

**FADE IN**

**EXT – SKY [DAY]**

*Dark clouds have gathered. Ferocious winds sweep them into a larger group of yet darker clouds. A series of thunderclaps ensue and a blanket of rain plummets into a forest below. It reaches the innocent head of a ten-year-old BOY who appears lost and alone. He looks up momentarily, an arm shielding his face. With eyes wide in terror, he begins to move aimlessly through the forest, searching over his shoulder for something unseen. The dark clouds blot out the last few shreds of light. It is ominous.*

*The boy breaks into a RUN. Ahead is a crop of boulders. He hops from one to the next before losing his footing and falling hard to the ground. When he gets up, he is favoring his right ankle. Suddenly there is GROWLING, teeth SNAPPING. The boy glances around to find a huge black wolf fifty paces away, standing beneath the largest tree in the forest. Atop its head is a streak of white hair. It glares menacingly and RUMBLES a threat. Wasting no time, the boy races off with all he has, around several trees, through a streambed, over a patch of bushes. Nearly breathless, he finally comes upon a band of trees and stops abruptly. There before him is a majestic white sand beach and a sea of the bluest order. It's beautiful, breathtaking. At that moment the foliage begins to SHAKE violently. The child retreats several steps toward the coming tide, the cold water enveloping his feet and ankles. He cries out...*

CHILD

*Mother!*

**INT – BEDROOM [NIGHT]**

*The boy comes awake with a start. His MOTHER rushes to his bedside and draws him close. A gust of wind shoots through his window.*

CHILD

Don't leave.

MOTHER

I'm not going anywhere Nicholas.

*The breeze tousles his hair as his mother's words begin to fade.*

MOTHER

I'm not going anywhere...I'm not going  
anywhere ...I'm not going anywhere...

**RUN OPENING CREDITS**

*The following title is superimposed on the screen:*

**SOUTHERN LYCIA, 290 A.D.**

*Narration by the character NICANDER, begins. Montage of Christians performing communion; entering villages; speaking before crowds of people.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

In the years following the death of Jesus of Nazareth, Christianity struggled to find its place in the known world. Through the self-sacrificing work of devoted followers, the Word of God was spreading, even flourishing in many of the remote areas. Yet for the Christian, there remained the constant threat from one of the greatest powers ever known to man—the Roman Empire.

*Roman conquest in foreign lands is depicted with artillery and siege engines, archers and infantrymen.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Roman provinces stretched as far north as Britannia, as far south as Egypt. To the west it was Spain, and to the east Syria. In all, it exceeded thousands of square miles.

*Roman calvarymen rampage through a village and assault the people with deadly precision.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

The threat posed by the Roman Empire meant the cruelest persecutions imaginable. They were often senseless, brutal, and ghastly in nature. Death came in many forms, from the jaws of a starved and ravaged animal let loose within an arena for entertainment purposes, to a painfully slow demise atop a crucifix, covered in tar and set afire. Rome itself had endured, a mighty nation for over 1,000 years.

*A Roman family is gathered bedside. A physician is attending an ailing woman. In another scene, a man is seen prostrated before the statue of Apollo and sobbing.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Yet even with its incredible influence and prosperity, the government fell into a state of decline. Marred by economic strife, barbaric invasions, plagues, even civil war, emperors were quick to lay blame on the religious order.

They were the perfect scapegoat; the very existence of followers alone was a standing insult to the Roman practice of worshipping a multitude of gods.

*From atop a scenic hill in the countryside, a group of people is gathered. A funeral is taking place. Dark clouds are plentiful in the sky above.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Thus it was, in the years following Jesus' days upon the earth, that thousands of innocent Christians died. And if it was not a premature death that found them, then it was a life entrenched in struggle for countless others. Such it was for an innocent child, a day his beloved parents were put to rest ...

*Narration ceases. A flurry of wind is sweeping through the hair of a stoic NICHOLAS. Just beside him, Nicander delivers a last prayer. He is a thin, perfectly bald, middle-aged man wearing a dark gray robe. In his hands he holds a scroll. A woman is singing a hymn in the background. Traces of weeping are heard from the crowd. Leaves are rustling in the trees.*

NICANDER

...you are dust, and to dust you shall return.  
Amen.

*The woman ends her hymnal as a small party of women walks over to Nicholas.*

OLD WOMAN AT BURIAL

It will be all right, child. The God of Abraham keeps their company now.

WOMAN AT BURIAL #1

Bless you, Nicholas.

WOMAN AT BURIAL #2

May God be with you.

*Oblivious to their presence, the boy continues to stare at the graves. Nicander approaches the women.*

NICANDER

My thanks to all of you for coming.

*Nicholas edges up to the gravesides and drops to his knees. There is profound sadness in his eyes. Reaching into the pocket of his dark robe, he pulls forth two purple lilac flowers. He places them delicately beside each grave marker. Nicander turns away from the group of wellwishers to observe the boy. There is concern on his face.*

OLD WOMAN (O.S.)

Abbot Nicander!

NICANDER

Yes?

WOMAN #2

What is to become of the boy?

WOMAN #3

Is there truth, that he is your nephew?

*Nicander appears stunned by the words. An empty glaze comes over him. Off to the side, Nicholas struggles to suppress his anguish. He gazes up to the heavens and begins to rock slowly from side to side. A single tear falls from his cheek to the ground. Suddenly a supporting hand is on his shoulder.*

NICANDER

We had best be going now. A storm comes.

*Another tear trails from his face as he rises.*

**EXT – FOREST TRAIL [DAY]**

*Nicander and Nicholas travel aboard a two-horse driven carriage. The trail is heavy with trees to either side. Nicander looks up, gauging the dark clouds.*

NICANDER

It won't be long before the storm reaches us,  
but an hour's ride should find us safely home.

*Nicholas looks absently at the road ahead. As they round a bend, they come upon a small contingent of Roman legionaries. A group of dirtied, broken and beaten men shackled in chains rest along the right side of the trail. One man stands out. A BLACK MAN with a powerful physique. Nicholas shares a moment of eye contact with him.*

NICANDER

Legionaries? Here?

*A confused Nicander brings the carriage to a stop. Thunder RUMBLES in the distance.*

NICANDER

Hello.

*Someone SPATS. The horses STIR. As Nicander peers over his shoulder, he beholds the author and shifts in his seat. A tall, swarthy looking man (CARUS) of svelte build and menacing eyes*

*emerges from behind a tree. It is apparent he has just relieved himself. As he steps from the shadows, he is garbed almost entirely in black. Even a black-handled sword is sheathed at his waist. Most distinctive of all are several pronounced scars running along his arms and face. Slow and deliberate, the man rejoins his detachment and pulls forth a silver dagger as if from thin air. He then puts the dagger to his mouth and picks at a tooth.*

NICANDER

Are—are you in command of the group here?

CARUS

Who is asking?

NICANDER

I am Nicander...of Xanthos.

*A sudden look of disdain creeps over Carus' face.*

CARUS

If memory serves, there is a monastery in Xanthos. What is your vocation?

PRISONER IN LINE (O.S.)

Blessed are the persecuted!

CARUS (*swinging around*)

Who has spoken out of place?

*Carus walks over to the prisoners. The abbot stiffens in concern and ventures a quick glance at the scroll resting by his feet.*

NICANDER

A storm is on the way. Surely, you and your company would be better served if you sought shelt—

*With a scolding glare, Carus' interrupts.*

CARUS

*Excuse me?* You think I'm leading a pilgrimage here, do you? Let me clarify something, and you take note. Powerful men don't concern themselves with the likes and dislikes of lesser men.

*(turning to prisoners)*

I'll be damned if I concern myself with the elements. Let the thunder tremble at MY SIGHT!

*Nicander glances at the prisoners, then back at Carus.*

NICANDER

These men, how have they wronged?

CARUS

How does raping and pillaging a village sound?

*The heavily muscled black man JUMPS to his feet.*

BLACK MAN

That's a lie, we—

*Before the man can finish his remark, Carus turns and STRIKES him a blow to the head with the handle of his dagger, KNOCKING him hard to the ground. The enraged man ROARS in anger, about to retaliate when he is kicked to the ground by swarming legionaries. A calm and collected Carus wards them off. Looming over the fallen man, one hand begins to deftly TWIRL the dagger.*

CARUS

Go ahead, come at me. We can make sport of it.

*A heavy silence looms as the black man considers the proposition. His breathing is that of an angry bull. Carus SNICKERS in derision and edges up to within inches of his face and carefully places the POINT of his dagger to the man's temple. The captive is struggling mightily to restrain his anger, his large hand clutching a pocket of dirt then releasing it. Carus whispers in a venomous tone...*

CARUS

Never...ever speak without being spoken to.  
Need I drive that point through to you?

*Beads of sweat collect on the prisoner's brow as he glowers at his captor. Then from the corner of his eye, the man notes Nicholas watching intently. Finally, the incensed prisoner shakes his head. Carus withdraws his dagger and pats him gently on the cheek.*

CARUS

Good!

*An appalled Nicander looks on from the edge of his seat. Carus sheathes his dagger and mounts his steed. With sinister arrogance, he turns his attention to Nicander again.*

CARUS

Is there anything else you should like to know,  
or have I exhausted your curiosity?

NICANDER (*unflinching*)

Your name, I did not get it.

CARUS

Forgive me my manners. It must be painfully obvious I am not used to unexpected company. *Carus!* My name is Carus. Remember it. Perhaps you shall even see me again...or maybe you boy. One never knows the will of the gods.

*Nicander watches as Carus spurs his horse forward; his eyes locked on Nicholas. The boy glares back bravely as the man brings his steed to a halt and spats again. Then without another word, he and his men ride past with the prisoners in tow. From close up, Nicholas can better see each of the prisoners. Some of them look haggard and mean, but most appear to be normal men. The last prisoner on the human chain approaches the carriage. It is the black man. Unlike the other prisoners, his steps remain lively. There is pride in his manner and he is humming. Suddenly the man turns to Nicholas and grins.*

BLACK MAN

Smile boy. To live is Christ!

*The black man then tosses an object onto Nicholas' lap and continues on; his humming resumed. The boy lifts the object. It is a remarkable WOOD CARVING of a man and a woman with a babe in her arms. Nicander looks from the carving to the departing men as they disappear around the bend.*

NICANDER

May God have mercy on them!

**EXT – SION MONASTERY [NIGHT]**

*In the midst of driving RAIN and THUNDER, Nicander and Nicholas have reached the monastery. There before the huge entrance doors, the abbot dismounts quickly.*

NICANDER

Whoa, girls, whoa. Come, Nicholas! Leave the carriage here.

*The boy reluctantly follows Nicander. At the foot of the door, Nicander pulls on a knotted and dangling rope, sounding a bell. Waiting patiently, Nicander draws the hood of his robe over his head and looks out into the distance. As he looks down, he notes that Nicholas has done nothing to shield himself from the heavy rain. The sound of a wooden bar is heard. A moment later the doors are opened and a short, middle-aged man directs them inside.*

NICANDER

Thank you, Padius. Oh, what a welcome sight these hallowed walls are.

PADIUS

Take care with your steps, master.

*Nicholas remains fixed in place, unwilling to enter. A puzzled look comes over his host.*

PADIUS

Won't you please come in?

*The abbot quickly removes the boy's saturated robe as Padius closes the door behind them. Nicander hangs the robe on a hook and places his arm round Nicholas.*

NICANDER

Nicholas, this is Padius, my deacon here in Sion. Padius, this is Nicholas...*my nephew!*

PADIUS

Pleased to make your acquaintance, young master.

*Nicholas fails to look up or acknowledge the man. Nicander forces a smile anyway. Padius pretends not to notice and helps Nicander remove his garments. Nicholas takes the opportunity to assess his surroundings. The monastery is spacious, modest in decor.*

NICANDER

Padius, please show Nicholas to his quarters and provide him with dry clothes.

PADIUS

At once, my abbot.

*Padius starts to make his way up a stairway, Nicholas trudging behind. Nicander addresses them once more.*

NICANDER

Nicholas, I would like to have you join me for supper. I shall call on you.

*The boy turns his head ever so slightly but does not answer.*

PADIUS

He shall be there, master.

*Nicander nods solemnly.*

**INT – MONASTERY CORRIDOR / QUARTERS [NIGHT]**

*Padius opens the door to a room. It groans.*

PADIUS

This is your room, young master. Come in,  
come in.

*A haggard Nicholas steps inside. Although small in size, the room is furnished with a bed, a table, and a chair.*

PADIUS

There are fresh clothes on your bed. I will  
start on some warm water for a bath.

NICHOLAS (*near whisper*)

I just...

PADIUS

Say again?

NICHOLAS

...I want to be alone. Please.

*Padius searches the boy's face.*

PADIUS

Yes, of course. Your days have been difficult.  
I will be back when supper is prepared, but  
take heed young one...you are home now.

*Nicholas watches as Padius closes the door and sweeps off. The man's footsteps echo in the corridor, slowly fading away. Alone now, Nicholas glares blankly at the wall, then lies on the bed and draws the blanket over him.*

**EXT – AERIAL SHOT OF MONASTERY [NIGHT]**

*Heavy rainfall continues to blanket the countryside. Darkness has fully descended.*

**INT – DINING ROOM OF MONASTERY [NIGHT]**

*A melancholy Nicholas enters the room. On the table Nicander rises from his seat as the boy takes the chair opposite. Food is prepared and places are set. Padius comes up behind Nicholas and stands at the doorway.*

PADIUS

Will you be requiring anything more, my abbot?

NICANDER (*shaking head*)

Thank you, Padius. Everything is in fine order.

*Padius nods and retreats. Nicander sighs and looks from Nicholas to his plate. He forces a cheerful disposition.*

NICANDER

Consider yourself fortunate young man, the food here in the monastery is no less spectacular than that of an emperors.

*The boy stares absently at his plate.*

NICANDER

Let's see Nicholas, you're what—ten years old now? I feel that we hardly know each other despite our relations.

*As Nicander looks on, the boy remains void of emotion.*

NICANDER

We should eat before our meal grows cold.

*The abbot begins to eat. Nicholas attempts to do the same, but can't muster the will.*

NICANDER

I may not look it from outward appearances, but I share your pain—I do! I feel their loss as well. And now, I won't pretend to know what the Lord has destined for your life Nicholas, nor what difficulties lie in wait. But I assure you, as God is my witness...I shall love you as my beloved brother and his wife did.

*The uneasy silence grows thicker. A sudden tear runs down the boy's cheek. Nicander must clear his throat and adjusts his collar.*

NICANDER

It grows warm in here. Yes, well, perhaps I should provide you with a little background. Sion...

*Nicander looks up at the ceiling and raises his hands.*

NICANDER

...this monastery was built long ago and served first as a fort.

*Nicholas breaks in, his voice tender.*

NICHOLAS

Why?

*The words trail from his mouth. Nicander is caught unexpectedly by the remark.*

NICANDER

Pardon?

*Staring absently at his plate, Nicholas pokes at the food.*

NICHOLAS

Why did they have to go?

*The abbot is at a loss for words. He hasn't an answer.*

NICANDER (*shaking head*)

I...I don't know.

NICHOLAS

Please excuse me.

*Heartbroken, the boy simply rises from his chair and strolls from the room.*

**INT – DINING ROOM OF MONASTERY [DAY]**

*Nicholas is sitting at the table, refusing the breakfast set before him. Narration resumes.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

The coming days brought much the same.

**INT – NICHOLAS' QUARTERS [DAY]**

*Nicholas is standing in his room, staring out the window.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

After the death of his parents, young Nicholas had withdrawn into a world of his own, shut off...and alone.

**INT – BASILICA ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*Nicholas is standing next to Nicander at the altar, helping to provide communion.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Nothing I attempted seemed to have any effect.

**EXT – VILLAGE OUTSIDE OF XANTHOS [DAY]**

*Nicholas is riding into town in a carriage with Nicander.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Trips into town, the basilica, the monastery grounds, nothing.

**EXT – GARDENS ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*Nicholas is feeding doves in a garden. In the background is a water fountain with an angel adorning its center. Nicander watches from a distance.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

In my life I had known many challenges, overcome many obstacles, encountered many trials...

**EXT – GARDENS ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*Nicholas is sitting on a garden bench, staring at the rustling leaves of a nearby tree.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

...but the nuances of raising a troubled child was one I had little concept of.

**EXT – BASILICA ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*Nicander is greeting church members at the door. He is shaking their hands and being congenial.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

My days remained busy with the operations of the monastery, and ministering in the basilica, but I felt I was losing ground, that if I couldn't reach my nephew soon, I might lose him forever.

**INT – MONASTERY CORRIDOR [NIGHT]**

*Walking down the corridor, Nicander stops in front of Nicholas' room. The door is closed. He makes ready to knock when he stops, his face rigid with indecision. A moment later he simply turns and walks away.*

**INT – NICHOLAS' QUARTERS [NIGHT]**

*Inside, Nicholas is staring out the window. He walks over to his bed where a sack is lying. A deposit of clothes is neatly folded beside it. The boy takes the clothes and places them inside. As he looks over, only the wooden sculpture remains on his bed. Nicholas seems to scrutinize it a moment before picking it up and placing it into the sack. He then pulls the drawstring closed and returns to the window. His eyes are punctuated with deep sadness.*

**INT – BASILICA OF MONASTERY [NIGHT]**

*Nicander is alone at the altar.*

NICANDER

Lord...I cannot do this alone. Lend me wisdom and understanding. Lend me Your Hand.

**EXT – SKY [DAWN]**

*The morning sky is cloudless. High above, a hawk glides round in circles.*

**INT – NICHOLAS' QUARTERS [DAWN]**

*With head resting on folded arms, Nicholas has succumbed to slumber, the very picture of innocence. After a deep breath, he stirs and comes awake. He looks round and realizes he has fallen asleep on the window's ledge. As he peers up at the morning sky, anger is written on his face. He rushes to his bed, snatches the sack and quickly exits the room.*

**INT – STAIRWELL IN MONASTERY [DAWN]**

*Nicholas is descending the stairs. He looks over his shoulder, stops, and then continues.*

**EXT – GROUNDS OF THE MONASTERY [DAWN]**

*Nicholas takes a glance behind. No one has noted his departure. He moves with greater speed now, entering a small cornfield.*

**EXT – CORN FIELD CLEARING [DAWN]**

*As he reaches a clearing at the edge of the grounds, a CREAKING draws his attention. Several hundred yards away, a group of people is entering a barn-like structure. They are garbed in dark green woolen robes with hoods fashioned over their heads. Several horses and a cart are visible. Nicholas continues to make his way ahead when he looks at the barn again. The road to Xanthos is mere feet away. He glares at it with a vacant expression.*

**EXT – BARN ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAWN]**

*From inside the barn we hear activity. Voices are apparent, too muffled to understand. The camera pans over to the right where we see Nicholas CREEPING UP, hunched over and concealed behind heavy brush. Suddenly several legionaries EMERGE from the shed. Nicholas is startled but continues to watch carefully. Although the soldiers appear tired and weary, there is tranquillity in their faces.*

**LEGIONARY**

What about...?

**GRUFF SOLDIER**

Let her alone for now. Let's head for the monastery.

*The men turn and head off. For a few moments, Nicholas appears confused. Then hurriedly he pushes and squeezes his way through the brush. Finally, his body halfway imbedded in the foliage, he manages to catch a glimpse. The soldiers are hiking up to the monastery. Oddly they appear weaponless, their spears and robes resting against the barn. With a sense of alarm, Nicholas pulls free of his hiding place. He then jaunts up carefully to the spears, takes them, and conceals them in the brush. As he looks back at the barn again, he realizes the door has been left ajar. Seeing no one, he rushes over to it. It appears abandoned. Inside is dark and still. Suddenly there is a SHUFFLING sound. Believing he must escape discovery, he pushes open the door and SCURRIES inside. Almost immediately his foot catches something and he comes CRASHING to the floor. A female voice CRIES out in the darkness.*

**FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)**

Who's there?

*Nicholas glances round in the darkness. A moment later the barn is filled with light from the open door. A beautiful woman (HELENA) is staring at him, her face aghast with surprise. She is wearing a purple gown, gold bracelets, and a necklace of red garnets. She stands up.*

HELENA

Who are you?

*His eyes wide, he rises quickly and studies the woman. She looks at her apparel in confusion. He shoots for the door, but she is there to meet him.*

HELENA

Wait!

*Nicholas backs off.*

HELENA

What is your name? What are you doing in here?

*He is hesitant.*

NICHOLAS

Nicholas.

*The woman's eyes are searching.*

HELENA

Are you related to Nicander?

*Nicholas looks at her sharply then edges for the door. She doesn't waver.*

NICHOLAS

Yes!

HELENA

Of course! You're his nephew. Nicander and I are good friends. I am Helena.

*As she moves forward a step, the boy retreats.*

HELENA

I see...you don't believe me.

*(pondering)*

Epiphaneous and Nona? They are your parents?

*Suddenly his face drops.*

NICHOLAS

I want to get out now. I want to go.

HELENA

What did I...? What's wrong?

*She allows Nicholas to open the door; he dashes out.*

HELENA

Nicholas?

*The boy stops, swivels round, and glares up at her.*

NICHOLAS

You're wrong! *I don't have parents!*

*As her eyes bear down on him, Nicholas looks down.*

HELENA

What are you saying?

*His lips begin to tremble with emotion.*

NICHOLAS

*I don't have them anymore! Why did we have to go to those catacombs anyway? We could have helped those families some other way. It's not fair that they became exposed to sickness. It's not fair you see? They help so many people, people all over.*

*(shaking head)*

*Why couldn't this once...why couldn't somebody help my parents?*

HELENA

Come back inside Nicholas. Trust me to show you something. Please! You can go wherever you were going after that.

*Reluctantly, Nicholas goes back inside. As light from the open door filters through, an object covered by a brown canvas is revealed. Helena takes the canvas in her hands and YANKS. It floats to the dusty floor, unveiling a large, weathered, WOODEN CROSS. Being twelve feet in length and six feet in width, it is lying on a beautiful marble table with a red velvet cloth.*

NICHOLAS

Wha-what is it?

*There is reverence in her eyes as she speaks.*

HELENA

The cross that bore Jesus.

*The boy's eyes widen as he closely looks over the aged relic. When he is mere inches away, a shard breaks from the cross to FALL upon one of his sandaled feet.*

HELENA (*chuckling*)

By all that is holy!

NICHOLAS

I didn't touch it.

*Alarmed, he takes a quick step back; the piece falls from his sandal.*

HELENA

Don't be alarmed it's a sign.

*Helena steps forward and gracefully picks it up; examines it.*

NICHOLAS

Of what?

HELENA

Your life will somehow be connected to the Lord. In fact, I'm sure of it.

*Helena can see that Nicholas is completely bewildered.*

HELENA

Come alongside me. I want you to take a better look.

*He edges closer to the cross.*

HELENA

Touch it, go ahead.

*Nicholas begins to move along the east side where the two beams intersect. Helena follows quietly behind. With a sudden look of despair, his eyes become fixated on the bloodstains still in evidence. With great tenderness, the boy begins to run his hand up along the gaping hole where a nail had been driven into Jesus' feet.*

NICHOLAS

His mother must have been sad when he died.

*Tears well up in Helena's eyes. They go unnoticed by the boy.*

NICHOLAS

My parents used to tell me stories about  
Him...  
about His life.

*After a moment, Nicholas looks up at her.*

NICHOLAS

Are they with Him now?

HELENA (*softly*)

Yes! Yes they are.

*Nicholas races up to her, embraces her tight, and starts to SOB uncontrollably.*

**EXT – SION MONASTERY [DAY]**

*The sun shines bright on the majestic monastery. The day is serene and tranquil.*

**INT – STUDY IN MONASTERY [DAY]**

*Padius walks into the room. Nicander is standing at a window, looking outside.*

PADIUS

The soldiers are eating now, good abbot.

NICANDER

Thank you, Padius. Any sign of Nicholas?

*There is a knock. The two men turn to see Nicholas standing outside the door. Nicander cannot hide his surprise.*

NICANDER

Nicholas? Come in.

NICHOLAS

I won't keep you long.

NICANDER

Don't be concerned. Step inside.

*Nicholas presses forward. Nicander's eyes are suddenly drawn to a shadowy figure outside the door.*

NICANDER

Helena?

*She steps into the room just behind Nicholas. A radiant smile graces her face.*

HELENA

Hello, Nicander. I'm...just accompanying my new friend here—lending a little support.

NICANDER

I see.

*Nicander nods and gives his nephew his full attention.*

NICHOLAS

I have come to ask a favor.

*(pause)*

I want to become a priest. Will you help me?

NICANDER *(shocked)*

Allow me to sit a moment.

*He takes a seat at a table and folds his hands in front. As Padius looks on, he cannot help but smile.*

NICANDER

A priest? How can you know it's what you want? You're very young still.

NICHOLAS

Because I want to help people, I want to help them not to hide anymore, and I want to help them not to be afraid for what they believe.

*Nicander glances in Helena's direction. She shrugs her shoulders and nods.*

NICANDER

It is a noble cause for which you aspire.

*Padius looks on in admiration. Nicander rises from his chair and crosses to Nicholas.*

NICANDER

I think you should know then that it takes many years of study and dedication. Many sacrifices...

NICHOLAS (*undaunted*)

I am ready now.

NICANDER

All right then, I will give you every assistance.

NICHOLAS

And I shall be treated like the others. I shall call you abbot, not uncle.

NICANDER

Fair enough, I quite understand.

*As Nicander looks over at Helena, he finds a glowering smile on her face.*

NICHOLAS

Can I say one more thing?

NICANDER

Of course!

NICHOLAS

I'm hungry!

NICANDER (*laughing*)

I should think so. I should think so.

*Nicander puts his hands together in a prayerful gesture of thanks.*

**EXT – GROUNDS OF THE MONASTERY [DAY]**

*The sun is just breaking over the horizon. Overhead, the sky is blue-gray and clear. Off in the distance a rooster is heard. Birds anxious at the prospect of another day, jettison from tree to tree as if participating in a game of tag.*

**EXT – ENTRANCE GATES OF MONASTERY [DAY]**

*Outside the monastery doors, Nicander and Nicholas bid Helena farewell. She is garbed again in her dark green woolen robe. She kneels before the boy.*

HELENA

Listen...you are a very special boy. Learn well from your uncle and you'll be able to accomplish anything you set your mind to.

*He smiles sadly and nods.*

HELENA

Oh, I have something for you.

NICHOLAS

What is it?

HELENA

Take a look for yourself.

*Helena places a wooden object with a leather string in his left hand.*

NICHOLAS

A cross?

HELENA

I fashioned it from the wood that fell at your feet, from the one true cross—the Holy Cross.

*He places it around his neck and clutches it tight.*

NICHOLAS

Thank you.

*Nicholas gives her a warm embrace. After a moment, she releases her hold and kisses him softly on the forehead. She then comes to her feet.*

NICHOLAS

We will we see you again?

HELENA

How does next summer sound?

*He smiles and nods as she makes her way to the carriage. The six soldiers await her. The driver of the carriage helps her onto the bench. Riding horseback at point position, the gruff soldier makes a clicking sound, spurring the horses on. With a cheery smile, Helena waves goodbye. They wave back. Slowly and steadily the party rides off.*

NICHOLAS

What is in Rome? Why does she have to go?

NICANDER

Helena is married to a powerful man and she has a son about your age. Perhaps

someday you shall meet him.

**EXT – COUNTRYSIDE [DAY]**

*Winter has passed; spring has arrived. Blossoming wild flowers strewn upon a hillside lay dormant no longer as they offer a splendor of radiant colors. Below, a streambed welcomes the last reserves of melted ice, each drop of water adding to its purity. From the far side of the stream, an expectant hare emerges from the brush. Finding no food it leaps off in another direction.*

**INT – CLASSROOM IN MONASTERY [DAY]**

*The abbot is instructing Nicholas in a classroom setting, reading to him from a black book. The boy wears a tan smock. Narration resumes again.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Over the course of the coming months, Nicholas immersed himself in his studies. To my pleasant surprise, he was a brilliant student and a quick study. Theology, devotions, scripture memorization, they all seemed to come naturally to him.

*Nicholas is smiling at Nicander as he answers a question put to him.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Even at such an early age, I began to witness a conviction and resolve unique to one so young. He had a maturity and single-mindedness about him that escaped even adult students.

**INT – NICHOLAS' QUARTERS [NIGHT]**

*Nicholas is seated at a table writing with an iron stylus (ancient pen) on vellum (parchment). He has a concentrated look on his face. He is in a robe of white. A window is behind him, a full moon in evidence.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

My tutoring was met with an eagerness; it was invigorating.

*Nicholas is asleep on his bed, stirring from a nightmare. After a few long moments, a tranquil look forms on his face.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

During this first year with me, Nicholas was also plagued by recurring dreams of a black wolf. The dreams were puzzling; disconcerting to say the least.

**EXT – FORESTED HILLSIDE [DAY]**

*Nicholas is at his parent's graveside. He is kneeling in prayer.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

As I expected, Nicholas spoke often of his parents and his desire to be reunited with them one day.

**EXT – BASILICA ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*A fourteen-year-old Nicholas is interacting with a small group of church members outside the basilica. His appears bright and amiable.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

As more years began to number, I saw gradual change in him. He was becoming more open and amicable. Even the recurring dream came with less frequency, finally tapering off altogether.

**INT – BASILICA ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*A sixteen-year-old Nicholas is at a podium delivering words of Christ. There is much to be read from his passion and exuberance. His words are faintly audible.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

At church, members of the congregation began to call on him to deliver readings from the scriptures; considering him something of a prodigy. During his readings, he had a way of speaking that was both dynamic and engaging. I too, found myself experiencing a beauty in Christ's words as never before.

**EXT – BASILICA ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*A throng of people is crowding into the monastery's basilica.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

The congregation continued to grow at a

remarkable pace, this despite the ever present threat of religious persecution. A threat that began to loom larger and larger.

**INT – IMPERIAL PALACE OF ROME [DAY]**

*Diocletian, the Roman Emperor is seated at his majestic dais. He is garbed in an elaborate purple toga with a laurel crown on his head. He is barking orders at a number of his subordinates and pointing his finger in accusation.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

The emperor Diocletian was failing in his efforts to bring unity to the nation. Frustrated, he demanded complete conformity to his will—a decree that would target Christians most of all.

**EXT – BASILICA OF ROME [DAY]**

*Several soldiers are shuffling a large number of Christians out of a church.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

He demanded Christians were not to assemble and their...

**EXT – COURTYARD IN ROME [NIGHT]**

*A pile of sacred books, scrolls, and artifacts has been set on fire. The plumes of smoke reach up to the sky.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

...sacred books be destroyed. As I feared, greater numbers of them went into seclusion.

**EXT – ARENA IN ROME [DAY]**

*A group of Christians are cowering from several male lions loosed on them. The hungry lions advance. Citizens in the crowd watch in both horror and delight.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Yet this did little to stem the flow of blood, and persecutions began to take place on an alarming scale.

**EXT – STREET IN ROME [DAY]**

*A Christian man falls to the ground as citizens barrage him with stones.*

**EXT – STREET IN ROME [NIGHT]**

*A woman is tied to a wooden post. At her feet is dried brush and shards of dead wood. A legionary advances on her with a torch in hand.*

**EXT – GARDENS ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*An eighteen-year-old Nicholas is seen with a radiant looking Helena. They are feeding doves at the water fountain.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Sion itself managed to endure without incident. Perhaps it was divine intervention, or something as simple as Helena's influence. I was just grateful. We owed much to this special woman who would spend her summers with us, summers that would strengthen her bonds with Nicholas. And of her own son Constantine, she talked often. He was a boy like Nicholas, sheltered and groomed. Oh how those precious years passed quickly. Before long, my nephew had become a man.

**INT – BASILICA ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*From a distance, an adult Nicholas is standing at the basilica's altar, a wide grin on his face. He is adorned in a priest's wardrobe. A large audience of people is in attendance as a ceremony is taking place, including Nicander, Padius, and Helena.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Before long, my nephew had become a priest.

**EXT – GARDENS ON MONASTERY GROUNDS [DAY]**

*On a cloudy day, an older Nicander is sitting alone on a garden bench overlooking the water fountain. He appears to be quietly reflecting. There suddenly emerges a figure from the shadows. It is Nicholas, now in his mid-twenties. He has chiseled features and smoldering eyes. Long hair falls to his shoulders, gracing his lithe body. Adorning his face is a short-cropped beard. There is an aura of confidence in his demeanor. With a calm but piercing voice he addresses Nicander.*

NICHOLAS

I thought I might find you outside.

*Nicander looks up and forces a smile.*

NICANDER

Come, join me.

*With a wave of his arm, he directs his nephew to the area beside him. Nicholas sits down and together they stare out at the trees.*

NICHOLAS

Favoring another beautiful day?

NICANDER

Guilty! It is such moments like this that help me see my way clear sometimes.

*The young priest glances over, hoping to read his thoughts.*

NICHOLAS

Anything I can help with?

*The abbot chuckles weakly and shakes his head.*

NICANDER

Just reminiscing. I remember when word of your birth came, I had just returned from Jerusalem. No two people were ever more happy over a child than were your parents. Your father must have sent me messages every other day, detailing your every progress.

*(pause)*

And now...if I never said it before Nicholas, thank you.

*Nicholas is at a loss for words. He shakes his head slightly.*

NICHOLAS

It's I who should be thanking you.

NICANDER

You don't understand. Raising you...has been a reward, a privilege I would have denied myself. I look upon you—forgive me—not as an uncle, but as a father would his son, with all his love, with all his hopes, with all his fears.

*Nicholas places a hand on Nicander's shoulder. The abbot breaks from his wistfulness.*

NICANDER

Anyway, listen to me! Tell me...does that burning desire to change the world still endure?

*The young man nods firmly, a conviction re-igniting in his eyes.*

NICHOLAS

As it always has, as it always will.

NICANDER

What is it you feel exactly?

NICHOLAS

What is this all about?

NICANDER

Indulge me. Please!

NICHOLAS

Restless! Consumed! Sometimes I can think of little else. That's what I feel.

NICANDER (*nodding*)

It...it's a heavy weight to bear.

(*pause*)

My father, your grandfather, once said on a day much like this, he said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

NICHOLAS

He was quoting Socrates.

*Nicander nods solemnly.*

NICHOLAS

Don't fear for me—don't! My life won't be lived in vain. I have something to say with it, and until then, I won't go quietly into the night.

NICANDER

All right then, just remember one thing.

*Nicholas looks hard into his uncle's eyes.*

NICANDER

You always remember you have a home here.

*The young priest places his right hand over his heart.*

NICHOLAS

And you here.

*With eyes clouded, a bird flying overhead distracts Nicander. A second later something hits his shoulder.*

NICANDER (*feigning anger*)

Oh, will you look at that.

*A small secretion is left on his robe. He looks over at Nicholas momentarily before the two men burst into raucous LAUGHTER. After a few moments, Nicander removes his robe and folds it carefully over an arm. He has a white smock underneath.*

NICANDER

Well enough talk. You should know I  
have made arrangements with a beautiful  
village not too far from here.

(*pause*)

It is a village called Myra, and you are to be  
their new priest. I hope you don't mind.

*There forms a sudden gleam in Nicholas' eyes.*

NICHOLAS

You're serious?

*The abbot brightens. Nicholas is beside himself as he JUMPS to his feet.*

NICHOLAS

You're serious! I've waited for this—oh my,  
I can't believe this—we've got to celebrate.

(*yelling*)

*Padius, come quickly!*

*The two men embrace. Padius approaches from the courtyard with a glazed look on his face.*

PADIUS

What is it, young master?

NICHOLAS

I am to be a priest in a village. Me—my own village.

NICANDER  
Padius, have we any wine left?

*Startled, Padius' head shifts from Nicholas to Nicander and back.*

PADIUS  
Sir?

*Like two schoolboys, Nicholas and Nicander ring out in laughter all over again.*

**DISSOLVE**

**EXT – ENTRANCE GATES OF MONASTERY [DAWN]**

*Under the advent of a new day, Nicander, Padius, and Nicholas stand outside the monastery grounds. Off in the distance a coyote is howling. The abbot is first to speak.*

NICANDER  
This is goodbye then.

*With a trace of a smile, Nicholas nods.*

NICHOLAS  
For a time.

NICANDER  
Only for a time.

NICHOLAS  
I...I find myself lost for words.

*The two men share a hearty embrace.*

NICHOLAS  
This day would never have come without you.

NICANDER  
I am only an instrument to your fate. Go now and find it.

*Nicholas turns away from his uncle, and swiftly embraces Padius.*

PADIUS

We shall miss you, young master.

*With cat-like quickness, Nicholas mounts his steed and has it canter over to them.*

NICHOLAS

The wisest man of all once said, “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” Thank you for my season and my purpose uncle.

NICANDER (*smiling*)

You're welcome. You'll find gold pieces in your pack. Take care to use them wisely. They were those of your parents.

*Nicholas glances at the pack. For a brief second there is pain again.*

NICANDER

My prayers are ever with you, *Nicholas of Myra*.

*Nicholas raises a hand in goodbye, turns his horse about, and GALLOPS off. When his nephew is finally lost from sight, Nicander searches the heavenly skies.*

NICANDER

May Your Face shine upon him.

**EXT – MOUNTAIN TOP [DAY]**

*From a vantage point high above Sion, Nicholas brings his steed to a halt. With a look of farewell, he gazes out over the monastery before pressing on again.*

**EXT – HILL [DAY]**

*Nicholas is seen descending a steep grade, carefully guiding his horse along the more secure terrain.*

**EXT – LARGE TREE [DAY]**

*Nicholas is huddled beneath an oak tree. The camera draws back and we see his parent's graveside a few feet away. Fresh flowers have been placed on top of each. In the background, the mountains seem to stretch forever.*

**EXT – STREAMBED [DAY]**

*Astride his stallion, Nicholas is seen crossing a stream. Suddenly a hawk swoops down before his startled eyes and snatches a fish from the water. Fearstricken, the horse begins to buck, SPLASHING water in every direction. Nicholas struggles to bring the steed under control.*

NICHOLAS

Easy girl, it was just a hawk! Easy! Easy!

*The horse calms and Nicholas glances up, but the hawk is nowhere in sight. As he does a cursory check, he finds himself completely drenched.*

NICHOLAS

*Oh, Sagitta!*

**EXT – VILLAGE OF MYRA [DUSK]**

*Dressed akin to a villager, Nicholas eclipses the top of a steep hill. Suddenly an expression of awe forms on his face. The camera pans to a large open field with lush, green grass stretching for miles. Gathered at one end of the field are hundreds of people. He has reached the outskirts of Myra. His eyes fall on a crudely built racetrack below. Throngs of peddlers mill about, selling and soliciting throughout the crowd. As he urges Sagitta on, he continues till he reaches the base of the hill. There he dismounts, slings his pack over his shoulder, and leaves his horse alone to graze on the fertile grass.*

NICHOLAS

Stay here girl, I'll be back.

*The priest makes his way into the festive crowd. The sights and sounds are invigorating. Off to one side, a group of young women dance to MUSIC in the background. Nicholas smiles at them in passing when one suddenly takes his arm and spins him.*

DANCING GIRL

Dance?

NICHOLAS

Whoa! Thank you. I must be going though.

*He waves and moves on. The amused girls simply giggle. Just ahead two men stand in conversation as they await the next race. Suddenly a voice CRIES out from the distance, carrying over the din of noise.*

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

*Last race of the day! Last race of the day!*

*Nicholas decides to approach them.*

NICHOLAS

Excuse me—the governor. Where I can find the governor?

VILLAGER AT RACE (*pointing*)  
Silvio! He should be over there watching the race. He has horses entered in this race.

NICHOLAS  
Thank you.

*Nicholas walks over to the racetrack where hundreds of people are gathered. He finds a place along the edge of the race path. A gruff voice suddenly draws his attention.*

MAN (O.S.)  
Blazes! That boy Griff better win!

*Nicholas looks over to see a short, stocky, white-bearded man (SILVIO) with a square jaw and a balding head. He is dressed in a red and yellow toga. Beside him is a striking man, moderate of build, with cunning eyes and a sharply pointed goatee.*

SILVIO  
Dagan? Don't you agree?

DAGAN  
Of course! You're the governor, Silvio.

*Nicholas walks over to him.*

NICHOLAS  
Excuse me! Governor?

*Just then a rams horn BLARES to signify the start of the race. All at once the contestants bolt off. Silvio BALLYHOOS in raucous laughter and fails to acknowledge the priest.*

NICHOLAS  
Governor?

SILVIO  
Shhh! Wait till the race is over!

*DAGAN looks over at Nicholas in suspicion. The contestants BOLT PAST them. Silvio points at a red-framed chariot of fanciful design. An average-size boy (GRIFF) in his late teens with a dark green tunic is manning it. His hair is pulled back tight in a ponytail.*

SILVIO  
There he is! Go! Go!

*The governor cups his hands over his mouth and YELLS at the top of his lungs.*

SILVIO

*Like the wind! Ride like the wind!*

*Nicholas resigns himself and watches patiently beside the two men. Everything is commotion; the CHEERING of the crowd, the rhythmic BEATING of the horse's hooves, the WHIRRING of the chariots wheels. Exhilaration is overflowing.*

*As Griff goes into a turn he is in third place, but gaining ground rapidly. Looking out into the crowd, Nicholas can see that the majority of them are cheering for the youth. Doing his own share of ranting and raving, Silvio turns to Nicholas and raps him across the back.*

SILVIO

All the way from Alexandria he is. Hired  
just for this race.

*As Nicholas nods and turns his attention back to the race, Griff's chariot goes rushing past the two leaders and into the lead. An elated Silvio turns to Dagan.*

SILVIO

He's leading! He's leading!

*Dagan looks almost concerned. The clamor of the crowd grows. The boy continues to put distance between him and the other four contestants. As he approaches the final turn, the chariot begins to SHAKE violently. As it comes fishtailing around the corner, there is a sudden, loud CRACK. The crowd then watches in horror as the chariot's axle snaps in two, loses its wheels and comes CRASHING to the ground. The youth manages to leap at the last moment, tumbling hard to the ground. When he finally comes to a rest, he is stretched out along the center part of the track. Meanwhile, the stallions saunter off the track with their wheel-less chariot in tow. Of the detached wheels, one has remained upright and goes plowing into a tree and EXPLODES. Nicholas leaps onto the track at sight of the prostrate boy. A GASP of awe goes up from the audience. Despite the threat of approaching chariots he races to Griff's side and drops to one knee. The youth is unconscious, but still breathing. He shakes him.*

NICHOLAS

Young man?

*As the priest looks over his shoulder, the second and third place chariots are coming out of the turn and bearing down on them.*

MAN IN CROWD #1  
Quickly you fool!

WOMAN IN CROWD  
Hurry—bring him—hurry!

*The priest looks into the crowd. They are frantically waving him over. In the background, the CLATTERING of hooves intensifies. The chariots are almost upon them. He tries to lift him but it's no use, there is no time. With nothing more to do, he draws Griff to him and provides what shelter he can with his body. But for the spinning wheels of the chariots, and the drumming of horse's hooves, there looms only silence from the disbelieving eyes of the crowd. Nicholas mutters a small prayer and awaits the inevitable. Not a second later the first chariot comes THUNDERING past only a foot away, a cloud of dust right behind. Even the ground is shaken by its passing. Nicholas chances not a breath, remaining bravely still. The second chariot, two-and-a-half horse lengths behind, ROARS by, just missing the two men by mere inches. Dust particles, grains of dirt, and small pebbles caught beneath the chariot's wheels blanket them. A GASP of awe lets out from the crowd. The priest turns his head again to steal a glance. Dead even and coming directly in his path are the last two chariots, each madly attempting to keep from finishing last. In their efforts to capture the inside lane, both riders are showing no regard for personal safety. Repeatedly their wheels BRUSH against one another. Nicholas turns back around and braces himself. From fifty feet away, the chariot on the outside lane manages a surge. Up by a horse length now, the rider foolishly criss-crosses in front of the remaining chariot. To avoid a catastrophic collision, the last place chariot veers wide to the outside. The crowd lets out a CRY of terror as both chariots pass literally within inches of Nicholas, the last one trampling over the broken axle and wheel of Griff's chariot. Like an EXPLOSION, shards of wood and splinters go flying through the air—another gasp of awe from the crowd. Amidst the hail of dirt and dust, Nicholas dares to look up. The last chariot is ambling its way down the track. As he looks over, the crowd is RACING to his aid. He takes a deep breath and releases his hold of the waking youth. An instant later, hands reach out and bring him to his feet. Two others tend to the boy.*

GRIFF

What happened? Say, let me go.

MAN IN CROWD #2

That man probably saved your  
life right now.

TEEN IN CROWD

The steeds didn't finish. They  
came off the track!

OLD WOMAN

You both could have died.

*Still stunned, Nicholas dusts himself off.*

WOMAN (O.S.)

Excuse me you dropped this...

*Nicholas looks over. Standing before him is a dark-haired woman (TERESA) of striking beauty. A tunic pink in color graces her shapely figure. In her hands is his pack.*

TERESA

It fell from your shoulder.

NICHOLAS

Thank you.

*As Nicholas takes the pack, he notes a twinkle of intelligence and warmth in her large brown eyes. She is in her twenties, and easily the loveliest woman he has ever seen.*

TERESA

What you did out there, I'm...stunned.

*She flashes a brief smile and then bends down to help tend Griff. Though groggy, the youth continues to fight off any assistance.*

TERESA

You should lie still. Are you pained?

*Nicholas is suddenly tapped on the shoulder. He turns to find the governor.*

SILVIO

Have you a moment?

*The priest nods and follows him through the crowd. Back where Griff lies, a crowd continues to gather. Teresa probes his ankle.*

GRIFF

Oww! It's all right, just leave it.

VILLAGER (O.S.)

Hey, I know you. You're no charioteer.  
You're that boy-thief from Attalia.

*All eyes fall on Griff, who looks up in alarm.*

**EXT – CLEARING [DUSK]**

*Removed from the commotion, Silvio stops and addresses Nicholas.*

SILVIO

Who did you say you were?

*Nicholas pauses before answering.*

NICHOLAS

Nicholas. I am Nicholas.

**EXT – VILLAGE PATH IN MYRA [NIGHT]**

*Silvio and Nicholas are walking on a stone-paved road leading up a hill.*

SILVIO

*Our priest? You're not dressed as I might imagine a...well a man of the cloth.*

NICHOLAS

*I had an accident on the way over.*

SILVIO

*Ahh...well let me just say, I, uh, don't profess to know a lot about...Christianity, but I am in favor of the ideas you promote—faith, love, even brotherhood—we need that. If this village is to *forge* into the future, something tells me Christianity must be an important step.*

*Nicholas looks over at him.*

SILVIO

*Let me show you something, Nicholas.*

**EXT – HILLTOP IN MYRA [NIGHT]**

*As Nicholas and Silvio reach the top of the hill, there is a stone archway with a wooden plaque seated at its center. Thick vines with leaves adorn it. Elaborately etched on the plaque is the word 'MYRA'. Nicholas turns his attention from the archway to the city below. There before him is a sight nothing short of spectacular, as the sun falls into the Mediterranean Sea. With glittering effect, the water shimmers on the surface in shades of orange and silver. Numerous boats line the harbor. But every bit as spectacular is the village itself as strings of country villas are visible, thin streams of smoke billowing from their chimneys. The light emanating from each of the windows is like hundreds of tiny candles.*

SILVIO

*Breathtaking, is it not?*

NICHOLAS

*I am in awe.*

*Silvio motions to his left.*

SILVIO

*Over there is our amphitheater, just below—the rock cliffs. Ahead the forum, or market square, replete with courtyard and fountain.*

But Myra's true pride and joy, there to your right, is Andriaki, our gateway to the Mediterranean Sea.

*Nicholas scans the horizon from left to right, his face beaming with emotion.*

**EXT – BASILICA / ATRIUM IN MYRA [NIGHT]**

*Nicholas and Silvio approach a distinctive but aged looking structure. From its roof there extends a cupola; at its front a large atrium.*

SILVIO

*And this...is our basilica.*

*Nicholas looks on in fascination.*

SILVIO

It was built more than a century ago, used as a temple for a local diety.

*A few villagers are milling about. As the two men enter the atrium, Nicholas captures every detail: beautiful red and gold vases to either side of the entrance, large plants in each corner. Wide supporting columns embraced by dangling grape vines. As they reach the basilica's entrance, two blazing torches hang outside the doors. Silvio motions for Nicholas to step inside. The priest reaches for a torch.*

SILVIO

No need. There will be light inside.

**INT – BASILICA / NAVE IN MYRA [NIGHT]**

*Inside the church, Nicholas peers in several directions. The central nave extends for a hundred feet. At the opposite end is the altar. To his flanks the aisles, each supported by eight large stone pillars with wooden railings running parallel. From overhead Nicholas views the cupola. It rises for a good forty feet. Silvio watches him with amused interest.*

SILVIO

Residence can be taken up in a small villa right out back.

*Nicholas says nothing, limiting his attention to the illuminated corners of each aisle.*

NICHOLAS

The candles—how is it they are lit?

SILVIO

Oh, yes. Many of the residents here are staunch in their Christian faith. Even without clergy, they continue to visit the basilica—offer up prayers.

*Nicholas walks down an aisle, his left hand branching out, making contact with the railing. There is a look of wonder on his face. It does not go unnoticed by the governor.*

SILVIO

Nicholas. Nicholas! Nicholas of Myra.  
*Nicholas of Myra!* It has a good ring to it.

NICHOLAS (*laughing*)

If you are nothing else, governor, you are certainly the politician.

*The priest walks up to the altar, turns and faces the pews. His face is aglow.*

SILVIO

What do you think?

NICHOLAS

Honestly, I feel so unworthy. But if the Lord has called me to this place and time I humbly submit myself to his judgment. I'm honored to be here.

SILVIO

Alleluah! Uh, that is Christian isn't it?

**EXT – VILLAGE OF MYRA [DAWN]**

*Early morning has come. The sun's first rays filter through the trees, offering a radiant greeting to the new day. Roosters prance about in search of scratch. A vigilant sheep dog on a scent stops and sniffs.*

**EXT – BASILICA OF MYRA [DAY]**

*A long, loud WAIL from a ram's horn is sounded from the church. Many villagers passing by, stop and approach out of curiosity. Some go so far as to enter the domicile where they find a congregation standing in prayer. As the church members realize they have new company, their faces fill with surprise. The two groups acknowledge one another. Most of them stand freely, yet others choose to lean against the railings. As the last of the villagers filter in, there is an awkward moment of silence. Just then the entrance doors come OPEN and a beam of sunlight shines through. With notable discipline, the Christians continue in prayer and refrain from turning their heads. The villagers however, turn in curiosity. We see their eyes go open*

*wide. A second later the beam is snuffed and the gentle TAPPING of sandaled soles is heard. The sandals are then removed and set by the doors. A man then proceeds to walk barefoot down the center aisle. One by one the congregation itself begins to look over their shoulders or from the corner of their eyes. A collective GASP of awe goes up once all eyes have fallen upon a man dressed in a white flowing robe with a red trim belt. With a stride that is both calm and collected, the man walks regally on, a black book with gold binding in his hands. The camera pans up slowly to reveal Nicholas! On his face there is reverence; there is intensity. As he walks past the crowd not a single eye strays—all eyes on him. Voices go up.*

WOMAN IN CHURCH  
The man from the race?

TEENAGER  
Look at that! Someone has come.

*As Nicholas reaches the altar he turns to the audience and gestures for silence. His riveting eyes draw their attention.*

NICHOLAS  
Let us everyone join hands.

*Nicholas takes the hand of two members closest him, and watches as the rest of the group follows his example. Nicholas bows his head, closes his eyes and begins.*

NICHOLAS  
Gracious and ever loving Father, we stand  
before You this day to give thanks and to seek  
Your merciful face...

*People continue to enter the sanctuary and join hands.*

NICHOLAS  
To know Your Word and to know Your ways.  
Let us not fail in this, we pray. Let us be  
found faithful. Let us be attentive to Your  
voice and obedient to Your will. And may  
Your church in Myra serve as a witness to  
Your infinite glory in all of Lycia and the  
world; not just today, but tomorrow and all the  
ages to come. We pray this in Jesus' name.  
Amen.

*The still crowd echoes his 'Amen'. Nicholas smiles in satisfaction as he releases his hold. The intensity in his eyes is replaced by tenderness.*

NICHOLAS  
Good morning everyone. My name is  
Nicholas.

CONGREGATION (*collectively*)  
Good morning!

NICHOLAS  
Let me begin by saying, this is a truly  
momentous day for me, and I have you to  
thank for it—all of you!

*The member's look at one another, confusion etched on their faces.*

NICHOLAS  
I am a priest. *Your priest! Myra's priest!*  
And it is only through your collective efforts,  
and your prayers that the good governor,  
Silvio, elected to seek a clergyman for this  
wonderful basilica.

*All at once the congregation attempts to speak.*

YOUNG WOMAN	OLD WOMAN	MAN IN CHURCH
You are a priest then.	Praises be to God...	Was it you at the race—

NICHOLAS  
Please, please. Let us not all talk at once.

*The crowd quiets.*

OLD WOMAN  
Our hearts are joyed to have you, young man.  
We have prayed long and hard for the day  
another man would have courage enough to  
lead us through these dark times.

NICHOLAS  
Then I stand before you an answer to that  
prayer, and lead you I will—all of you. That  
is my promise. *Now*, let us open new doors  
together.

*A CHORUS of approval rises from the audience.*

**EXT – BASILICA DOORS OF MYRA [DAY]**

*Silvio is observing the service through a partially open door when a male VOICE calls out.*

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

(agitated)

Silvio!

*The governor closes the door and turns to his unexpected visitor. It is Dagan!*

DAGAN

What is this I heard about a priest? A priest for what order?

SILVIO

Dagan! And how are you this fine morning?

DAGAN

Do not play games with me.

SILVIO

No games. The man you speak of is Christian.

DAGAN

Christian? Have you gone mad?

SILVIO

Christianity existed here long before today, Dagan.

DAGAN

Is he in there?

*The governor says nothing.*

DAGAN

You thought to keep this from me?

SILVIO

Let me reiterate, Dagan, he is a Christian priest. I don't interfere with you or members of your order do I?

DAGAN

Do you know what I think, Silvio? This is another one of your ploys to win public support, only you've gone too far this time. It's one thing to have these stragglers milling about aimlessly, and quite another to put a leader in their ranks. Now so far as I am concerned, anything goes.

*As Dagan departs, a worried glaze comes over Silvio. He looks after Dagan a moment before turning his attention to the basilica, a frown on his face.*

SILVIO (*shaking head*)  
This post shall be the death of me, I know it.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)  
Excuse me, governor?

*Silvio turns to see a legionary in full regalia upon a stallion.*

SILVIO  
What? What's wrong?

MESSENGER LEGIONARY  
I'm here to deliver a package for a man named Nicholas.

SILVIO  
Yes, of course you are. I shall take it to him.  
I mean I...

*The governor bites back the panic in his voice.*

SILVIO  
...a man came into town yesterday, perhaps he is this man you speak of...Nicholas.

LEGIONARY  
Yes, well, if it is not too much trouble.

SILVIO  
No! No!

*The legionary hands Silvio a package wrapped in brown paper with a rope tie.*

SILVIO  
Thank you.

*The legionary bows his head respectfully and proceeds to ride off. The governor looks around guardedly and breathes a deep sign of relief. He then looks over the package.*

SILVIO  
The absolute death of me!

**INT – CLASSROOM IN MYRA [DAY]**

*Within the confines of a classroom, children are seen seated at tables. There is giggling and quiet conversation going on among them. The students range in age from five to eight. A woman's voice is heard in the background.*

TERESA (O.S.)

Now be careful with the ink.

*A girl and a boy stand up and run to the room door. At the head of the classroom is the woman. It is Teresa. She notes the children's actions.*

TERESA

Mary, Michael, please take your seats.

MARY

But Miss Teresa...

MICHAEL

We finished!

TERESA

And I am very proud, but we still have some exercises with the wax tablets.

MARY

Ohhh!

MICHAEL

Ahh!

*Teresa frowns at their response, a slight chuckle escaping.*

TERESA

All right, I'll tell you what. If everyone tries their absolute hardest to hurry through this, I'll introduce you to a very special friend of mine.

CLASS STUDENTS (*excited*)

Hurrah!

*Teresa smiles and lifts an abacus from a table.*

**EXT – BASILICA / ATRIUM OF MYRA [DAY]**

*With service ended, Nicholas bids the last members (DAVID and LETITIA) goodbye. Off to the side, a squeamish Silvio awaits.*

DAVID

It had always been my mother's dream, and... well mine to!

NICHOLAS

I'm happy to hear that, David. When next Sabbath comes, I'll hold a baptism.

DAVID

We look forward to it, Father.

*Nicholas pats David's shoulder as he and Letitia walk past Silvio.*

LETITIA

Thank you, governor.

SILVIO

You're very welcome, Letitia.

*The governor walks over and addresses a beaming Nicholas.*

SILVIO

I would say you fared well.

NICHOLAS

There are many hungers in this world. It is a blessed man who helps to satisfy a spiritual one.

*A reluctant smile crosses Silvio's face. He motions at the package in hand.*

SILVIO

This arrived for you.

*Nicholas takes it from the fidgety governor and examines it.*

SILVIO

I, uh...had hoped to introduce you around the village today...unfortunately, ahh...

NICHOLAS

No, you do what you need to. I can see it for myself. In fact, the morning air will do me good.

SILVIO

Yes! All right then. Well, I shall let you be about your business. But if you should need anything, anything at all...

NICHOLAS (*nodding*)

I'll reach you.

SILVIO

Excellent. All right then.

*The governor dashes off. Nicholas looks after him a moment before looking down at the package. He turns and heads back into the basilica, removing the binding in the process. Once inside the atrium, Nicholas pulls away the last of the wrapping to discover an intricately woven scarlet robe. It is beautiful and of fine cloth with white fleece lining inside. Carefully placed on it is a small card. His eyes are immediately drawn to the signet.*

NICHOLAS

Helena!

*With a look of awe, he spreads the robe out to its full length. Suddenly the sound of WEEPING draws his attention. It is coming from inside the church. Nicholas edges up to the door and opens it slightly. There he can see a girl (REBECCA) in her late teens. She is kneeling at the altar with hands crossed.*

REBECCA

Lord, I hope you can hear my prayer. I—I am Rebecca, third daughter to Bellasario. Me and my...me and my sisters don't pray my Lord, for my father will not let us...not since mother died. But I believe Lord, I must believe. And it's not for myself I come, truly—truly I do not.

*Not wishing to eavesdrop, Nicholas struggles with remaining.*

REBECCA

My father, my sisters, we have fallen on hard times. We are at risk of losing...everything... everything my father has worked so long, so hard for. My...my older sisters have suitors, but without a dowry...

*She begins to SOB heavily.*

REBECCA

Please-show-me-a-sign, Lord. If not...please understand what I must do, and forgive me.

*Rebecca unfolds her hands, turns and runs toward the entrance doors. Nicholas moves slowly off to one side. There is confusion on his face. A moment later the door comes open and a troubled Rebecca goes running past.*

NICHOLAS

Rebecca!

*In her grief, she does not hear him call out. With empathy in his eyes, Nicholas watches her round the corner of the atrium and disappear. He then casts a glance at the door swinging shut and then the scarlet robe in his hands.*

**EXT – MARKET SQUARE OF MYRA [DAY]**

*A child with a wooden sword races out into the street from a tenement building. Following three seconds behind and chasing him is his mother.*

MOTHER

Noah, come back here now.

*Nicholas is strolling along an intersecting street when the child suddenly rounds the corner and takes a swipe at him. Alert and largely amused, the priest EVADES the blade thrust as the child runs off in laughter. The panting mother apologizes and continues to give chase. Nicholas laughs to himself and resumes his tour. He watches as people rummage through the many shops lining the forum. At the center of the square is a large water fountain. Rooted in the middle is a statue of a legionary holding a child. A steady stream of water pours forth. Nicholas begins to approach when his ears are met by children's LAUGHTER. He looks around and finds a small party of children on the other side of the fountain. Squinting to see, he can just make out a woman in their company. He has a sudden look of curiosity.*

**EXT – MARKET SQUARE / WATER FOUNTAIN OF MYRA [DAY]**

*Teresa is seated on the rim of the fountain. The children sit forming a half circle in front of her on the floor. A small sack is at her feet.*

TERESA

All right children, let's see. Are we ready for a visitor?

*The children nod their heads vigorously.*

TERESA

Well let us see what's in my sack.

*Her hands go inside the sack. The teacher throws her voice.*

PUPPET

No–no–no, I'm shiny.

*A figurine POKES its head out of the sack to look at the laughing children.*

TERESA

I think you mean shy. Now come on, they're my friends.

*A delighted Nicholas looks on from the street. Suddenly the boy, Noah runs past him.*

NOAH

I'll come back for you, barbarian.

*The priest laughs and shakes his head at the boy's imagination. Teresa continues to play the part of Roxana.*

TERESA

...this is Roxana, children.

CHILDREN (*collectively*)

Hello, Roxana!

TERESA

So Roxana, want do a song for the children?

*The figure shakes its head vehemently. The children laugh more. Now on the other side of the water fountain, Nicholas remains riveted by the action. As the children observe his presence, he GESTURES for their silence.*

TERESA

All right then, I'll do it myself.

(*singing*)

*How do you start to make a friend?*

*How do you start to show them that you care?*

*The teacher is looking down at Roxana, who is staring up at her.*

TERESA

*How do you gain their precious trust?*

*A great big smile for me is a must.*

(*speaking to children*)

Let's all sing it now.

TERESA / CHILDREN (*collectively singing*)

*How do you start to make a friend?*

*How do you start to show them that you care?*

*How do you gain their precious trust?  
A great big smile for me is a must.*

*Roxana claps at the children's performance. Their faces are aglow.*

TERESA

Come on, Roxana. Help me take a bow.

*Teresa rises to her feet and genuflects. Impressed by the performance, Nicholas himself starts to CLAP.*

NICHOLAS

That was wonderful.

*STARTLED by his applause, Teresa turns and catches her foot on the sack. Her arms go FLAILING in the air and YELPING, she falls into the water. There is a SPLASH in her wake. The figure Roxana, having been thrown, falls into the arms of a shocked Mary. The rest of the children rush to her aid, no one faster than Nicholas. He reaches out to take her hand.*

NICHOLAS

Are you—are you all right?

*Seated bolt upright, Teresa is shocked and embarrassed. Without assistance she fumbles for her footing and quickly comes CRASHING down again. With mouths open wide, the children remain still. A fire burns in Teresa's eyes as she glares at Nicholas.*

TERESA

*Arrrgh!*

*With a wave of her arm, Teresa sends water SPLASHING on the priest. A second later, water is dripping from his chin as well. Surprised by the impromptu drenching, Nicholas simply glares in shock. Teresa realizes what she has done as her eyes go open wide and her hands go to her face in embarrassment. Despite her matted hair, she remains a picture of beauty. Suddenly a HUMOROUS LOOK washes over Nicholas and he breaks out into laughter. It proves contagious as Teresa herself starts to laugh, and then the children. Only one child remains serious—Michael. Nicholas is quick to compose himself once he notices the boy.*

NICHOLAS

I'm so sorry. Please, let me help you out.

*Nicholas manages to bring Teresa to her feet. She gingerly makes her way to the fountain's edge.*

NICHOLAS

Here, allow me.

*He lifts her from the fountain, cradling her as gently as a baby. Although embarrassed, she says nothing. Once free of the fountain, they share a meaningful glance. Suddenly a voice cries out.*

MICHAEL

Jump off, Miss Teresa! I'll push him in.

NICHOLAS

Whoa, little guy. Peace!

*The red-faced priest brings Teresa gently to her feet.*

TERESA

Thank you, Michael, that isn't necessary.

*Michael looks up and frowns at Nicholas as Teresa stands with her arms folded modestly in front. Nicholas removes his robe.*

NICHOLAS

Why don't you take this?

*He offers it. She takes it; examines it.*

TERESA

Is— isn't this the robe of a priest?

*He nods and smiles gently.*

NICHOLAS

My name is Nicholas.

*Her eyes remain fixed on him as she pulls the robe over her head.*

TERESA

Teresa. So that makes you a—

*Just then a woman (CELESTE) comes running up. She is in her late forties with graying hair pulled back and braided.*

CELESTE

My dear, I saw you fall. Are you all right?

TERESA

Yes, thank you.

*Teresa rings the water from her hair.*

CELESTE

We can't have our schoolmaster out of commission. Come! I carry garments in my shop. I can fix you up.

TERESA

That's very kind, thank you.

*(to children)*

That's all for today children. We'll start again tomorrow.

*As Nicholas looks back at the children, he finds Michael grimacing at him.*

**INT – MARKET SQUARE MERCHANT SHOP [DAY]**

*Teresa is changing clothes from behind a dressing curtain. Nicholas awaits her in an open area when Celeste emerges beaming with satisfaction.*

CELESTE

I found the perfect gown for her. You will see.

*Nicholas smiles in response and makes a near imperceptible nod.*

NICHOLAS

Ahh...I have a question for you. I imagine as a merchant you know most everyone here.

CELESTE

Indeed. I've lived here in Myra *all* my life. Is there someone you have in mind?

NICHOLAS

A man. He takes the name of Bellasario?

CELESTE

Bella? Yes I know him. Widowed he is with three fine daughters—poor man! He is hardened through his losses, but no finer man has fathered a child. His home is the last one along the eastern most street here, the one with the small windows.

*Just then Teresa steps from the curtain. She is dressed in a flowing robe of red and yellow. Celeste puts her hands together at sight of her.*

CELESTE

You look ravishing, my dear. That gown was made for you. You *must* keep it, okay?

*Teresa looks down at the gown comfortably fitted to her figure.*

TERESA

Oh no, I couldn't ask you—

CELESTE

No, no, I insist.

*Teresa can see that Celeste is serious. A warm smile graces her face.*

TERESA

I'm grateful. Thank you, Celeste.

*Teresa looks over at Nicholas. She extends her arms out in display, imploring an opinion. His eyes go to Celeste, who is watching closely. The priest simply smiles.*

NICHOLAS (*to Teresa*)

I agree—I do! Were I to bear witness to an angel at this moment, I could not be no more impressed.

*Teresa extends Nicholas a “Yeah, right!” look as Celeste's eyebrows furl slightly at the two of them. The priest is forced to grin widely and turn away.*

**EXT – VILLAGE STREET IN MYRA [DUSK]**

*Nicholas and Teresa walk side-by-side in silence. She is carrying a handbag in her right hand. Finally, she looks over at him.*

TERESA

So why?

NICHOLAS

Why?

TERESA

The clergy.

NICHOLAS

Ahh, you couldn't ask about my favorite flower or my most embarrassing moment?

TERESA

Well now you know mine!

*They share a chuckle. Nicholas looks up the road in contemplation and takes in a deep breath.*

NICHOLAS

When I was a boy I accompanied my parents to a village outside Athens once. The countryside it was so different, so serene; so alive. We made camp one night on a verdant hill, a ledge overlooking the Mediterranean.

*Nicholas looks up at the stars overhead. Teresa follows his gaze.*

NICHOLAS (*continued*)

I can still see it, waking just before daybreak to a perfect spring day. This burnt orange orb was peeking over the rim of the world and it seemed to be casting a million shimmering lights upon the sea. I just lied there, thinking I was witnessing the birth of a new day, almost like watching the very Hand of God splashing color on a canvas. It was the dawn of creation, and I was there to see it. It was just...I'll never forget it!

*She is taken in by his illustration. He looks over at her and locks eyes.*

NICHOLAS (*continued*)

I want that for others. I want them to know God even as I know Him.

*They remain pensive. She breaks eye contact first.*

TERESA

Do you ever consider...well, the risk you take?

NICHOLAS

What is there to risk when everything you have is appointed to you. If the number of my days are at an end, it is only by His will.

*Teresa looks over at the handsome country villa beside them and comes to a halt. She looks up demurely at Nicholas.*

TERESA

This one is mine. I better be going.

*Nicholas looks deep into Teresa's eyes, AWESTRUCK by her beauty.*

TERESA

What is it?

NICHOLAS

Just...

*Nicholas changes his mind.*

NICHOLAS

...the youth from the race track, how is he doing?

TERESA

You don't know?

*Nicholas shakes his head in confusion.*

TERESA

As I was tending to him, someone in the crowd recognized him, saying he was a thief or something. The next thing I knew, he got up and hobbled away. I haven't seen him since.

*Nicholas shows surprise at the revelation. Teresa looks at the handbag in her hand.*

TERESA

Anyway, I'll wash your robe and return it later.

NICHOLAS

You don't have to do that.

TERESA

Don't argue, you've seen what I'm capable of.

NICHOLAS (*chuckling*)

Right! I better...!

*Teresa smiles modestly and turns from him. Nicholas begins to walk away.*

TERESA

I'm sorry for earlier...

NICHOLAS

Don't give it a thought. It was to my good fortune.

TERESA

Why do you say that?

NICHOLAS

Because of the smile that followed.

*Her face is quietly beaming as she disappears into her villa. Nicholas shakes his head a few times, smiles and continues on his way.*

**EXT – VILLAGE OF MYRA [NIGHT]**

*There is little activity in the streets at this hour. Oil lamps and candles have long been extinguished. The town is at rest.*

**EXT – MEDITERRANEAN SEA [NIGHT]**

*The shimmering sea is a picture of quiet solitude. Seafaring vessels are moored to the docks. A tide of rolling waves lick at the shore.*

**INT – NICHOLAS' VILLA [NIGHT]**

*Nicholas is kneeling in silence, hands together in prayer. As he emerges from his meditation, he opens his eyes and looks at the candle on the table before him. There beside the candle is the wooden statue.*

NICHOLAS (*whispering*)

Amen!

*He leans forward, blows out the candle, stands up and walks to another part of the room. An oil lamp illuminates the area. As he stands before his cot, he looks upon the red scarlet robe sprawled out on the bed. Gently he takes it in his hands and starts to put it on. A minute later the garment is fitted. It covers nearly his entire body. Nicholas drops to one knee and reaches under his cot, drawing forth his pack and a red woolen stocking. He removes a hand full of gold coins from the pack and places them inside the stocking. Nicholas closes the pack and returns it to the cot. As he rises to his feet, the priest holds the stocking up at eye level. He gauges its weight in the palm of his hand. Satisfied, he places the stocking inside an inner pocket of his robe and makes his way to the partially open front door. He stops and looks out into the darkness. There is caution in his manner. He then draws the hood over his head and walks outside.*

**EXT – VILLAGE STREET IN MYRA [NIGHT]**

*Perfectly concealed beneath his scarlet robe, Nicholas strolls down an avenue, keeping to the darkened and shadowy areas.*

**EXT – BELLASARIO'S VILLA [NIGHT]**

*As Nicholas comes upon a home with small windows, he stops and looks around. Seeing no one he moves stealthily along its wall. Then from within his robe he pulls forth the stocking. As a few coins clatter inside the sack, a dog in the distance begins to BARK. Nicholas quickly places the stocking through a window, but finding nowhere to lay it, he allows it to drop to the floor. The coins RATTLE under the impact; more dogs begin to bark. Wasting no time, the priest walks briskly away from the home and escapes detection.*

**EXT – VILLAGE STREET IN MYRA [NIGHT]**

*Nicholas' is making his way silently along a street when lights in the distance draw his attention. He deviates from his path and crosses into another block. The surroundings seem to change suddenly. Seedy looking villagers saunter about. Most of the activity ahead appears to be coming from the east side, where a tenement is situated. As he makes his way further, he can see that the structure is old and dirty. From inside come the SOUNDS of men and women frolicking. Nicholas dismisses it with a frown and decides to cut through a back alley. Suddenly he hears a male VOICE raised in anger.*

MAN IN ALLEY (O.S.)

What does your kind expect? I think I've  
earned some free business after all the times...

*Nicholas takes another step and accidentally BREAKS a twig beneath his foot. Despite the shadowy recesses, he is able to discern the silhouetted figure of a man and a quietly SOBBING woman (SABINA). The man looms over her. At sight of Nicholas, the man departs in the opposite direction, leaving the woman to her own fate. As Nicholas comes up to her, she RECOILS against the wall. It is obvious her gray gown is torn and tattered.*

NICHOLAS

Don't be afraid, I bear you no malice.

*She draws her clothes over her body in modesty. She does not look up at Nicholas, whose face remains concealed. In empathy, he bends down to one knee.*

NICHOLAS

Are you hurt?

*She raises her hand as much from fear as to ward him off.*

SABINA

I-I'm...I'm all right.

*In the distance a fight breaks out; pots are SHATTERING. Nicholas looks over his shoulder before turning his attention back to the woman.*

NICHOLAS

Let me help you.

*She COWERS in suspicion. Nicholas decides to pull the hood partially from his face.*

NICHOLAS

I know you have no reason to trust me...but  
I want you to. You shouldn't remain here.

*She looks down the alley and then at him. He has an aura of sincerity and confidence.*

NICHOLAS

What is your name?

SABINA (*whispering*)

Sabina.

*Nicholas extends his hand.*

NICHOLAS

Take my hand, Sabina? I am Nicholas.

*With great care she takes his hand and comes to her feet. Almost immediately she becomes faint and woozy. Nicholas takes her gently in his arms; lends support.*

NICHOLAS

Here! You're going to be okay now. It's  
going to be okay.

SABINA (*eyes closed*)

I'm so scared.

NICHOLAS

I'm here now.

*He draws the hood fully over his head and leads her from the alley. She leans against him in weariness.*

**EXT – MARKET SQUARE OF MYRA [NIGHT]**

*A few blocks removed from the alley, Nicholas and Sabina walk. The priest glimpses over his shoulder and sees no one.*

SABINA

I—I can rest now.

*Nicholas stops. He can see the haunted expression on her face as she gazes back. Her eyes drop briefly before falling upon a temple structure not fifty feet away.*

NICHOLAS

Are you okay?

*She nods absently. Nicholas notes the creeping concern in her eyes.*

NICHOLAS

When day breaks, I'll go to the authorities.

SABINA (*frightened*)

*No!*

*Sabina's eyebrows furl as she rubs her forehead with her hand.*

SABINA

You mustn't—it was my fault. I deserve it—  
I'm the one who's out there. I do bad things,  
I—

*The woman starts to break down.*

NICHOLAS

Shhh now! It's all right.

*Nicholas takes hold of his hood and pulls it back, exposing the full of his face. His riveting eyes become visible in the dim light of the moon. He takes Sabina gently by her arms.*

NICHOLAS

Sabina, we do what we believe we must in  
this world, but no life is without sorrow, and  
no life is without hope. Not even yours.

*She looks away unconvinced. Nicholas appears to reflect a moment.*

NICHOLAS

Let me share a story with you...

*He releases her. She rubs her arms and looks up demurely.*

NICHOLAS

Once there was once a pack of wolves that took in a young stray. Although thankful, the stray always felt a little different from the rest. If they were carousing, she was frolicking; if they were being rambunctious, she was busy taking in the sweet aroma of a beautiful windswept flower. Well one thing delighted the stray like no other—water! Pure and simple water. Yet for reasons unknown, the pack told her it was forbidden and never allowed her near any. When she was to drink, it was only dark, dirty water. Then one day a heavy storm came.

*Sabina watches intently as the priest elevates his arms and looks up at the night sky.*

NICHOLAS

Rain pelted the land for days. When it was over, the anxious and excited wolves raced from their cave, accidentally leaving the stray alone. Well naturally the stray saw her opportunity. So...she ventured from the cave, marveling with each step at the wonder of it all. It was everywhere—in the trees, on the ground, even trickling lightly from the sky. Before long she came upon a clearing, and there to her amazement was a large puddle. So what did she do? She pranced right up to it, looked down, and no sooner jumped back in alarm. Someone was in the puddle! Again she inched her way back up to the puddle's edge and peered in. There it was again!

*Nicholas bends to pick a pebble up from the floor. He lets it BOUNCE in his hand.*

NICHOLAS

Suddenly it hit her—whose face it was in the puddle—because in all its splendor was the radiant, beautiful face of a deer. A rash of thoughts flooded her mind. It all made sense now you see. She had never been allowed near a body of water because she would see herself for who she was. As long as she was part of the pack, she would mature only to meet the

needs of their ravaging appetites. But you now what? Strange as it may sound, the stray considered remaining anyway. I mean how could she walk away from the only life she had ever known?

*He looks hard on Sabina; his eyes PIERCING.*

NICHOLAS

Thankfully, the image of her reflection would not go away, reminding her that to remain would be her undoing. With a look of sadness, yes, with a look of remorse, the deer looked a last time on what had been her home...

*With a sidearm motion, Nicholas FLINGS the pebble. It skitters away.*

NICHOLAS

...and then bolted away into the trees, never to return to the wolves of the forest again.

*Her eyes become moist with emotion.*

SABINA

Who are you?

*A male VOICE calls out.*

MAN (O.S.)

A bard! And an effective one judging from your face my sweetness.

*Suddenly a man EMERGES from behind a temple pillar. Sabina drops down and bows.*

MAN

I am impressed young priest.

*Emerging slowly from the shadows is Dagan. Nicholas steps forward to face him.*

NICHOLAS

I have seen you before—with Silvio.

*Dagan comes to a halt mere feet from Nicholas. His eyes glisten in the light like a PREDATOR. Nicholas looks from Dagan to Sabina then back again in confusion.*

NICHOLAS

You are this woman's guardian?

*Dagan breaks out in a derisive LAUGHTER.*

DAGAN

Of sorts, yes. I am a disciple of the Goddess Diana. And actually, it's fortunate you are here. Nicholas isn't it?

*Repulsed by the man's haughtiness, Nicholas reaches out to Sabina.*

NICHOLAS

You've been through enough already. Come!

*Frightened, she looks up at Dagan. The man nods his approval and she rises quickly.*

DAGAN

You are Christian, is this not true?

*Nicholas turns his attention back to Dagan in quiet defiance.*

DAGAN

Your ear for a moment and I am content. I am considered among other things, a man with some measure of wisdom, so...let me impart to you my council. This movement, this Christianity, it has a sweet, seductive allure. Be you a beggar, a rich man, a murderer, a child, you are all as equals in the eyes of your God. Yet I fear it's all for naught. That it's nothing more than a farce. A foolish ideal designed to bring hope to the poor and decrepit souls of this world.

*Dagan moves from Nicholas' left to his right.*

DAGAN

Now you Nicholas, you're young, possessed of an impetuous nature, not like others of the cloth. The whole of the world have you yet to experience. I ask you, why should you commit yourself to this dreadful little village? To carry out a thankless job for a band of unappreciative dolts? You see, is there not folly in your actions? Now, look at the beauty beside you. Is she not alluring? Feel the energy that feeds off

the night. Is it not exciting? Just think how an alliance could benefit us both?

NICHOLAS

An ungodly man digs up evil, it is on his lips like a burning fire.

*A STUNNED Dagan takes a half step back and addresses Sabina.*

DAGAN

I offer this boy a golden opportunity and get what in return?

*(to Nicholas)*

Enough then! Your god is supposed to be about choices, so let me hand you yours. You either conform to the Roman Empire and all its practices, or you stand in opposition to it. Which is it?

NICHOLAS

I have nothing more to say to you. Sabina, this man has no hold over you. Your body is your own—*your temple!* Not his, not any mans. Cherish it as it was meant to be.

DAGAN

Sabina! Throw yourself before the Temple of Diana and beg the divine forgiveness of our noble goddess. You have heard much blasphemy this night.

NICHOLAS

Why don't you just leave her be.

DAGAN

Oh, I do. Beside a paying customer that is.

*As Dagan starts to laugh, Sabina turns and flees. Suddenly she stops to look a last time on Nicholas. There is a heavy look in the young priest's eyes. The woman looks quickly away and flees, losing herself behind the temple structure. Nicholas extends Dagan a look of pity.*

NICHOLAS

Believe me, someday you will know justice, and no goddess will be there to represent you.

*The man feigns surprise, edges closer to Nicholas and whispers.*

DAGAN

I'm quite aware of that, so please keep it down. I would hate to tip the fools.

*Dagan breaks out in LAUGHTER all over again as Nicholas turns and marches away. The man's CACKLES echo through the streets and off the walls.*

**EXT – BEACH [DAY]**

*As the laughter dies, it is replaced by the sound of a WAVE crashing against the shore. Nicholas is walking along a calm beach. There is peace and solitude in the air. The sky above is crystal clear. All of nature is as one. Suddenly the SNARLING of an animal tears him from his tranquillity. He turns round to see a large black wolf coming up behind him. It is enraged and ready to lunge. Nicholas looks about the white sandy beach and finds a long stick at his feet. Just as the wolf launches itself they are both hit by a monstrous wave and pulled under the surface. The priest struggles for control, struggles for air, struggles to reach the surface. The water is so dark he can see almost nothing. He continues to swim, kicking and moving his arms with all of his might, trying vainly to propel himself to the surface. Yet without light from above, there is no sense of direction. He grows more and more tired. Finally, on the verge of giving up, Nicholas makes out a faint light. With all he has he wades toward it. Yet even as the light becomes steadily brighter, he can feel himself losing consciousness. Bubbles propel from his mouth. He can't go on. Suddenly his hand reaches something. Instinctively it grasps hold. With what ebbing strength is left, Nicholas pulls and pulls, finally, victoriously, CLEARING the surface as a cork would a bottle. He shakes his head and takes several deep breaths to rejuvenate his dulled senses. He then looks round and finds himself floating in the middle of the ocean, no land in sight. The weather is hurricane-like in proportion. As he looks down, it is a piece of wood keeping him afloat—a large wooden cross. Nicholas holds for dear life in the midst of the powerful storm. THUNDERCLAPS are ensuing, one after another. The noise is DEAFENING. Despite the struggle, the priest gazes up and CRIES out.*

NICHOLAS

Lord, do not let me die so. Let me serve my life as once I asked. *My Loooord!*

*Suddenly there is the sound of splashing. Nicholas turns and finds the bobbing head of the black wolf twenty feet away. It is struggling to stay afloat. Everything is CHAOS. In the moments that follow, hundreds of wooden crosses start to SURFACE, many surrounding the wolf. Sensing an unyielding hatred in the animal, Nicholas can scarcely believe his eyes as it starts to swim past the safety of the crosses and toward him—jaws SNAPPING in anger. Too spent and exhausted, Nicholas remains in place and CRIES out.*

NICHOLAS

*No! Enough already! Let it end now!*

*Thunder and lightning blast directly overhead. A sudden blinding FLASH takes place and Nicholas must cover his eyes. Once they come slowly open, the priest is speechless. All evidence of the storm has passed and he finds himself miraculously returned to the safety of the white sandy beach. Around his neck is his wooden cross. He spins around in disbelief, taking in his surroundings—utterly confused. The large cross is gone too! There is a RINGING sound in his head. A white light suddenly envelops him. As his searching eyes look up, he must shield them. And then his mouth goes open wide. There before him, is a BEING of sheer perfection; a powerfully built angel with golden-brown wings. Nicholas STUMBLES in shock and drops to his knees. With a look of unconditional love and understanding, the angel begins to communicate. Yet as its lips move, Nicholas can hear nothing, only a ringing remains in his ears. The priest shakes his head to clear it. Still the RINGING! He shakes his head harder and harder, harder and HARDER—*

**INT – NICHOLAS' VILLA [DAWN]**

*Asleep in his bed, Nicholas awakens with a START. His brows are beaded with perspiration. In the distance a rooster is heard. The priest sits up and runs a hand through his matted hair. At the side of his bed is a bowl of water. He reaches down and cups some in his hands; applies it to his face. He shakes his head, rises and walks over to a window. The last few shades of darkness are giving way to the coming sunlight. He rests his hands on the ledge of the sill and looks out. He then hangs his head in EXASPERATION.*

**INT – BASILICA IN MYRA [DAY]**

*Within the church, Nicholas leads the members in prayer. As before, they are all holding hands. The congregation has doubled from its previous size.*

NICHOLAS

...we pray this in the blessed and holy name of  
Your Son Jesus. Amen.

*(to church body)*

Good morning!

*A burly man moves forward so as to be seen, and points an arm toward the crowd.*

BURLY MAN

What do you think, Father? Did we bring  
enough friends and family.

NICHOLAS

Enough indeed. *Bring more!*

*The congregation laughs. Nicholas steps from the altar and advances down the aisle.*

NICHOLAS

Listen, let us take our amenities outdoors. I  
would like everyone to follow me.

*Members fall in behind. As he exits the doors, Nicholas is beaming in satisfaction.*

**EXT – COURTYARD OUTSIDE BASILICA OF MYRA [DAY]**

*Steadily they follow him. Befuddled villagers in the streets stop and watch as the procession moves with a sense of purpose. Nicholas is gracious to all.*

**EXT – ANDRIAKI BEACH / MEDITERRANEAN SEA [DAY]**

*Nicholas and the anxious members are all gathered on the beach.*

NICHOLAS

Good people, your attention please.

*A HUSH falls over the group. Nicholas smiles and winks at a child in the crowd.*

NICHOLAS

There is a very real belief out there that...one day we as a faith will be no more. I say this isn't so.

*Nicholas reflects on his words and shakes his head. Then with his priestly robe still on, he begins to WADE into the sea. He stops only when he is waist high in depth. The crowd remains silent. The priest pumps a gentle fist in the air.*

NICHOLAS

Three-hundred years ago there came a man unlike any other. He made fantastic claims, performed unimaginable miracles. His words? Like honey to the soul...the truth of ageless wisdom. In time, he was unjustly tried and sentenced to death. A man perfect in word and deed, he was the Son of God, having come that we might have life through Him. How? By giving His life for us on the cross... by shedding His blood. And why? So He could wash away the sins of the world—our sins! And all so that we might one day have life—everlasting life with Him.

*(lower)*

This was His gift to us. He stands at the door and knocks. We have but to hear His voice, open the door and He will come in. Now I stand before you and ask, “Do you want eternity in your hearts? Do you want to follow

after Him?” It may not be a life free of pain,  
but I promise you a life of peace that  
surpasses understanding...true joy.

*(fervently)*

On this last thing I tell you true—each of  
you—not before Heaven...not before earth  
succumb will this faith be vanquished. The  
word is Spirit, and as Spirit endures forever.  
This faith...will endure forever, so help me  
God!

*As Nicholas looks hard on the members, they turn and look at one another for direction. Finally a man steps forward and goes wading into the water, and then another, and then another. Suddenly the entire throng pushes forward; their faces alight.*

NICHOLAS *(smiling)*

Ammmen!

**EXT – VILLAGE HILLTOP IN MYRA [DAY]**

*Atop a hill overlooking the harbor, Dagan watches the proceedings. A group of five men wait behind him. They are mounted on horses and ready for travel.*

DAGAN

He's rumored to be in one of the neighboring  
villages to the west.

*Dagan remains impassive as he witnesses Nicholas repeatedly take a townsman in his arms, offer up a prayer, and submerge them in the shallow waters.*

DAGAN

Inspid, conniving man. You haven't a clue.

*The horses whinny. The messengers look at one another in alarm. Then suddenly a flicker of MADNESS forms in Dagan's eyes. He raises an arm towards the West.*

DAGAN

Find him. *Find him!*

*The messengers turn their mounts and SPEED from the hill, each bearing a different course. From behind a great stone one hundred yards off, an unidentified person escapes their notice.*

**EXT – ANDRIAKI BEACH / MEDITERRANEAN SEA [DAY]**

*The teeming crowd stands with drenched clothes, their faces beaming with emotion. The last one, a boy, is submerged in the water and brought up quickly.*

NICHOLAS

...may the Holy Spirit receive you this day  
forth unto forever. Amen.

*Nicholas removes his hand from the boy's forehead and allows him to return to the shore. The members have begun to leave, uttering thanks as they depart. The priest emerges from the water to stand with David and Letitia. The pair offers him a blanket.*

DAVID (O.S.)

The Harvest Festival is taking place a little  
later, pastor. Will you be attending?

*Nicholas suddenly sees a lone figure standing on the beachfront. It is Rebecca. The wind sweeps through her long brown hair, as she appears to be waiting. A dejected expression is on her face. But most notable of all is the red woolen stocking that was left for her family. She holds it securely.*

LETITIA

Pastor?

NICHOLAS

I'm sorry? Yes—I'll be there. Please excuse  
me.

*Nicholas breaks from their company and approaches the girl. She wipes something from her cheek and looks off.*

NICHOLAS

Rebecca!

*The girl looks at him with surprise on her face.*

REBECCA

You know my name?

NICHOLAS (*nodding*)

Are you here to see me?

*She looks away at first then nods slowly; a weak smile playing on her face.*

REBECCA

This is for the church.

*Nicholas takes the stocking in his hand and draws it open. He then looks at Rebecca.*

REBECCA

I assure you minister, it was not gained illegally. I—I prayed for it, and it was given me.

NICHOLAS

No—I believe you. But why...?

REBECCA

My family and I are poor. I—I prayed not knowing what would happen and...and it was there in the morning. Oh pastor, I believe it is heaven sent, but my father, he is sure it is illgotten. He will not listen to reason. He is without...faith.

NICHOLAS

I see. It is a sizable contribution. Perhaps your father would at least accept—

REBECCA (*shaking head*)

Just keep us in your prayers. Please!

*Rebecca marches off. Nicholas stands alone in silence when a messenger approaches him.*

MESSENGER

This for you, sir.

*Nicholas takes the offered vellum in his hand as the messenger walks off. He removes the straw binding and examines it.*

NICHOLAS

Nicander?

*As he begins to read, we hear Nicander's voice.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Good shepherd of Myra, I trust my note finds you in the best of ways. Due to demands on my time I must be short. Word has reached me that the Empire is entering a period of great trial. Civil war has now become all too real. But more importantly, you should know that special attention is being given to our vocation. I believe we are entering a critical time—change appears imminent. Please take great care. My thoughts and prayers go with you. “N”

*As Nicholas looks up, we can read no emotion.*

**EXT – HARVEST FESTIVAL IN MYRA [DAY]**

*There is much clamor and commotion. Five pavilions have been set up near the amphitheater; the most elaborate in the center. Many are sharing song and wine. Vendors peddle their wares and LAUGHTER and MERRIMENT is everywhere. Nicholas smiles at everyone in passing. Many of the villagers take notice of him.*

**YOUNG VILLAGER** (*whispering*)

Look Asha, the priest.

*Nicholas simply smiles at the couple and continues on. Situated throughout are outdoor pits with lambs and pigs being slowly roasted. A procession of horns blow in the background. As he moves past the first pavilion, something inside the second catches his eye and he stops. Although littered with people, Nicholas makes out the hobbling form of a hermit. As the priest edges for a better look, a sympathetic merchant hands the hermit a fruit and turns to pick up something from the floor. Not a moment later, the hermit's hand reaches out and SNATCHES a piece of bread from his cart. Unaware of the infraction, the merchant waves goodbye as the person makes a hasty retreat. Curious now, Nicholas watches the hermit press through the crowd like a hungry wolf. Then, as if by instinct, the person turns and looks directly at him. It is Griff. Suddenly a hand is placed on Nicholas' shoulder. STARTLED, he turns.*

**ELDERLY VILLAGER**

Finding your way, father?

**NICHOLAS**

Yes! Thank you.

*The villager moves on with a smile. When Nicholas turns back around, Griff has disappeared. The priest grimaces after a moment and moves in the direction of the center pavilion. At its entrance stands a man. He crosses toward Nicholas.*

**PAVILION ATTENDANT**

Pastor? I thought it was you! We must have you inside. Please, join the governor.

**NICHOLAS**

I don't know, I—

**PAVILION ATTENDANT**

Come, come. Let me escort you.

*Nicholas is led inside where he sees a string of veiled women gyrating to the sound of music. The governor is sitting and watching in rapt attention. Just as the priest is led to Silvio's side, the song concludes. The governor looks up at his newfound company.*

SILVIO

Nicholas! Splendid—here.

*The governor pats the area beside him.*

SILVIO

Sit and be social.

*As the group of musicians break, Silvio's attention returns to the panting women. He points in their direction and curls his eyebrows at the priest.*

SILVIO

Marriage is permissible in the priesthood?

*Nicholas cannot hide his surprise at the governor's question.*

NICHOLAS

It is, but no thank you. Just...thank you.

*(embarrassed)*

What of you?

SILVIO

Never. What woman would put up with my idiosyncrasies—tell me?

NICHOLAS

I don't know. We all have a few.

*The governor can't seem to peel his eyes from the dancers.*

NICHOLAS

You know I've meant to ask about that youth, the one racing your chariot.

SILVIO *(frowning)*

Yeah, the little con artist took *me* for a ride.

He not only destroyed my chariot, he cost me a small fortune in...

*Silvio notes Nicholas' disapproving glare.*

SILVIO

...well never mind. He won't show up in this

village again. And if he should, I have men looking out for him.

*Nicholas smirks. The governor grows suddenly serious.*

SILVIO

Say...why don't you move in closer.

*Nicholas does as he is bid. The governor glances around before leaning in close.*

SILVIO (*whispering*)

You haven't, uhh...we no one's, ahh... everything's been okay of late, hasn't it?

NICHOLAS

Yes.

*Silvio smiles broadly as though a weight was lifted from his shoulders.*

SILVIO

Good! Good then. Now...let us eat and be merry.

(*clapping hands*)

Fruit! Have we no fruit?

*The music and the dancing resume as a servant brings a plate of grapes and starts to feed Silvio. The priest looks mildly perplexed.*

PAVILION ATTENDANT (O.S.)

Over this way.

*Nicholas looks over his shoulder and does a double take as Teresa is being escorted over. She has an amused look on her face. The priest clears his throat.*

PAVILION ATTENDANT

Governor.

*Silvio fails to hear.*

PAVILION ATTENDANT

Governor, I have another guest.

SILVIO (*looking up*)

Huh? Oh my dear, welcome. I thought perhaps you were another dancer.

TERESA

I think there's quite enough already.

*Silvio laughs. Teresa glances over at Nicholas, who is smiling weakly.*

SILVIO

Please sit down.

TERESA

Really...I was just passing through and I—

SILVIO

By the way, have you met Nicholas—our  
Christian priest?

NICHOLAS

Yes!

TERESA

Yes!

SILVIO

Well then, you must stay. Keep him, er, us  
company.

*Outside Silvio's line of vision, Nicholas nods and gives her an arresting smile.*

TERESA

Well, all right, maybe just a few minutes.

*The governor nods once and continues to watch the dancers. As a new song begins, one of the dancers breaks from the group and advances toward them with tambourine in hand. She starts to move seductively forward, removing the veil from her face. Once close enough, she allows the veil to float down into Nicholas' lap. Teresa notes the elated expression on Silvio and the awkward one on Nicholas.*

SILVIO

Beautiful, beautiful! Lucky man you are  
Nicholas.

*Just then, Teresa looks over to see several of her students running up.*

MARY

There you are, Miss Teresa.

TERESA

Hello, children.

MARY

We want to show you something.

MICHAEL

And our parents said it was all right. Please!

TERESA

Well...

*Silvio continues to laugh in delight. Yet as Teresa looks at Nicholas, she can see that he is terribly uncomfortable. A frown of conviction lights her face.*

TERESA

I'll tell you what Mary...

*She motions for the girl and whispers in her ear. After a moment, Mary scurries off to whisper to the others. Each of their heads turn or bob to look at Nicholas in the process. Some quiet arguing erupts between the children and Michael followed by silence. Suddenly the group of children divides into three groups and fully CHARGES Nicholas, Teresa and the dancer. To Nicholas and Teresa, they take their hands, bring them to their feet, and jostle and prod them to go outside. To the unfortunate dancer, they begin to TUG and PULL at the several veils lining her anatomy. The woman YELPS and does her best to brush their little hands away as Silvio sits stupefied.*

SILVIO

Children, where are your manners? Children!

*With Nicholas and Teresa safely away, the rest of the children race off in a hoard of GIGGLES. The dancer stands humiliated as she gropes for the fallen veils.*

**EXT – HARVEST FESTIVAL IN MYRA [DAY]**

*Nicholas, Teresa, and the children have assembled outside the pavilion.*

NICHOLAS

I'm not sure what happened just now...

*The kids laugh along before looking up at Teresa. The priest glances her way.*

NICHOLAS

Thank you.

*Teresa only nods as the children begin to scurry away. All but one!*

MICHAEL

Are you coming, Miss Teresa?

TERESA  
(to Nicholas)

Let's go.

NICHOLAS

Go?

**EXT – GRASSY HILL OUTSIDE MYRA [DAY]**

*As a heavily forested mountain range serves as the backdrop, Nicholas, Teresa, and the children march up a hill laden with wildflowers. A gentle breeze sends the flowers dancing. The teacher has two children by the hand. She looks on ahead at Nicholas. He is carrying a beaming Michael on his back. As they near the top, some of the children race ahead. Nicholas turns around and walks backward.*

NICHOLAS

Do you know where they're leading us?

TERESA (*shaking head*)

They won't tell me.

*A sudden CHEER goes up among the leading children, turning Nicholas back around again. They have fallen from sight.*

TERESA

Children?

*Seconds later, Nicholas and Teresa reach the top. As they look down, they see mineral springs not forty feet away. Michael leaps from Nicholas' back with unbridled enthusiasm, and chases after the other children.*

MICHAEL

Wait for me.

*An instant later, the children at Teresa's side bolt away.*

MARY

Last one in's a water buffalo.

*Nicholas and Teresa turn to each other, their faces aglow. Wasting no time, the children strip down to a minimum and go wading into the pool. Nicholas and Teresa come strolling up behind. From the center of the pool, Michael's head juts out.*

MICHAEL

Nicholas...aren't you coming in too?

*With great surprise in his face, the priest looks over at Teresa.*

NICHOLAS

Did I just make a friend?

*Teresa nods in answer.*

NICHOLAS

Can't refuse then, can I?

TERESA

It wouldn't be wise—he's nearly as unstable  
as I am.

*Nicholas extends his hand, imploring her to join him.*

TERESA

Oh no. I had my turn, remember?

NICHOLAS

And I'm not going to forget it, am I?

*Teresa smirks at him as he removes his robe and tunic. The sunlight gleams off his sinewy body. He then removes the cross from his neck.*

NICHOLAS

Hold this for me?

*Teresa nods as Nicholas rounds about.*

NICHOLAS

Make way, here I come.

*The priest dashes to the edge of the pool and LEAPS into the water's depths. Long moments go by without a sign of him.*

MICHAEL

Where did he go?

*Suddenly Nicholas EXPLODES to the water's surface, just behind the unsuspecting children.*

NICHOLAS

Rrrrrr! I am a WATER BUFFALO!

*The children SCREAM and swim away. Teresa finds herself LAUGHING at the charade.*

**EXT – MINERAL SPRINGS OUTSIDE OF MYRA [DUSK]**

*The sun is sinking into the horizon like a fiery red ball. The camera pans over to show Nicholas lying comfortably on the ground next to a sitting Teresa. She appears pleased with his company. The priest is outfitted in his robe again. His hair is wet.*

NICHOLAS

How long have you been in Myra?

TERESA

Not much longer than you actually. Several months ago I...lost my father.

NICHOLAS

I'm sorry.

*Teresa is holding firm the wooden cross.*

TERESA

Guess you could say I came here—starting over and all—to find myself again. And my mother, she died when I was born.

*Nicholas becomes serious, focusing on a lilac before him. Teresa notes the change.*

TERESA

How about you?

NICHOLAS

My parents and I were close...but I lost them when I was young.

*He looks over at the children.*

TERESA

What happened?

*Nicholas clears his throat and rolls over to lie on his side. She sits a little straighter as he gathers his thoughts. Delicately, the priest plucks a lilac from the ground and holds it close.*

NICHOLAS

Every year my parents and I, we would head off on a pilgrimage. We were blessed financially so we would help those in seclusion with food, supplies, teaching the scriptures. Well one year we visited some catacombs.

*He places the flower on the ground.*

NICHOLAS

Conditions weren't the best and, uh, my parents didn't make it.

*Teresa extends him a sympathetic smile.*

NICHOLAS

A wonderful person took me in after that, my uncle—an abbot—and things came together again. I owe everything to him, a dear friend, and...

*Nicholas points to the wooden cross.*

TERESA

...the message of the cross.

NICHOLAS (*nodding*)

Yes.

*Teresa examines it more closely. Suddenly there is rustling in a nearby bush. A moment later a figure EMERGES. Nicholas sits up.*

NICHOLAS

Sabina?

SABINA

I'm very sorry, I—I don't mean to intrude.

*Nicholas comes to his feet, as does Teresa.*

NICHOLAS

No, please come. Um, this is Teresa. Teresa, this is Sabina.

*Sabina remains in place.*

TERESA

Glad to meet you.

NICHOLAS

I've wondered—well how are you?

SABINA

I'm leaving. I'm just—just here to say bye  
and to say thank you.

NICHOLAS

Sabina that's wonderful, I'm happy for you. I  
know you will be prosperous. In fact I...

*Sabina smiles faintly. Nicholas walks up to her and looks into her eyes.*

NICHOLAS

...I know you're scared but don't doubt  
yourself. Sometimes we just have to stand in  
the light to know warmth on our face again.

*The woman embraces Nicholas.*

SABINA

Thank you...for everything.

*After a moment she steps back and removes a tear from her face.*

SABINA

Just watch for Dagan. That race...you know  
with the red chariot?

*Nicholas nods. Teresa listens intently.*

SABINA

Well have the axle checked. I think you'll find  
it was tampered with. Dagan made a lot of  
money on that race.

*Nicholas and Teresa look to one another.*

NICHOLAS

Thank you.

*Sabina hangs her head. She seems particularly troubled.*

SABINA

One last thing. This morning I saw...I  
witnessed Dagan sending men out to find  
someone...in a nearby village. I think he said  
prefect. They're going to bring him here.

TERESA

Prefect? The Prefect of Rome, what would he want here?

*Tears run down Sabina's cheek and her lips are trembling as she looks up at Nicholas.*

NICHOLAS

Me.

**EXT – MINERAL SPRINGS OUTSIDE OF MYRA [NIGHT]**

*The festival is still going strong as darkness descends. Teresa finishes drying off Mary.*

MARY

Thank you. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?

TERESA

Straight to your parents now.

*The little girl nods and races back down to her parents. Teresa then looks over at Nicholas. He is standing several feet away, looking up at some stars. She walks over to join him.*

TERESA

What will they do to you?

NICHOLAS

Take me to Rome I imagine. Beyond that...?

TERESA

Nicholas, listen to me. Maybe you should go away for awhile.

NICHOLAS

I can't do that.

TERESA

If you won't do it for yourself, then do it for the church, the children, the...people.

*Unable to look at her, he just stares ahead.*

NICHOLAS

I chose long ago to fight for faith with the most precious thing I have, Teresa—my life. If I walk away now, I compromise that faith and all the saints who went before me.

*Teresa looks deflated. TEARS well up in her eyes. A small chortle escapes.*

TERESA

I don't think I can go through...again. Forgive me, I-I have to go.

*Nicholas is about to stop her when he suddenly refrains. As he looks down dejected, he spots his cross on the ground.*

**INT – NICHOLAS' VILLA [NIGHT]**

*Outfitted in his scarlet robe, Nicholas puts the finishing touches on a handwritten note. He then lays the stylus down on the table and places his note inside the stocking returned to him from Rebecca. Rising to his feet, he blows out a candle, and quickly inserts the stocking into a pocket of his robe.*

**EXT – BELLASARIO's VILLA [NIGHT]**

*As Nicholas approaches the home it is unusually quiet. Suddenly a patch of bushes begins to SHAKE. The priest stops in his tracks. A moment later a small dog comes sauntering out. The dog stops and sniffs its paw, then continues to scurry away. Nicholas edges up to the window and pulls forth the stocking when a male VOICE calls out.*

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Stop there!

*Nicholas wheels around. A man (BELLASARIO) steps from behind a tree.*

BELLASARIO

Who are you?

*The priest draws back his hood. Although surprised, he remains calm.*

NICHOLAS

My name is Nicholas. I am a priest.

BELLASARIO

A Christian priest?

NICHOLAS

Yes!

BELLASARIO

Well, what are you doing here outside my home?

NICHOLAS

Trying to help a good neighbor.

BELLASARIO

What are you saying?

NICHOLAS

Bella, I know that things have been a little difficult of late...I just felt I could...

*(raises the stocking in his hand)*

...I brought this so—

BELLASARIO

Take that stocking and get out of here. I don't take charity.

*Bellasario turns abruptly and starts to walk away.*

NICHOLAS

Wait.

*Bellasario keeps going.*

NICHOLAS

*Bella!* Is it right that a man should compromise the future of his children for the sake of his pride? Who loses? One or all?

*Bellasario comes to a slow halt and turns his head.*

NICHOLAS

Please! This will pass, and when it does—return back to the church what you have gained.

*Nicholas places the stocking on the ground before him. The coins chink. Bellasario remains with his back to Nicholas.*

NICHOLAS

You know—funny thing faith. As fleeting as we know it to be sometimes, it only takes the will and it is restored again. Good night!

*The priest turns, draws his hood back over his head, and departs.*

**EXT – BASILICA / ATRIUM OF MYRA [DAY]**

*A gust of wind sweeps through the village, kicking dust particles into the air. Leaves of nearby trees dance in the streets in search of a resting place.*

**INT – CLASSROOM IN MYRA [DAY]**

*Teresa is instructing the children when the CLOP-CLOP-CLOP of horses and METAL is heard. The sound emanates from outside. She rises from her chair and looks out into the street. Her face suddenly darkens.*

**INT – BASILICA OF MYRA [DAY]**

*Nicholas and David are anchoring benches. Off to the side, Letitia is clipping a potted plant. Suddenly the doors come BURSTING open and the burly man rushes inside.*

BURLY MAN

*Pastor! Praetorian Guardsmen—outside!*

NICHOLAS

*(to David)*

*Remain inside.*

**EXT – BASILICA / ATRIUM OF MYRA [DAY]**

*As Nicholas emerges from the basilica, Letitia embraces David. Though under the cover of the atrium, Nicholas is able to make out the figure of Dagan in the courtyard, a smug expression on his face. To the right of him a formidable looking man in black attire climbs down from his steed. To either side of him a group of Praetorian Guardsmen sit astride their horses. Guised in the black trim that differentiates them from the typical legionary, they are ominous in appearance. With his finger extended, Dagan points at Nicholas.*

DAGAN

*That one.*

*Nicholas moves into the courtyard. A crowd of villagers is gathering.*

**EXT – STREET ADJACENT TO BASILICA [DAY]**

*A block away, Silvio rounds the corner and HALTS. There is a sudden expression of alarm on his face. Seeing that no one has spotted him, he turns shame-faced and ambles away.*

**EXT – COURTYARD OUTSIDE BASILICA [DAY]**

*The man in black walks toward Nicholas. The priest seems to recognize something as his eyes go open wide. The man is creased with lines of aging, and hair streaked silver on both sides. Teresa arrives on the scene and places a hand over her chest in alarm.*

**EXT – COURTYARD OUTSIDE BASILICA [DAY]**

*Now a foot from Nicholas, the prefect sizes him up. There is TENSION. The man's eyes fall to the cross round Nicholas' neck and the two men stare at one another. Suddenly the prefect turns and walks back to Dagan.*

PREFECT

The messenger said he was a bishop?

DAGAN

Well not yet a bishop, but surely one day. He speaks with a viper's tongue. Even now his reputation spreads like fire through a field.

*Carus looks back at Nicholas.*

PREFECT

What say you to these charges?

*Nicholas picks Teresa from the crowd. Their eyes lock momentarily before he turns back to the Roman officer.*

NICHOLAS

Have words become so dangerous that the Empire should fear one humble man?

*Another tense pause. A thin smile then creeps across the man's face. He begins to laugh lightly.*

PREFECT

Enough of this wasted time.  
(to guardsmen)  
Let's return to our furlough.

DAGAN

Wait! I—I demand that you—

PREFECT

*You what?*

DAGAN

I—what I mean to say is, all suspects must pay public homage to the God Diana. Surely he can do that for you?

*The prefect appears undecided.*

PREFECT (*angrily*)  
This village is full of weasels. All right, but after he pays homage, I take my leave.

DAGAN  
Of course, prefect!

*David BURSTS from the atrium and into the crowd.*

DAVID  
That man is a fool. He speaks out of jealousy.

PREFECT  
Shut up and stand away.

DAVID (*scared*)  
We out number you.

*Several men chime in agreement. The guardsmen leap from their horses and UNSHEATHE their swords as the prefect brandishes a dagger. A CRY of terror rises from the crowd.*

NICHOLAS  
*Hold on!* All of you!

*The crowd quiets. Teresa can contain herself no longer. She PUSHES her way to the head of the crowd.*

OLD MAN  
Young lady what are you...?

NICHOLAS  
This is not to be the way. There will be no bloodshed on my account.

*Letitia takes David's hand in hers.*

LETITIA (*whispering*)  
David, we are to be married soon. Perhaps we should listen.

*Conflicted, David looks over at Nicholas. The priest motions him away. David hangs his head and whisks off with Letitia.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN  
Slaughter them, prefect?

DAGAN  
No! Remove the head and the body will fall.  
These people will be no trouble once he is  
deposed.

*Unconvinced, the prefect looks from Nicholas to the crowd.*

PREFECT  
I wonder if there are any here who feel they  
have profited by this man?

*The man turns and SLITHERS into the crowd like a snake. His eyes linger on the burly man.*

PREFECT  
How about you?

*Two guardsmen begin to creep up. Suddenly the burly man appears nervous.*

BURLY MAN  
I—I think he's just—he's passing through.

*The prefect smirks and moves on.*

PREFECT  
And what about you...or you...or you?

*To a man they shake their heads in fear and step back. Teresa alone remains where she stands. She looks over at Nicholas, who is shaking his head in warning.*

PREFECT  
Well what is this?

*He strolls up to Teresa.*

PREFECT  
And what has he given you sweet flower?  
Bear in mind there *are* children present.

*The guardsmen burst out in LAUGHTER.*

TERESA

You're a vile, contemptuous man.

*The prefect turns and addresses his men.*

PREFECT

My mistake, she is a *wild flower*.

*The guardsmen laugh more as the prefect moves in closer. Teresa stares bravely at the man.*

TERESA

He has done nothing wrong.

CARUS

No? Well, let us see.

*(to Nicholas)*

What do you say, priest? Let's put this misunderstanding to an end. Declare your allegiance to Rome by offering your worship to the goddess Diana...and I will be gone.

*The crowd goes hush. A baby begins to CRY in the background. Nicholas looks out into the crowd, into their eyes. They are awaiting his response. The priest then GAZES up to the heavens.*

NICHOLAS

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me...

*The crowd lets out a collective GASP. The prefect smiles menacingly and looks at Teresa first, then Dagan.*

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

PREFECT

Take him.

NICHOLAS

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...

*The guardsmen CONVERGE on the priest and forcefully strap his hands to his back. He does not resist. The child Mary is in the crowd. She looks up at her mother in bewilderment.*

MARY

Mommy, what is happening? Why are they taking him?

MOTHER

Because he's not like them, honey. You can't see this, let's go.

*Mother and child scamper away. The burly man looks on, mortified by the proceedings. People CRY OUT for mercy. The man in black walks over to stand behind Teresa. He begins to toy with her hair.*

PREFECT

Now the only question is, do I take you too?

NICHOLAS

*Carus!!!*

*Suddenly Nicholas' face goes rigid. He separates himself from the guardsmen and propels himself on the man, sending the prefect SPRAWLING to the dirt. Instantly the guardsmen are on him. One man takes his spear shaft and attempts to choke the priest from behind, while other men start to beat on him. As Carus comes to his feet with a venomous glare, the guardsmen fling a coughing Nicholas to the floor. The guardsman with the spear tosses it to Carus. The prefect's hands are SHAKING from anger. Just as he arches back to drive the spear through the priest, Teresa SCREAMS out.*

TERESA

*No!*

*Straining to catch a breath, Nicholas looks up at Carus defiantly and BARES his chest, standing fearless before him. The prefect appears to be calculating. Nicholas' cross is lying on the ground next to him.*

CARUS

You would prefer quick death, wouldn't you?

*(to guardsmen)*

Saddle him to the ass.

*The guardsmen bully Nicholas over to a waiting donkey.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

What of the woman?

*A sobbing Teresa looks on.*

CARUS

No. Let her wallow in her sorrow.

*The guardsmen tear away the rest of Nicholas' priestly robe before tossing him onto the ass. Teresa looks over at him through tear-soaked eyes. A few feet away, Dagan watches with a devilish grin on his face. Carus climbs his steed.*

CARUS

Let's go.

*The party of Romans and the priest ride off unchallenged.*

**EXT – ROOF BUILDING IN MYRA [DAY]**

*From above a nearby edifice, Griff goes unseen. Having just witnessed the capture, he shakes his head in anger and looks away.*

**EXT – SKY ABOVE MYRA [DAY]**

*Far above a circling hawk SCREECHES.*

**INT – TERESA'S VILLA [DAY]**

*With her head buried in her arm, Teresa is slumped against her bed, alone in her anguish.*

**EXT – BASILICA IN MYRA [DAY]**

*From a hundred feet away, two people come running into the courtyard. Once up close, we see it is Rebecca and Bellasario. Their faces drop.*

REBECCA

*Papa?*

*Bellasario glances about in confusion. The old man from the church is standing a short distance away. With a grim face he addresses them.*

OLD MAN

*He's gone.*

*A distraught Rebecca FLINGS herself into her father's arms.*

**INT – TERESA'S VILLA [DAY]**

*Teresa remains slumped against her bed, her back to the door. In her anger and pain she fails to hear a knocking at the door. She is quietly sobbing. Several seconds go by and a few more*

*raps come. Still she remains oblivious. Just then the door comes slowly open, a head peaks through. It is Griff, still in a dark green tunic. He is apprehensive.*

GRIFF

Lady?

*She does not hear him.*

GRIFF

Lady?

*Teresa whirls suddenly in fear, Nicholas' cross in her hands.*

GRIFF

Easy. I'm not going to harm you.

TERESA

What do you want?

GRIFF

My name is Griff.

TERESA

What do you want, Griff?

*The youth looks away to stare at nothing then turns back to Teresa.*

GRIFF

I need to ask you something about him.

TERESA

Him?

GRIFF

The priest. The Christian.

*(pause)*

You were there. Did he...did he really try to save my life?

*Teresa nods solemnly.*

GRIFF

Why would he do that?

TERESA

Maybe if you had asked me an hour ago I

couldn't begin to answer that.

GRIFF

And now?

TERESA

Because it's who he is. He doesn't wear his faith like we wear a robe, putting it on and taking it off. It's written on his heart.

GRIFF

No one's ever offered me so much as a piece of bread before—no one.

*Teresa raises a hand to her face and sobs.*

**EXT – BASILICA IN MYRA [NIGHT]**

*Dark clouds gather overhead. Despite being outfitted in a heavy robe, Teresa has her arms folded in front. As she and Griff approach the basilica, they see the doors are propped open. Light emanates from within. They look at each other puzzled.*

GRIFF

What do you think is going on?

*The two walk in to find a room full of villagers. Most are newcomers. In every corner are rows of lighted candles. Addressing the crowd from the altar is David. He looks up as they walk in through the doors.*

DAVID

Teresa! We hoped you'd come.

*David steps from the altar and moves down the center aisle, up to Teresa. He gives Griff a suspicious look.*

TERESA

David, this is Griff.

DAVID

Hello.

*(to Teresa)*

Many of the townspeople are gathered here.  
We plan to hold vigil.

*As Teresa looks up, every eye in the basilica is on her.*

TERESA

Thank you, all of you.

*Voices of encouragement go up in the crowd. Letitia walks up and joins them.*

LETITIA

We went through his things. There was a note on his bed—a message for someone in Xanthos. He doesn't want him notified unless...

*Teresa nods in understanding.*

DAVID

We also found a satchel of gold. It'll be in safe keeping till he returns.

*With a proud face, Teresa looks around at everyone. Suddenly someone hooks her around the waist. She looks down to find Michael. She smiles and runs a hand through his hair.*

TERESA

Don't look now, but we've become a community.

DAVID

And we'll stay one.

*Before anyone can react, the entrance doors SLAM OPEN and two thugs rush in. They immediately SEIZE Griff by the arms. Teresa is appalled and shocked.*

TERESA

What is this? Let him go!

*Not a moment later, Dagan walks in with a grin on his face.*

DAGAN

Imagine that, a place for harboring criminals.

DAVID

What is this about?

*Just then Silvio and the burly man enter. There is a no-nonsense air about the governor.*

SILVIO

Release him, Dagan.

DAGAN

What? Don't you see who he is?

SILVIO

You are a subject of your governor. Now stand down and take your leave.

*The burly man moves into position, anticipating a confrontation. The two thugs release their hold on Griff. Dagan looks on exasperated.*

DAGAN

I think you've all gone mad. All of you!

*A disbelieving Dagan glances at the party of Christians and STALKS off with his men.*

TERESA

Thank you, governor.

SILVIO

I found a note on my estate. It said I should check the axle of my chariot. Apparently there's been some foul play, and although I can't prove who...well let's just say I have reliable sources.

*Griff breathes a sigh of relief.*

SILVIO

I beg your forgiveness, all of you. I saw this Coming, and...I turned away.

TERESA

Not to sound disrespectful, but it's not our forgiveness you should seek.

*Silvio hangs his head in shame.*

TERESA

You don't know this but, I know of a brave charioteer...who on the morning departs for Rome.

*The governor looks up and over at Griff. The boy frowns. Silvio nods firmly and bites down on his lower lip.*

SILVIO

Son, thanks—no! Thank you, young man.

*The congregation starts to chant a hymn of hope and faith. Griff looks up at Teresa grinning.*

**EXT – VILLAGE OF MYRA [NIGHT]**

*A light rain begins to fall. Puddles start to form along the dirt paths. A dog with matted fur crosses a street in search of shelter. Peddlers close down their shops and withdraw into their homes. A mother calls her playing children inside.*

**EXT – BASILICA OF MYRA [NIGHT]**

*Alone with her thoughts, Teresa exits the basilica. She stops at the street line and leans against an atrium pillar. Griff comes up behind her. She senses his presence.*

TERESA

At the races—if you did nothing wrong, why did you run?

GRIFF

When you've lived the streets as I have, you discover people aren't always looking for justice. Usually they're just looking for someone to blame.

*Teresa nods in sympathy; understanding.*

TERESA

Isn't it funny how we're all running from something. Yet Nicholas, he goes toward...

*The rain starts to fall with more INTENSITY. The camera pans up to the night sky.*

**EXT – TAURUS MOUNTAINS [NIGHT]**

*The storm is well underway as sheets of rain pelt the land. From the west a bone-chilling wind whips through the trees.*

**EXT – TAURUS MOUNTAINS / ENCAMPMENT [NIGHT]**

*A camp is set up in a clearing alongside a series of jutting boulders. The guardsmen stand off to one side, outfitted in heavy smocks. As Carus looks on, one of the guardsmen is securing a chain to the base of a tree trunk. At the other end, Nicholas is chained at the ankle. He is SHAKING from the biting cold and ailing. The guardsman pulls on the chain to test it. Satisfied, he crosses over to Carus.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

Several days exposure, he's with fever,  
prefect. Don't expect him to last the night.

*A contemplative look on his face, Carus walks over to Nicholas. He removes his short sword from its sheathe. Nicholas remains indifferent.*

CARUS

You called my name. How did you know it?

NICHOLAS

I met you on a road...outside Xanthos once.

CARUS

It's been many a year since I've visited  
Xanthos.

NICHOLAS

I-was-but-ten.

CARUS

And yet you recall.

*Nicholas looks on BOLDLY DEFIANT.*

CARUS

Repent of your faith and I will make your  
death a swift one.

NICHOLAS

Do-not-fear-for-me.

*(shaking head)*

Fear-for-your-soul!

*Carus resheathes his sword and begins to walk back to his men.*

CARUS

Let the creatures of the night keep your  
company then.

*As the prefect reaches his men, he turns.*

CARUS

Oh...and you may want your God there too.

*The guardsmen laugh. Carus turns back around and retires into a cave opening along with his men. Alone now, Nicholas' shivering is more PRONOUNCED. He looks around. No where*

*is there shelter. He tugs on his chain. There is no give. Tired and weary, he pulls harder, slips and SPLASHES down in the mud. With a look of resignation he glances up.*

NICHOLAS

Our Father, who art in Heaven...

*The priest appears to be growing delirious. He cannot control the powerful shaking that is racking his body. He shakes his head. Then into a fetal position he curls. The rain continues to assault him.*

NICHOLAS

...hallowed by thy name...

*Suddenly he glimpses something moving in the brush fifty yards away. His vision is obscured from the driving rain. He puts a hand to his eyes and rubs. There is no one.*

NICHOLAS

...thy kingdom come...they will be done...

*His condition is deteriorating. The bushes suddenly begin to SHAKE and a radiant LIGHT starts to emanate from the area. Nicholas shakes his head that he might clear it. Then he sees it. Advancing toward him is the angel in his vision. As before, the angel is perfect in appearance. Powerfully built muscles are evident. Golden brown wings grace its back.*

NICHOLAS

...on earth...as it is...in Heaven...

*The priest is struggling to remain conscious. In the moment it takes to blink his eyes, he now finds himself looking upon a large reindeer with massive antlers. The angel has vanished.*

NICHOLAS

...Lord, do not let me die soooo....

*Then his eyes go closed and his head drops slowly. He can remain consciousness no longer. Nicholas does not witness the golden-brown reindeer as it moves up to tower over him. He does not see it nudge him with its nose. He does not see it drop beside him, nor does he realize the warmth and the shelter it begins to provide.*

**INT – TAURUS MOUNTAINS / CAVE [DAY]**

*Carus has been called over to the cave opening. A guardsman is pointing to the clearing.*

CARUS

What is it?

*As the prefect looks out he must shield his eyes from the brightness of the sun. In the clearing is Nicholas, huddled over in prayer. His color is good and he looks a new man. There is great SURPRISE on the face of Carus.*

**EXT – TAURUS MOUNTAINS / ENCAMPMENT [DAY]**

*Carus walks over and stands before Nicholas. It is a beautiful morning.*

CARUS

What happened here last night?

*The priest ends his prayer and rises to his feet. He shields his eyes and looks up to the sky. In all sincerity he says:*

NICHOLAS

You said it from the first—I had company.

*The prefect pulls to within inches of Nicholas, struggling to keep his anger in check.*

CARUS

You take yourself too seriously priest. You're nothing more than a ripened pig being led to the slaughter. Your days are numbered.

NICHOLAS

Yes! And only the God of Abraham knows that number.

*A glaring Carus SPITS, pauses for effect, and then STORMS away.*

CARUS

Pack up!

*Nicholas looks after Carus a moment and then down at the ground. Fresh indentations are evident. Hoof-prints left from a large reindeer!*

**MONTAGE OF TRAVELING SHOTS:**

*Griff is seen on one of Silvio's prized stallions. He stops and dismounts, then does a careful examination of the terrain. Horseshoe marks are discernible in some dried mud. He looks up and stares out at the distant mountains.*

*Carus is leading his men across a rapid flowing stream. They are on horseback. Nicholas follows close behind atop the donkey.*

*Nicholas, Carus, and his men are seen traversing a desert at the height of a WINDSTORM. The sands are lashing them, but still they continue.*

*Nicholas is walking, dirty and battered from exposure. His hands are tied before him. Carus and the guardsmen remain on horseback several yards behind. The sun is beating down on them.*

**EXT – ROMAN COLISEUM OF ROME [DAY]**

*From inside the massive coliseum, thousands of people sit watching a contest between two gladiators. The NOISE is deafening. The two men THRUST and PARRY with short swords. One makes handy a battered shield, while the other uses a net-like device.*

*Overlooking the proceedings is Diocletian. Lines of aging crease his face, yet he remains an imposing figure. He is garbed in a purple and gold toga. A laurel crown rests on his head. A staff of servants stands ready behind him. Legatus' (generals), and tribunes (officers) sit to either side of him. Yet one seat to his immediate right remains vacant. A set of bronze cymbals are suddenly SOUNDED.*

**SENTRY**

Great emperor, there is one to see you.

*Though obviously enthralled by the action, Diocletian looks over his shoulder. A woman stands awaiting his acknowledgment.*

**DIOCLETIAN**

Helena, my dear. Come, sit beside me.

**HELENA**

If you please, emperor.

*Helena turns away from the merciless fighting below. She is older now, but every bit as elegant and beautiful.*

**DIOCLETIAN**

I have forgotten.

*The emperor looks into the arena once more before rising to address her.*

**DIOCLETIAN**

In all the years, you haven't changed my dear.

*He takes her affectionately in his arms.*

**DIOCLETIAN**

Let us retire inside.

*They pass through a veil of red silk curtains and into a private chamber. A loud ROAR goes up from the crowd. Diocletian's head turns slightly out of interest.*

**EXT – ROMAN COLISEUM STAIRS [DAY]**

*Coming up a stairway is Carus, his men, and Nicholas. They gaze into the arena as the crowd voices its approval. Inside, one of the gladiators lay dead from a wound to the chest. The victor stands over him with his arm raised triumphantly.*

CARUS

*(looking into arena)*

Pathetic.

*Appalled by the remark, Nicholas slows a step. A guardsman hits him from behind.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

Keep moving!

**INT – ROMAN COLISEUM / PRIVATE CHAMBER [DAY]**

*Diocletian is seated on a dais and in conversation with Helena. She appears reserved.*

HELENA

He's doing well. It seems nothing brings him more joy than being alongside his father. I just fear they consider themselves invincible.

DIOCLETIAN

Exactly why Constantius resides over my Western provinces. Now my Eastern factions—they are a different story.

HELENA

Then rumors are true? Your Eastern armies are dividing?

DIOCLETIAN

*I don't know.* They continue to vow their allegiance to me, but...I can sense disparity at work here.

*Helena looks on in surprise.*

DIOCLETIAN

Maybe I'm just old and tired, overly suspicious. Still, my ceasar in the east, Maxentius, has known things privy to me and only a select few.

HELENA

Someone is leaking information?

DIOCLETIAN

Possibly. As a safeguard, I would like you to relay that piece of information to your husband, Helena. It could become important.

*Before she can answer, the cymbals are sounded again. Carus enters the room.*

DIOCLETIAN

Carus! The hunter in black has returned.

CARUS (*bowing head*)

Great emperor.

DIOCLETIAN

You remember Helena.

*Carus glances momentarily at her.*

DIOCLETIAN

We were just engaged in a conversation on the loyalty of my subjects.

CARUS

Were you? Allow me to beg off then. I know someone who is not so loyal.

DIOCLETIAN

What?

CARUS

I have brought a Christian priest who has been found in open defiance of the laws.

*Helena shows some concern. It is not lost on the prefect.*

DIOCLETIAN

Christians! Thorn of the Empire. Some three-hundred years now and still they thrive. Even my own twenty years of rulership have done little to quell their numbers. So what is it you ask of me Carus? What separates this one from the rest?

CARUS

His arrogance. He's different. But he's here because I want all of Rome to participate in his death—see how disobedience is rewarded.

HELENA

Might I ask this man's name?

CARUS

His name is Nicholas!

*Her face DROPS; she practically goes FAINT. Diocletian rises from his dais.*

DIOCLETIAN

Helena! Are you well?

*She takes a moment to compose herself.*

HELENA

I fear I...I know this man.

**EXT – HILL OUTSIDE ROME [DAY]**

*High above the city, Griff looks down from atop a hill. He is on horseback and worn from the long journey, yet the sight below seems to invigorate him. After a few clicking sounds, he and horse continue to advance.*

**INT – ROMAN COLISEUM / PRIVATE CHAMBER [DAY]**

*Carus is standing beside Diocletian. They appear to be scrutinizing Helena.*

CARUS

It's plain she is sympathetic to their cause—the wife of a high ranking officer no less.

HELENA

And if I should be...will you hunt me too, Carus?

CARUS

My sword does not discriminate—long as the blood is red.

DIOCLETIAN

Enough! I won't stand for argument.

HELENA

Forgive me. I forget myself, emperor. If I  
may implore your—

*Diocletian raises his hand for silence. She complies.*

DIOCLETIAN

Let me judge for myself this man.

*He motions to a sentry, who in turn pulls open the curtain. The emperor sits down.*

SENTRY

Send him in.

*Two guardsmen accompany Nicholas inside. Immediately his eyes go to Helena and he slows a step, yet he gives no outward sign of acknowledgment. Diocletian watches on. He seems old and weary now. The priest is halted several feet from the dais.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

You're in the presence of the emperor.  
Prostrate yourself.

*With an angry scowl, Nicholas ignores the man's request.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

I said down!

*The guardsman hammers him to the back of a knee. The priest BITES back the pain and remains upright. Diocletian looks uncomfortable.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

You don't learn.

*The guardsman makes ready to strike again when Helena intercedes.*

HELENA

Stop it!

*The confused guardsman looks to Carus.*

CARUS

Why do you wait?

DIOCLETIAN

Hold on. I'll dispose of this amenity. Let

him stand.

*The prefect GLARES angrily at Helena.*

CARUS

Well, priest! I'll bet you never imagined an audience with the emperor himself. You search for God, now look, he sits before you.

*Nicholas' face grows RED with anger and he experiences childhood memories of people fleeing from soldiers. From the crowd outside he hears the chant, "Kill him, kill him..." and then he sees a mental image of his parent's graveside. His eyes dart from Carus to Diocletian and back again.*

NICHOLAS

*Murderers!!!*

*SHOCK registers in Diocletian's face. Carus SMIRKS.*

DIOCLETIAN

Remove this man from my presence.

*The guardsmen start to haul Nicholas away. He remains LIVID.*

NICHOLAS

I'm not finished.

DIOCLETIAN

Yes-you-are! Carus, his fate is in your hands. I don't care anymore.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

This isn't finished!

HELENA

My emperor, please. I beg your mercy.

*The emperor rises to his feet and slowly proceeds to walk toward the chamber exit.*

DIOCLETIAN

In years past, the Roman Empire was a mighty nation, surpassing even that of the Egyptians—no glory and honor unknown. Now, I have the inner workings of strife, turmoil, as my only reward. I have grown tired now, of that I am certain.

*Diocletian exits the room, leaving Helena and Carus staring.*

**EXT – ENTRANCE GATES OF ROME [DUSK]**

*A towering archway greets Griff. He has entered the great city. It is majestic and immense. Throngs of people mill about their everyday business. Peddlers are selling and soliciting. A woman standing outside an apartment calls out to him.*

HOSTESS

You look a tired one. Come inside, a steam bath is waiting.

*Griff simply continues on.*

**INT – ROMAN FORUM - HOLDING CELL [DUSK]**

*Helena emerges from the end of a corridor led by a guard. It is dark and musty. A lone torch hangs on the wall. There are sounds of WAILING and CRYING in the distance.*

GUARD #1

The first cell on the right.

*Peering through a foot wide window in the wooden door, Teresa finds Nicholas slumped over in a corner of his cell.*

HELENA

Nicholas! Are you hurt?

*A distraught Nicholas just stares ahead at the wall.*

NICHOLAS

What have I done? How long—how long  
have I looked to this day—only to lose it.

*(half-laughing)*

Was it hatred that prodded me all these years?

*The guard remains vigilant a few feet off. Helena addresses him.*

HELENA

Can I enter?

GUARD #1

It's as close as you get. Tomorrow he is to  
be put to death.

HELENA

What? By whose orders?

GUARD #1

Carus!

*Helena pulls on the door. It is locked shut. She glares at the guard with disdain.*

HELENA

Nicholas. Look to me.

*He continues to stare ahead.*

HELENA

*Nicholas!*

*He finally looks over with a sullen expression.*

HELENA

You've not failed. You must understand that.

NICHOLAS (*misty-eyed*)

If I could have put aside my prejudice. If I could have reasoned, maybe I could have—

HELENA

No! No, Nicholas, I know Diocletian. He would never accede to your wishes. I used to believe the same thing.

*Nicholas looks down in silence.*

HELENA

Now we have to look at the situation. We have to pray. It's not in our hands anymore.

(*pause*)

Remember who we serve. Not take this...

*She forces a fresh robe through the small window.*

HELENA

I'll return as soon as I can.

*Helena turns and rushes off.*

**EXT – ROMAN FORUM [NIGHT]**

*Griff strolls casually along a busy street, blending with the crowd. Ten legionaries are standing guard at different points. Griff feigns interest in the wares of a vendor when he notes a slow-moving man in a green cloak bringing a platter of food into the building. The man has a hood fully drawn over his face and he is hunch-backed. The guards allow him past without a backward glance. Griff finally decides to slip along the eastside of the facility where small windows are visible. There is dense shrubbery and Griff uses it to his advantage. Encouraged by the absence of soldiers, he advances within fifty feet of the structure when he hears something. Suddenly a soldier steps out from behind a tree. Griff HITS the floor to avoid discovery. With a look of disappointment, he begins to crawl away.*

**INT – ROMAN FORUM – HOLDING CELL [NIGHT]**

*Nicholas goes to his window and looks out at the city. It is the window Griff had been approaching. High above a star twinkles in greeting. Suddenly the soldier comes into view. Nicholas glances once more at the star then retreats to his bed. There he kneels and prays.*

**EXT – FOREST OUTSIDE ROME [NIGHT]**

*A full moon rests at its highest mark on a cloud-ridden night. Somewhere in the distance an owl hoots. All is quiet. Then we hear the growing clatter of HOOVES. Moments later six horsemen come into view, riding full-bore. Moonlight glints off their chestplates and drawn swords. They are military. As their mounts leap over a downed tree trunk, a cry of ATTACK goes up. All at once, a contingent of Roman foot soldiers SPRING from a concentration of shrubs and surround them. There are perhaps thirty men. The six horsemen come to an immediate halt. Five of them form a circle around a horseman with a gold chestplate.*

DARIUS

*Keep the perimeter!*

GOLDPLATED HORSEMAN

No, Darius. I'm taking my place.

*The goldplated horseman advances to round out the circle as the party of foot soldiers charge. STEEL meets STEEL and CRIES of pain go out. Several soldiers fall under the horsemen, who use their elevated position to advantage. A foot soldier cripples a horse leg with a jab from his spear. As the horseman comes CRASHING to the floor, three soldiers POUNCE on him. Several more soldiers fall under the attack of the horsemen, but not before another is pulled off and killed. The soldiers are beginning to overwhelm through sheer numbers. Another horseman falls from the battle. Darius addresses his goldplated comrade.*

DARIUS

*We'll hold them off—you must go!*

GOLDPLATED HORSEMAN

This is my fight too!

*The two men thrust and parry, skillfully maneuvering their mounts.*

DARIUS

*Listen to me dammit. You must send warning.  
Now, while there is time!*

*The goldplated horseman hesitates a moment before tearing himself away from the battle and speeding safely into the forest. Only Darius and one other fallen horseman remain. Darius leaps from his mount and CHARGES in what will be his last.*

DARIUS

*Long live Rome!*

**INT – ROMAN FORUM – HOLDING CELL [DAY]**

*The sound of a chirping bird awakens Nicholas. It flies out the window after being startled by him. The priest appears worn as he sits up and begins to rub his face. As he looks over he finds a sunbeam illuminating a corner of the cell. Squinting, he realizes that the light is REFLECTING off something in the wall. He goes over and examines it carefully. It is an etching that reads:*

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. – Paul

*Nicholas lets out a gasp of awe and shakes his head in disbelief. He then looks up and smiles. Suddenly the frenetic SOUNDS of the city hit him. He comes to his feet and moves to the window. Almost immediately he notices the absence of soldiers and the FRENZIED look of the citizens. They move hurriedly from one place to the next, or speak with raised voices. Nicholas is unable to discern any details so he moves to the cell door and peers out. Oddly, there are no guards outside his cell.*

NICHOLAS

Hello?

*There comes no answer.*

NICHOLAS

Is anyone...is anyone there?

*His ears are met by the sudden set of footfalls in the distance, growing in intensity. The pace is harried. Nicholas remains at the door in anticipation.*

HELENA (O.S.)

Nicholas!

*A second later, Helena appears. She is quivering and short of breath.*

NICHOLAS

Helena! What is happening?

HELENA

I don't have much time...Diocletian has abdicated his seat to the throne.

NICHOLAS

God in Heaven, why?

*She puts a hand up and catches her breath.*

HELENA

I've managed a stay on your life. Carus cannot touch you. That's not all of it though. Last night word arrived in the city. It's no longer rumor, an army marches on Rome. The city is in panic.

NICHOLAS

Civil war?

HELENA (*nodding*)

A carriage is waiting outside for me. I must get word to my husband.

*Helena starts to edge away.*

NICHOLAS

Helena...thank you!

*She smiles demurely and departs. Nicholas listens as her footsteps fade away.*

**EXT – ROMAN FORUM [DAY]**

*The old man with a green cloak is walking casually up the forum stairs. He is carrying another large platter of food. Two sentries allow him past without a thought. As he is about to walk past the door, a deep VOICE calls out.*

MALE VOICE #1 (O.S.)

Hold!

*The old man turns around slowly to see a large sentry well over six-feet tall.*

LARGE SENTRY

What? They got you working night *and day*  
now, Fabio? Here, spare me two figs.

*The old man nods and says nothing. The soldier begins to peel the fig and whistles as he departs.*

**INT – ROMAN FORUM – HOLDING CELL [DAY]**

*Sitting on his bed, Nicholas has his head lowered. Suddenly he hears the faint sound of scurrying feet. He turns to see a fleeting shadow rush past his cell. He advances to the door.*

NICHOLAS

Hello?

*Stone silence. The unmistakable jangling of keys is heard and two guards come into view.*

MALE VOICE #2 (O.S.)

Unlock the first cell.

*The two men stop in front of Nicholas' cell. Moments later the door is opened and shackles are placed on his wrists.*

GUARD #1

Let's go. Follow us.

*Perplexed, Nicholas walks from his cell and proceeds down the corridor just as a shadow steps out from the open cell opposite Nicholas'. There the old man with the green cloak appears. He looks after the departing priest and withdraws his hood. It is GRIFF!*

**EXT – EMPEROR'S PALACE [DAY]**

*The Imperial Palace is shown. It is regal in appearance. The area outside is bustling with activity from citizens and soldiers alike.*

**INT – EMPEROR'S PALACE [DAY]**

*Nicholas is led inside a large chamber where the young officer with the gold chestplate discusses matters with several subjects. They are standing by a table overlooking a map.*

TRIBUNES

...the Milvian Bridge?

OFFICER (*nodding*)

My father's guess.

SENTRY IN PALACE

Excuse me, your excellencies, he is here.

*Ignoring the sentry, the officer presses his signet ring onto the map. The considerable muscles in his arm bulge from the pressure. The sentry appears uneasy.*

SENTRY IN PALACE

Should I have him return later, sir?

OFFICER

Wait a moment.

*The officer rolls up the map, turns, and hands it to a waiting courier.*

OFFICER

God speed your journey.

*A trace of surprise crosses Nicholas' face. With the officer now facing him, he can see that the man is distinguished, in his mid-twenties.*

COURIER

Thank you, sir.

*The two men salute one another in the Roman fashion, pounding their chests with a clenched fist and extending their arms out in front. As the courier races off, the officer turns his attention to the sentry and looks over at Nicholas.*

OFFICER

Is it he?

GUARD #1

Yes, sir.

*The officer scrutinizes Nicholas as he addresses one of the servants.*

OFFICER

A cup of wine.

*The servant rushes off.*

NICHOLAS

Is...Helena here?

*The officer walks over to the emperor's throne and sits.*

OFFICER

Prisoners do not have the luxury of voicing questions, especially *Christian* ones.

*As the servant brings the officer a silver chalice of wine, the officer's eyes remain FIXED on Nicholas.*

NICHOLAS

Why am I here then?

*The officer takes a drink and continues to stare. Nicholas turns and begins to walk away.*

OFFICER

My mother has always spoken highly of you, Nicholas of Myra, or is it Xanthos?

*A stunned Nicholas stops suddenly and turns back around.*

OFFICER

Let me to introduce myself. I am General Constantine, beloved son of Constantius and Helena.

*Constantine downs the remainder of wine with one gulp.*

NICHOLAS

Our first meeting is not as I imagined.

CONSTANTINE

*(to servant)*

More wine.

*(to Nicholas)*

And how did you imagine it?

NICHOLAS

It's just that...

*A thought suddenly hits the priest. He looks away from the general and mutters.*

NICHOLAS

...that you are...here...?

*(looking up at Constantine)*

...on the dais!

*The sentries look at Nicholas bewildered. The priest stares at Constantine.*

NICHOLAS (*whispering*)  
It's you Constantine! It has to be.

*In his eagerness, the priest advances. Four sentries suddenly level their spears and impede his progress. Nicholas is not discouraged.*

NICHOLAS (*passionately*)  
Constantine, listen to me. Something great is at hand here, I feel it. It is the day—the kairos—the God-given time in history. You are empowered. You Constantine can end it once and for all—the deaths, the persecutions, the—

CONSTANTINE  
Man with a silver tongue. I can see what my mother has seen before me.

*Pause. Nicholas is DEFLATED.*

NICHOLAS  
I am a vessel of truth, that's all. Will you not consider my words?

*Constantine stands from the chair.*

CONSTANTINE  
*Please!* All my life my mother has regaled me with grand tales of miracles and mighty men of faith. As I have said to her, it is the sun god only that I recognize. My every want, my every need is seen to, and very soon, very soon now, I will sit on top of the world alongside my father. Where will you be?  
(*to Roman Sentries*)  
Enough of this, send him away.

*The guards start to usher Nicholas away.*

NICHOLAS  
It is written, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord..."

*Constantine watches on from the corner of his eye.*

**INT – ROMAN STREET [DAY]**

*Nicholas is being led up a busy street by the same two guards. As they round a corner they find Carus waiting there with a Praetorian Guardsman to either side of him. The guards salute and come to attention.*

GUARD #1  
Prefect.

GUARD #2  
Prefect.

*Carus returns the salute.*

CARUS  
I will take custody of this man now.

GUARD #1  
Sir?

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN  
The key to his shackles.

*The guard hands him the key.*

**INT – ROMAN COLISEUM – SUBTERRANEAN LEVEL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*Carus, Nicholas and the guardsmen exit a GROANING elevator. Two large gray rats go skittering past.*

NICHOLAS  
You never tire of this, do you Carus?

*The prefect remains silent as they turn a corner and enter a cellblock. Nicholas can hear inmates now. There is LAUGHTER taking place. There is CRYING. There is YELLING. Once they reach the actual cells, the prisoners start to cajole. The cell doors in this area are composed of iron bars.*

SCRAGGLY PRISONER  
Mercy on us. Grant us freedom.

BIG-NOSED PRISONER  
Let me die with dignity. I'll fight  
in the arena. Do you hear me?  
*I'll fight in the arena!*

*Nicholas looks from left to right, searching their faces.*

STOCKY PRISONER  
In here. He's welcome in here.

UGLY PRISONER  
Welcome to the family, boy.

TALL PRISONER

GAP-TOOTHED PRISONER

Hell's bells, looks like someone's  
gonna see *the beast*.

A walking corpse, fellas.

*First one prisoner starts to CLANG the iron bars of his door, and then another, and then ANOTHER. In moments the entire cellblock is in CHORUS. As they turn a corner and enter another corridor, beads of sweat form on Nicholas' brow.*

BALD PRISONER  
Start your prayin', boy.  
Ya hear me?!!

CYNICAL PRISONER  
Prayers aren't heard in hell.

*Just ahead, the corridor dead-ends in front of an overly large cell. No torches are perched outside. The confines of the cell are dank, dark and ominous.*

BEARDED PRISONER  
At least give him a chance. Give him a sword!

CARUS  
Open it.

*The clanging ceases. Nicholas looks around, unsure what to expect. His shackles are removed and he is quickly shoved in. The door CLANGS shut behind him. Everything is dark. Even Carus is a mere shadow.*

CARUS  
I'm not sure what Helena had in mind when she demanded you remain confined *but*, I think this should qualify – a cell; an iron door.  
(to men)  
Did she say anything about a *cellmate*? I can't remember?

*Even in the darkness, the priest can see Carus' smirk. One of the guardsmen brings over a torch from outside another cell. Nicholas can feel everyone's eyes on him. They are expecting something. Aided by the light, he turns around to see the enormity of his quarters. It is not so much a cell as a chamber. At the rear a large opening appears in the wall. It is hidden from view. But what captures Nicholas' attention are the piles of human bones off to one corner. There a helmet, two shields, and a broken short sword lay. Numerous skulls and skeletal remains lay shattered and crushed. Suddenly a sharp NOISE comes from the rear of the cell, then heavy FOOTSTEPS.*

GANGLY PRISONER (O.S.)  
He's coming, I hear him!

*Nicholas looks over at Carus.*

CARUS

Welcome to the Valley of the Shadow of  
Death, priest.

BEARDED PRISONER (O.S.)  
Give him a chance!

CYNICAL PRISONER (O.S.)  
Go down fighting like a man.

*The sounds grow closer, SPLASHING footfalls. Nicholas fixes his eyes on the opening. Just then a large head peers from the wall, a tiny eye glaring at him, GLINTING RED off the firelight like a demon from Hell. Suddenly there comes a rumbling, almost inhuman GROWL. The thing emerges from the hole.*

BALD PRISONER (O.S.)  
*Damn you to hell beast!*

NICHOLAS (*whispering*)  
God in heaven!

*Fitted in a torn dirt-laden smock, the BEAST is a sight to behold. A crop of long, white hair crowns the man's head in matted clumps. A beard wild and gray dangles from his chin. The skin is black, the body large and muscular. Several broken teeth lend the impression of fangs, and a recess in the face is noted, where an eye had once been.*

*The growling persists. Nicholas remains quietly in place, as the force of its anger seems to build with every approaching step. No one says a word now, all eyes riveted on the unfolding event. As the beast gets to within a foot of the priest, it's YELLING, RANTING, and RAVING at a fever pitch. Spittle flies, hands clinch and flail at the air. In its stark raving madness, it starts to circle the priest like a vicious predator, bumping him, prodding him to some form of action, some evidence of fear. Yet through it all, Nicholas remains composed. The beast's anger intensifies. Finally, the priest closes his eyes. A guardsman glances from Carus to the beast in concern.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN  
Hit him you stupid animal.

*The beast ambles over to a crude wooden table and with little effort, tears off a leg. With a thunderous YELL the man raises the leg over his head and crosses over to Nicholas.*

BEARDED PRISONER  
Let him out!

CYNICAL PRISONER  
Who's the monster Carus,  
you or the beast?

*The priest opens his eyes to see the beast about to strike him down. Suddenly there is something familiar in its face. Instantly a memory comes flooding back and he is in the woods again as a child. Back to the time he first encountered Carus. Back to the time he was given a wooden carving from a captive black man. Nicholas softly voices the words he recalls...*

NICHOLAS

To live is Christ...and to die is gain.

*The response is immediate. The beast looks at Nicholas as he might a ghost. The growling ceases and one hand comes down slowly, while another goes up to its forehead. It appears to be suffering from an internal conflict. Finally after a long pause it turns, the wooden leg dropping to the ground. It then limps slowly to the crevice and disappears inside.*

GANGLY PRISONER

The beast backed down. *The man lives!*

*A CHEER goes up among the cellmates. A slack-jawed Carus is livid. His face is FLUSH. The CLANGING on the iron bars begins again.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

What kind of sorcery is this?

CARUS

No food rations. No water. Do you hear me?

*The guardsmen nod and follow after Carus as he storms down the corridor. Nicholas finally draws a deep breath.*

**INT – ROMAN COLISEUM – SUBTERRANEAN LEVEL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*A guard is about to pass an empty cell. Suddenly we hear a cat's meow coming from inside. The puzzled guard stops and pulls open the unlocked door. He peers inside and immediately goes limp, crumpling to the floor. The next thing we see is the body being dragged inside.*

**INT – NICHOLAS' HOLDING CELL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*Nicholas and the group of cellmates are standing at their doors.*

BEARDED PRISONER

...you're a priest?

GANGLY PRISONER

So it was magic you worked on the beast?

BALD PRISONER

It was a miracle, fool!

CYNICAL PRISONER

Right! Miracles? If that was the case, why doesn't he miracle himself right out of here?

GANGLY PRISONER

Probably could if he wanted.

BALD PRISONER

Then why wouldn't he, oaf?

GANGLY PRISONER

Maybe to try and keep your stinkin' soul from hell.

CYNICAL PRISONER

Gaianos you little weasel, I'm going straight for you when I'm free!

NICHOLAS

Stop! It wasn't sorcery.

BEARDED PRISONER

What was it then? Why did the creature back down?

NICHOLAS

Because he's a god-fearing man and not an animal.

BEARDED PRISONER

Well just so you know, we don't deal in God down here.

NICHOLAS

What do you deal with?

BEARDED PRISONER

Swords. That's where our freedom lies.

NICHOLAS

Freedom? I've never known a sword that can offer freedom.

CYNICAL PRISONER

If we win enough contests, yes.

NICHOLAS

And if you should lose a contest?

*Silence. The bearded prisoner simply smirks. Nicholas turns to glare at the opening.*

BEARDED PRISONER

I am Lucca. The bald one is Celadus...

*(points to gangly prisoner)*

...that one is Gaianos the skinny...

*(points to cynical prisoner)*

...and this is Octavio. So you wondering about your cellmate?

NICHOLAS

Yes. What is his real name?

LUCCA

Tierus I think! Been in here for well over a decade and left to rot. Said he was a quite a man at one time. They forced him to fight in the coliseum several times but they couldn't kill him. So instead they just leave him here.

CELADUS

Yeah, a man with a broken spirit.

GAIANOS

They broke more than that. It's said they ripped the tongue from his mouth because he wouldn't stop preaching.

OCTAVIO

Yeah, he's on the other side now—completely mad.

*Nicholas looks over his shoulder in the direction of the crevice.*

NICHOLAS

What of all of you?

LUCCA

When the gladiatorial contests begin again, they'll put a sword in our hands and force us to fight.

*At the opposite end of the corridor, a guard turns the corner. Everyone goes quiet. As he marches in Nicholas' direction, he is looking carefully into each cell. It is apparent the guard is neither big in stature, nor muscular. Finally the guard looks over and sights Nicholas. He jaunts quickly up to the cell.*

CELADUS

By the blood of my kin, I know I been in here  
a long time when recruits start looking green  
as a cucumber and just as ugly.

GUARD

Hey, shut up?

(to Nicholas)

Remember me, Christian?

*Griff removes the helmet from his head. Shock registers on Nicholas' face.*

GAIANOS

Who is he?

GRIFF

About the last person you expected, right?

NICHOLAS (shaking head)

What are you—what are you doing here?

GRIFF

I guess I'm...well, here for you.

NICHOLAS

You followed me from Myra?

*The youth nods. Nicholas half-laughs at the irony.*

NICHOLAS

I'm sorry, your name escapes me?

GRIFF

Griff.

*A stunned Nicholas looks around. There is no one in sight.*

NICHOLAS

Thank you, Griff. I'm...everyone in the  
village...how are they?

GRIFF

Everyone's fine. They're holding prayer  
vigilance and stuff like that.

*The priest chuckles and is obviously moved when he goes suddenly somber. Griff senses it.*

GRIFF

Teresa is fine too. Here, she asked me to return this...

*Griff pulls out his cross. Nicholas' face lights up as he takes it.*

NICHOLAS

My cross!

*Griff looks over his shoulder to find all of the cellmates watching intently.*

GRIFF

What are you all looking at?

GAIANOS (*excited*)

Can I have one too?

*The prisoners break out in LAUGHTER.*

GAIANOS (*excited*)

What? I see miracles; I start to believe.

*Heavy FOOTFALLS are heard. Men are approaching.*

GRIFF

They must have found him!

*Griff looks around for a place to hide.*

NICHOLAS

Found who? Griff?

*The cell opposite Nicholas' is free. Griff disappears inside as the footsteps grow louder.*

NICHOLAS

Please—all of you...say nothing.

*Six legionaries round the corner and come trotting into their block.*

LEADER

Account for every man.

*The soldiers are doing a cursory check of the inmates. In moments they reach Nicholas' cell. They halt in front, looking puzzled.*

LEGIONARY IN COLISEUM

Everyone's here.

*The leader glares suspiciously at Nicholas.*

LEADER

Too bad it wasn't you. Carus would have enjoyed the excuse.

*The priest says nothing. The leader then looks suspiciously into Griff's open cell. Nicholas holds his breath.*

LEADER

Was this cell empty?

LEGIONARY IN COLISEUM

It was yesterday.

NICHOLAS

Say, I'm *hungry*. When can I get some food?

*Distracted, the leader addresses the priest.*

LEADER

As soon as the next rat goes scurrying into your cell!

(*to men*)

Let's go. That fool Brigatus probably lost his armor in another foolish wager.

*The leader turns and leads his men away.*

LEGIONARY IN COLISEUM

Where'd he get the knock on the head then?

*We hear a loud CLANG!!!*

LEGIONARY IN COLISEUM (O.S.)

Ouch!!!

NICHOLAS

Griff?

*The young man appears at the edge of his cell with a disgruntled look on his face.*

GRIFF

Not bad, Christian. Not bad.

**EXT – ENEMY ENCAMPMENT OUTSIDE ROME [DUSK]**

*A large open field is harboring thousands of Roman legionaries from the east. They are readying for war and pooling their forces.*

**INT – NICHOLAS' CELL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*Nicholas is addressing the prisoners from his cell. They all listen attentively.*

NICHOLAS

I think you should wait. If they remain suspicious they'll be looking for you.

GRIFF

Look, I got this far, I can do this, I can find the keys.

LUCCA

The wonder worker's right, ya outta wait a while, kid. You look like you ain't slept in ages anyway. Catch up while you can.

GRIFF

I could close my eyes for a few minutes.

*Nicholas nods. The prisoners decide to retire into their cells. Nicholas looks briefly at Griff before glancing over his shoulder.*

NICHOLAS

I hoped he would come out by now.

GRIFF

Who?

*Nicholas takes the torch hanging outside his cell and disappears.*

GRIFF

Is someone in there with you? Christian?

**INT – NICHOLAS' CELL / CREVICE IN WALL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*With torch in hand, Nicholas peeps through the crevice. As evidenced by the light, the chamber extends well beyond. The priest enters through the hole and decides to press on. There is a slow drip drop as water seeps from the cave wall. But even more audible is a steady and rhythmic SCRAPING. Nicholas continues on about twenty feet when he enters what*

*appears to be a large, ancient looking chamber with wooden pillars supporting the cave walls. Oddly the wooden posts are chewed up. Large chunks have been removed in almost every one. Dust and dirt sediment fall steadily to the floor as a result of their waning support. Nicholas takes a few more steps and illuminates a corner in so doing. There he finds Tierus, whittling on a wooden object. The priest moves cautiously forward.*

NICHOLAS

Hello...Tierus. I am Nicholas.

*As the light grows brighter, the man growls in warning. He raises a hand to shield his sensitive eye.*

NICHOLAS

I'm sorry. Let me...I'll put it down.

*Nicholas wedges the torch between two boulders and discovers a CACHE of wooden figurines. There are literally hundreds of them in varying shapes and sizes.*

NICHOLAS

This is amazing. It must have taken...!

*He looks over his shoulder to see Tierus look down. He has stopped whittling.*

NICHOLAS

I don't know if you remember...you once gave me a wooden figure. I was just a boy.

*Tierus just continues to look away.*

NICHOLAS

It meant a lot to me, I want you to know that.

*The man raises his head slightly but doesn't look up.*

NICHOLAS

In fact, more than you'll ever know. Thank you for that!

*Nicholas retrieves the torch and walks away.*

**EXT – BATTLEFIELD NORTH OF ROME [DAY]**

*The Roman forces of the west and east stand at the ready, a half-mile from one another, each army awaiting word that will send them into battle. It is a tense moment. All is quiet. At the head of the western forces sits a man astride his stallion. He appears to be about fifty, stone-*

*faced with graying hair. To either side of him are his officials, and behind them thousands of foot soldiers and horsemen.*

LEGATUS

We are ready, Constantius!

*With a sullen expression, Constantius turns to the general.*

CONSTANTIUS

This is as it must be then?

*The man nods. Constantius turns to his soldiers, who are anxiously awaiting his word.*

CONSTANTIUS

*Charge!*

*A BATTLE CRY goes up.*

**INT – NICHOLAS' CELL BLOCK [TORCHLIGHT]**

*Griff has been out. He RUSHES down the cellblock and back to his cell. Nicholas is anxiously awaiting.*

GRIFF

Guards are coming—and listen.

NICHOLAS

What is it?

*He peers down to the end of the corridor. The sound of MARCHING troops is heard.*

GRIFF

Diocletian's successor—Constantius was killed today!

*Nicholas cannot hide his dismay. A contingent of legionaries comes into view.*

LEADER

Everyone of them but the last!

*The soldiers start to open all four cells, ushering Lucca, Celadus, Gaianos, and Octavio into a single column and out of the corridor – everyone but Nicholas.*

LEADER

Bring the torches too.

*The soldiers take the torches hanging outside their cells.*

NICHOLAS

Where are you taking them?

*The leader does not respond as they are shuffled away. After a few long moments, a figure rounds the corner and approaches. In the pervading darkness, the person is indiscernible. As the light of Nicholas' torch reaches the man's face, we see it is Constantine. He appears disheveled and unsteady. A silver goblet of wine is in one hand. He walks right up to Nicholas as Griff dares to poke his head from his cell for a quick glance.*

CONSTANTINE

'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord',  
that's the last thing you said to me right? You  
said that? Well there is something you may  
want to know...the prisoner's life is in the  
hand of his ruler.

*Nicholas gives no response.*

CONSTANTINE

What? No questions? No fearless words?

*The general leans against a cell. The priest's eyes go to the cup in his hand.*

NICHOLAS

I heard of your father's death. I'm sorry.

*Taken aback by the remark, Constantine accidentally SPILLS his wine.*

CONSTANTINE

*Curses!*

*In anger he FLINGS the cup. It goes skipping down the corridor.*

CONSTANTINE

So even the pangs of isolation do little to quell  
the news of an caesar's death. Interesting!  
Why don't you tell me—what fate does your  
God have for my father?

NICHOLAS (*shaking head*)

Judgment is reserved for God alone, I don't  
know.

*There comes a sobering conviction in Constantine's eyes.*

CONSTANTINE

Well just suppose that I expressed an interest in your God. Show me something...some form of proof that might lead me to believe.

NICHOLAS

He's not a subject of the Empire to be tested, Constantine. He is God the Father.

CONSTANTINE (*livid*)

*What?* Damn you! I go now to war under light of new day outmanned four to one. Death for me is imminent, and you stand there—alive and well and...hell with this!

*Constantine's hand goes to his sword. He pulls it out in dramatic fashion and wields it as if he might strike Nicholas. The priest continues to show no fear.*

CONSTANTINE

*Arrghh!*

*Instead Constantine turns and STRIKES at anything in his way, cell doors and wall alike. sparks go flying from the force of his strikes. Nicholas can only watch the man vent his anger. After a few minutes the general begins to tire. He drops to his knees and starts to ramble.*

CONSTANTINE

My father's dead and my life—short lived for what? A meaningless death upon a forgotten battlefield?

*A pause.*

NICHOLAS

Constantine, open your eyes and see for the first time. For all the power of the Roman Empire, the prestige...they serve you naught—for a man's mind and body...a man's very soul is beholding to God alone. Without this—this simple truth—there can be no true sense of purpose! Separate today from tomorrow. For the sake of mankind Constantine, help us to *know* a new tomorrow.

*Another pause.*

CONSTANTINE

Perhaps we are similar as my mother has said...each to a shared fate. Well...like you, Nicholas, I will walk bravely forward till my destiny finds me.

*Constantine comes to his feet and resheathes his sword.*

CONSTANTINE

I will go and fight to my end if necessary, but I do so with the noble heart of my father, and the grace of my Christian mother.

*Nicholas looks down at his cross momentarily. He thinks to removes it from his neck.*

NICHOLAS

Constantine, take this. It was given to me by your mother years ago. May it bless you.

*With great surprise on his face, Constantine walks over and takes it.*

CONSTANTINE

Thank you. My mother's influence was always there wasn't it?

*The priest nods.*

CONSTANTINE

There is no word from her, she has disappeared. Ask your God for me...

*The general hesitates, struggling to voice the words.*

CONSTANTINE

...ask him not to take her too...do that for me.

*The general clears his throat, turns his heels and heads back down the corridor.*

**EXT – SION MONASTERY [DAY]**

*As Nicander is out strolling the grounds, a man on horseback comes galloping up. There is urgency on the man's face.*

MESSENGER

Good abbot, this is for you.

*Nicander takes the offered note and examines it. After he has a moment to digest it, he glances up at the man with an INCREDULOUS expression.*

NICANDER

An army marches on Rome. Civil war is here.

*The abbot looks out at the distance as he ponders. He then addresses the man again.*

NICANDER

Can you send a message to Myra?

MESSENGER

Of course!

**INT – NICHOLAS' CELL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*Nicholas and Griff are lying in their cells, each with their backs to one another.*

GRIFF

...it doesn't matter how sincere he sounded,  
Christian. I say you can't trust anyone.

NICHOLAS

Yet you seem to trust me.

*Griff searches for a response, but cannot find one.*

NICHOLAS

There is nothing too great for God, my friend.  
Why do you think you're here?

*Nicholas adjusts his head and closes his eyes.*

**EXT – WHITE SANDY BEACH [DAY]**

*Nicholas finds himself miraculously transported to the safety of the white sandy beach again. Around his neck is his wooden cross. He spins around in utter confusion, taking in his surroundings. There is a RINGING sound in his head. Suddenly the WHITE LIGHT envelops him again. As his searching eyes look up, he must shield them. And then his mouth goes open wide. There before him is the same being of sheer perfection; a powerfully built ANGEL with golden-brown wings. Nicholas stumbles in shock and drops to his knees. With a look of unconditional love and understanding, the angel begins to communicate.*

ANGEL

Hear me child, for I speak.

*Nicholas' face brightens.*

NICHOLAS

I can hear you now. I can...I hear?

*The angel hovers before him.*

ANGEL

Such genuine love have ye known. By your faith alone do you stand before me. And so let it be: make known your will to the Father, the Creator of all under heaven and earth.

*The being smiles with incomparable beauty. The priest pauses a moment before responding.*

NICHOLAS

Lend me the power, the ability to bring change into the world, the ability to end the plight and long-suffering of those who have chosen faith. If I could have but this I...

*The being nods and spreads its hands out over Nicholas' head. A magical light of millions of glittering particles ENVELOPS him. The priest watches in wonder.*

ANGEL

Child of God, take heed. Let you become a sign then, that the world may know. Go now and proclaim God's will.

NICHOLAS

What is...what is that will?

ANGEL

*Behold! The power and the glory!*

*The angel spreads its arms out wide. Suddenly thousands of Roman soldiers take form. Crosses the size of a sword start to materialize in their very hands. As one, they raise their arms into the air and ROAR.*

SOLDIERS (*collectively*)

In this conquer! *In this conquer!* IN THIS CONQUER!

**INT – NICHOLAS' CELL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*Nicholas comes AWAKE. He gathers himself a moment and then edges to the end of his cell.*

NICHOLAS

Griff! Griff!

*Griff comes into view from his cell. He has just awakened.*

GRIFF

What is it, Christian? What's wrong?

NICHOLAS

You have to find Constantine! It's urgent!

GRIFF

You want me to find...the general guy?

NICHOLAS

Griff! Listen to me. Things are beginning to make sense now! It's imperative that you find him!

*Although confused, the youth is convinced by Nicholas' sense of urgency. He nods.*

NICHOLAS

Good. I want you to bring him here if you can. If it's too late, if he has already left...then head straight for his camp.

*(pause)*

You have to find him Griff.

GRIFF *(nodding)*

What is the message?

**EXT – ENTRANCE GATES OF ROME [DAWN]**

*A group of ten legionaries and Constantine are riding from the city gates.*

**INT – NICHOLAS' CELL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*Griff steps into the corridor before Nicholas' cell. The priest is somber.*

NICHOLAS

Griff. About Teresa...if I—

GRIFF

No! You'll *be* here when I get back.

*Nicholas nods. Griff then turns and RACES down the cellblock.*

LUCCA (O.S.)  
Don't forget our address kid.

**INT – ROMAN COLISEUM – SUBTERRANEAN LEVEL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*Griff moves cautiously down a corridor. As he reaches an intersection of cellblocks, he finds several soldiers gathered. He moves past them discretely.*

SOLDIER IN CORRIDOR (O.S.)  
You! What are you doing?

*Masking his fear, Griff turns to see the soldier addressing a guard. After a sigh of relief, the youth steps up his pace and presses forward.*

**INT – ROMAN COLISEUM [DAWN]**

*Peering to and fro, Griff walks casually out of the coliseum. As he chances a last look over his shoulder, he turns back around and walks into a stocky soldier. The man glares at him suspiciously before tipping his head in greeting and walking away. The youth does likewise and continues into the street to an unattended horse. Wasting no time, he looks around once, mounts the animal, and RIDES off like there's no tomorrow.*

**EXT – FORESTED OUTSKIRTS OF ROME [DAY]**

*Griff is seen astride the steed and riding as fast as possible.*

**EXT – CONSTANTINE'S ENCAMPMENT [DAY]**

*As Griff enters a clearing the sight of thousands of soldiers greets him. His mouth goes open wide at the sheer number.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN (O.S.)  
Halt! Who goes there?

*Almost immediately members of the Praetorian Guard confront him.*

GRIFF  
I've a message for Constantine.

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN  
I'll bet you do.

(to men)  
Get him off that horse!

GRIFF

No wait!

*Realizing that the men intend to bar his way, Griff SPURS his horse forward, firing right past them.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

Stop him! *Stop him!*

**INT – CONSTANTINE’S TENT [DAY]**

*Constantine is joined by several officers, mapping out plans. A tribune among them notices as the general is placing something around his neck.*

TRIBUNE

What is that? It almost looks like one of those Christian symbols you see.

CONSTANTINE

That’s because it is.

*The room goes quiet. Each officer turns and glares at the object and then one another. Suddenly a number of raised VOICES are audible from outside.*

GRIFF (O.S.)

*General Constantine! General are you in there?*

*Constantine looks at his men in confusion.*

**EXT – CONSTANTINE’S TENT [DAY]**

*Constantine and his officers exit the tent. A spent Griff rides up and halts.*

GRIFF

Sir, I must have a word with you?

*The general gazes at the boy in trepidation.*

GRIFF

Please! I come with message from Nicholas.

*The general’s expression changes. The tribune at his side turns to him in confusion.*

**EXT – CONSTANTINE’S ENCAMPMENT [DAY]**

*Several hundred feet away, Carus and a mustached guardsman emerge from a tent. Four guardsmen are in pursuit of Griff when he stops them.*

CARUS

What is it? What's going on?

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

Prefect, an unauthorized man has entered the camp. He's headed for the general.

*Carus pulls his sword from its sheathe and races toward the general's tent.*

CARUS

Let's go.

*(to mustached guardsman)*

*Antonius come!*

**INT – CONSTANTINE'S TENT [DAY]**

*Constantine and Griff are alone inside the tent. The youth gulps down a cup full of water and turns to the general.*

**EXT – CONSTANTINE'S TENT [DAY]**

*Carus and his guardsmen come racing up to the tent. Constantine's officers stand outside looking bewildered.*

CARUS

What is going on?

CENTURION

The general has a visitor. He is to be left alone.

CARUS

Visitor? Who?

CENTURION

I don't know the young man's identity, but it appeared urgent.

*With a trace of alarm, Carus turns to his men.*

CARUS

You're dismissed. Return to your posts.

*All but Antonius departs. Carus makes a slight nod to the man and together they walk around to the back of the tent, escaping notice.*

**INT – CONSTANTINE’S TENT [DAY]**

*Griff is looking hard at Constantine. The general appears uncomfortable and is pacing.*

CONSTANTINE

An angel? An army? This is all so...!

*A few feet away, the general stops and extends Griff a beseeching glare.*

CONSTANTINE

Say again. What were his exact words?

*Griff reaches out and touches the cross around the general’s neck.*

GRIFF

“In this conquer,” he said. “In this conquer!”

*The general looks Griff straight in the eyes.*

**EXT – CONSTANTINE’S TENT [DAY]**

*Constantine and Griff emerge from the tent. The officers stand at attention.*

CONSTANTINE

A provisions officer, I need one now!

*Undetected, Carus and Antonius edge away. The prefect turns to his guardsman.*

CARUS

Bring him to me.

*Antonius nods once and glares at the youth.*

**EXT – CONSTANTINE’S ENCAMPMENT / PROVISIONARY TABLE [DUSK]**

*From a nearby table, Griff watches the proceedings. He is chewing on a piece of bread and washing it down with water. Countless legionaries are set in motion, laying their shields in a large pile as a group of servants paint crosses on them.*

ANTONIUS (O.S.)

On behalf of the men, I would like to say  
thank you, young man.

*Griff turns to see a grinning Antonius addressing him. He is dressed as an officer. The man extends his arm for the shaking. The youth takes it.*

GRIFF

You're welcome.

ANTONIUS

I can't begin to tell you what this will mean if it should work. Anyway, Constantine has asked me to call on you. He has another question regarding Nicholas.

*With innate distrust, Griff glances about in suspicion, then nods.*

**EXT – AREA OUTSIDE CONSTANTINE'S ENCAMPMENT [DUSK]**

*Away from the encampment, Antonius turns to Griff.*

ANTONIUS

There...he's just over there.

*As Griff steps into an area concealed by brush, he finds Carus and his guardsmen waiting. The youth turns to see Antonius STRIKE him across the top of his head.*

**EXT – CONSTANTINE'S TENT [DUSK]**

*Constantine exits his tent and looks around. He addresses the sentries standing outside.*

CONSTANTINE

Have either of you seen the boy?

SENTRY #1

No sir!

SENTRY #2

No!

*The general glances in several directions.*

**EXT – AREA OUTSIDE CONSTANTINE'S ENCAMPMENT [NIGHT]**

*Griff is bound at the wrists to an overhanging tree branch. He appears to be beaten into submission; his face bloodied and bruised. In a casual demeanor, Antonius turns from him and approaches Carus.*

ANTONIUS

He's not talking. I need more time.

CARUS

We don't have time. Anyway, it doesn't matter now. Ready yourself. You know where to find General Maxentius?

*The man nods.*

CARUS

Tell him our army is set to strike as they reach the Milvian Bridge. If he can circle his men along their flanks, they can be boxed in. His army will slaughter Constantine and his soldiers where they stand. Give him this if he should question you.

*Carus removes his signet ring and tosses it to Antonius. The henchman snares it.*

CARUS

Oh, and make sure he knows Constantine's army is the one with the crosses painted across their shields.

*The guardsmen start to laugh. Antonius mounts his horse and addresses them.*

ANTONIUS

Finish off the boy...?  
(peering to and fro)  
Where is he? Where...?

*The guardsmen glance around in confusion. Only a dangling rope remains tied to the tree.*

CARUS

Blasted! Find him!

*After a momentary glare Antonius rides away.*

**EXT – EDGE OF CONSTANTINE'S ENCAMPMENT [NIGHT]**

*Griff runs into the camp where the horses are rounded up. He slips into their midst, leaps on one of the horses and rides off.*

**EXT – AREA OUTSIDE CONSTANTINE'S ENCAMPMENT [NIGHT]**

*A guardsman comes running up to Carus. The prefect is climbing his steed.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

He's managed to elude us so far, prefect.

CARUS

Post men around Constantine. If he shows up, drive a spear into his back.

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

You don't think he's trying to keep the message from reaching—

CARUS

How? By chasing down Antonius? A boy? Foolish! Now I'm taking my leave. I have some unfinished business with a priest.

*The prefect rides off.*

**EXT – CONSTANTINE'S ENCAMPMENT / PROVISIONARY TABLE [NIGHT]**

*Constantine examines the sea of painted shields before looking up with a worried expression.*

**EXT – FOREST TRAIL OUTSIDE ROME [NIGHT]**

*Antonius has stopped at a river. He is dousing his face with water. As the ripples in the water subside, his reflection becomes clear under a ghostly full moon. Suddenly we see Griff's REFLECTION as well.*

GRIFF

I understand you're looking for me?

*The henchman swings around just as Griff KICKS him in the face. He falls backward into the water. There is a large SPLASH. With his armor weighing him down, he struggles to rise. The youth pounces on him and begins to PUMMEL him mercilessly. Somehow the larger man pulls Griff into the water with him. Their bodies disappear beneath the surface.*

**EXT – ANOTHER FOREST TRAIL OUTSIDE ROME [NIGHT]**

*Darkness has fallen and storm clouds are forming. It is cold and bleak. From afar, we see a man on horseback, approaching at BREAKNECK SPEED. As his figure fills the screen, we see it is Carus, the very picture of hatred. Suddenly out of nowhere, a large reindeer LEAPS in front of the prefect's stallion. The two animals go careening into each other and Carus FALLS hard to the floor. The horse continues to run away in fright. When Carus finally comes to his feet, we see one of his left fingers bent back unnaturally. He simply grabs the dislocated finger with his right hand and jerks on it. We hear a SNAP.*

CARUS

Arrggh!

**EXT – HILL OVERLOOKING MILVIAN BRIDGE [NIGHT]**

*Thunder RUMBLES in the distance. On horseback, Constantine and his forces come to a halt at the top of a large hill. Down below is a bridge. The general turns to his officers.*

CONSTANTINE

Carus? I haven't seen him?

*The officers look at one another perplexed.*

CENTURION

Last I saw him, it was outside your tent, sir.

CONSTANTINE

My tent?

CENTURION (*nodding*)

When the boy first arrived. He seemed ill at ease.

*The general appears stunned by the revelation.*

CONSTANTINE (*muttering*)

Carus? *It's you!*

CENTURION

Sir?

*A scout on horseback comes racing up the hill at them.*

SCOUT

Sir, they're approaching the bridge now.

*With a game face, Constantine turns and addresses his officers.*

CONSTANTINE

Make ready for battle. Remain hidden till I give the word.

*The officers salute and scurry off. Constantine examines the cross around his neck a moment, before looking down at the bridge. Overhead, the full moon peaks through the clouds.*

CONSTANTINE

If you're truly there...may it be Your hand that guides...

**EXT – SION MONASTERY [NIGHT]**

*Nicander is sitting in his study. There is a knock on the door.*

NICANDER

Come in.

*Padius opens the door and admits the messenger through the door.*

MESSENGER

From governor Sylvio of Myra, sir.

*The man hands the abbot some parchment. Nicander unfolds it and reads through it quickly. A moment later he looks away in deep shock, crumpling the message in his hand.*

**EXT – HILL OVERLOOKING MILVIAN BRIDGE [NIGHT]**

*Hundreds of enemy soldiers are making their way across the bridge. The general has a hand up to steady his forces. Finally as the moment arrives, his hand DROPS.*

CONSTANTINE

*For God and country!*

*Driven by the battle cry, a wave of soldiers goes SURGING over the hill and down toward the bridge. Freshly painted crosses still drip from some of the shields.*

**EXT – MILVIAN BRIDGE [NIGHT]**

*On the bridge, soldiers of the eastern forces look up to see the western army advancing.*

ENEMY CENTURION

Quickly, off the bridge. *Move!*

*Too late! Hundreds of Constantine's archers reach the shore of the Tiber River, withdraw their arrows and fire. The projectiles go sailing high into the air only to arch back down into their intended victims. Screams and cries are heard. Many of the soldiers choose to leap into the river, only to find themselves struggling to remove their heavy body armor.*

*The battle is in FULL SWING. At one end of the bridge, Constantine is leading a team of horsemen. A centurion points at a concentration of enemy soldiers.*

CENTURION

There he is, sir. *General Maxentius!*

*Constantine's eyes lock on a MAN a hundred yards away. He is outfitted in a fanciful silver and gold chestplate. A distinctive crest extends over the top of his helmet, and a black cape falls down his back. An instant later, the enemy commander sights Constantine. Simultaneously they charge one another, their subjects right behind.*

**EXT – ENTRANCE GATES OF ROME [DAWN]**

*Steady sprinkles have begun. The day is terribly overcast. A soaked Carus walks through the gates. The two sentries salute him. He only continues on his way.*

**EXT – VILLAGE STREET IN ROME [DAWN]**

*The streets are eerily empty. Still Carus continues on.*

**EXT – ROMAN COLISEUM [DAWN]**

*As he marches up to the stadium, Carus engages a group of guardsmen standing outside. They salute him.*

**CARUS**

Four of you, follow me. The rest of you, round up every available guardsmen and meet me in the Coliseum. *Now move!*

*Four of the men fall into step behind the prefect. The rest dash off. It has begun to rain.*

**EXT – NICHOLAS' CELL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*All is quiet. The prisoners are asleep. The camera pans wider and we see Nicholas sitting with his legs crossed in front, and his hands together in prayer. Suddenly there is COMMOTION at the end of the corridor. The priest looks up. Two guards have rounded the corner and are advancing in his direction. Four more men appear behind them. They are guardsmen. The prisoners are slowly coming awake. As the party reaches his cell, the guards unlock the door. Nicholas remains impassive. Lucca edges to his door.*

**LUCCA**

What are you animals doing here now?

*Suddenly the guardsmen look at one another and nod. Without warning, they unsheathe their swords and CUT DOWN the two unsuspecting guards. Nicholas steps outside his cell in an attempt to intercede, but is immediately STRUCK DOWN by a guardsman. He FALLS to his knees. The prisoners are up in arms, SWEARING and CURSING.*

**PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN**

Hurry up. Let's get him to the arena.

*Nicholas is helped to his feet. As they begin to walk away, there is a familiar GROWLING in the background. The guardsmen turn to see Tierus charging from his crevice. An astute guardsman races to the door and SLAMS it shut just before the large man can reach it. Tierus throws himself at the bars in anger. The astute guardsman backs away quickly and returns to his compatriots.*

ASTUTE GUARDSMAN

Go! Let's go!

*With Tierus RANTING and RAVING behind them, the wide-eyed guardsmen scurry off. At the end of the cellblock is a stone-faced Carus.*

**EXT – COLISEUM IN ROME [DAY]**

*It is pouring outside now. THUNDER and LIGHTNING blast overhead. The massive structure is empty, its atmosphere foreboding. Nicholas is in the middle of the arena, surrounded by twenty guardsmen and Carus, who is glaring at him. An official suddenly enters the arena at the far end and approaches quickly.*

OFFICIAL

What is going on out here? Carus? Is that you?

**INT – LUCCA' CELL [TORCHLIGHT]**

*An angry Lucca is propped against a cell wall.*

LUCCA

If I ever, ever get out of here...

*Suddenly a hand goes to the lock of his cell and a key is slipped inside. There is a CLICK and the door SWINGS open. Lucca turns to look.*

LUCCA

Well, damn if you didn't come back.

*A battered looking Griff is staring across at him. He has a flesh wound on one shoulder.*

GRIFF

You just gonna stand there?

LUCCA

You look a mess, kid. Toss it to me...

*Griff tosses Lucca the key and leans against a wall in exhaustion. The man then crosses from cell to cell, opening each one. As he reaches Nicholas' cell he hesitates. Griff notes the*

*reluctance from the corner of his eye. From the rear of the cell, Tierus' shadowed form EMERGES. The large man walks up and looks Lucca dead in the eyes. Then with unspoken understanding, Lucca unlocks the door. A moment later the large man steps out to stand with the rest of the prisoners. He takes in his surroundings, as though he might be seeing it for the first time. For a tense moment all eyes are on him. Then uncharacteristically, a single tear streams down the man's cheek. The inmates look on in admiration. Suddenly Tierus moves past them, marching with a determined look on his face. The prisoners follow a step behind.*

LUCCA

We'll have to fight our way out, boys.

*(to Griff)*

Got you any weapons?

GRIFF

I got something better—a pass to freedom.

*Griff opens his palm to expose the signet ring of the Roman Prefect.*

**EXT – COLISEUM IN ROME [DAY]**

*There is a CRACK of thunder. The official is standing before Carus, in the midst of the guardsmen.*

CARUS

Are you questioning my authority?

OFFICIAL

Are you questioning mine? Why aren't you on the battlefield Carus?

CARUS

I don't like where this is going, John, but all right, out of respect to you...

*Carus starts to creep toward to the man. His hand drops unnoticed to the hilt of his dagger.*

CARUS

...this man is a spy. Already hundreds of our men have fallen on the battlefield. All because of him.

*In ignorance, the custodian allows the prefect to move into position behind him.*

CARUS

So I came back—to kill!

*Carus seizes the official and DRIVES the blade into his back. The man lets out a blood curdling CRY and falls away dead. Nicholas watches in horror, held in check.*

NICHOLAS

You're mad, Carus! *Inhuman!*

CARUS (*gloating*)

Call me a wolf, priest.

*Nicholas suddenly realizes a truth. His eyes go to the prefect's hair—the white patch.*

NICHOLAS (*to himself*)

Wolf?

CARUS (*to guardsmen*)

Give him a sword and a shield.

*A guardsman tosses his shield and sword at the priest's feet. The storm is growing stronger.*

CARUS

Pick it up! Here's your chance to avenge me!

NICHOLAS

You will *surely* be avenged Carus, but not by my hand.

CARUS

*Pick it up!*

*The unflinching priest remains where he stands. Suddenly the gate to the arena CREAKS. All of the guardsmen turn to see Tierus entering.*

PRAETORIAN GUARDSMAN

It's the Beast!

*The large man advances fearlessly toward Carus. Griff appears behind him, followed by several soldiers and gladiator-trained prisoners, including Lucca, Celadus, Gaianos, and Octavio.*

GRIFF (*yelling*)

Carus is a fake! He has betrayed you...he is in league with Maxentius!

*The guardsmen appear confused. Griff raises the prefect's signet ring above his head.*

GRIFF

Carus, does this belong to you?

*He then FLINGS it at the leader. Carus turns livid as it rolls to a stop at his feet. His face contorts and hatred burns in his eyes.*

CARUS

Get them! Get them all!

*PANDEMONIUM erupts as the two factions begin to fight. Thunder and lightning are directly overhead now. One guardsman takes a swipe at Tierus with his short sword. The big man evades it, takes hold of his foe, lifts and TOSSES him at a charging guardsman. Nicholas glances over to see Carus dispatch of a soldier. The prefect then heads for Tierus, coming up behind and ready to strike. A guardsman suddenly engages Tierus hand to hand.*

NICHOLAS

Tierus!

*In one fluid motion, the big man SWINGS the guardsman around to take Carus' blade in the back. Just then another guardsman leaps onto Tierus' back. The priest charges forward.*

NICHOLAS

No!

*Carus pulls his sword free from the guardsman's body and strikes at Nicholas. The priest turns his head in time to avoid the blade's edge, but not its flat side. There is a terrible CLANG and he falls abruptly to the floor. Moments of blackness and flashes of light follow. Garbled VOICES, YELLING and CRYING are heard, and then the words, "Let me live my life as once I asked," echo in his mind. Immediately his senses return. Nicholas glances up to see Carus clutched in a mighty bear hug. Tierus is squeezing him with all that he has. The prefect tries to fight free but cannot. A series of SNAPS occur and Carus lets out a CRY of pain. With his back turned to Nicholas, the big man suddenly releases Carus. The prefect falls to the floor but manages to CRAWL away in agony. Tierus is standing oddly still. As he turns finally, we see a dagger buried in his stomach. For a brief moment, he glares absently at the priest then falls in a HEAP. Nicholas rushes to his side and takes him in his arms. The brave man looks up at the sky with unmistakable tranquillity and reaches for an invisible hand.*

TIERUS

Messiahhh comes...

*Through tear-soaked eyes, Nicholas chortles in agreement, his voice hoarse.*

NICHOLAS

Yes! That's right.

*(pause)*

Go to Him, my friend. Go to Him now.

*Tierus' hand drops and he expires in the priest's arms. Nicholas then looks up to see Carus stumble to his feet. The prefect seizes a sword from the floor and limps toward him.*

CARUS

*Now you die!*

*Carus RAISES his sword over his head and readies a fatal blow. Suddenly everything switches to slow motion. Nicholas' welling anger surfaces as he looks up and CRIES out.*

NICHOLAS

*Enough already! Let it end...now!*

*Just above the prefect's head, we see two storm clouds collide. Instantly a bolt of LIGHTNING snakes down to strike the tip of Carus' sword. There is a deafening THUNDERCLAP and a blinding flash of light. When the priest opens his eyes, he is staring at the remains of the prefect twenty feet away. Steam ISSUES from it. All the commotion in the arena comes to an abrupt halt. It is over. The slow motion ceases just as a HORN BLARES in the distance. There is YELLING in the background.*

ROMAN CITIZEN (O.S.)

The west has won. Constantine has won!

*Suddenly entering the arena are legionaries. And leading them is Helena herself. A chorus of CHEERS goes up among the soldiers. The guardsmen throw down their weapons in defeat. Helena spots Nicholas amid the turmoil. The priest looks down at Tierus.*

NICHOLAS

Today you see heaven my friend.

**EXT – SHIP ON THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA [DAY]**

*The sun is shining bright. A gentle breeze is blowing and there is not a cloud in the sky. A large sea vessel comes into view, a mile out from land and heading for Andriaki.*

**EXT – VILLAGE STREET IN MYRA [DAY]**

*Villagers are about their everyday business. Suddenly a HORN sounds from the direction of Andriaki. The villagers turn their heads in the harbor's direction.*

**EXT – SCHOOL HOUSE OF MYRA [DAY]**

*A puzzled looking Teresa steps out of a classroom having heard the same horn.*

**EXT – BASILICA OF MYRA [DAY]**

*David and Letitia materialize a moment later from inside the basilica.*

**EXT – ANDRIAKI DOCK [DAY]**

*The large sea vessel is docking. From the end of the beachhead a crowd is gathering, Teresa is amongst them.*

VILLAGER (O.S.)

Who is it? Can you see?

*Teresa edges for a closer look but can see little amid the crowd. A moment later, Griff steps off the ship. A GASP of awe lets out from the crowd.*

VILLAGER (O.S.)

It's just the boy. The priest isn't with him.

*Teresa's face drops and a hand goes to her face in anguish. She looks away about to cry. Then loud SHOUTS go up in the crowd. Teresa looks up to see the crowd parting before her. Nicholas emerges. Her lips start to quiver and tears of happiness overwhelm her. As the crowd continues to ROAR and WHISTLE its approval, Teresa and Nicholas go to each other and embrace triumphantly. As the noise dies down, the priest turns to the crowd.*

NICHOLAS

Come! Come with me—all of you.

*Nicholas motions for them to follow.*

**EXT – VILLAGE STREET IN MYRA [DAY]**

*The burly man has a large mallet in his hands. He is hammering wooden beams into place. Nicholas and an entourage of fascinated villagers come up behind him.*

NICHOLAS

I need to borrow this.

*Nicholas SNATCHES the instrument from his hands and continues on his way. The burly man does a DOUBLE TAKE.*

BURLY MAN

Pastor?!!

**EXT – TEMPLE OF DIANA IN MYRA [DAY]**

*Dagan is before the statue of Diana, retrieving monetary contributions left out from his followers. Suddenly we hear FOOTSTEPS approaching and CROWD NOISE. Dagan turns round and his eyes go open wide. Nicholas is coming up behind him with a sledgehammer extended over his head. Dagan puts his arms out in front and cowers.*

DAGAN

*Wait! No!*

*Nicholas STRIKES his intended target—a leg on the statue and forces it to topple. Dagan is exasperated.*

NICHOLAS

Now how does that go again? Oh yes, you have two choices, either you're with us, or against us?

*Dagan backs away in terror, TRIPPING over himself in the process.*

NICHOLAS

Christianity is here to *stay*, Dagan.

*The man looks out into the crowd then dashes off. The crowd ROARS its approval. Suddenly a man comes up beside the priest and the noise dies.*

SILVIO

Well said, pastor. Welcome home!

VILLAGERS (*collectively*)

Welcome home!

*With a grin from ear to ear, Nicholas throws down the mallet and draws Teresa and Griff to his side. The priest looks up to the sky and YELLS at the top of his lungs.*

NICHOLAS

*Yes!*

**EXT – ANDRIAKI BEACH / MEDITERRANEAN SEA [DAY]**

*Nicander narrates again. Nicholas is seen baptizing villagers in the sea. He has Griff in his arms this time.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

In the days that followed, my nephew's life returned to normal, Constantine would go on to unify Rome, and Christianity would find a much desired place among Roman society, and more importantly—the world over.

**INT – BASILICA OF MYRA [DAY]**

*A ceremony is taking place where Constantine is bestowing Nicholas with an honor. In attendance is Nicander, Teresa, Griff, David, Letitia, Helena, Padius, Silvio, Constantine, and hundreds of villagers.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

In honor of faithfulness and servitude,  
Constantine himself ordained Nicholas a  
bishop, an honor never bestowed upon one so  
young.

**EXT – BASILICA OF MYRA [NIGHT]**

*Nicholas, Teresa, Griff, David, Letitia, Helena, Nicander, and Silvio are outside the basilica loading large sacks onto a modified chariot with two waiting stallions. The red chariot looks sleigh-like. It begins to snow.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

Recalling the words of the apostle Paul that  
God loves a cheerful giver, Nicholas sought to  
celebrate the birth of Christ one fine  
December day. He gathered a number of  
helpers, and with the infamous chariot used at  
the races, loaded large sacks with something  
very special...

**EXT – VILLAGE STREET IN MYRA [NIGHT]**

*The group is following behind the chariot.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

...drawn by Silvio's capable steeds, Cupido  
and Kometus...

**EXT – VILLA IN MYRA [NIGHT]**

*Finally it stops and the group fans out from residence to residence their faces aglow; their hands filled with wooden objects. A curious child pokes his head out from a window to see them just as a glowing SHOOTING STAR goes steaking through the night sky.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

...he went from residence to residence, laying  
Tierus' precious wooden figures at each door.

**EXT – AMPHITHEATER IN MYRA [DAY]**

*In the crowd we see a happy Sabina. The burly man is next to her with his arm around her. A few feet from them are Bellasario, Rebecca, and the rest of his daughters. Even many of the ex-prisoners are in attendance, including Lucca. But it is Silvio himself in the forefront, outfitted in a scarlet robe with a black belt.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

On the morning of the next day, the turn out for mass was so immense, Nicholas had to take his sermon to the amphitheater. Even the good governor Silvio was in attendance, having outfitted himself in Nicholas' robe. With his white beard and jiggling belly he was a memorable sight. Of the mass itself, Nicholas would say it carried a special meaning, so from that time forth he commemorated it as the *Christ Mass*.

*The camera pans backward and ascends till the village of Myra fills the screen.*

NICANDER (O.S.)

A ten-year-old boy with a vision once set out to do the impossible, and by some heavenly design he accomplished exactly that. Years later, someone would say of my nephew, "He brought the gift," but rather I believe, he simply pointed the way to it—the reason for the season—the true...GIFT EVERLASTING!

*The following words are superimposed on the screen:*

**Nicholas died on December 6, 343 A.D. After his death, legend has it his casket began to discharge a perfumed myrrh that would heal hundreds of believers.**

⊕

**By the Middle Ages, more churches were named after Saint Nicholas than all the apostles put together. His immense popularity was second only to the Son of God and Mary the mother of Jesus.**

⊕

**To this day, Saint Nicholas remains a glorious figure, a champion of faith and righteousness, the man who became "Santa Claus!"**

**FADE OUT**