

JIM. NO!

*(A stunned silence.)*

MICHAEL. What?

JIM. I am so sorry, John, but...look, I really can't do this any longer...ya just gotta understand...there comes a time when you have to accept reality. Santa...Santa is, well...he's...

*(MICHAEL is aghast, JOHN is stricken. They both back away from JIM, joining and flanking the volunteer, three against one. JOHN holds her/him for comfort.)*

MICHAEL. Yes, Jim? Would you care to tell John just what Santa is? Would you care to tell contestant Number Three here? *(To the volunteer:)* I'm sorry, what's your name? *(Get a reply, and no matter what they say, confirm it as:)* Cindy...would you care to tell little Cindy here?

*(MICHAEL holds Number Three from the other side.)*

Why don't you just tell us *all* the truth about Santa?

JIM. Oh, come on! This is not fair!

MICHAEL. No, I believe you have something to tell John. I think we'd *all* like to hear it.

JOHN. Say it ain't so, Jim...

JIM. You're making me out to be the bad guy here...

MICHAEL. Really, Jim, I had no idea you were so...Santa-Claustrophobic.

JIM. Oh, for cryin' out loud, this is...I can't believe this, this is absurd...I don't make the rules, this is *reality*. He's a grown man...almost... All right, why don't *you* tell him the truth about the Easter Bunny?

*(JOHN is stricken, eyes even wider and nearly doubles over in shock, unable to speak...or maybe just a simple "aak!")*

MICHAEL. Oh, Jim, I think you've done enough damage already today, don't you? Why don't you just stick to the point, and tell little Johnny and little Cindy here about "reality"?

JIM. Okay, all right...sure. Okay, John, I'm gonna try this logically...Okay, now Santa visits all the children in the world, all the good, all the nice children, on Christmas Eve, leaves them presents, fills their stockings, eats and drinks their milk and cookies, and ho, ho, ho, off to the next...right?

JOHN. (*Uncertain, but hopeful:*) Yeah...

JIM. (*Whipping out a pocket calculator:*) Okay! Good...now...John, there are about 380 million children in the Christian world, okay, in the *Santa Claus believing* part of the world, right? Right. Okay, now if we break that down to an average of, say...three kids per house, that's...126 million houses he has to visit...in one night.

JOHN. (*Sees nothing wrong with this:*) Yeah?

JIM. John, even giving him all the time zones to work with, that breaks down to something like 800 houses *per second*.

JOHN. Yeah!

JIM. John, that means Santa has about 1/1000 of a second to park the sleigh, hop out, slide down the chimney, fill the stockings, down a couple of cookies, glass of milk, shimmy back up and zoom! on to the next house...

JOHN. Yeah!

JIM. That's 252 million cookies, John...that's almost 8 million gallons of milk...

JOHN. Wow...

JIM. And at only one present per kid, each not weighing much more than two pounds...

JOHN. I want a truck!

JIM. Okay...

JOHN. A red one, with flashing lights! And a GameBoy!

JIM. (*With increasing intensity:*) John, his sleigh would be carrying more than 380,000 tons, it would have to travel at 650 miles *per second*! 380,000 tons traveling at 650 miles per second in our atmos-

phere, would create so much air resistance and friction it would burst into flame with an explosion equal to ten Nagasakis...

(JOHN is dumbfounded.)

Do you understand what I'm getting at here?

JOHN. *(In awe:)* Yeah...

JIM. I thought you might. I know it's hard to accept, and I'm sorry, but...

JOHN. Santa...is... EVEN MORE AMAZING THAN I THOUGHT!

JIM. What!? No, John...I was trying to explain to you...

MICHAEL. Actually, Jim, Santa Claus, or Saint Nicholas, has considerable basis in reality, going back all the way to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century...

JIM. What?

MICHAEL. I've been doing some research.

JOHN. That's a lot of cookies...

JIM. This is insane...

MICHAEL. *(Turning to Number Three:)* So, Cindy — what about you? *(Arm around their shoulder, put them on the spot:)* Good ol' Saint Nick? Real or no? Whaddya say?

*(Prompt them until an answer — JIM and JOHN can lobby as they see fit.)*

*(If "Yes," then:)*

*That is a bold statement, and I'm proud of you. Folks, don't you think that little Cindy here, admitting to an advanced state of arrested adolescence, is admirable? I think courage like that deserves to be recognized, don't you? Let's have a big round of supportive, if somewhat pathetic applause for Cindy! *(Get applause, John hugs him/her furiously.)* Thanks so much for playing!...*

*(If "No," then:)*

No, I'm sorry, that's incorrect, you DO believe in Santa Claus, and this next scripted segment has been designed to incorporate a positive response, so we'll proceed as if you had said 'yes' — Let's have a

big round of supportive, if somewhat pathetic applause for Cindy! Thanks so much for playing!...

*(Prompt them off the stage and back to their seat.)*

Have a safe trip back to the second row, drive careful—

JIM. The weather report calls for snow and frost and thick frogs—

MICHAEL. Call us when you get there so we know you're OK—

JIM. Hey, and good luck with that dancing career—

JOHN. Watch out for flying reindeer! ("*Thumbs up*" gesture.)

MICHAEL. Now, Jim, as I was saying, Santa Claus, or Saint Nicholas, *was* an actual person, born in Turkey, about 271 A.D. He was the Bishop of Myra, and became the patron saint of, well, just about everything: sailors, merchants, paupers, murderers, scholars...

JIM. Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of *murderers*?

MICHAEL. Sure, and thieves, and pawnbrokers, and bakers...

JIM. Murderers have a patron *saint*?

MICHAEL. Well, generally he's the patron saint of anybody in trouble, and there are many legends about how he brought gifts to those in need, usually at night, so no one could see him, hence the idea of *Santa Claus* delivering presents on Christmas Eve...

JIM. Sure, to all the good little murderers and pawnbrokers and thieves...

MICHAEL. Jim, you're missing the point here...the point is, the *spirit* of Christmas and the *spirit* of giving has spread pretty much worldwide, and millions of people have Santa Claus traditions, and millions and millions of children *do* believe in him—In Brazil he's *Vovo Indo*, in China he's *Dun Che Lao Ren*, on Easter Island he's...

JOHN. Rapahago! Mata Ki Te Rangi!

MICHAEL. Mata Ki Te Rangi, indeed, John. So ya see, Jim, when you stop believing in Santa Claus...that's when you start getting clothes for Christmas. What did you get last year, Jim?

JIM. Socks. And a sweater. And a \$5 gift certificate to Denny's...

MICHAEL. Have you ever worn that sweater, Jim? I mean, after Christmas morning?

JIM. No.

MICHAEL. Didn't think so. So when little Johnny here writes to the newspaper, and says, "Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?" he needs an answer, and I think *you* should be the one to give him that answer. Whaddya say? Jim? John?

*(He gestures for them to have a seat. JIM resignedly sits in the chair and begrudgingly beckons JOHN over to sit next to him. JOHN is delighted, but at the last moment sits on JIM's lap. This does not work well, as JIM is obviously crushed. They re-arrange, with JIM on JOHN's lap. JOHN looks expectantly at JIM.)*

JIM. *(With a sigh – can't believe he's doing this:)* Yes, VerJohnia<sup>1</sup>, there is a Santa Claus. He lives in the hearts of children and advertising executives everywhere. He lives in shopping malls and TV specials. He lives in Coca-Cola commercials and those frightening little mechanical dancing dolls that people put on their front lawns, and in bell-ringing, moth-eaten corner drunks. But you know where he lives most of all, Johnny?

JOHN. The North Pole!

JIM. The North Pole! That's right, John! Where it's 70 below zero, and water freezes before it hits the ground, where there's no vegetation to support life, let alone eight reindeer...

JOHN. *Nine* reindeer,

JIM. *Nine* reindeer, and a couple a hundred thousand slave labor elves who crank out hundreds of millions of toys... 'course they're doing it with no raw materials, or modern power tools, or supply lines, but he lives there, Johnny, oh he lives there all the same...

JOHN. Tell me about how fast the sleigh goes again! And the cookies! And the cookies!

<sup>1</sup> Actually, even without John's name this works—try it: VerBobia, VerMarkia, VerPhilia.

JIM. (To MICHAEL:) Are you satisfied?

MICHAEL. Very.

JIM. (Getting off JOHN's lap:) Can we move on now?

JOHN. Hey, Jim?

JIM. Yeah?

JOHN. (Crushing him in a big bear hug:) I love you, man!

MICHAEL. All right, what's next...?

### Macy's Day Parade

(Warm and nostalgic...)

JIM. Ah! The beginning of that *special* time of year. There's a nip in the air...

MICHAEL. Frost is on the pumpkin...

JOHN. The sweaters come out of mothballs...

JIM. And who can forget those cozy evenings around the fire ...

MICHAEL. The family gathered by its warm glow...

JOHN. Mother in her 'kerchief and I in my cap...

JIM. The children gathered at his knees as Dad opens a well-loved holiday tale and begins to read,...

(Very abrupt change in tone — and fast!)

MICHAEL. Well that never happened in My house, pal, 'cause we had —

**ALL. TELEVISION!!!!**

(MICHAEL exits.)

JIM. All of us gathered with eyes like saucers looking up at that warm, friendly, blue, cathode tube glow;

JOHN. The soft crackle of static snow, and we were bathed in the warmth of the pre-recorded magic of X-Mas!!!