged up... or something!

The stars around Silverbell's head whirl more quickly, and the lightbeam shooting out from the medallion becomes a solid pathway of light.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Hold on!

There is a huge brilliant flash.

Maria and Rudy hold on tight. As if riding a wave of brightness, Silverbell half-gallops, half-shoots onto the bolt of light, out the window, and into the night sky.

SILVERBELL  
Hey, hey, neigh, let's fly away!

MARIA AND RUDY  
Whoaaaaaaaaaaa!

EXT. NIGHT SKY

Up among the wispy clouds, the tiny figures of Maria and Rudy hold tight to Silverbell whose eyes sparkle with delight.

Maria stares in amazement at the starlights orbiting Silverbell's head. She notices Rudy quivering and wants to distract him.

MARIA  
Look, Rudy, Silverbell is using the light shining from the medallion to navigate through the sky.

RUDY  
(afraid)  
That medallion must really be ma-magic.

The moon looms overhead. Maria notices pale wisps of clouds between her and the twinkling dots of faraway tiny stars. Her faded red scarf blows in the breeze, and Maria pulls it snug around her neck.

RUDY (CONT'D)  
Do you know... I mean... how are we... do you know how we're going to get back?!

MARIA  
Don't worry, Rudy.

RUDY  
But what if we're forever and ever  
and ever lost?!

SILVERBELL  
You know, I'm a little worried, too,  
just like you.

MARIA AND RUDY  
(scream at the same  
time)  
You are?!

SILVERBELL  
No, no, no, not just like you're  
worrying, because I actually do know  
where we're going.

MARIA  
And you're still worried?

SILVERBELL  
Because it's my job to help you find  
your talent or skill, but I don't  
know how that will happen or even if  
it will!

MARIA  
Oh, I'm sure you will help me find  
it, Silverbell.

SILVERBELL  
Well, this is real life, you see.  
So... there can be no guarantees.

They fly into huge clouds and are totally surrounded by soft  
vast whiteness.

RUDY  
Are we... are we in heaven, Maria?

Maria feels flecks of white on her scarf.

MARIA  
No, Rudy, I don't think it snows in  
heaven.

EXT. SKY - APPROACHING STARLIGHT CIRCUS

Far ahead are sparkling lights that blink green, red, orange,  
yellow, and blue. They hear TINKLING BELLS and CAROUSEL  
MUSIC and SNIPPETS OF THE MELODY FROM THE SILVERBELL CHRISTMAS  
SONG.

SILVERBELL

Prepare for landing very soon, at  
the Starlight Circus beneath the  
moon.

EXT. STARLIGHT CIRCUS - AERIAL APPROACH - NIGHT

As Silverbell flies closer to the Starlight Circus, the MELODY GETS LOUDER. Snowflakes shine with silver and gold. Maria and Rudy see more multi-colored Christmas lights strung in rows across three large tents and many smaller ones. There is a Cirque du Soleil feel to the atmosphere.

SILVERBELL

In a moment we will end this ride,  
with an extremely smooth celestial  
glide.

Two rows of blinking lights point the way. But Silverbell veers off the light path.

MARIA

Silverbell, I think you might be  
missing where we're supposed to--

Silverbell misses the blinking lights and lands with a THUD on his belly. While Maria and Rudy hold on for dear life, Silverbell slides forward, stirs up clouds of snow and sawdust, and skids to a stop inside a small tent.

INT. DRESSING ROOM TENT - NIGHT

PERFORMERS and CLOWNS don costumes and makeup. Maria and Rudy jump off Silverbell and are awestruck by the colors, costumes, and CIRCUS PERFORMERS. A FOUR-PIECE CIRCUS BAND plays the SILVERBELL MELODY.

SILVERBELL

(scrambles to his feet)  
If there is one thing I truly hate,  
It's when I make a stupid mistake!

MARIA

It's not a mistake, Silverbell!  
It's exciting! It's wonderful!

Rudy spots a woman clown, BOREALIS, who puts on white face makeup. Borealis wears a glittery gown sewn with stones that resemble sparkling diamonds. A big rhinestone diamond adorns her head. Her eyeshadow and lips are diamond sparkles. Sitting on a stand are tubes of different colored creams. As Borealis speaks, the colors of her costume shimmer.

BOREALIS

Hi, my name is Borealis, which is  
short for Aurora Borealis.

Rudy smiles. As Borealis applies more makeup, Rudy sneakily squirts a tube of red clown makeup in the air. Borealis turns and grabs the tube. Right before Rudy's astonished eyes, Borealis flicks her wrist and the tube vanishes.

RUDY

Whoa!

MARIA

(rushes over)

Rudy, are you making trouble already?  
Is he making trouble?

BOREALIS

Who? Oh, him? Nooooo. He's no  
trouble to me. I love an audience!

Maria and Borealis laugh. Maria tilts her head to one side and squints at Borealis, as if Borealis is vaguely familiar.

SILVERBELL

Maria, you and Rudy might wander  
over there, and take a good look at  
those big polar bears.

Silverbell points with his head. Maria excitedly leads Rudy to a nearby table where THREE POLAR BEARS use giant powder puffs to powder their already white fur. They create little clouds of powder.

Borealis pulls Silverbell aside.

BOREALIS

(applying clown makeup)

Remember the plan we prepared you  
for? It's changed.

SILVERBELL

The p-plan has changed?

BOREALIS

The plan has become more dangerous  
than expected.

SILVERBELL

With all the magic here? You can't  
s-s-s-stop her?

BOREALIS

The sorceress -- she has her own  
brand of magic, and it's out of  
control.

Silverbell's eyes get big and his flanks shiver.

Beyond them, RINGMASTER SPIRITUS strides into the tent. Resembling a younger version of Henry, Ringmaster Spiritus

wears a black jacket with long tails, a top hat, and white gloves. He strides to Maria and Rudy.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
I am Ringmaster Spiritus, and I have something very important to show you.

EXT. STARLIGHT CIRCUS - CIRCUS GROUNDS - NIGHT

Maria, Rudy, and Silverbell follow Ringmaster Spiritus. Maria excitedly notices the snow-dusted tents strung with Christmas lights. ACROBATS, CLOWNS, JUGGLERS, TAP DANCING LAMAS, and CHILDREN CIRCUS-GOERS move between tents.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
The circus has a natural magic, like the wind.

With a flash of hands, Ringmaster Spiritus reaches into the air and pulls two apples out of nowhere. He tosses one to Rudy and hands another to Maria. She breaks off a big piece and feeds it to Silverbell.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)  
Anything is possible here.

Lightly-falling snowflakes shimmer with many colors swirling in the gentle breeze. The snowflakes form into translucent dancing figures.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)  
Did you know, amigos, the circus and Christmas are both about the celebration of life?

Maria ponders this as she takes another bite of apple -- then suddenly freezes mid-bite. Maria's eyes dart in all directions.

In a darkened tent opening, a FIGURE IN A BLACK CAPE watches with red-flamed beady hawk eyes. The cape flutters as if made of ashes. Then the figure is gone, leaving only a FAINT CACKLE OF LAUGHTER.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)  
I see you sense the danger.

Maria's little body tenses and she slips a protective arm over Rudy who gulps.

Silverbell's nostrils flare as he sniffs the air, and pins back his ears.

MARIA  
What is it?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 There are those who wish to steal  
 Silverbell's magic medallion.

Ringmaster Spiritus nods at the medallion which suddenly  
 flickers and glows.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)  
 We all know the medallion holds great  
 power.

They walk a few steps further. Ringmaster Spiritus stops at  
 a glittering, white and gold wagon.

INT. RINGMASTER SPIRITUS' WAGON - NIGHT

Maria and Rudy follow Ringmaster Spiritus inside. Silverbell  
 pokes his head through the door. Ringmaster Spiritus opens  
 a desk drawer and removes a small red leather pouch covered  
 with jewels that sparkle like rain in the sun. He hands it  
 to Maria.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 You will use this to hold the star-  
 tokens.

MARIA  
 Hold the what?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Maria, you are here to find your  
 special talent, right?

MARIA  
 Yes. Yes, I am.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 But, to find your way back home, you  
 and Silverbell will need three star-  
 tokens.

MARIA  
 Three star-tokens.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 You must get these star-tokens before  
 midnight or you will not be able to  
 get back home.

RUDY  
 Not get back home!? I told you!

MARIA  
 Rudy!  
 (to Ringmaster Spiritus)  
 How will we get the star-tokens?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 You will play certain games that are  
 less about winning or competing and  
 more about -- well, you'll see.

MARIA  
 I'll see?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 As I was saying, the games involve  
 riddles. When you solve a riddle, I  
 will give you a star-token.

MARIA  
 So, solving the riddles will help me  
 find my special talent, and you'll  
 give us star-tokens which we need to  
 get back home?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Exactly. But, as I mentioned, there  
 are those who wish to steal  
 Silverbell's magic medallion.

Maria glances at the medallion around Silverbell's neck.  
 Her face is confused.

SILVERBELL  
 We must do everything exactly perfect,  
 and right. Or else we'll be stuck  
 in an endless night.

His face pale with fear, Rudy's eyes whirl nervously, as if  
 he wants to crawl under a rock.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 The First Riddle is: To save those  
 who fly, you must trust inside.

MARIA  
 "To save those who fly, you must  
 trust inside." Now what?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Now it's up to you. You must solve  
 the First Riddle to receive your  
 first star-token.

MARIA  
 I understand. Thank you, sir. Thank  
 you very much.

EXT. CIRCUS MIDWAY - NIGHT

Maria, Rudy, and Silverbell walk past PERFORMERS, CHILDREN,  
 and ANIMALS.

RUDY

I told you we could get stuck here!

Silverbell makes a horselike "Pppphhhh" sound. JUGGLERS toss colored balls in the air. MEN ON STILTS and WOMEN ON UNICYCLES move down the midway.

MARIA

Don't worry so much, Rudy.

But Maria also looks worried.

MARIA (CONT'D)

"To save those who fly, you must trust inside." What could that mean?

THROUGH AN OPEN TENT FLAP, they see colorfully-dressed CLOWNS and JUGGLERS ice skate in circles around Christmas trees glowing with multicolored lights.

MARIA (CONT'D)

The answer has got to be inside one of these tents. But which one?

SILVERBELL

I believe we better look around, until the riddle's place is found.

Suddenly, Maria, Rudy, and Silverbell are startled by a dark figure with red-rimmed eyes who leaps in front of them, blocking their way.

SORCERESS SINTINA

What an exceptionally extraordinary simply incredibly beautiful medallion.

Wearing a black, ashen cape, SORCERESS SINTINA's scary, dreadful voice slithers from her throat and her reddish-gray, lifeless eyes pierce Maria's.

Maria's mouth drops open. She cannot move. Rudy is pale and begins to shudder.

MARIA

Get... out... of... our... way!

Maria ducks as SYLVESTER, a furry batlike creature with long dark wings narrowly misses her. Sylvester settles on the shoulder of Sorceress Sintina. Maria stares at the strange creature which has a furry body and pointy face like a ferret. The ferret-bat wears a short black cape around its stubby neck. Its voice is a shrill chirping sound.

SYLVESTER

It is most definitely an extraordinary medallion!

SORCERESS SINTINA

Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!

Maria stares at Sorceress Sintina. A SLITHERING, HISSING SOUND accompanies the drizzle of ashes and smoke swirling around the Sorceress's black cloak, engulfing her in grayness.

Maria looks stricken, feeling a bit sorry for Sorceress Sintina. She snaps out of it.

MARIA

Out of our way!

The ferret-bat Sylvester jumps off Sorceress Sintina's shoulder and flutters to the ground. Faint circles of smoke encircle Sylvester, as if puffs of smoke rings are blowing up from his pawlike ferret feet toward his pointy batlike head. Watching the smoke rings, Rudy's eyes began to go around in circles, his stomach churns, and he feels dizzy. Maria holds onto him.

SORCERESS SINTINA

Well then, children, and horse, have fun and joy at the Starlight Circus!

(flashes long, menacing fingernails)

But you will never get the star-tokens you need to discover your special talent and return home. Never!

Sorceress Sintina vanishes into a cloud of smoke.

Sylvester, the ferret-bat, stands there for a moment before he realizes the Sorceress has gone. He hurriedly flutters his wings and disappears.

RUDY

I'm ready to go home now!

MARIA

It'll be okay, Rudy.

SILVERBELL

I'm worried for my magic.  
(bends head forward to touch medallion)

The loss of it would be tragic.

EXT. CIRCUS MIDWAY - NEAR ANGEL TENT - NIGHT

Maria, Rudy and Silverbell glance at different tents as they walk. After a moment, Maria points at the top of a tent lit with neon lights and flashing neon signs such as "RIGHT THIS WAY!" "STEP RIGHT UP!"

MARIA

See that angel on top?

The angel changes form. First it's an angel, then Sorceress Sintina, then a raven that CAWS and flies away.

Maria blinks. It's an angel again. A shiver of fear runs up Maria's spine.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Did you see what I saw?!

RUDY

What? What? See what?

Silverbell turns and exchanges a troubled glance with Maria. He nods slightly, not wanting to alarm Rudy.

MARIA

If Sorceress Sintina wants to scare us away from this tent, then maybe it's the one.

Silverbell nods. Rudy shrugs.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Okay. Let's concentrate. The First Riddle is: "To save those who fly, you must trust inside."

Taking a deep breath, Maria marches bravely into the tent.

INT. ANGEL TENT - AT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A TICKET TAKER wears a red clown mask with black feathers and a strange, painted-on, yellow smile. He moves his arms like a windmill as he flamboyantly gestures for Maria, Rudy, and Silverbell to stop.

TICKET TAKER

You're welcome to stay, but if it's star-tokens you're searching for, you'll have better luck in a tent with purple porpoises and carrot-colored Christmas trees.

MARIA

Purple porpoises and carrot-colored Christmas trees?

(beat)

I don't think so.

Ticket Taker laughs and gestures for them to enter. Rudy gives him a nasty look. Then Rudy's expression lights up as he sees someone he knows.

Rudy waves to a red-haired, 5-year-old boy -- T.J. -- who sits in the audience with HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN who wear clothes from different periods throughout history, and AD-LIB to each other in many languages.

RUDY

There's my friend T.J.! I want to say hello!

On the trampoline, Borealis the Clown juggles diamond-studded balls. She wears her glittery gown and the big rhinestone on her head. Borealis bounces high in the air, does a funny clumsy backflip and, in mid-air, waves to Maria.

Maria laughs and waves back.

Borealis juggles diamond-studded balls. She drops the balls on the trampoline, so they bounce up and she has to jump high to catch them. But she misses, and the balls fall, hit the trampoline, and bounce up again.

The audience of children LAUGHS and APPLAUDS.

A spotlight shines on Borealis as she climbs a wooden scaffold that extends toward the top of the tent. Below her, on the trampoline, CLOWNS jump up and down, roll around, and comically squirt each other with paint that, after a moment, magically disappears.

Rudy tugs Maria toward his friend T.J. Maria lets go of Rudy's hand and he runs toward where T.J. sits in the audience.

T.J. is Rudy's age with dark hair and a front tooth missing. He sits in the audience near the edge of the trampoline.

T.J.

Rudy! Hi! I came here with my older brother. But, of course, he's with his friends.

T.J. moves over, making room for Rudy to sit next to him.

All the clowns, except Borealis, jump off the trampoline and run down aisles to the back of the tent. Borealis stands in the center of the trampoline.

BOREALIS

(squeaky, funny voice,  
while waving a stick)

Stick around, because next you will witness the amazing Starlight Angels trapeze featuring Angel Prince Marr and Angel Princess Gila.

The lights go out and the tent is in darkness.

Silverbell reacts, uneasy. Maria puts a hand on his flank.

A SPOTLIGHT shines on a tent entrance. DRUM ROLL. CIRCUS BAND plays ENTRANCE MUSIC. Two huge white horses enter. Their riders are handsome dark-haired ANGEL PRINCE MARR and beautiful ANGEL PRINCESS GILA. They wear costumes covered with shimmering sequins that reflect glittering colors.

Moving to the beat of the CIRCUS BAND'S MUSIC, the two majestic white horses prance around the edge of the large circular trampoline that also serves as a safety-net.

As Prince Mar passes by where Maria stands with Silverbell, Maria can clearly see Angel Prince Marr's startling sapphire-blue eyes.

Angel Prince Marr and Angel Princess Gila slide off their horses. They hold the edge of the trampoline-net and, with flowing movements, pull themselves up so their feet are over their heads, then roll onto the safety net-trampoline.

Prince Marr and Princess Gila meet in the center of the safety net-trampoline, gracefully jump to reach two ropes dangling from the scaffold high above. They each wrap the rope around one of their legs for balance, and pull themselves higher.

Maria is enthralled by the angel costumes glowing with lustrous, sparkling sequins. Squinting slightly, Maria sees something even more amazing and mysterious about these Starlight Circus angels. They are constantly encircled by a warm, soul-stirring, rainbow-like aura.

Maria glances at the faces of the children in the audience. They are a range of ages, from toddlers to teenagers who wear a wide range of clothing, seemingly from different time periods and different countries around the world.

MARIA

(whispers)

Silverbell, are all these children  
and teenagers on an adventure just  
like me?

SILVERBELL

Well... It's more like they are in a  
dream and you are awake. Which makes  
this adventure exist -- just for  
your sake.

MARIA

I'm not sure I understand.

SILVERBELL

Don't worry, you will. And, even if  
you don't, it's okay. You can still  
find your special talent and enter  
the contest straightaway.

Prince Marr and Princess Gila swing from the ropes to two "fly bars" suspended by wires from the scaffold overhead. A brilliant, crystal, rainbow of color trails Prince Marr and Princess Gila as they spin, twist, twirl, and tumble in the darkened air of the circus tent.

Prince Marr and Princess Gila fly through the air to land on a small platform or perch where they pause to take a bow.

Rudy claps his hands. The eyes of other children are filled with awe. Rudy exchanges a smile with his friend T.J.

SILVERBELL

Maybe we better go, before they start the show. And search for the right event, which must be in another tent.

MARIA

No, no, it's just starting. Let's watch!

Silverbell stares at her for a moment, his lips forming a grin as he watches Maria overflowing with joy and fascination.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Look! It's him!

In his black coat and white gloves, Ringmaster Spiritus gets the audience's attention.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Welcome to a spectacle of Balance and Beauty by the Starlight Angels. While the elegance of their athletic actions seems to defy gravity, Prince Marr and Princess Gila must always maintain balance. It's the same for all of us. Life is a matter of balance. If we are not balanced, we fall...

High above, on a tightrope wire, Prince Marr and Princess Gila pretend to lose their balance and begin to fall.

The audience GASPS, then LAUGHS in relief.

ANGLE - BEHIND THE AUDIENCE

Sorceress Sintina and Sylvester, the ferret-bat, enter the tent through a small flap.

BACK TO PERFORMERS AND AUDIENCE

As the audience applauds, the trapeze performers grab their ropes to stabilize themselves, and energetically swing through

the air, flying to the beat of the MUSIC played by a QUARTET OF MUSICIANS on drums, guitar, tuba, and flute.

In the circus ring below, the two white horses, HUGGENS and CALVER, are in constant choreographed motion. They wear black halters decorated with rhinestones, and small angel wings stick up from their saddles. The horses do their own dance, mirroring the movements of Prince Marr and Princess Gila who sparkle as they spin in an electric ballet high in the air.

MARIA

Aren't they amazing?

Silverbell is absorbed in watching, and doesn't seem to hear her. Lights in the tent are turned off and Maria gasps in anticipation.

Strong spotlights shine on the two white horses and the trapeze artists, casting giant shadows that loom over them. The way the lights are positioned, it appears as if the shadows of Prince Marr and Princess Gila are riding the shadows of the two dancing horses. Other lights create the impression of hundreds of tiny stars twinkling in the background.

Princess Gila and Prince Marr perform their aerial ballet, "flying" through the air with Prince Marr as the "catcher" who catches Princess Gila who is the "flyer." Arms slip over legs, and legs flip over arms, like golden leaves in the wind. Whenever one trapeze angel's hand touches the other's, pinpoint flashes of light sparkle across the tent.

ON MARIA AND SILVERBELL

MARIA

They must really trust each other.

Silverbell doesn't respond. He is entranced in watching the beautiful horses in their wonderful dance, rearing and balancing on their hind legs, their front legs waving in the air as they stand on the red-carpeted ring.

Maria's attention shifts back to the trapeze artists. Suddenly, her blue eyes blinked and she sniffed the air.

MARIA (CONT'D)

(sniffs again)

Soot.

Maria whirls around just in time to catch Sorceress Sintina crouching low next to Silverbell. Holding a knife in her bony grip, Sintina starts to cut the leather straps holding Silverbell's medallion.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Silverbell!

Mustering all her strength, Maria pushes Sorceress Sintina away from Silverbell.

Losing her balance, Sorceress Sintina grabs Silverbell's leg. Silverbell rears and sends his hooves crashing down toward Sorceress Sintina.

Her eyes aflame, Sintina grimaces and quickly surrounds herself in a dark cloud of smoke.

From the smoke cloud, a raven flies upwards into the darkness of the tent.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Whew! That was too close!

SILVERBELL

Thank you, Maria. I was absorbed in the beauty of the horses and didn't see the evil forces.

MARIA

Where do you think the Sorceress flew?

SILVERBELL

She has to still be very near, which is why we must get out of here!

His nostrils sniffed the air and his big brown eyes scan the circus tent, searching for Sorceress Sintina.

There is an AHH from the audience. Maria turns to look.

Standing on the platform high above the circus floor, Prince Marr and Princess Gila put on blindfolds. In the ring below, Ringmaster Spiritus and Borealis cover the eyes of the horses.

Silverbell nods toward the door of the tent, but Maria doesn't budge. She glances back and forth from the door of the tent to the two trapeze artists. She is trying to decide what to do.

The tent goes dark. Maria looks up. She notices something.

Prince Marr and Princess Gila glow as one as they spin on cables attached to the scaffolding near the roof of the tent.

Beyond them, barely perceptible in the darkness above the trapeze artists, there is movement. A dark figure is up to something.

Silverbell again motions toward the door of the tent. He snorts.

MARIA

Silverbell, I think they're in danger.  
I'm not sure, but I'm pretty sure.

SILVERBELL

But what if you're wrong? We've  
already stayed too long. If we're  
to solve the riddles and return  
tonight, we must do everything exactly  
right.

MARIA

Even if we lose a chance to get the  
First Star-Token, we have to tell  
the trapeze angels they could be in  
danger.

SILVERBELL

So you're taking a risk to help, and  
trusting in yourself.

MARIA

Wait a minute! Remember what the  
riddle said?

Silverbell cocks his head to one side and glances up at the  
"flying" trapeze artists.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Yes! "To save those who fly, you  
must trust inside."

Silverbell nods and snorts.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Okay. We have to warn Princess Gila  
and Prince Marr.

Maria and Silverbell make their way around the edges of the  
trampoline-net until they find Borealis.

MARIA (CONT'D)

The trapeze angels could be in danger.

BOREALIS

Could be?

Borealis stares up at Prince Marr and Princess Gila who soar  
from one hoop to another, sending a shower of gold and silver  
sparks splashing across the darkness of the tent.

BOREALIS (CONT'D)

They don't look like they're in  
danger. Are you sure?

MARIA  
 (shouts to be heard  
 above music)  
 Yes! And you have to help!

BOREALIS  
 Oh, I do, do I?! This is up to you,  
 Maria.

MARIA  
 But they're way up there!

BOREALIS  
 You believe there is danger. So you  
 must tell them.

Maria is silent for a moment as she considers her options. She glances up at the trapeze artists, then at Borealis. She thinks a beat, then cups her hand to her mouth.

MARIA  
 (top of her lungs)  
 Danger! Danger!

ON SCAFFOLDING NEAR TOP OF TENT

A smoky light encircles Sorceress Sintina. As she glares down at the floor far below, the Sorceress can see Maria yelling. Sorceress Sintina laughs and loosens cables. Nearby, ferret-bat Sylvester uses his sharp little teeth to slice into the ropes just enough to weaken them.

NEAR EDGE OF TRAMPOLINE-NET

Maria waves and yells. Still blindfolded. Prince Marr and Princess Gila cannot see Maria waving at them and the MUSIC IS TOO LOUD for them to hear. They continue their blindfolded aerial ballet while the blindfolded horses in the ring below dance along with them to the beat of the ROARING MUSIC.

BOREALIS  
 You have to get closer.

MARIA  
 Silverbell! You can fly me up to  
 them!

SILVERBELL  
 They're blindfolded and, if I fly  
 you at all, they won't know what's  
 happened, and be startled and fall.

MARIA  
 You're right. We don't want to  
 surprise them.

Borealis nods so the big plastic rhinestone on her head points at the trampoline. Maria glances at the trampoline then up at the trapeze angels, then back at the trampoline, then up at the trapeze angels. Maria gulps.

SILVERBELL

You might need to take a chance,  
which is why you're here, to risk  
the adventure, and push past your  
fear.

MARIA

(very small voice)  
I'm just a little scared. Especially  
with all these people watching.

With his muzzle, Silverbell gently tousles Maria's hair, and kisses her on top of the head.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Okay.

Silverbell kneels and Maria climbs onto Silverbell's saddle. Silverbell trots over to the springboard the clowns use to launch themselves onto the safety-net trampoline.

Maria slides off Silverbell and onto one end of the seesaw board.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Wait!

But Silverbell is already stomping down on the other end of the seesaw board. Maria flies into the air with a somersault and falls on her bottom in the middle of the safety-net trampoline.

Audience members laugh and point. Maria feels for her scarf, making sure it's in place to hide her birthmark.

BOREALIS

Okay, Maria, stand up and steady  
yourself. Now jump up and down.

Maria begins jumping and her scarf flies up and down in the air. Maria makes sure it stays on tight around her neck.

BOREALIS (CONT'D)

Higher!

More audience members notice Borealis coaching Maria and assume Maria is part of the act. They point and laugh.

MARIA

(shouts again)  
Angels! Angels! Danger!

The MUSIC IS LOUD and all the audience knows is that Maria is pointing and shouting like a maniac. They laugh more. Maria is not amused. She turns and glares. The audience assumes her reaction is part of the performance, and they love it.

A COAL-BLACK RAVEN flies from the scaffolding. Leaving a trail of smoke, it heads straight for Maria's head.

Maria is bouncing. The raven SCREECHES and CAWS in Maria's face.

The audience thinks the raven was a trained part of the circus act. Now Rudy notices and is upset. He jumps from his seat and runs toward the trampoline.

As Rudy gets closer, he can hear Maria yelling, while she fights off the raven.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Danger! Danger!

Rudy runs to the band and waves his arms wildly so they'll stop playing. They ignore him. The audience laughs.

Rudy gets an idea. He grabs one of Borealis' diamond-studded juggling balls.

Rudy runs at the band and shoves the juggling ball into the tuba. The band is startled.

Audience laughs. The MUSIC STOPS.

Prince Marr and Princess Gila realize something is wrong. They take off their blindfolds and immediately see the raven attacking Maria.

Prince Marr holds onto the legs of Princess Gila as they both swing down on a rope. Princess Gila's arms are just long enough so she can reach out, grab Maria by the shoulders, and swing away into the air. Maria is startled and terrified.

The raven bursts into flames and vanishes in a cloud of dark smoke. Now the audience is sure it was all part of the performance. They applaud wildly.

The BAND PLAYS again.

As the trapeze artists and Maria swing higher, Maria is petrified and holds onto Princess Gila for dear life. They land on the little platform.

MARIA (CONT'D)

(points at scaffolding)

I'm pretty sure Sorceress Sintina did something to the ropes and wires and whatever else is up there.

PRINCESS GILA

Thank you so much.

Maria is taken aback. Princess Gila's voice is similar to the voice of her mother's.

PRINCE MARR

Well, Maria, we better not disappoint our audience. So I think we need to finish the show. The trampoline is our safety net. But now that we know there could be trouble, we can be more careful.

Prince Marr and Princess Gila swing Maria along with them as they sail through the air, hold onto a fly bar, let go, and "fly" to another bar. Initially petrified, Maria gradually relaxes and sails through the air in a moment seemingly out of space and time.

From the ground, Borealis keeps a close watch on Maria. When Maria veers off course a tiny bit, Borealis moves her own body slightly, sending energy to "push" Maria back into alignment.

Silverbell watches Maria proudly.

The crowd applauds wildly, including Rudy. Back in his seat next to his friend, T.J., Rudy jumps up and down.

RUDY

That's my sister! My big sister!

INT. RINGMASTER SPIRITUS' WAGON - NIGHT

Hovering in the air in front of Ringmaster Spiritus, like images on televisions in a security office, are "views" of performances in all the circus tents as they are happening. Ringmaster Spiritus watches Maria with Prince Marr and Princess Gila. He hurriedly exits.

INT. ANGEL TENT - NIGHT

Ringmaster Spiritus strides into the angel tent and raises his arms to get the attention of the audience.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

(with a nod in Maria's  
direction)

As you have seen tonight, when you  
trust in yourself... you soar.

The audience APPLAUDS and CHEERS.

## RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

Now on with the conclusion of the  
trapeze act!

More APPLAUSE from the audience.

## IN THE SHADOWS

In the darkest shadows of the tent, the raven lands and transforms back into Sorceress Sintina. She is so angry that smoke drifts from her head and little fires break out all over her black cape. The ferret-bat Sylvester quickly flutters to Sorceress Sintina's cape and flaps his wings to put out the little fires.

## SYLVESTER

Calm down, Sintina. Please calm down. You're going to catch a death of fire!

## SORCERESS SINTINA

The only thing I'm going to catch is that medallion!

## SYLVESTER

Maybe...

## SORCERESS SINTINA

No maybes!

She hisses, and her tongue transforms into a snake that lunges at Sylvester. He quickly backs away. The hissing subsides.

## SYLVESTER

Don't blame me! You know who's really causing the problems. It's the--

Sylvester stops mid-sentence as Sorceress Sintina raises a sinister bony finger. She has an idea.

## SORCERESS SINTINA

(taking a step toward  
the ring)

You're right, Sylvester. You are most definitely, completely, certainly, without doubt right.

Sylvester reacts with puzzled exasperation, and quickly flies after her.

## AT THE RING

Prince Marr, Princess Gila, and Maria take bows to APPLAUSE. Prince Marr scoops Maria up and swings down on the rope to drop her gently on the trampoline. She bounces a few times.

Silverbell stands next to the trampoline and Maria slides onto his saddle. The crowd APPLAUDS WILDLY.

Princess Gila and Prince Marr again climb higher on the ropes and swing through the air, with twists and turns.

Below them, the two dancing horses, Huggens and Calver, run in a circle around the edge of the trampoline, and criss-cross directions under it.

MUSIC SPEEDS UP for the conclusion of the performance. The lights in the tent turn into red and green Christmas colors, and flash faster and faster.

The lights and MUSIC reach a crescendo. Prince Marr and Princess Gila descend on ropes toward the two dancing white horses below.

Maria watches closely, still worried.

MARIA

Silverbell, what if the sorceress damaged the ropes? They could break before the trapeze angels reach the horses.

Silverbell neighs in agreement as he watches Princess Gila and Prince Marr quickly lower themselves on the ropes.

MARIA (CONT'D)

But what can we do?

Maria sees something beneath the trampoline. She squints.

MARIA'S POV - UNDERNEATH THE TRAMPOLINE

In the shadows, Sorceress Sintina and Sylvester are almost invisible. Sylvester's little paws quickly dig up one of the stakes that hold the safety net-trampoline in place. There are piles of dirt next to other stakes. At the same time, Sorceress Sintina loosens ropes that hold the safety net in place.

ON CIRCUS ACTION

As the two white horses, Calver and Huggens, crisscross underneath the trampoline-safety net, it collapses. Huggens and Calver are startled and afraid. They thrash wildly, trip and fall.

The rope she holds begins to split apart. With no horses to land on, the rope about to break, and no safety net, Princess Gila is in serious danger.

Maria watches, horrified.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Silverbell!

Suddenly, a bolt of light shoots from Silverbell's medallion. Silverbell gallops onto the bolt of light toward Princess Gila.

The audience assumes this is another part of the amazing performance and again APPLAUDS wildly. Now the AUDIENCE GASPS as Princess Gila's rope breaks and she plunges toward the floor of the tent.

MARIA (CONT'D)

We can do it!

Silverbell flies under Princess Gila so she lands on the saddle right behind Maria, then happily throws her hands in the air.

The audience APPLAUDS, though now they are unsure what was planned and what wasn't.

Watching from the shadows, Sorceress Sintina's eyes narrow into slits of anger.

SORCERESS SINTINA

That amazing medallion. It will be mine!

As Prince Marr descends on a rope, it splits apart. Silverbell, with Maria and Princess Gila already on his saddle, dashes toward Prince Marr. At the last possible second, Silverbell flies under Prince Marr, who lands on the saddle right behind Princess Gila.

ON CIRCUS FLOOR

Prince Marr, Princess Gila, and Maria rush to help Ringmaster Spiritus and Borealis who pull the trampoline safety net off the two scared white horses.

Sorceress Sintina makes a nasty face, raises a clenched bony hand in defeat, and shakes it in frustration at Maria. Sylvester jumps onto Sorceress Sintina's shoulder and uses one of his bat wings to nudge her head in the direction of the exit tent flap.

With a last menacing glance at Maria, Sorceress Sintina slithers out of the tent, whiffs of smoke trailing behind her.

Prince Marr, Princess Gila, Maria, Borealis, Ringmaster Spiritus, and Maria pull the safety net away from the frightened horses, Huggens and Calver.

SILVERBELL

It's okay, my friends, you don't have to run. You're safe now, the trouble is done.

As Princess Gila hugs Maria, Maria's scarf slips and she quickly pulls it up.

PRINCESS GILA

Thank you so much, Maria.

PRINCE MARR

Yes, thank you for your assistance.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

(gives Maria a shining star-token)

"To save those who fly, you must trust inside." You have solved the riddle and won the First Star-Token.

As Maria takes the token, she is surprised to see Silverbell's medallion light up.

MARIA

Thank you.

Maria carefully places the First Star-Token in the jeweled pouch that Ringmaster Spiritus had given her when they first arrived at the Starlight Circus.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

And you will receive the Second Star-Token when you solve the second riddle: How does who is smaller help another be taller?

MARIA

"How does who is smaller help another be taller?" That's the riddle?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

You may not yet see how, Maria, but solving each riddle brings you a little closer to knowing your special talent.

Ringmaster Spiritus tosses Maria an apple, then walks off.

PRINCE MARR

Maybe we can help you solve the riddle. Would you like to visit the dressing room tent again, and meet more circus people?

MARIA

Yes!

RUDY

(runs up)  
Can I go, too?

Rudy waves to his friend, T.J., who is leaving the tent.

MARIA

As long as you remember to listen.

RUDY

(pops his chewing gum)  
Listen? Me? Of course!

MARIA

And Rudy, thanks for your help.  
You're the best brother!

Maria starts to give Rudy a hug, but he quickly squirms away.

EXT. CIRCUS BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Sorceress Sintina silently slips through the circus grounds, leaving tiny swirling smoke trails in her wake. Ferret-bat Sylvester flies in wide circles around her. Sorceress Sintina's bony hands occasionally flick at Sylvester.

SORCERESS SINTINA

Who does that girl think she is?!  
No one stops me! I will crush that  
little twit, capture the medallion,  
and steal the Spirit of Christmas!

Sylvester starts to speak, but thinks better of it.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - NIGHT

Maria, Rudy, Prince Marr, and Princess Gila walk past brightly lit tents, CIRCUS PERFORMERS, ANIMALS, and CHILDREN OF ALL AGES in clothing from various time periods. Maria is again struck by the sapphire-blue of Prince Marr's eyes.

PRINCESS GILA

Oh, yes. We had lots of jobs before  
the Starlight Circus, including being  
regular angels.

MARIA

Regular angels?

PRINCE MARR

You know, we hung around, did the  
occasional good thing for people,  
worked here and there.

MARIA

So you were like me? You didn't know what your special talent was?

PRINCE MARR

At first, no one knows their special talent.

PRINCESS GILA

But any girl who can jump on a trampoline and be part of a trapeze act will certainly find her special talent.

INT. DRESSING ROOM TENT - NIGHT

Maria has a big smile on her face as she learns to juggle with Prince Marr. Behind them are a variety of PERFORMERS and CLOWNS, along with many colors of costumes and makeup.

Prince Marr tosses a soft, cushiony juggling ball back and forth. Following Prince Marr's lead, Maria also tosses a ball back and forth.

MARIA

If I'm good at juggling, and that's my special talent, can I join the circus right now?

PRINCE MARR

Do you usually jump from one floor of a house to another, or do you take the stairs?

Maria looks at him, not quite sure what this means.

PRINCE MARR (CONT'D)

If you want to be in the circus, or do most anything else for that matter, you take small steps.

MARIA

Okay.

PRINCE MARR

You're doing good with one juggling ball, now let's try another.

Princess Gila steps up, smiling, and hands them more practice juggling balls. Prince Marr demonstrates simple juggling. Maria follows his lead.

PRINCE MARR (CONT'D)

Let it become automatic. Talk about something.

MARIA

Something? What? Oh, you know what bothers me? Why do people hurt each other? Like even here at the circus -- Sorceress Sintina hurts people. And back home, at school why do kids, and even my cousin Malcolm -- why do they want to hurt me?

PRINCE MARR

There can be lots of reasons. Why do you think?

Maria continues to toss the juggling balls back and forth, getting into a rhythm.

MARIA

Because I have this birthmark and they think I'm ugly

PRINCE MARR

Did you ever think maybe it's more because they're scared of you?

MARIA

Scared? Of me?  
(loses her concentration,  
drops the balls)  
Oops! Sorry.

Maria regains the juggling rhythm.

PRINCE MARR

Because there's something different about you. Many people are scared of people who are different from them.

Maria considers Prince Marr's words as she regains her juggling rhythm. He gives her a third juggling ball and they practice, side by side. She is learning quickly and her technique gets better.

Ringmaster Spiritus strides into the dressing room tent.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Okay, everybody in the next show, let's be ready!

Ringmaster Spiritus sees Maria juggling. He pulls an apple from the air and gently tosses it to Maria. She catches it and juggles it with the balls. He pulls another apple from the air and tosses it to her, then another, until they are both juggling back and forth with three apples.

PRINCE MARR

Keep the rhythm, Maria.

When an apple starts to go off course, Ringmaster Spiritus focuses on it and uses a little magical energy to bring it into line. Soon, he doesn't have to. Maria has the rhythm.

MARIA

(giggles)

I can do it!

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Yes, Maria. You can do it.

INT. CIRCUS STABLES TENT - NIGHT

Silverbell chomps on a big red apple. He is with the two big white circus horses. Huggens eats oats, while Calver nibbles on a mixture of grass and alfalfa.

SILVERBELL

Do you think I could've handled it b-b-etter?

CALVER

Better? I don't know. You did the best you could. We've all had run-ins with that crazy Sorceress Sintina.

SILVERBELL

Maybe I could've stopped it from happening.

HUGGENS

It's hard to stop a sorceress, especially that one.

SILVERBELL

I don't like making mistakes.

CALVER

Silverbell? Are you one of those horses who always thinks you could've done something better?

SILVERBELL

Um, well... usually. Yeah.

Calver and Huggens both nod their heads, as they chew more hay. From a nearby tent, CIRCUS MUSIC WITH A BEAT drifts into the stables. Huggens and Calver do a few dance steps.

SILVERBELL (CONT'D)

I like to do things perfect. I like to be perfect. But... it's like when I landed in the dressing room tent.

CALVER

Yes, we heard.

SILVERBELL

Oh? D-d-did everyone hear? Is everyone laughing about it?

Calver takes a bite of hay and swishes his tail to the rhythm of the CIRCUS MUSIC.

HUGGENS

No, no. It was perfect.

SILVERBELL

Perfect?

CALVER

Yes, Maria and Rudy got to see -- right from the start -- the inside of the circus -- not all the glitz and glamour.

SILVERBELL

So it was good? Hmm. Okay, all right. I feel better about that now.

HUGGENS

Your stutter is also good.

CALVER

Huggens is right. Your stutter is perfect.

SILVERBELL

Now you're going too f-f-far. Why? Why would you think my stutter is p-p-p-perfect?

HUGGENS

That, my friend, is something you need to discover for yourself.

Silverbell reacts, dubious. Calver takes a bite of oats.

CALVER

He's right. There are some things no one else can discover for you.

HUGGENS

That's why Maria needs to discover her special talent -- herself.

SILVERBELL

But that's my j-j-job!

HUGGENS

And you're doing your job -- perfectly --  
by being her true friend.

CALVER

Nobody can have too many of those.

Calver and Huggens laugh, do a dance step to the beat of the music, and take big bites of hay. Silverbell stares into the water bucket for a long beat, pondering his reflection and the words of Calver and Huggens.

EXT./INT. POLAR BEARS PRACTICE TENT - NIGHT

Three Polar Bears, who Maria and Rudy earlier saw powdering themselves, practice juggling rubber salmon. The Three Polar Bears are huge with big pot bellies. Smaller POLAR BEAR COACH watches and gives pointers.

POLAR BEAR COACH

That's it. Now toss them a little  
higher. Remember, you won't just be  
juggling, you'll be in a contest!

Sorceress Sintina, with Sylvester on her shoulder, enters the tent. Three Polar Bears and Polar Bear Coach see her and freeze. The rubber salmon fall to the floor.

SORCERESS SINTINA

Hey, Coach. That's a sorry-looking  
team. I think they need help. Don't  
you?

The Coach fearfully shakes his head "no."

SORCERESS SINTINA (CONT'D)

(moves her hands slowly  
through the air)

I have just the thing -- a magic  
juggling spell.

The Three Polar Bears get zombie eyes. The rubber fish leap off the floor and the Three Polar Bears begin juggling perfectly.

SORCERESS SINTINA (CONT'D)

And I have an idea for a new coach.

Sorceress Sintina puts a spell on the Polar Bear Coach who slips into trance and falls backward toward the floor.

INT. DRESSING ROOM TENT - NIGHT

Borealis and Maria sit in front of the mirrored vanity with a brilliant array of colors spread out like little rainbows.

There are blue and gold eyelashes, pink and orange pancake makeup tubes, blue and white lipsticks, along with tubes of glittery colors.

BOREALIS

You like juggling, but you're not sure that's your special talent?

Borealis coats Maria's face with a greasy white substance.

MARIA

Yes. And that stuff feels funny on my face.

At a table next to Maria and Borealis, Princess Gila reacts, frustrated, as she tries to apply clown makeup to a squirming, uncooperative Rudy who blows bubble-gum bubbles in her face.

RUDY

(laughs and points at Maria's face)

That looks funny!

MARIA

It's supposed to look funny, silly boy. I'm a new clown!

Rudy giggles.

MARIA (CONT'D)

But you always look funny, since you're always a clown.

Rudy makes a face at her. They giggle together.

Borealis squeezes red coloring from a tube and smooths it on Maria's face under her chin, on her forehead, and in a big smile around her mouth.

BOREALIS

In the clown world, each clown has his or her own unique makeup.

Princess Gila uses black coloring to paint a big smile around Rudy's mouth.

PRINCESS GILA

The makeup is one of a kind, like a special tattoo.

BOREALIS

(comically raises her eyebrows)

It's true.

Princess Gila and Borealis both pat Maria and Rudy's face with their palms to smooth out the makeup.

Maria's touches her faded red scarf.

BOREALIS (CONT'D)

Oh, yes. And birthmarks are also unique, and can be very beautiful.

MARIA

Really?

BOREALIS

There's no need to hide, Maria. It truly is what's inside that matters.

MARIA

Well, most people don't think that!

PRINCESS GILA

A birthmark is a badge of honor.

Princess Gila lifts part of her costume to reveal a butterfly-shaped birthmark on her stomach.

MARIA

Badge of honor?

A VERY TALL CLOWN comes over, points at Maria and laughs. Other clowns join in. Maria is at first a little put off, then relaxes as she realizes the clowns aren't laughing at her in a bad way, but in a fun way. Maria makes a goofy face.

ON SYLVESTER AT TENT SLIT

Sylvester's furry little ferret-bat face pokes through a slit in the tent. His black beady eyes watch everyone having a great time. He reacts with a pouty expression of feeling left out and wishing he were part of the fun.

EXT. CIRCUS MIDWAY - NIGHT

Maria and Rudy wear their clown makeup as they walk with Silverbell.

MARIA

Okay, the riddle is: "How does one who is smaller help another be taller?"

RUDY

That's silly!

MARIA

Prince Marr said maybe we need to find somebody to make taller.

RUDY

How can we make anyone taller? I want to be taller all the time, and look at me.

He squeezes his eyes shut and tries with all his might to grow. He looks as if he might explode.

RUDY (CONT'D)

Oh, I know! Maybe we can stretch somebody.

MARIA

Oh, yuck, but if we need any volunteers, I'll ask you.

RUDY

We could give them lots of burritos and ice cream, and they would grow taller!

MARIA

I don't think so, Rudy. We don't have time to wait for someone to grow taller. And look how long it's taken you and you're hardly tall at all.

RUDY

What about you?! You're hardly tall at all, too!

Silverbell shows his big white teeth in a smile, and SNORTS with laughter.

EXT./INT. ICE RINK TENT - NIGHT

Maria, Rudy and Silverbell stop at a wide tent strung with colorful lights and painted with Christmas scenes from around the world.

Maria peeks through the door of the tent and reacts as if she'd just been shocked with static electricity.

MARIA

I don't know, but maybe because Ringmaster Spiritus is here, this is the right tent.

Rudy squeezes his head under Maria's arm so he can look into the tent, too. Silverbell leans over top of Maria so his muzzle is resting on the top of her head.

MARIA (CONT'D)

What do you think, Silverbell?

## SILVERBELL

On the one hand, you might be right.  
But on the other hand, we haven't  
got all night.

They hesitate, then they all move at once, bumping into each other -- Three Stooges-style. Once they stop bumping, Maria ushers Rudy into the tent first.

## INT. ICE RINK TENT - NIGHT

Ringmaster Spiritus stands in the center of a large circular ice-skating rink surrounded by seats filled with curious CHILDREN of all shapes, colors, and sizes, and a FEW ADULTS. The Starlight Circus Band plays JUGGLING MUSIC.

## RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Ladies and gentlemen, mademoiselles  
et monsieurs, señoritas y señores,  
on my right is the first team --  
Santa's Elves.

The crowd CHEERS and APPLAUDS as THREE ELVES skate and dance onto the ice. They juggle different-sized boxes wrapped as red and green Christmas presents. They are pixyish and perky. They skate to the side where the ELVES' COACH, a tiny woman, pats them on their backs.

## RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

Our other team is the North Pole  
Polar Bears!

The audience makes SOUNDS OF OOOING AND AHHING as the Three Polar Bears skate onto the ice while juggling candy canes, small chunks of ice, and fishy-looking fake salmon. The Polar Bears are twice as tall as the Elves and wear purple vests.

## RUDY

They're really big.

## MARIA

And they're very good jugglers.

The Three Polar Bears do an elaborate juggling routine where they pass eight fake salmon back and forth, then high into the air, catching them as they come down. Now and then, a Polar Bear bounces a salmon off its huge belly, so that it ricochets toward another Polar Bear.

The Polar Bears skate to the side where Polar Bear Coach -- a dark-coated bear with eyes not unlike Sorceress Sintina's -- gives them a thumbs-up.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Thank you for visiting us at the Starlight Circus in the Sky. This circus is for people all over the world, of all races and religions.

The audience members APPLAUD.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

And, like all circuses, the Starlight Circus demonstrates the spirit of giving of holidays like Christmas, and also the generous spirit of other holidays such as Hanukkah, Ramadan, Kwanzaa, and Thanksgiving.

The jugglers skate around, getting ready to start.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

But tonight's contest isn't exactly about giving. This is a contest to see which team drops the fewest objects. There are sensors in the objects to be juggled. If one hits the floor, a point will be displayed on the scoreboard.

He waves his hands and a huge lit-up scoreboard appears. It has a time clock and the names of the teams: "ELVES" and "BEARS."

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

The only other rules are, well, there are no other rules. Okay... start!

Ringmaster Spiritus snaps his fingers and the scoreboard starts to tick down from two minutes. He quickly moves to the edge of the ice.

Maria smiles as she watches the Elves juggle Christmas presents of different sizes and shapes.

The wrapping on the Christmas presents unravels in the air, so the Elves juggle colorful boxes without wrapping.

The boxes open and the Elves juggle what was inside the boxes -- dolls, baseball gloves, stuffed animals, and various toys.

The Elves give presents to some of the kids in the audience. The audience APPLAUDS wildly.

RUDY

Presents!

The Polar Bears juggle giant candy canes, which delight the children.

High in the air, the candy canes open into umbrella-like parachutes so the candy canes float down while the Polar Bears skate around in slow-motion, finally catching the candy canes.

The Elves ice-dance and juggle tiny Christmas trees of white, green, or gold. They gradually add more and more miniature trees until they juggle sixteen tiny Christmas trees almost faster than the eye can see.

Maria's eyes dart here and there to follow the Elves' movements.

The Elves don't drop even one tree. Children in the audience react, amazed.

The Polar Bears skate and juggle big, round, colorful chunks of ice, like snowball ice cones. Drops of water splash off the ice chunks as they sail high into the air, going between one Polar Bear juggler and another.

At the edge of the rink, Polar Bear Coach yells.

POLAR BEAR COACH  
Higher! Higher!

Polar Bears struggle to toss the ice balls higher. Suddenly, one of the colorful ice chunks comes down a little off the mark and the Polar Bear juggler just misses catching it. It CRASHES on the ice rink and SHATTERS into tiny colorful bits of ice.

The scoreboards shows 1 point for the ELVES.

Polar Bear Coach has a satisfied smile, as if what's happening is part of the plan.

Ringmaster Spiritus suspects something and watches with concern.

Maria catches the look on Ringmaster Spiritus's face. She stares toward the Polar Bear Coach. Her eyes widen as she sees...

MARIA'S POV - UNDERNEATH THE SEATS

Sylvester lurks.

BACK TO CIRCUS ACTION

The first miscue causes another Polar Bear juggler to lose the rhythm and another ice ball SMASHES into little pieces.

The scoreboard shows 2 points for the ELVES and 0 for the BEARS.

Trying to recover, the Polar Bears again juggle fake fish. As they pass the rubbery-looking fish back and forth, the fish seem to wiggle in the air, as if jumping out of the water in a lake.

The Elves juggle colorful Christmas tree globes with lights inside. The Elves don't bobble once.

Polar Bear Coach motions the Polar Bears toward the crowd, as if the Polar Bears are on an invisible tether.

Polar Bears reach their long arms into the audience and maliciously grabs book bags, candy, ice cream cones, and the presents the Elves gave out a few moments before.

MARIA

What?! They're taking stuff from  
the kids!

RUDY

Those bears are scary.

Polar Bears use objects they took from the kids to juggle with the other Polar Bears. Books and pens fall out of book bags. Candy, ice cream, and toys are kicked across the ice. The Polar Bears laugh.

KIDS AD-LIB

No fair! No fair!

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

(addresses audience)

Remember... the only rules are not  
to drop what you juggle. Anything  
else... is allowed.

Elves skate near the Polar Bears, scoop up the books, pens, and toys, and hand them back to the children in the audience.

The Polar Bears make angry faces and ROAR at the Elves.

Elves pick up and juggle large white eggs painted with Christmas designs.

Polar Bears, who are much taller than the Elves, purse their lips and blow air toward the Elves' spinning eggs.

The eggs drift off-course and the Elves frantically skate to try and catch them before they splat on the ice.

MARIA

Hey!

AUDIENCE

(ad-lib)

Cheaters!

Polar Bears keep blowing on the eggs in the air and finally one of the Elves can't skate fast enough to catch up with an egg that has drifted off course. It SPLATS on the head of Elf #1, then hits the floor. Elf #2 misses an egg so another one SPLATS.

Scoreboard shows 2 points for the ELVES and 2 for the BEARS.

The white Polar Bears juggle bright red tomatoes and continue to torment the Elves. The Elves bobble a third egg with SPLATS.

Scoreboard now shows 2 points for the ELVES and 3 for the BEARS -- with thirty seconds left.

Elves now juggle colorful triangles. The Polar Bears reach out their long arms, grab some of the triangles and hold them just out of the reach of the Elves. Audience BOOS the Polar Bears.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Thirty seconds left. Remember... no rules.

In the audience, Maria turns to Rudy.

MARIA

Well, if there are no rules, I'm going to help!

RUDY

Maria, don't! If you get hurt, we'll never get home!

Silverbell opens his mouth and tries to catch Maria's scarf to hold her back, but he's too late.

Maria darts onto the ice. The Polar Bears grab more triangles and hold them high in the air so that the Elves can't reach them.

MARIA

(slides past a Polar Bear)

Out of my way, you big bellied bully!

Elf #3 skates to Maria. Up close, Maria can see he is small, but very strong.

MARIA (CONT'D)

If you're on my shoulders, you can grab the triangles back from the bears!

Elf #3 stares at Maria for an instant, gets the idea, and quickly climbs on her shoulders.

Maria doesn't have skates, but is good at sliding across ice (as we saw her do when walking home from school).

With Elf #3 on her shoulders, Maria slides over to startled Polar Bears #1. Elf #3 is able to grab the triangles and start juggling again with Elf #2. But Polar Bear #2 grabs some of the triangles.

RUDY  
(yells from seat in audience)  
Good work, Maria!

MARIA  
(yells from ice)  
C'mon, Rudy! You can help, too!

Rudy gulps, then bravely gets out of his seat and skids across the ice. Other kids see Maria and Rudy on the ice, and they get out of their seats.

More kids slide onto the ice to help the Elves. Soon the ice is swarming with kids. Kids are having a great time, throwing all kinds of food. Rudy sees his friend, T.J., and waves.

Silverbell takes a step onto the ice, but it is too slippery. His legs slide out from under him and he quickly backs off.

On Maria's shoulders, Elf #3 catches triangles, takes them from the startled Polar Bears, and tosses them to the Elves.

Rudy and the other kids help by retrieving fallen objects for the Elves to juggle. The audience APPLAUDS wildly.

The Polar Bears are out of sync. They try to keep juggling bright red tomatoes, but Polar Bear #1 bobbles and drops a tomato which SPLATS on the ice. Then another SPLATS.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
(blows his whistle)  
The contest is over! The Elves have won!

Scoreboard shows ELVES 5, POLAR BEARS 3.

Elf #3 scrambles off Maria's shoulders.

ELF #3  
Thank you for making me taller!

MARIA  
Taller?

ELF #3  
Yes. When I got on your shoulders, you made me taller.

In an "of course" reaction, Maria hits the side of her hand with her hand. Elf #1, Elf #2 and the Elves's Coach skate up to Maria.

Behind them on the ice rink, kids are still sliding around, having a great time as they make a mess of the dropped tomatoes and eggs, ice cream cones and candy canes that litter the ice. It's chaos.

ANGLE - POLAR BEAR COACH SNEAKS UP ON SILVERBELL

In the confusion, Polar Bear Coach sneaks up and snaps Silverbell's medallion from the horse's neck. Polar Bear Coach transforms into Sorceress Sintina and stuffs the medallion inside her cape.

A stab of agony crosses Silverbell's eyes, and he slumps in defeat, signaling that his strength and powers are gone.

Sylvester jumps on Silverbell's back and Sorceress Sintina quickly pulls the startled Silverbell toward the exit of the tent.

EXT. ICE RINK TENT - NIGHT

Maria runs after Silverbell. The Elves rush to help. The big Polar Bears turn and block the way. Sorceress Sintina and Sylvester retreat into a dark cloud of smoke, taking Silverbell with them. They vanish, along with the Polar Bears, leaving behind only the SOUND OF A SNARLING CACKLE.

MARIA

Oh, no! She's mean!

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

(walks up)

We've tried to change her ways...  
but failed.

MARIA

I'll stop her!

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Now that she has the medallion, I  
don't know if she can be stopped.

MARIA

We'll just see about that!

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Wait a second, Maria. You did solve  
the second riddle.

MARIA

Yes, but I lost Silverbell!

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 (hands her Second Star-  
 Token)  
 And you are another step closer to  
 discovering your special talent.

Maria puts the Star-Token in her jeweled pouch.

MARIA  
 Don't you understand?! Right now I  
 don't care about the stupid star-  
 tokens. I lost Silverbell!

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 To get the Third Star-Token, there  
 is one last riddle: To find the way  
 from the darkest part, follow the  
 light within your heart.

Maria glares at him for an instant, takes Rudy by the hand  
 and quickly walks off. Ringmaster Spiritus watches her go,  
 and sighs.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - SERIES OF SHOTS - NIGHT

Maria searches everywhere. Scared little Rudy holds tight  
 to the back of Maria's jacket.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - NEAR SIDESHOW TENT - NIGHT

Still searching, with Rudy in tow, Maria sees the Three Polar  
 Bears dejectedly walking out of a tent. She hurries to them.

POLAR BEAR #1  
 We're sorry about what happened.

MARIA  
 I know the sorceress made you do it.  
 Is she in there? With Silverbell?

They nod, turn away, and drag themselves down an alley between  
 two tents.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 Okay, Rudy. This is it.

Borealis walks up. Maria points to the tent.

BOREALIS  
 That tent? Maria, dear, whatever  
 you do, for all our sakes, please  
 stay far away from that particular  
 tent.

Borealis pats Maria on the shoulder, and hurries toward  
 another tent.

RUDY  
 Why don't we find the Third Star-  
 Token and go home?!

MARIA  
 (thinks, makes decision)  
 I'm taking you somewhere safe.

EXT. RINGMASTER SPIRITUS' WAGON - NIGHT

Maria and Rudy are with Ringmaster Spiritus.

MARIA  
 You stay here. And be good, okay?

Rudy nods nervously. Maria gives him a hug, and quickly turns to go.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Maria!

She stops.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)  
 I want you to remember...

Maria nods.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)  
 Everyone is a master of their own  
 fear.

EXT. SIDESHOW TENT - NIGHT

Maria runs to find the tent, but it's not there. She turns in circles. What happened? Where did it go? It's hard to see. She looks up and the sky is filled with dark clouds. Maria hears the DISTANT JINGLE OF BELLS and SILVERBELL NEIGHING. But where is the tent?

Suddenly, there is a break in the clouds. Moonlight shines down illuminating a path in the light dusting of snow.

Maria follows the path. After a few seconds, the sideshow tent is visible.

Maria braces herself, fear on her face. She goes through the tent opening.

INT. SIDESHOW TENT - NIGHT

The entryway flap to the tent seals tightly behind Maria. Her exit from the tent has completely disappeared! She gulps, and calls out.

MARIA  
Silverbell! Silverbell!

Maria takes another step in the darkness, slips, loses her footing, slides into a narrow tunnel leading down.

INT. THE TUNNEL TUBE

Maria slides faster and faster, down, down, down.

INT. MAGIC MAZE

Maria lands in an underground cavern with a greenish glow. There are seven different tunnels leading from the cavern.

Maria closes her eyes for a moment, feeling deep inside herself for her intuition. She opens her eyes and chooses a tunnel.

INT. FIRST TUNNEL IN MAGIC MAZE

Maria walks cautiously until she comes to an intersection of two tunnels. She makes another choice.

INT. SECOND TUNNEL IN MAGIC MAZE

Maria walks through the mazelike labyrinth, turning corners, as if she might be going in a circle. Maria momentarily looks frantic. She calms herself, shuts her eyes to feel inside herself, and uses her intuition to walk through the maze. Soon Maria's heart thuds and her forehead glistens.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Silverbell, if you're there and you  
can hear me, I'm lost. I'm lost and  
I'm scared.

SERIES OF SHOTS - IN THE MAGIC MAZE

There is strange "Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" lighting and shadow. It is not clear what is real and what is illusion. Maria begins imagining things from her own past. These are difficult memories designed to stop her progress. She sees a SERIES OF IMAGES:

- 1) She is four and starts school.
- 2) She is teased by other kids for her birthmark.
- 3) Her father, Martin, leaves for military service.
- 4) Her mother, Angela, hears news of her father's death.
- 5) Her mother being too sad to console, yet putting on a brave front.
- 6) Her mother working for Aunt Gertie.
- 7) Maria sad and gloomy, day after day.

## INT. THIRD TUNNEL IN MAGIC MAZE

Maria is so sad and exhausted she can barely put one foot in front of the next.

MARIA

Silverbell, are you there? Can you help?

(takes a deep breath;  
determined)

No, no. This time I have to help you, Silverbell.

Maria's cheeks grow hot, and her face reddens, but she trudges forward.

MARIA (CONT'D)

(recalling the words of  
Ringmaster Spiritus)

Everyone is a master of their own fear.

Maria feels an inner strength and there is a new determination in her step. She sees another tunnel and, without hesitation, turns in that direction.

## INT. FOURTH TUNNEL IN MAGIC MAZE

Moving along the tunnel, Maria finally hears SILVERBELL NEIGHING. She walks more quickly.

The tunnel opens into a cavelike chamber.

## INT. CHAMBER IN MAGIC MAZE

Silverbell is imprisoned behind ice-frosted, steel bars. He is on the floor, with his head slumped on his chest. His eyes are hazy and dim.

MARIA (CONT'D)

(rushes in)

Silverbell!

Silverbell unsteadily tries to focus on Maria. She draws a deep breath and wipes her tear-filled sapphire-blue eyes.

SILVERBELL

My medallion is gone. We must get it b-b-back.

MARIA

We will. First, we have to get you out of there.

SILVERBELL

S-S-Sorceress Sintina has left for now, but may return at any moment.

(dejected)

She took me by surprise and I couldn't s-s-stop her.

SOUNDS OF EARTH SHIFTING. A shower of rocks and dust fall from the roof of the cave. Maria kneels and covers her face.

Small rocks hit the floor and bounce toward the steel bars that imprison Silverbell. The rock shower stops. Maria dusts herself off.

SILVERBELL (CONT'D)

Just save yourself, Maria!

Maria's eyes search the cave for a way to free Silverbell. She stares up at the roof of the cave from where the rocks fell. Next, she looks at the rocks on the floor of the cave.

MARIA

We can do this, but you have to help, Silverbell.

SILVERBELL

Just g-g-go, Maria. I don't think I can do anything.

MARIA

Silverbell! You have to! You just have to!

Hearing Maria's encouragement and concern, Silverbell snaps out of his own distress, struggles to his feet, and speaks in a hoarse whisper.

SILVERBELL

Okay, Maria, dear, what do we do to get out of here?

Hearing Silverbell make rhymes, Maria smiles hopefully.

MARIA

See that boulder over there. I'm going to roll it so it hits the bars and breaks them.

SILVERBELL

That very boulder is quite huge. I don't think you can make it move.

MARIA

All I need you to do is step away from the bars so you don't accidentally get crushed.

Silverbell quickly takes a few steps back.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I know it looks flat, but when those rocks fell from the ceiling, they rolled toward where you are. So, if I move the smaller rocks around the big boulder, it may just start rolling, pick up speed, and hit the steel bars.

Maria tries to push one of the small rocks at the base of the boulder. The small rock won't move. Maria steps back and thinks. She takes off her faded red scarf and slips it behind the small rock. She pulls with all her might on both ends of the scarf. Finally the small rock slides out so fast that Maria, who is still pulling on the scarf, reels backward, loses her balance, and falls on her butt.

Silverbell can't help chuckling. Maria turns and glares at him. Silverbell quickly stops.

Maria picks herself up and slides her scarf behind another small rock. This time she moves the rock more slowly, and pushes it out of the way. The big boulder still does not move.

There is one small rock left. Maria wraps her scarf around this small rock, moves to one side, and pulls with all her might. The rock slides out quickly. Maria loses her balance and falls backward. But this time the big boulder starts rolling toward the bars that imprison Silverbell.

The big boulder picks up speed, creating a RUMBLE in the cave. Debris falls from the ceiling. The boulder kicks up a cloud of dust, and slams into the bars with a huge CRASH! The AIR IS FILLED DUST and Maria can't see what's happening.

As the dust settles, Maria does not see Silverbell. She jumps up, alarmed. Was he crushed by the boulder?!

Maria feels something wet on her neck. She whirls around to face Silverbell. He has a big silly grin on his face.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Silverbell!  
(throws her arms around  
his neck)  
Don't scare me like that!

INT. TUNNEL INTERSECTION IN MAGIC MAZE

Maria and Silverbell eagerly walk down a tunnel. It ends at the intersection of four tunnels. They have to choose. Maria walks down one tunnel and Silverbell follows.

SERIES OF SHOTS - MORE TUNNELS IN MAGIC MAZE

Maria and Silverbell walk down one tunnel after another. Each time, they walk more slowly, more defeated, more tired.

INT. VERY DARK TUNNEL IN MAGIC MAZE

It's so dark Maria can hardly see. She can hear Silverbell's HOOVES CLIP-CLOPPING on the hard icy path behind her. Maria stops. Silverbell stops. They are lost.

MARIA (CONT'D)

There must be something else.  
Something we're not--

Maria suddenly stops. She can no longer hear Silverbell's hooves behind her.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Silverbell?

Silverbell NEIGHS.

MARIA (CONT'D)

You're there! Whew! Good! Why did you stop walking?

SILVERBELL

I'm sorry things seem so stark, it's just that I'm -- I'm afraid of the dark!

MARIA

You? Afraid of the dark?

SILVERBELL

Terrified of nightness. That's why, usually, I live among the stars -- the brightness. And, you see, I've always had my medallion to shine bright in the darkest night, and without it I fear I have no light.

MARIA

Silverbell, you always have light-- Wait! Light... in your heart... Maybe...

SILVERBELL

Maybe what?

MARIA

"To find the way from the darkest part, follow the light within your heart."

As she says the riddle, a golden light -- ever so softly at first, like a dim flashlight, then gradually a little stronger -- magically shines from Maria's heart area.

MARIA (CONT'D)

There it is! The light in my heart!  
This is a magical circus -- so it  
works!

Maria and Silverbell follow the path in the direction that the light from Maria's heart guides them. As they near an intersection of tunnels, the light points in one direction and they follow.

INT. LAST TUNNEL IN MAGIC MAZE

They continue to follow where the light leads.

INT. MAGIC MAZE - NEAR TENT OPENING

They reach the tent opening, and the light shines on where the opening was. But the opening is no longer there.

SILVERBELL

You already got in before, so there  
must be some sort of door.

MARIA

(feels tent fabric,  
searching for an opening)  
Nothing is what it seems, Silverbell.  
That's what I keep seeing over and  
over. Nothing is what it seems.

Suddenly, a gust of wind and a cloud of smoke blows around them. A cold WIND SCREAMS through the sides of the tent and HOWLS A WICKED SOUND. Wings flutter in the darkness just above their heads.

SILVERBELL

The sorceress is on the way, we must  
escape without delay!

Silverbell uses his hoof to paw the ground, and turns his body so he faces away from where the tent flap opening should be. Maria stares at Silverbell, wondering what he is doing.

SILVERBELL (CONT'D)

I have a hunch the way out is in --  
the opposite of what you did to begin.

MARIA

The way out is in? What?

SILVERBELL

(starts walking backwards)  
 You were walking forwards when you  
 entered this pit. If we now walk  
 backwards, it's the opposite.

Feeling a little foolish, Maria walks backwards next to Silverbell and together they pass right through the wall of the tent. Maria's eyes go wide in amazement.

EXT. SIDESHOW TENT - NIGHT

The side of the tent is pushed outwards. Sorceress Sintina approaches from down the alley. Sitting on her shoulder, Sylvester does a double-take.

SORCERESS SINTINA

Clever little twits.

Maria and Silverbell magically appear walking backwards through the side of the tent. Maria quickly jumps on Silverbell's saddle and he trots off before Sorceress Sintina and Sylvester get near the tent.

SORCERESS SINTINA (CONT'D)

(opens her cloak and  
 takes out medallion)

We don't need that horse anymore,  
 Sylvester. Or the girl. Soon I  
 will have more power than anyone  
 imagined!

EXT. RINGMASTER SPIRITUS' WAGON - NIGHT

Maria and Silverbell approach the wagon. Rudy runs to Maria.

RUDY

I was worried. Are you all right?

SILVERBELL

Give us a day, we'll be okay.

MARIA

But we don't have a day. We only  
 have till midnight!

RUDY

I'm ready to go home!

MARIA

Don't worry, Rudy. We solved the  
 Third Riddle. "To find the way from  
 the darkest part, follow the light  
 within your heart." That's how we  
 found our way out of the Sorceress  
 Sintina's maze.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 (exits wagon)  
 Congratulations, Maria.

Ringmaster Spiritus flashes his hands in the air and produces the Third Star-Token.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)  
 (hands Star-Token to  
 Maria)  
 The Third Star-Token. You can use  
 this in combination with the other  
 two Star-Tokens to get back home.

Ringmaster Spiritus starts walking down the circus midway. Maria quickly follows him. Rudy and Silverbell hurry to catch up.

MARIA  
 But we have to get Silverbell's  
 medallion back from the sorceress.  
 There must be a way. Can you please  
 tell me more about her? Give me a  
 hint? A clue?

Ringmaster Spiritus stares at her with concern and takes a deep breath. He thinks a moment, as he keeps walking.

EXT. CIRCUS MIDWAY- NIGHT

As Maria, Rudy, and Silverbell keep pace, Ringmaster Spiritus flashes his hands. Suddenly, Maria and the others see IMAGES IN THE AIR -- as if watching a stage play hovering a few feet in front of their eyes.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Sorceress Sintina had the most popular  
 act at the starlight circus. It was  
 a magic show she performed with her  
 brother, Rolley.

In the images in the air, Maria watches Sorceress Sintina perform with a fancily-dressed man, ROLLEY.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)  
 The attention Sorceress Sintina  
 received grew and grew. But it was  
 never enough.

Maria, Rudy and Silverbell watch the image change to one of Sorceress Sintina yelling at her brother. They continue to walk, and the images in the air move with them.

Rudy has difficulty walking while he's engrossed in the images in the air. He trips, and Maria catches him.

They approach a clearing. Now Rudy bumps into Silverbell, who uses his muzzle to gently keep Rudy upright.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Ringmaster Spiritus, Maria, Rudy and Silverbell enter a moonlit clearing near the circus tents.

In the images in the air, Sorceress Sintina angrily creates pottery in the air and makes it crash against a wall. She turns animals into insects. She turns her wrath on HUMAN HELPERS and changes them into corn stalks and dandelions.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Part of my job as Ringmaster was to remind her we are all one big family at the circus, one team, including the animals.

The two white horses, Calver and Huggens, walk up and watch, standing next to Silverbell. They NEIGH SOFTLY in agreement with Ringmaster Spiritus, and take a few bites of the grass in the clearing.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

In fact, Maria, everyone in the world -- this world and any other world -- is really one big family. We are all connected.

MARIA

So even Sorceress Sintina must be part of the world family. Maybe she's forgotten.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Sintina became more and more vain. Standing in front of the mirror one day, Sintina used her magical powers to take more power.

Maria watches the images in the air. Sorceress Sintina stands in front of a mirror. She moves her arms in a way to draw energy and magic from the air.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

But she did not realize that the source of the power was not a force for good, but rather an instrument for selfish actions.

Maria frowns, as she continues to watch pictures form in the air.

## RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

Sorceress Sintina's magical power became colder and colder, and she began making bad things happen. It even changed her thoughts. Power and control started becoming the only thing she cared about, the only thing she loved. But it was not love, because it was without caring for others.

Images of Sorceress Sintina using her powers to turn people into animals and insects, demolish entire tents, and destroy small circus wagons.

## RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

The power was so unmanageable that it became a war within herself. One day during the magic act, there was a fiery explosion. Her brother Rolley was accidentally killed.

Maria watches the images as Sintina and Rolley perform in a circus tent. There is an explosion and a fire. Rolley is thrown into the air and his head snaps against a wooden tent pole. Sorceress Sintina runs to him, but he is dead. She holds him in her arms. Maria winces, her face showing compassion.

In the images, Sorceress Sintina's face is black and smudged from the fire. For an instant, Maria could see the sadness in Sintina's eyes, but Sintina quickly covers the sadness with anger.

## RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

Sintina became more enraged and embittered. She blamed others for the death of her brother. She used the evil power -- and it used her -- to gain more and more attention.

Watching the images in the air, Maria sees Sorceress Sintina weaving spells on herself and changing into a cougar, then a tiger, and finally a raven. Her spells drift over children attending the circus, enticing them to watch her act and ignore the others.

## RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

Sorceress Sintina had no room in her heart for love. Greed for power took the place of compassion.

## RUDY

What's compassion?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Compassion is when we feel the  
 suffering of others and want to make  
 it better.

The image in the air becomes a picture of dark, dreary, smoky  
 Sorceress Sintina.

MARIA  
 What happened then?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Her life became very dark. That is  
 why she created the magic maze and  
 the dark cave.

MARIA  
 That maze was really dark!

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Bright light has become Sorceress  
 Sintina's enemy.

RUDY  
 Light is bad for her?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 It can kill her. Staying distant in  
 her cave, she dreams of more power.  
 Sorceress Sintina believed  
 Silverbell's magical medallion had  
 great power, and the spirit of  
 Christmas, so she stole it.

Now the images of Sorceress Sintina fade away.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)  
 You do have a choice, child. You  
 have collected three star-tokens.  
 You can use them to get back home  
 and leave Silverbell's medallion  
 behind.

MARIA  
 We must find the medallion. Not  
 just for Silverbell's sake, but so  
 Sorceress Sintina does not use it to  
 do harmful things to others.

EXT. CIRCUS MIDWAY - NIGHT

Maria holds Rudy's hand as she races along with Silverbell,  
 searching the dimly-lit circus grounds for where Sorceress  
 Sintina might be hiding.

As Maria, Rudy, and Silverbell strain to find the way, Maria sees that little Rudy is terrified.

Suddenly, Rudy lets go of Maria's hand and runs into the center of a crowd of children. Maria is startled. A moment later, Rudy hurries back to Maria, dragging T.J., the friend he had sat with earlier. Tears stream down T.J.'s face.

MARIA

What's the matter?

T.J.

I'm lost!

RUDY

T.J. can't find his older brother. His brother has the tokens and, without him, T.J. can't get home. Unless he has a star-token.

MARIA

A star-token?

Silverbell takes Maria aside and whispers.

SILVERBELL

Maria, I know the boy is in distress, but if you give away a star, your chances of returning home will be even less.

Ringmaster Spiritus walks over. Borealis the Clown walks up from another direction.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

It's true, Maria. If you give away a star, you will have an even harder time learning your special talent and getting back home.

Borealis nods in agreement with Ringmaster Spiritus. Both Ringmaster Spiritus and Borealis are very serious.

Maria glances at teary-eyed T.J., and back at Borealis and Ringmaster Spiritus. Prince Marr and Princess Gila walk up and watch.

MARIA

At least I have Silverbell. T.J. is alone. And, without a star-token, can he ever get back home?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Well... it's not likely. A star-token is a ticket back to Earth.

Maria reaches into the jeweled pouch and pulls out one of the three star-tokens. Maria hands it to T.J.

T.J.  
 (small voice)  
 Thank you, Maria.

RUDY  
 Can we all go together?

MARIA  
 Yes, Rudy. We can all go together... after we find Silverbell's medallion. We'll have one star-token for you, one for me, and Silverbell will have his medallion.

RUDY  
 But what if you can't find Silverbell's medallion before midnight?

MARIA  
 (to Princess Gila and Prince Marr)  
 Can you please look after Rudy and T.J. for a little while?

PRINCESS GILA  
 Of course, little one.

She takes the two boys by the hand, and Prince Marr holds Rudy's other hand.

MARIA  
 And don't cause trouble. Okay, Rudy?

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - NIGHT

Maria and Silverbell walk with Ringmaster Spiritus and Borealis toward the main tent.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Maria, you have the most generous heart we have seen in a very long time.

Maria's shyness suddenly returns and she stares at the ground.

BOREALIS  
 Since Maria did give unconditionally, perhaps there is something we can do to help.

Ringmaster Spiritus takes deep breath and slowly exhales.

MARIA

What?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

It could be dangerous to everyone in the circus.

BOREALIS

If Sorceress Sintina becomes even angrier, we could all be in really really big trouble.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

We need to ask the rest of the circus family if it's okay.

INT. MAIN TENT - NIGHT

All the circus performers are there -- Prince Marr and Princess Gila, the clowns, the Elves, the Polar Bears, other performers and the circus animals.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Nobody knows what Sorceress Sintina might do next. Are you willing to take a chance on Maria?

Maria watches as Ringmaster Spiritus gazes deeply into the eyes of the circus performers and animals. They nod in agreement. Maria breathes a sigh of relief.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS (CONT'D)

What we can give you is a clue-riddle.

MARIA

Clue-riddle?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

It can help you find the medallion. The clue-riddle is: In harming our enemies, we only harm ourselves.

MARIA

(a little disappointed)  
That's it?

BOREALIS

It's a very important clue.

MARIA

Um, sorry. Thank you all very much. We will do our best to find Sorceress Sintina and recover the medallion. And we'll try not to make her any angrier.

Ringmaster Spiritus puts a gentle hand on Maria's shoulder and gazes encouragingly into her eyes.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS  
 Brave Maria, I give you a bright bit  
 of chance, and a light touch of  
 magic... You have until midnight.  
 One hour.  
 (beat)  
 All right, then.

INT. SORCERESS SINTINA'S MAGIC MAZE

In the dark cavern deep inside Sorceress Sintina's magic maze, Sylvester tries to calm the upset Sorceress.

SORCERESS SINTINA  
 (waving medallion in  
 the air)  
 Why won't it light up for me?! Why  
 can't I unleash its power?!

As Sorceress Sintina sulkily inhales and exhales, tiny whiffs of smoke float from her mouth and nose.

SYLVESTER  
 Maybe it's for the best.

SORCERESS SINTINA  
 The best!

She lunges at Sylvester who quickly hops away.

SYLVESTER  
 I just mean maybe it's a sign that  
 it's time to --  
 (flutters upward)  
 Ever since that girl arrived at the  
 Starlight Circus, the energies --the  
 powers -- have been shifting.

SORCERESS SINTINA  
 It's her fault!

SYLVESTER  
 Maybe it's time to banish that which  
 has caused you to feel excluded for  
 these past few years.

SORCERESS SINTINA  
 Never! Never!

SYLVESTER  
 That is not you talking. That is  
 not the person you were before you  
 lost your brother.

SORCERESS SINTINA

(stares at the medallion)

The girl. It has to be her fault.

I must capture that girl!

Sorceress Sintina slips the medallion under her dark cloak and hurriedly leaves. Sylvester scurries after her for a few steps then, suddenly remembering he can fly, launches himself into the air on his fluttering bat wings.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - NIGHT

Silverbell and Maria search through one tent after another. Almost everyone has left and the circus grounds are lonely and deserted. Lights flicker and go out. It's darker.

SILVERBELL

It seems a big hill we have to climb,  
if we are to recover the medallion  
in time.

MARIA

I know. It's getting close to  
midnight. But we have to keep--

Suddenly, two figures sweep out of the darkness. Maria and Silverbell gasp in surprise as they come face to face with Sorceress Sintina and Sylvester who are also startled.

Sintina opens her coat to taunt Maria and Silverbell with a glimpse of the medallion.

SORCERESS SINTINA

Looking for this?

Sorceress Sintina takes a step closer to Maria and Silverbell. The lights on the medallion blink to life -- because it is near to Silverbell. The light startles Sorceress Sintina.

Gaining strength from the medallion, Silverbell's life force returns. Maria is glad to see her friend's defeated stance once again become magnificent and proud. Silverbell flares his nostrils, flicks his head, and the medallion flies out of Sorceress Sintina's hands.

Maria's eyes are glued to the medallion as it begins to spin round and round in front of Sorceress Sintina's stunned and frightened face.

The lights from the medallion are so bright that Sorceress Sintina is blinded. She puts her hands in front of her face.

Sylvester wants to help, and flies toward Sorceress Sintina. But the power from the spinning, glowing, blinding medallion is so great that Sylvester is stopped, frozen in mid-air.

Suffering from the blinding light, Sorceress Sintina drops to her knees.

MARIA

Silverbell! Make it stop! Remember what Ringmaster Spiritus said about the sorceress and bright light?! It can kill her!

Maria's eyes plead with him to stop. Silverbell hesitates for a moment, making sure Maria's request isn't a trick by Sorceress Sintina.

MARIA (CONT'D)

If we hurt her, we'll be like her!

Silverbell withdraws the blinding light. The medallion drops to the ground at Sorceress Sintina's feet.

Sorceress Sintina stares at Maria. Her face is more open, vulnerable, but her voice is still angry.

SORCERESS SINTINA

You didn't let me die?

MARIA

The clue-riddle... In harming our enemies, we only harm ourselves.

SORCERESS SINTINA

(her evilness starts to shift)

No... no... no...

MARIA

(whispers, with pure love)

Time spent angry is time lost being happy. That's from Mama.

SORCERESS SINTINA

I'm feeling... I...

Sorceress Sintina's red-rimmed eyes begin to seep tears. She sniffs, not wanting to cry. The tears keep coming.

SORCERESS SINTINA (CONT'D)

(through tears)

I'm sorry, Sylvester. You've been a loyal friend. I now offer to change you into whatever you'd like.

SYLVESTER

Thank you, Sintina, for your kind offer. I am content to be a ferret-bat.

MARIA

It's quite unique, actually.

Behind them, all the performers and circus animals we've seen thus far gradually gather around in a large circle.

Prince Marr and Princess Gila join the circle, bringing Rudy and T.J.

SORCERESS SINTINA

For everyone's sake -- the sake of  
the entire circus, including me -- I  
will banish the powers of darkness  
and open to the light.

Sorceress Sintina uses her hands to slowly stir the air as if unweaving a spell. She ad-libs mysterious, unintelligible words.

A THICK FOG ROLLS IN. Maria glimpses strange forms and movements.

Sintina raises her hands over her head. An earsplitting THUNDERCLAP shatters the silence and a brilliant bolt of lightening shoots through the night sky.

The entire area is suddenly brighter. Sintina does not cover her eyes from the light. She no longer needs to protect herself. The circus no longer needs to exist only at night.

Ringmaster Spiritus, the clowns, the jugglers, the trapeze artists, and all the other performers and animals quietly form a large circle.

Sorceress Sintina gazes upon the faces of the circus family and looks in their eyes. Tears again fall from Sorceress Sintina's eyes.

Maria watches as Sorceress Sintina's tears cleanse the smoke and dirt from her face.

Sorceress Sintina removes a brilliant quartz stone on a chain around her neck. She uses her magic to form a cloud-shaped pendant and presents it to Maria. Touched by the gesture, Maria takes the pendant and puts her arms around Sorceress Sintina.

Next, Borealis the Clown walks forward and embraces Sorceress Sintina.

BOREALIS

Welcome back, Sintina.

Ringmaster Spiritus follows, then others.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

We are very grateful to you, Maria.  
With your generous heart, you have  
helped our Starlight Circus once  
again be united in love.

BOREALIS

It's almost midnight.

Silverbell exchanges a glance with Ringmaster Spiritus who signals that it's time.

SILVERBELL

Maria, get on my saddle. You, too,  
Rudy and T.J.

T.J. clambers on the saddle, followed by Rudy. Maria gives Ringmaster Spiritus a big hug. Borealis hugs her. Prince Marr and Princess Gila also embrace Maria. Silverbell kneels and Maria gets on the saddle in back of Rudy.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Now take your two star-tokens and  
toss them in the air.

Maria takes the two-star tokens from the red pouch and tosses them into the air.

The star-tokens rise up and start to glow, then drop into line around Silverbell's head.

MARIA

Something's missing. A third point.  
Is it T.J.'s?

Ringmaster Spiritus nods at T.J. who tosses his star-token in the air and it orbits along with the other two.

MARIA (CONT'D)

There's still something else, right?  
When we flew here with Silverbell,  
there were four stars around him.

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Yes, Maria. All of us here at the  
Starlight Circus -- together we will  
be the fourth point.

MARIA

But how?

RINGMASTER SPIRITUS

Remember, Maria, we are all connected.  
That is one of the secrets of magic.  
Everything and everyone impacts  
everything and everyone. We all  
impact each other.

The performers and animals bow their heads. Light begins to pour from them.

Simultaneously, a powerful beam of light shoots out from the medallion.

Maria smiles and waves good-bye. Rudy and T.J. also wave.

SILVERBELL

(neighs)

Hey, hey, neigh, let's fly away!

Silverbell leaps into the air and gallops onto the beam of light toward a "Star Path" in the night sky.

EXT. SKY ABOVE STARLIGHT CIRCUS - NIGHT

Maria, Rudy, T.J. and Silverbell fly on the Star Path of light. The colorful lights of the Starlight Circus recede into the distance.

EXT. SKY AND CLOUDS - NIGHT

The stars circling Silverbell's majestic head whirl in a rhythmic pattern. Maria, Rudy, and T.J. and Silverbell pass through wisps of clouds.

T.J.

Maria, Rudy said you were looking for your special talent. What is it?

RUDY

Yeah! What is it?

MARIA

I, well, I'm not sure. Ringmaster Spiritus said if I solved the riddles, each one would be a step to finding my special talent, but...

SILVERBELL

I believe your special talent is set. But you are not quite knowing it yet.

MARIA

I don't understand.

SILVERBELL

Since we've had our tour, what do you know now you didn't know before?

MARIA

I've learned you're a wonderful friend, and everyone's power and sense of purpose comes from within by having a generous heart.

SILVERBELL

Just as my mission is the help I impart, perhaps your special talent is encouraging a generous heart.

Maria thinks about that for a minute. She could see all the stars in the night sky.

MARIA

But what can I do in the contest?

SILVERBELL

Remember how you sang magical rhymes over and over until I arrived?

RUDY

I remember how she did!

SILVERBELL

And remember how you helped Prince Marr and Princess Gila to soar? You became part of their act and the audience roared.

T.J.

I saw that! It was great!

MARIA

And I wasn't even that scared. Well, I was at first.

SILVERBELL

And remember how you trusted your intuition. You took chances, and helped the elves to win. You even reached Sorceress Sintina's lost soul, and coaxed her back into the circus family's fold.

MARIA

I'm glad about that, but... why can't I have a talent like other kids? Like piano, or ballet, or telling jokes! I don't have a plan for the contest!

SILVERBELL

When I took you to the Starlight Circus, I had a plan. But Sorceress Sintina was out of hand.

(MORE)

SILVERBELL (CONT'D)

Then your generous heart helped me feel... perfect as I am.

MARIA

I helped you feel perfect?

SILVERBELL

Whatever I did -- with you it was all okay. The landing in the tent, letting the medallion get away. Losing my will behind metal bars, and allowing me to be afraid of the dark. I no longer needed to think I was doing things wrong. To be a true friend to others was my purpose all along.

EXT. SKY ABOVE SANTA FE - DAYBREAK

In the first light of day, as Silverbell flies closer, Rudy, and T.J. are awed by the outline of the mountains.

EXT. SKY ABOVE MARIA'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAYBREAK

Maria sees they are approaching her house.

SILVERBELL

I think we're coming to the lane, but which of the houses is y-y-yours again?

RUDY

You don't fool us, Silverbell. You know our house!

MARIA

And you stuttered!

Silverbell laughs, and neighs, and snorts air through his nose.

SILVERBELL

You see, now it's all okay with m-m-me. Even if others are bothered by my s-s-stutters.

Silverbell laughs and snorts again.

EXT. MARIA'S HOUSE - OUTSIDE HER WINDOW - DAYBREAK

Silverbell hovers outside the bedroom and Maria pushes the window open.

RUDY AND T.J.  
Thank you, Silverbell!

Rudy and T.J. scramble off Silverbell and into the bedroom.

MARIA  
(wraps her arms around  
Silverbell's neck)  
I don't want you to go!

SILVERBELL  
No longer being able to see or t-t-  
touch someone you love does not mean  
their love is no longer with you.

MARIA  
You mean like my Papa? His love is  
still with me?

SILVERBELL  
Your Papa's love is always there.  
Just open your heart and feel how he  
cares... And so do I.

Maria holds tight to Silverbell's neck for a moment longer,  
then slides through the bedroom window.

EXT./INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - DAYBREAK

Maria stands at the window. Silverbell neighs, turns and  
gallops away on a path of light.

INT. MARIA'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Maria brushes her teeth in front of the bathroom mirror.  
She sees her birthmark, tilting her head to one side.

EXT. SCHOOL - ENTRANCE TO AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Near the entrance to the auditorium, colorfully-costumed  
jugglers and acrobats from the Winter Fiesta perform for the  
HUNDREDS OF CONTEST-GOERS. Walking with Angela and Rudy,  
Maria gazes up at the star-filled night sky.

ANGELA  
Are you nervous about the contest,  
mi hija?

MARIA  
A little. I wish I'd had more than  
a week to practice.

ANGELA

Remember, Maria, it's okay not to win. It's... you're doing it. That's what matters.

MARIA

I know, Mama. Henry and Hannah said that, too.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

PEOPLE mill about and look for seats.

MARIA

I'm going backstage till they call my name.

ANGELA

Good luck, mi hija. Your papa would be proud.

RUDY

Just remember how great you did at the circus!

ANGELA

You and that circus! Must've been some dream.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - ENTRY AREA - NIGHT

Aunt Gertie, wearing even more Southwest jewelry than usual, stands opposite the GOVERNOR of New Mexico -- 60s, barrel-chested, white cowboy hat, black suit, turquoise bolo tie, and black boots.

GERTIE

(searches her beaded handbag)

I know that campaign contribution is here somewhere, Governor.

GOVERNOR

How very thoughtful, Gert. Your family has always been quite generous. I hear you organized most of this event for the kids.

GERTIE

And my daughter's in the contest. Ballet. She's worked very hard.

GOVERNOR

I'm sure she'll do great.  
(MORE)

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)  
 (notices something among  
 the cards in her wallet)  
 Who's that?

GERTIE  
 (takes out a photo of  
 Martin)  
 My brother. He died in...

GOVERNOR  
 Martin. I remember now. I'm sorry.  
 (glances at photo, smiles)  
 I just thought of how your folks hit  
 the roof when he eloped. She was  
 very sweet, though. Whatever happened  
 to her? And they had kids, too,  
 right?

Gert nods. She stares at the photo, holding back emotion.

GERTIE  
 (regains composure)  
 Sorry. Holiday times. It's when I,  
 you know, miss him the most.  
 (finds check in handbag)  
 Here's that check.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - AISLE NEAR WALL - NIGHT

Still wearing her coat and red scarf, Maria walks down an aisle through the auditorium. Contest-Goers AD-LIB CONVERSATION, visit with others, and look for seats.

TWO BOYS FROM SCHOOL mischievously tug at Maria's red scarf, then laugh and back away. Maria hurriedly keeps walking. Mrs. Fisher, the red-haired teacher, sees what happens and hurries over to Maria.

MRS. FISHER  
 You sure you're up for this?

MARIA  
 I think so.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - STAGE BEHIND CLOSED CURTAIN - NIGHT

CONTESTANTS wait. Elizabeth stretches in a ballet outfit.

Maria walks to Henry and Hannah who are at the piano. Hannah gives Maria a hug.

HENRY  
 Remember what we practiced?

MARIA

(nods)

But I'm getting nervous. I can't do this without Silverbell.

HANNAH

You can, Maria.

MARIA

Do you think he'll show up?

Henry starts to respond, then sees the curtain open. Maria quickly steps back into the wings of the stage.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - ON STAGE - NIGHT

The curtain opens and the audience sees Henry and Hannah sitting stage left next to a piano. There is a third chair near them. The Governor walks onstage, sets a plastic cup on the chair, and walks to a microphone. He nods to the front row of the audience where Aunt Gertie, Uncle Bill, and Malcolm are seated next to other AUDIENCE MEMBERS.

GOVERNOR

(into microphone)

Welcome to the Winter Fiesta Christmas Talent Contest. As you may have seen on your programs, the winner of the contest will receive some cash, which we all love, and this one-of-a-kind rocking horse -- hard-carved with wood from the tree of life -- by that man sitting at the piano. Take a bow, Henry.

Henry stands and smiles.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

And lovingly hand-painted by his lovely wife, Hannah.

Hannah smiles and nods.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

Henry and Hannah work for Gert Hutton, who is largely responsible for making this event happen.

Aunt Gertie stands and turns to the audience with a big smile. Uncle Bill, Malcolm, and Elizabeth sit in adjacent seats. Audience APPLAUDS.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

Henry and Hannah graciously volunteered to practice all week  
(MORE)

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)  
with the kids, and be tonight's  
musical accompaniment.

Audience APPLAUDS.

Standing backstage, Maria's eyes glance around the auditorium, searching to see if Silverbell will appear.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)  
Now we will start with...  
(reads program)  
...Finley Dowd.

Governor goes to his chair. At the piano, Henry plays the lead-in MUSIC to the song, "Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow." Hannah stands next to him, ready to turn pages of the music.

SNOWMAN BOY -- a 9-year-old dressed as a snowman -- walks onto the stage, trips and falls on purpose, gets up, and takes a bow.

The audience LAUGHS and APPLAUDS. Watching from the wings along with CONTEST PERFORMERS, Maria smiles.

Snowman Boy nervously smiles at the APPLAUSE. The audience quiets.

SNOWMAN BOY  
OH, THE WEATHER OUTSIDE IS FRIGHTFUL,  
BUT THE FIRE IS SO DELIGHTFUL. AND  
SINCE WE'VE NO PLACE TO GO, LET IT  
SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW.

Snowman Boy gestures offstage. Reluctantly, TWO SNOWFLAKE GIRLS -- 6-year-old girls dressed as snowflakes -- run on stage and throw confetti so it floats down around singing Snowman Boy.

SNOWMAN BOY (CONT'D)  
LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT  
SNOW.  
(he gestures, encouraging  
the audience to sing)  
LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT  
SNOW.

Audience members sing along with Snowman Boy. He finishes the song. The audience APPLAUDS LOUDLY.

Watching from the wings, Maria and other Contest Performers applaud.

ON ANGELA AND RUDY IN AUDIENCE

Angela stares at the printed program.

ANGELA

I don't see Maria's name on the list.

RUDY

No?

Angela looks toward the front row where Aunt Gertie sits.

ANGELA'S POV - AUNT GERTIE

At the moment, Aunt Gertie turns around and looks back. She turns away.

ON THE STAGE

The Governor walks to the microphone.

GOVERNOR

"Oh the weather outside..." Wasn't that just delightful.

(glances at program)

Next up are Tommy Rodriguez and Magdalena Sena as tap-dancing Santa's elves!

TWO SANTA'S ELVES - two 12-year-olds, a boy and girl -- tap dance onto the stage. They pretend to make toys while dancing to MUSIC Henry plays on the piano.

ON ANGELA AND RUDY IN AUDIENCE

They enjoy the performance.

RUDY

At the circus there were elves and polar bears who ice-skated and juggled.

ANGELA

Polar bears?

(glances at program)

I'm worried. I think you better find your sister and tell her she's not in the program.

Chewing gum, Rudy gets out of his seat and starts down the aisle.

MONTAGE OF PERFORMERS

1) A 14-YEAR-OLD-POET recites...

## 14-YEAR-OLD POET

Christmas in Santa Fe, what does that mean? Some people think it snows red and green. But we know it doesn't 'cause we know the truth, it snows enchiladas and chiles to boot.

2) Elizabeth performs a beautiful ballet piece with a series of very serious and well-practiced ballet steps, including pirouettes and leaps. Henry plays piano accompaniment. The audience responds warmly, APPLAUDING WILDLY.

3) Quick SHOTS OF MANY YOUNG CONTESTANTS, ending on...

4) A 10-YEAR-OLD MAGICIAN who pulls scarves out of a hat. Audience APPLAUDS.

## GOVERNOR

(looks at program)  
That was our last contestant.

## ANGLE ON MARIA

Her eyes are filled with disappointment. Rudy stands next to her and gently touches her arm.

## ANGLE ON STAGE AND AUDIENCE

## GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

Now our judges will vote. Will you please stand up judges? I'm a judge, and Julian Garcia, the Mayor of Santa Fe. Sybil Valesquez of Valesquez Jewelers. And Gert Hutton of Hutton's Furniture.

Aunt Gertie stands, along with the MAYOR, and the JEWELRY STORE OWNER.

On the stage, Henry stands and motions to the Governor. The Governor walks to Henry who whispers in his ear.

## GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

(into microphone)  
It appears we have one more contestant who, somehow, was not listed.

## AUNT GERTIE

(calls to Governor from her seat)  
Did the contestant officially sign up?

Governor looks to Henry who nods. Henry and Aunt Gertie exchange a slightly hostile glance.

GOVERNOR  
 (into microphone)  
 Okay, then. Will the last contestant  
 please... begin.

Governor walks to his seat. Henry places a solitary black chair in the center of the stage. The stage remains empty for a long moment.

Still wearing her worn coat and red scarf, Maria shyly walks onstage. She takes off her coat and sets it on the chair. She is dressed in a dazzling angel costume that sparkles much like the costumes of Princess Gila and Prince Marr at the starlight circus.

ON ANGELA IN AUDIENCE

She reacts, very proud.

ON AUNT GERTIE, UNCLE BILL AND MALCOLM IN AUDIENCE

MALCOLM  
 Don't worry, mom. The ugly freak  
 can't win.

AUNT GERTIE  
 I know. But she's... she's...  
 embarrassing.

UNCLE BILL  
 (leans close, whispers)  
 Maybe it's time to move on, Gert.  
 It's not Maria's, or Angela's, or  
 anybody's fault your brother died.

Aunt Gertie snaps her head around and glares at Uncle Bill. She looks down, takes a deep breath, and turns her attention to Maria on the stage.

ON MRS. FISHER WATCHING FROM BACK OF AUDIENCE

She crosses her fingers for luck.

ON THE STAGE

Maria's heart beats wildly. She slowly removes the faded red scarf and gently sets it on the chair.

SHOTS OF SCHOOL KIDS IN AUDIENCE

They point at Maria, snicker, giggle, AD-LIB negative comments.

ON THE STAGE

Maria stares into the eyes of the laughing children and smiles. She glances at Aunt Gertie without resentment, and nods.

MARIA

Before I start, I'd like to -- well,  
that rocking horse over there --  
it's very special.

Henry plays a soft melody, and waits for Maria to begin. But nothing happens. Maria does not move. In fact, she seems frozen.

Maria's eyes frantically search the auditorium.

MARIA'S POV - IN THE SHADOWS ABOVE THE AUDIENCE

Very faint figures of Prince Marr and Princess Gila gently soar through the air.

ON STAGE AND AUDIENCE

Maria waves at the figures. SOUND of AUDIENCE LAUGHING. Maria quickly puts her hand down.

A faint image of Silverbell flies above the audience. He nods his regal head at Maria. A light beams from his medallion.

The beam of light from Silverbell's medallion becomes a spotlight on Maria. She's happy now.

IN THE CONTROL BOOTH

A MAN IN CONTROL BOOTH sees the spotlight on Maria and is startled. He checks switches that control the lights. In doing so, he flips several switches so more lights shine on Maria.

ON THE STAGE

Henry plays the SILVERBELL MELODY ON THE PIANO. Maria's voice begins as a whisper, soft and endearing. It gets stronger as her song continues.

MARIA (CONT'D)

(sings)

I FELT ALONE AND SAD ON A WINTER  
SCHOOL DAY,  
WHEN TWO ANGELIC BEINGS HAPPENED MY  
WAY.

(MORE)

## MARIA (CONT'D)

HENRY AND HANNAH HAD A CHRISTMAS  
ROCKING HORSE,  
BEAUTIFUL AND STRONG, WITH A MAGICAL  
FORCE.  
HENRY SAID I NEEDED TO SING A CERTAIN  
TUNE,  
AND SILVERBELL WOULD BE ALIVE RIGHT  
IN MY ROOM.  
I HAD TO TRUST IN MY HEART WITH ALL  
MY MIGHT,  
TILL TIME STOOD STILL WITH A FLASH  
OF WINTER LIGHT.  
SILVERBELL BECAME MY TRUEST FRIEND  
AND GUIDE,  
ON A MAGICAL JOURNEY WHICH LED ME  
INSIDE.

## VARIOUS SHOTS - AUDIENCE

- 1) Audience members feel the impact of her words. There is emotion on their voices.
- 2) Angela is proud and tearful.
- 3) Mrs. Fisher smiles.

## ON THE STAGE

Maria sings the chorus.

## MARIA (CONT'D)

INSIDE YOUR OWN SOUL THE JOURNEY  
MUST START,  
TO RECONNECT WITH YOUR GENEROUS HEART.  
THERE YOU DISCOVER YOUR OWN SPECIAL  
LOVE,  
IT FITS ONE AND ALL LIKE A SOFT VELVET  
GLOVE. EVERYONE CAN GLOW FROM INSIDE  
OUT,  
JUST SHOW YOUR TRUE LOVE AND SHOUT  
IT OUT. WE ARE ALL CONNECTED BY A  
STRING OF LOVE,  
WE ARE ALL LINKED BY OUR GENEROUS  
HEARTS. WE CAN ALL GIVE FROM THE  
DEPTH OF OUR SOULS,  
WE CAN ALL REACH FROM THE EARTH TO  
THE STARS.

As she sings in her simple, honest voice, the room takes on a silvery light that seems to radiate from Maria's heart.

## KIDS IN AUDIENCE

The kids who earlier taunted Maria are now spellbound, as if they can feel what's in her heart.

ON THE STAGE

Taking a deep breath, Maria begins the second verse:

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 WITH A WHISH, WHISH, AND FLASHING OF  
 LIGHTS,  
 SILVERBELL FLEW ME INTO THE NIGHT.  
 YES, SILVERBELL GALLOPED ACROSS THE  
 NIGHT SKY,  
 KNOWING TO SUCCEED I MUST CERTAINLY  
 TRY.  
 AS WE LANDED WITH A THUD, I YELLED  
 OUT, "MY OH MY!"  
 IT COULD BE RATHER SCARY AT THIS  
 CIRCUS IN THE SKY.  
 THERE WERE MYSTICAL BEINGS AND MAGICAL  
 PACTS,  
 BLINKING CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND AMAZING  
 TRAPEZE ACTS.  
 RINGMASTER SPIRITUS HAD FOUR RIDDLES  
 TO SEE,  
 WHAT I DIDN'T YET KNOW -- THE ANSWERS  
 WERE IN ME.

AUNT GERTIE IN AUDIENCE

Her face is a tiny bit softer and shows a hint of compassion.

ON THE STAGE

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 THE FIRST RIDDLE LED US TO THE FLYING  
 TRAPEZE,  
 THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS PERFORMED  
 WITH GRACEFUL EASE.  
 I SOON LEARNED MY VALIANT SILVERBELL  
 WAS AT GREAT RISK,  
 FROM SORCERESS SINTINA AND HER FERRET  
 SIDEKICK. WE SOLVED TWO MORE RIDDLES,  
 FOR SPECIAL TOKENS TO GET HOME,  
 BUT AFTER SILVERBELL WAS KIDNAPPED,  
 I FELT SO ALONE.

From the wings, other Contest Performers watch Maria with rapt attention.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 TO FIND MY MISSING SILVERBELL, I  
 LEARNED SINTINA'S STORY,  
 OF HOW SHE LOST HER BROTHER IN HER  
 STRUGGLE FOR GLORY.  
 THEN SHE LOST HERSELF IN POISON PAIN  
 AND MADNESS,  
 BLAMING OTHERS FOR HER HEART FILLED  
 WITH SUCH SADNESS.

## AUNT GERTIE IN AUDIENCE

She sniffs and chokes back tears as she listens to the third verse which affects her deeply.

MARIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 BUT HOLDING ONTO ANGER CONTAINS A  
 STEEP PRICE,  
 WE LOSE OUR HAPPINESS, AND DON'T ACT  
 VERY NICE!  
 SINTINA CONSTANTLY HURT OTHERS WITH  
 HOT ANGER AND FEAR,  
 TILL SHE FINALLY BROKE THE SADNESS  
 IN A SWIFT FLOOD OF TEARS.

Aunt Gertie sniffles more and more, holding back tears. Uncle Bill gently puts his loving arms around her. Gertie tries to choke back her tears, but can't. Slowly, her eyes begin to drip tears, streaking through the layers of makeup and dripping on her many necklaces.

## ON THE STAGE

Maria sings the last verse:

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 FROM THE CIRCUS RIDDLES, AND  
 PERFORMERS SO CLEVER,  
 I HAD AN ADVENTURE OF TRUTHS TO  
 CHERISH FOREVER.  
 I THANK YOU SILVERBELL, MY COMPANION  
 SO BRAVE,  
 FOR YOUR TRUST AND DEVOTION -- THE  
 LOVE THAT YOU GAVE.  
 AND I FORGIVE ALL OF YOU WHO THREW  
 WOUNDS MY WAY,  
 FOR THE PATH TO LOVE CAN BE MURKY  
 WITH DISMAY. WITHIN THE DARKNESS  
 THERE IS ALWAYS LIGHT,  
 BUT STUBBORNNESS KEEPS IT SO FROM  
 OUR SIGHT.  
 THE RIDDLE TO HAPPINESS IS DESTINED  
 TO START,  
 HIDDEN DEEP INSIDE A VERY GENEROUS  
 HEART. YES, GIVING COMES FROM A  
 SPIRIT SO SINCERE. NOT JUST AT  
 CHRISTMAS TIME, BUT ALL THROUGH THE  
 YEAR.

## SHOTS OF AUDIENCE MEMBERS

Many are emotionally impacted, feeling Maria's song deep in their hearts. As Maria begins the chorus, AUDIENCE MEMBERS SING along with her.

MARIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 INSIDE YOUR SOUL THE JOURNEY MUST  
 START,  
 TO RECONNECT WITH YOUR GENEROUS HEART.  
 THERE YOU WILL FIND YOUR OWN SPECIAL  
 LOVE.

AUDIENCE  
 IT FITS ONE AND ALL LIKE A SOFT VELVET  
 GLOVE.

ON MARIA AND AUDIENCE

Maria gestures, encouraging more of the audience to join in the chorus.

MARIA  
 EVERYONE CAN GLOW FROM THE INSIDE  
 OUT,  
 JUST SHOW YOUR LOVE AND SHOUT IT  
 OUT.

AUDIENCE  
 WE ARE ALL CONNECTED BY A STRING OF  
 LOVE,  
 WE ARE ALL LINKED BY OUR GENEROUS  
 HEARTS.  
 WE CAN ALL GIVE FROM THE DEPTH OF  
 OUR SOULS,  
 WE CAN ALL REACH FROM THE EARTH TO  
 THE STARS.

They APPLAUD WILDLY. Many stand and APPLAUD.

Maria looks over at Henry. For a second, she sees him as Ringmaster Spiritus. Next to him, Hannah makes a funny clown face. Maria smiles.

Maria gazes at applauding audience, then toward the very back.

MARIA'S POV - BACK OF AUDITORIUM

Behind the rows of seats, at the very back, are faint figures of the people and animals from the Starlight Circus in the Sky.

ON THE STAGE

Suddenly, and very surprisingly, the wooden rocking horse version of Silverbell starts to move slowly across the stage. It looks like magic!

Rudy tumbles out from the wings, holding a cord attached to the rocking horse.

The audience LAUGHS and APPLAUDS, then gives Maria a standing ovation.

ON THE FRONT ROW

Aunt Gertie, the Mayor, and the Jewelry store owner consult with the Governor about judging the contest. From their body language, it's clear they favor Maria -- except for Aunt Gertie. She's worried about Elizabeth and glances toward the backstage area where her daughter Elizabeth is watching.

Aunt Gertie turns to the others, nods and smiles. Uncle Bill hugs Aunt Gertie who is about to cry again.

ON THE STAGE

Maria, Elizabeth and the other performers are at the back of the stage. The Governor takes the microphone.

GOVERNOR

Can I have your attention please?  
It's... unanimous...

He gestures toward Maria who shyly smiles.

Audience APPLAUSE.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

Thank you all for coming! Now will  
all our wonderful contestants please  
take a bow!

More APPLAUSE

ON MARIA AND ELIZABETH

Maria sees the disappointment on Elizabeth's face and edges closer to her.

MARIA

(whispers)  
Your performance was really great.

ELIZABETH

Thanks. But you deserved to win.  
You really did. I never imagined...

Maria reaches into her coat pocket and removes the red jeweled pouch from the Starlight Circus. She gives Elizabeth a star-token. Elizabeth's eyes go wide.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

What's this?

MARIA

Just a token of what I hope will be our friendship.

ELIZABETH

Thanks. You know, I'm having a birthday party next month. And my birthday parties are the best.

Maria smiles.

GOVERNOR (O.S.)

Now the presentation of the prizes.  
Maria?

Maria sets her coat and scarf back on the chair and walks toward the Governor.

The audience stands and APPLAUDS. The Governor hands her an envelope and gestures at the rocking horse, Silverbell.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT (MINUTES LATER)

As Maria walks off the stage, still in her angel costume and holding her coat and scarf, she is approached by Aunt Gertie. Aunt Gertie kneels down, looks in Maria's eyes, and hugs her. There are tears in Aunt Gertie's eyes.

AUNT GERTIE

Congratulations.

MARIA

Thank you.

Maria removes the cloud-shaped pendant necklace Sorceress Sintina had given her, and presents it to Aunt Gertie. Aunt Gertie removes the large squash-blossom necklace she wears, and also a choker, and also a large brooch and slips all the jewelry in her pocket. Tears again in her eyes, she puts on the pendant necklace. Maria helps her fasten it.

Now Aunt Gertie removes takes out one of her necklaces and hands it to a surprised Maria.

AUNT GERTIE

Please give this to your mother.

Standing nearby, Uncle Bill watches, his eyes filled with emotion.

ON MARIA AND ANGELA

Maria walks to where her mother waits in the audience.

ANGELA  
 (hugs Maria)  
 That was wonderful, mi hija,  
 wonderful!

MARIA  
 This is for you.

She hands Angela the necklace from Aunt Gertie. Angela is taken aback. She looks over at where Aunt Gertie stands. They exchange a smile.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 Mama, do you think Papa might be an  
 angel now?

ANGELA  
 An angel?

MARIA  
 Look!

Maria points toward the back of the auditorium where Prince Marr is standing. His clear brilliant blue eyes shine radiantly.

Angela looks and gasps.

ANGELA  
 What...? Who...? Martin?!

MARIA  
 Yes, at the circus, I didn't  
 understand at first. But now I do.

Prince Marr smiles warmly, blows a kiss to Angela, and fades into invisibility.

Angela exhales deeply, as if letting go of years of sadness and grief. She smiles, tears in her eyes.

ANGELA  
 That dream? Did it...

MARIA  
 Remember what you taught me? What  
 matters is how we feel.

ANGELA  
 And I feel better, mi hija. I feel  
 much much better.

MARIA  
 (hands her prize money)  
 Merry Christmas, Mama!

## ANOTHER ANGLE - MARIA AND SILVERBELL

Maria hears TINKLING BELLS. She looks around. No one else reacts. Just as at the workshop, the others don't hear. She looks up to see Silverbell flying overhead. He is almost invisible. He snorts and neighs. Maria sees the twinkling stars and warm, silvery light radiate from Silverbell. A beam of light shoots out. He vanishes.

## EXT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Contest-Goers chat and enjoy each other's company, as if their hearts are more open and they are more connected.

Maria, Rudy, Henry and Hannah exit the auditorium. Henry helps Maria carry the rocking horse.

MARIA

Thank you, Henry. Thank you, Hannah.

Malcolm waits with a few MALCOLM BUDDIES. He sees Maria and makes an unrepentant face. Maria sticks her tongue out at him, then smiles.

Maria thinks a moment, has an idea, and hurries over to Malcolm. She reaches into the red pouch and removes a star-token. She hands it to Malcolm.

MALCOLM

I don't want any jewelry!

His buddies laugh.

MARIA

It's not jewelry. Just... put it in a safe place, okay?

He nods, looking sullen.

As Maria walks to rejoin the others, the Governor stops her.

GOVERNOR

Congratulations again, young lady. There was really something... unusual... I mean extraordinary... about your performance. You certainly have a special talent.

MARIA

(startled, something clicks)

A special talent? Thank you. Thank you very much, sir.

EXT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Angela, Rudy, and Hannah walk. Henry and Maria carry the rocking horse. Rudy tries to help them.

HENRY

You know, Rudy, your whole life can be an adventure. Would you like that?

Rudy nods and giggles, then buries his head in Angela's coat.

Henry helps Maria put the rocking horse in the back seat of Angela's car.

Now Maria notices Henry and Hannah's pickup truck parked nearby. Their weathered suitcases and travel bags are in the back.

MARIA

Oh, no! You're leaving!

Maria hugs them both.

HENRY

(whispers to Maria)

See how you've made a difference with your family, and so many others? Remember, child, a generous heart grows and grows.

They both turn to look as a flatbed truck passes the parking lot. On it is a MARIACHI BAND playing MUSIC.

INT. NANA ROMERO'S CASITA - NIGHT

MARIACHI MUSIC PLAYS SOFTLY. The logs in the fireplace are almost burned out, but still glowing.

NANA ROMERO

... And Maria watched as Henry and Hannah got into the truck and drove away.

Nana Romero took a deep breath and was silent. The grandchildren are still for a moment.

FIRST GIRL

That was a fun story, Grandma

NANA ROMERO

Muchas gracias, mi hija.

With her bluer-than-blue eyes sparkling, and humming the song that Maria had sung that night in the contest, Nana Romero stands and switches on a lamp.

Now, in the light, although it has faded over time and is almost invisible, it is clear Nana Romero has the same cloud-shaped birthmark as Maria.

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

Would you turn on that other light,  
please, Rudy?

OLD RUDY

Glad to.

Rudy is now an old man, but still has a mischievous smile. As Rudy switches on another light, plaques and photos on the wall become visible.

Among the plaques are a variety of leadership awards for Maria Romero, including "Teacher of the Year" and "Mayor of Santa Fe." There are also photos of her with a husband and children. We recognize one of the men in the room as NANA ROMERO'S HUSBAND. Other photos show them with grandchildren.

FIRST CHILD

Can I get on the rocking horse, Nana?

NANA ROMERO

Be gentle, okay? He's not so young  
anymore.

The child runs to the corner near the Christmas tree. We now SEE the wooden rocking horse, Silverbell.

In an overstuffed chair, a large, grey-haired man sits staring into space. Nana Romero watches him a moment.

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

You okay, Malcolm?

OLDER MALCOLM nods. He's a little choked up. His hands are in his lap. He lifts one hand to show Nana Romero that he is holding the star-token. She smiles and nods. MALCOLM'S GRANDCHILDREN are at his feet.

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

(addresses everyone  
again)

Oh, I almost forgot.

The children stop moving and listen closely as Nana Romero continues.

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

Each and every Christmas, in a different city or town, in another state or country all around the world, Henry and Hannah look for one lucky child. Maybe it could be you.

Everyone is silent for a moment.

FIRST BOY

What about Silverbell? Did Maria  
ever see the real live Silverbell  
again?

NANA ROMERO

Of course!

FIRST GIRL

She did, Nana?

NANA ROMERO

On a clear night like this, she could  
look up at the sky...

Nana Romero gazes out the window at the starlit night sky.

NANA ROMERO (CONT'D)

And if she truly concentrated, and  
had a generous heart, she could see  
the twinkling stars of the Silverbell  
Constellation.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

A tornadolike funnel with two shooting stars hurtles past a  
backdrop of twinkling stars which form the Silverbell  
Constellation.

FADE OUT.

THE END