FADE IN:

INT OFFICE - EVENING

The Christmas decorated, glass enclosed expanse of a successful CEO.

Through the door comes COOKIE ENGLISH, 40, attractive, accomplished, assured. Fresh from the Christmas party, she sways slightly as she slides behind her desk.

FRANK (O.C.)
Merry Christmas.

She turns to the couch where FRANK, 50, in wrinkled suit, lounges. Tired, Frank's at the end of a long slog.

COOKIE
Who are you? Wait, I don't care who you are. Get out before I call security.

FRANK
Not much Christmas cheer in that.

COOKIE
I don't care what you're selling or why you think it's OK to break into my office. Just leave.

FRANK
Before you hear what I have to say?

COOKIE
Way before that. You have ten seconds.

FRANK
I've begun badly. Let me start over. You're my assignment.

COOKIE
That's it.

She grabs her phone and starts to dial then stops.

FRANK
It doesn't work.
She replaces the receiver and pulls out her cell.

    FRANK
    That either.

She doesn't believe him and tries to dial. No dice. Frowning, she lays aside her cell and starts for the door.

    FRANK
    It won't open.

She tries the door anyway. Won't open.

    COOKIE
    (facing him)
    Unlock the door before I scream

    FRANK
    Why is this always so difficult?
    Scream all you want. No one will hear.

She SCREAMS "HELP" and pounds the door. He shakes his head.

    FRANK
    Wouldn't it be easier to listen? I mean, this is for your benefit.

She turns from the door, marches to the desk, picks up her chair, and hurls it at the window.

It bounces off.

    FRANK
    Please, what next? Gonna punch through with your spiked heels?

She rights her chair and sits, facing him.

    FRANK
    Ahhh, foreplay over. Let's hitch the reindeer to the sleigh. I'm an elf.

    COOKIE
    Elf? You can't do better than that?

    FRANK
    No one ever believes. Why is that?
COOKIE
Could it be because you look as elfish as a pregnant polar bear?

FRANK
It's the ears. Everyone wants pointy ears.

COOKIE
And curled shoes with bells

FRANK
We don't wear those any more, at least not on assignment.

COOKIE
What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be at the North Pole making toys?

FRANK
Santa got out of the toy business a long time ago.

COOKIE
Oh?

FRANK
In the beginning, it was the naughty-nice thing. Since there were a whole lot more naughtys, it was an easy gig. You could get a ton of coal for a song. Then, parents got involved. They couldn't let their little naughty go without Christmas, so they replaced the coal with presents and blamed Santa. How can the fat guy get around that?

COOKIE
I wasn't aware he was trying to get around anything.

FRANK
Yeah, well, since the kid thing tanked, he's moved on. Now, he does the naughty-nice thing with adults.
COOKIE
And you're his special elf.

FRANK
One of the non-polar squad. It's an out-reach thing.

COOKIE
Right, why is the big guy interested in me?

FRANK
Because you're a no-list.

COOKIE
No list?

FRANK
Not on the nice list, not on the naughty list. Most people are easy. They're either mostly bad or mostly good. But some people fall between. The fat man thought intervention would push those people onto the nice list.

COOKIE
That's me?

FRANK
You got it. Take that little bear you put in the church manger. Yeah, I know you made sure the corporate logo showed, but it was still a nice gesture. On the other hand, what you're planning to do with Lance from the mail room is downright naughty.

Cookie is floored.

COOKIE
I don't know what you're talking about.

FRANK
Of course you don't. No one ever does.
She studies him a moment.

COOKIE
You're stalking me, aren't you.

FRANK
We prefer to call it an investigation.

COOKIE
You've been following me, and what, you have me bugged?

FRANK
I can't very well investigate without following now can I. And you forget Elves have special powers. If I don't want you to see me, you won't.

COOKIE
This is crazy. I must have lost my mind. What was in that punch?

FRANK
Look, it's Christmas Eve. You're the last name on my list. I've done some surveillance, and I like you. I like your silly husband Joel and your willful daughter Audrey. I like that you slipped an extra hundred into the envelope for that store manager, and that your secretary's bonus is five percent larger than what you told the board. You have good instincts. I'd like to see something good happen for you like it happened for the Andersons.

COOKIE
John and Laura?

FRANK
The big promotion, the remission, yeah, those Andersons.

COOKIE
Santa did that?
FRANK
That's what he does, what he likes to do.

COOKIE
You're serious.

Frank shakes his head and smiles.

FRANK
I might be, or I could be a drunk playing with your head.

COOKIE
Don't think for a minute I believe you.

FRANK
When I first took this job, I thought that if I just talked to people, they would change. Do some good, get a reward. A senior elf told me to lose the hero cape. If people didn't believe, they weren't going to change. It didn't matter what I could tell them. It didn't matter what happened to their neighbors. Santa was just some red-cheeked dude on a Coca-Cola can. So, no, I don't expect you to believe me or forego your plans with Lance. There is no Santa Claus, Cookie. And even if there were, what difference would it make to you?

COOKIE
You're not much fun, are you?

He laughs again.

COOKIE
I tell you what, Mr. Elf.

FRANK
Frank.

COOKIE
Early tomorrow morning my security team will sweep my office and my house and remove all those nasty electronic
gizmos you installed. Then, they're going to go through the surveillance tapes and identify your face. When they do, they'll find your employer and I'll bleed you dry. When I'm done with you, you won't have enough spare change for a long-distance call to the north pole, south pole, barber pole or wherever your boss lives.

FRANK  
(laughing)  
Like I've never heard that speech before. The truth is that I'm an elf, but no one ever believes the truth.  
(stretches) 
I don't have much time.

COOKIE 
You're wasting mine.

FRANK 
I'm trying to keep you off the naughty list.

COOKIE 
I'm afraid you're too late. I plan to be very naughty.

FRANK 
You don't have to, you know. You can call it off.

COOKIE 
Why would I do that?

FRANK 
I could tell you that I have a bet with the reindeer elves. Winner gets an extra week in the Bahamas.

COOKIE 
You're not funny.

FRANK 
Remember the Mercers?
COOKIE
Tom and Gloria.

FRANK
Remember what happened to them?

COOKIE
Their son had a car accident. He's in a wheelchair. The accident caused a divorce. Tom went west, and Gloria moved downtown to be close to her son.

FRANK
Tom died in prison in Nevada. Seems the other inmates didn't appreciate a child molester. Gloria went on a binge a year ago and disappeared. We know where she is, but, well, we're like confessor, we don't tell. Tom junior hates his wheelchair, his tiny room in the nursing home, and his caregivers. He'd like to join his father.

COOKIE
Why are you telling me this?

FRANK
They were on the naughty list.

Cookie laughs.

COOKIE
Santa?

FRANK
Tom junior's car hit a patch of ice on a night when there was no precipitation. How do you think that happened?

COOKIE
It wasn't some elf, I can tell you that.

He stares at her.
COOKIE
Oh, come on. It's switches and coal, isn't it?

FRANK
Back in the toy days, not any more.

COOKIE
So, if I get on the naughty list, bad things will happen to me?

FRANK

COOKIE
You're worse than boring. You're nonsensical. There is no Santa, no naughty list, no elf hosing down the pavement on a cold night. What is it you want? Because this is getting old.

FRANK
I don't need much. Just tell me you believe in Santa, and that you'll skip Lance.

Cookie laughs.

COOKIE
And then what, the Easter Bunny shows up and demands allegiance to dyed eggs?

(stands)
Your time is up, Mr. Elf. Get out.

Frank stands and brushes the wrinkles on his suit.

FRANK
I'm tired. I should leave you to stew in your chosen juices. But one last time, how can I get you to believe?

She regards him a second.
COOKIE
I have to say I believe?

FRANK
And dump Lance.

COOKIE
Well, if that's all...I believe in the Fat Man, Santa, Kris Kringle, or whatever his name.

FRANK
And Lance?

COOKIE
No Lance.

FRANK
Mean it?

COOKIE
Lance is a pretty face, nothing more. Nothing lost.

Frank smiles, walks over, and holds out his hand.

COOKIE
What no contract written in blood?

FRANK
If you backslide, he'll know.

Cookie shakes his hand.

FRANK
Be nice, Cookie. It'll pay off.

The phone on the desk rings.

FRANK
(turning away)
You'll want to answer that.

She grabs the phone.

COOKIE
What? When? Where? Damn! I'll be right there.
She replaces the phone and looks around.

No Frank.

COOKIE
Frank?  Frank?

No answer.  She grabs her coat from a closet and heads for the door.

COOKIE
I said I believed.

INT HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

In the bed, AUDREY, 14, attached to various drips and machines, lies unconscious, one leg in traction. Next to the bed, Cookie and her husband, JOEL, 40's, someone who often acts 15.

JOEL
According to her friends, she was close to the edge when another skier cut her off, and she hit a tree.

COOKIE
Oh my god.

JOEL
It's not so bad.

COOKIE
Not so bad? Look at her.

JOEL
I know, I know, the broken leg, the shoulder separation. Yeah, that's bad, but look on the bright side.

COOKIE
Bright side?

JOEL
When they did a scan, they discovered a mass in her chest.

COOKIE
What?
JOEL
They're doing a biopsy, but they're pretty sure, it's cancer.

COOKIE
Oh my god, cancer?

JOEL
Probably treatable and localized. They caught it early. All because of the crash. Without the crash, we wouldn't know.

Cookie looks from Joel to Audrey.

COOKIE
That's a good thing, isn't it?

JOEL
A Christmas gift.

COOKIE
(taking Audrey's hand)
A very nice gift, a very nice gift.

FADE OUT.