

KRAMPUS

Written by

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DARKNESS. Bathed by a frigid HOWLING WIND, building like a choir of SCREAMS as we--

FADE IN:

INT. A CHILD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A clock ticks. A Christmas candle flickers. The wind moans outside as we drift past a CHILD'S DESK:

Textbooks and toys. Gadgets and clothes. And then an ENVELOPE crudely addressed to THE NORTH POLE. Next to that, an unfinished LETTER that so far only reads "Dear Santa..."

We then float to a REINDEER COSTUME draped on a bed occupied by a sleeping MAX ENGEL (12). Tousled hair, mouth agape, even while asleep Max evokes a mix of wide-eyed innocence and adolescent mischief.

All is calm. All is bright. Until... THE ROOF CREAKS. The faint yet deep sound of wood beams straining.

Max stirs but doesn't awaken. But then CRREEEAK. It happens again, louder and longer.

MAX'S EYES pop open. He sits up, curiously listening to the ticking clock and eerie silence. And then--

WHUMP. Skitter skitter. What sounds like footsteps on the roof. *Could it be?*

Max looks at an ADVENT CALENDAR on his wall, its tiny door opened to DECEMBER 22. Confused, he nervously walks to the window and opens the curtains to find--

Nothing. Just darkness and trickling snow. Looking up at the sky, Max's face is tinged with disappointment when

WHAM! A HUGE FIGURE SLAMS INTO HIS WINDOW. Max stumbles back, A SHADOW FALLING OVER HIM as he gawks in horror at

A creepy PLASTIC SANTA DECORATION. Dangling upside down, entangled in flickering Christmas lights. St. Nick slowly swings back and forth, dead eyes staring into our souls.

Annoyed and creeped out, Max sighs as we PULL OUT from his window and up INTO THE NIGHT SKY, rising high above the neighborhood...

Until we're soaring over a festively decorated SMALL TOWN. A SNOWSTORM filling the air while a CHILDREN'S CHOIR warms our hearts:

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

*It's beginning to look a lot like
Christmas, everywhere you go...
Take a look in the Five and Ten,
Glistening once again, with candy
canes and silver lanes aglow...*

CREDITS AND MUSIC ROLL as the town strangely begins TILTING to one side, toppling end over end as we realize we're actually inside of a

SNOWGLOBE. Which keeps TUMBLING THROUGH THE AIR until IT SHATTERS in a shower of glass and miniature homes that are CRUSHED under the rampaging feet of

FRENZIED HOLIDAY SHOPPERS--

INT. MEGAMART - NIGHT

MOBS OF BARGAIN HUNTERS rampage through a sprawling warehouse MEGAMART in EXTREME SLOW MOTION.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

*It's beginning to look a lot like
Christmas ... Toys in every
store... But the prettiest sight to
see, is the holly that will be on
your front door...*

CREDITS AND MUSIC CONTINUE over a MONTAGE OF SHOPPERS fighting to the death to save a few bucks:

A FRENZIED MOTHER knocks over an OLD LADY to grab discounted cell phones...

TWO HUSBANDS fist-fighting over video games are TASERED by SECURITY GUARDS as their mortified wives watch...

SCREAMING KIDS on the lap of DRUNK MALL SANTA while their WASPY PARENTS yell at them to stop crying...

FRAZZLED MINIMUM WAGERS... An elderly SALVATION ARMY BELL-RINGER nearly mowed down by shopping carts... A TODDLER nursing a black eye... All the holiday insanity we see on the news every December, but up close and in horrifying detail.

Finally, under the store's massive fake Christmas Tree: A CHORUS OF KIDS dressed in homemade holiday costumes -- snowmen, elves, and sugarplum fairies. But most of the kids aren't singing because they're CHEERING at:

MAX, now dressed as a REINDEER. But poor Max is sprawled on his back, shielding himself as he's pummeled by a BRAWNY KID dressed as a SHEPHERD. Teachers rush to pull them apart while

IN THE AUDIENCE: TOM AND SARAH ENGEL (30's), Max's upscale, uptight parents, try to force their way through the horrified crowd, while Max's older sister, BETH (15), gleefully records the pint-sized brawl on her phone.

CREDITS END as the choir closes with these parting words:

CHILDREN'S CHOIR (CONT'D)
*Soon the bells will start... And
 the thing that will make them
 ring... Is the Carol that you sing
 Right within your heart...*

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

MARLEY'S GHOST
*...I am here tonight to warn you,
 that you have yet a chance and a
 hope of escaping my fate. You will
 be haunted by three spirits...*

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

PULL OUT as "A Christmas Carol" plays on a small TV, continuing out past trays of fresh baked cookies until we settle on an OLD WOMAN'S HANDS kneading dough:

OMI (pronounced *oh-me*, German for *Grandma*) a silver-haired old woman wrinkled by seven decades of smiling. She is baking sugar cookies from scratch, enjoying the peace and quiet.

But then Omi pauses. Sensing something coming... THE NOISE. She sighs, bracing herself as THE FRONT DOOR BURSTS OPEN and THE ENGEL FAMILY stroms in, overloaded with boxes and bags.

TOM
*And you're going to write an
 apology to the rest of your class
 for ruining the recital. What were
 you thinking, Max? That kid was
 twice your size.*

MAX trundles in wearing his reindeer costume with an ICE PACK over one eye, still hurt and glum from the fight. Softly:

MAX

Yeah but Ben Kuklinski is always ragging on Christmas. He even told the first graders that Santa was just a cheap marketing ploy invented to sell Pepsi.

Max is trying to hide how upset he is but his dad notices.

BETH

Coke.

MAX

You know what I mean.

BETH

But not why you care.

MAX

Well someone's gotta.

Tom kneels down with a fresh ice pack and inspects Max's bruised eye -- and his ego. Gently:

TOM

Here, lemme see.

MAX

(winces)

Ow ow ow...

TOM

Eh, it's not so bad. But c'mon, champ, was dropkicking him into the manger really the best way to handle this?

MAX

I was under the influence.

(off Tom's look)

What? All we had to eat was Christmas fudge and candy canes.

Cute. Tom can't help but smile and tousle Max's hair. Max seems to cheer up -- a beat of calm in the holiday chaos. Sarah unwraps a brand new FRAMED FAMILY PORTRAIT:

SARAH

Not to sound harsh, but every kid has to learn the truth some day.

(re: the family photo)

Beth, help me hang this?

Hearing his mom say this, Max sinks, ever so slightly:

MAX

No, I know. I just -- I didn't want it ruined... for the little kids.

But something tells us Max is lying, both to us and himself...

Tom changes the TV from "A Christmas Carol" to CABLE NEWS, filling the house with TERRORISM and HOLIDAY CRIMES. He then looks at Omi's cookies and taps her on the shoulder:

TOM

These look great, Mom.

Omi smiles and nods, speaking softly in GERMAN:

OMI

Danke.

TOM

But don't work too hard, Sarah already bought cookies at the store.

Omi's smile drops, clearly insulted. Tom's cellphone rings.

TOM (CONT'D)

It's Roger.

SARAH

I thoguht you said you weren't working over Christmas, Tom.

TOM

I said no *traveling* over Christmas. I still need to take a few calls.
(on phone)
Hey, Roger. Yeah, now's fine, what's up?

Annoyed, Sarah grabs the new family portrait and heads for the living room as Tom starts towards his den.

MAX

Hey wait, aren't we gonna watch Charlie Brown and wrap presents together like always?

TOM

After what you pulled today you can do it alone, and fast, because your cousins will be here any minute.
(on phone)

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

No, no, that was for my kid. It's
a Christmas cluster-eff over here.

Tom leaves as Max pulls off his antlers and slumps into a chair. Sympathetic, Omi helps him unroll gift wrap.

MAX

Thanks, Omi.

Omi dabs his nose with frosting, and again speaks in German. Barely a strained whisper, it's difficult for her to speak:

OMI (SUBTITLED)

Have you finished it?

Max shakes his head, and we realize that he can understand her. In fact, other than Tom, Max is the only other family member who's bothered learning Omi's language.

Max makes sure the coast is clear, then removes a LETTER from his pocket. The same letter we saw on his desk last night...

MAX

I started, but I don't know what to
ask for this year.

BOOM BOOM BOOM -- they flinch at the sounds of HAMMERING and SHOUTING from the next room:

SARAH (O.S.)

Because they're family, Beth! And
it's only for a few days!

BETH (O.S.)

Last year I found shit in my bed,
mom. Human SHIT.

SARAH

For the last time, that was their
dog!

Omi and Max exchange a look.

OMI (SUBTITLED)

I'm sure you will think of
something.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

BOOM BOOM BOOM! FRAMED FAMILY PORTRAITS bounce and clatter against the wall with each deafening HAMMER BLOW.

BETH

"They're why some people shouldn't be allowed to breed!" Your words, Mom, not mine!

Beth storms upstairs as Sarah calls after her:

SARAH

I never said that!
 (to herself)
 I said maybe they should have to take a *test* before they're allowed to breed.

Sarah finishes hanging the portrait, obsessively re-adjusting it so it's JUST right. But scanning the line of annual holiday photos, she finally seems to notice something:

Excited young grins becoming forced smiles. The tight huddle around Santa turns into a loose grouping. A visual history of her family's dissolution from one Christmas to the next.

Sarah's tense veneer softens, suddenly realizing how their once cherished tradition has become an obligation...

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MAX

Omi... do you really still believe in Santa?

Omi frowns, as if remembering something she'd rather forget. She tries finding the right words, then:

OMI (SUBTITLED)

Of course. But... I also believe St. Nicholas is what you make him.

MAX

What do you mean?

OMI (SUBTITLED)

That to believe in him is to believe in the *true* spirit of the holiday. The spirit of giving. Of *sacrifice*...

She stares off, lost in a memory. Max watches with growing concern until:

OMI (SUBTITLED) (CONT'D)

I also believe in dessert before dinner.

Omi hands him a cookie. Max takes it with an uneasy smile, wondering what secrets his grandmother may be hiding...

EXT. ENGEL HOUSE - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

A suburban McMansion dotted with festive lights. But as the WIND shrieks, we start *creeping* towards the house, strangely drifting through the air like some eerie POV...

DEREK (O.S.)
Well at least your family cares
enough to fight.

This disembodied POV hovers outside a frosty ATTIC WINDOW, watching Beth SKYPE with her boyfriend, DEREK (17).

INT. BETH'S ATTIC BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

BETH
Yeah, my cousins are crawling out
of the shallow end of the gene pool
so everyone's a little on edge.

DEREK (SKYPE)
Your mom popping xanax again?

BETH
Like candy. Tonight we're making a
Japanese snowflake tree of some
shit. Takes a lotta work to make
our family look more awesome than
it actually is, you know?

DEREK (SKYPE)
Hmm, yeah, I like snowflakes but I
like my plan better...

Derek holds up GREMLINS and DIE HARD DVDs with a BAG OF WEED, then playfully flicks his tongue at her.

BETH
Verrry enticing, but think I'm
stuck here.

DEREK (SKYPE)
C'mon, people escaped from Alcatraz
and I'm only four blocks away.

Beth's face drops... hearing something... something bad.

DEREK (SKYPE) (CONT'D)
What? What's wrong?

Her room RATTLES as a DEEP RUMBLING builds outside. Beth cringes, quietly playing for it to go away.

BETH
Everything.

INT. TOM'S DEN - SAME TIME

THE RUMBLING shakes Tom's BORING WORK TROPHIES and PHOTOS:
Best Ceramic Tile Salesman 2013; Incentive Marketing Leadership Conference 2011; Paradigm Shifters Jamboree 2009.

Winning at the noise, Tom sneaks some whiskey into his coffee, closes his eyes, and silently mouths *fuuuck*.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

Max finishes his letter when DINGDONG-DINGDONG-DINGDONG--NONSTOP ANNOYING DOORBELL RINGING FILLS THE HOUSE.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

DINGDONG-DINGDONG-DINGDONG! Sarah pauses from her decorating, breathes deep, trying to keep it together:

SARAH
(whispered mantra)
It's Christmas... It's Christmas...
It's Christmas... It's --

MOMENTS LATER

A DOOR SWINGS OPEN and Sarah is now ALL SMILES!

SARAH (CONT'D)
MERRY CHRISTMASSSS!!!

ON THE FRONT DOORSTEP:

LINDA (30's). Four kids and three part-time jobs have taken the shine off Sarah's younger sister. They hug. Awkwardly.

LINDA
MERRY CHRISTMAS, SIS!

SARAH
So glad you guys made it!

LINDA

Oh my gosh, you have no idea!
Accidents all over the freeways and
nothing but traffic and crazy talk
radio for six hours. Oh and here--
we brought a little taste of home!

She hands Sarah a CASSEROLE DISH filled with something brown
and moist. Sarah's stiff grin only gets stiffer.

SARAH

Wow, thanks. It looks just... Wow!

HOWARD

Move on in, Linda! No need to keep
the traffic jam goin' now!

Red-faced, broad-chested, with a Santa hat over his hunting
cap, HOWARD (40s), pushes his way inside with luggage and
gifts crudely wrapped with magazines and newspapers.

TOM

(reaches for luggage)
Howard! Lemme help you with that.

But Tom misjudges the weight and is pulled to the ground when
SNARLING JAWS SNAP AT HIS HAND, revealing:

HOWARD

ROSIE! Down, girl!

A fat bulldog named ROSIE, who helps the in-laws track mud
and snow all over Sarah's shimmering floors.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Ha! Gave your butler the night
off, huh, Tommy?

Tom smiles uneasily as THREE KIDS pile through the door. TWO
HUSKY BOYS step in first: JORDAN (12) and STEVIE (11). Both
sport varsity jackets, glum faces, and shaved heads.

SARAH

Marry Christmas, girls. Don't you
look cute in your matching jackets!

Holy shit, Jordan and Stevie are actually girls.

LINDA

They're a little cranky because the
Steelers lost.

(proud)

(MORE)

LINDA (CONT'D)

Jordan, Stevie, why don't you tell Aunt Sarah about your Presidential Fitness Awards.

Max greets pudgy HOWIE JR. (8), a mute mouth-breather with enough body fat to only need a football jersey for warmth.

MAX

Ummm, hey Howie...
(beat; searching)
Soooooo what'd you ask Santa for this year?

Howie just stares blankly as Beth whispers to Max:

BETH

Dialysis

Uncle Howard pulls Max into a painful headlock and noogie.

HOWARD

MAXI-PAD! Still gettin' straight A's in detention?!

Max twists loose, annoyed.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Christ-on-a-stick, would it kill ya to shovel the walk? I coulda broken a hip out there!

Sarah glares at Linda as if she invited a Nazi to Passover.

LINDA

Surprise...? *Please don't be mad.*

A dry gulch if there ever was one, AUNT DOROTHY (60's) trudges inside looking for something else to bitch about. Sarah forces another smile and a stiff hug.

SARAH

Aunt Dorothy... What a surprise.

AUNT DOROTHY

Yeah well, your sister's no Mother Teresa but at least she swings by once in a while to make sure I'm not dead. Now where's your nog? I wanna get merry.

SARAH

In the kitchen. Help yourself.

Aunt Dorothy scowls at Sarah's decorations as she leaves.

AUNT DOROTHY
 (under her breath)
 Lord Almighty, looks like Martha
 Stewart threw up in here.

Tom is about to close the door but stops, looks at Linda.

TOM
 Wait, wasn't there... another...?

Linda smacks her forehead, remembering:

LINDA
 CHRISSY! Dammit Jordan, I told you
 to bring her inside!

JORDAN
 Not my kid.

Jordan elbows Stevie and points to THE LETTER poking out of
 Max's back pocket, clearly addressed to THE NORTH POLE.
 Ideas brewing, the girls mischievously whisper to each other.

Howard slaps Tom hard on the back, lurching him forward.

HOWARD
 C'mon Tommy, help me grab the baby
 and the rest of the girl crap outta
 the truck.

Coast clear, Sarah pulls Linda inside.

SARAH
 A holiday roast is a surprise.
 Cancer is a surprise. She is a
 goddamn nightmare. What were you
 thinking?

LINDA
 Oh c'mon, she's not *that* bad! And
 besides, she tricked me! I thought
 we were just dropping off gifts but
 she came to the door with a
 suitcase. What was I supposed to
 do, leave her alone on Christmas?

SARAH
 No, but you could at least warn me
 when one of your mistakes is going
 to become my problem.

LINDA
 You think everything I do is a
 mistakr.

Howard walks back inside carrying BABY CHRISSEY, his arms outstretched like he's holding a bomb.

HOWARD

I, uh, think this warhead is armed.

Linda takes Chrissy as Sarah raises a brow at her sister: *point proven*. Another defeat in a lifetime of lost arguments.

LINDA

Guess I better go change her.

Tom and Sarah exchange a look -- a brief private moment. He goes cross-eyed and Sarah shakes her head, smiling. Until...

AUNT DOROTHY

So. What's for dinner?

Max sits on the steps, baffled by his bizarre family, as we--

CUT TO:

EXT. ENGEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Again a strange disembodied POV seems to be watching the family, this time drifting outside the DINING ROOM WINDOWS.

It watches them chat around an EXQUISITELY DECORATED TABLE. Music, candles, and gourmet food provide a stark contrast to the giant bottle of Mountain Dew Howie Junior is CHUGGING.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

HOWARD

HA! That's my boy!

THE LONG HOT BURP that follows blows away Max and Beth's appetites. Beth tries to elave but catches a sharp glare from Sarah. Tom escapes into his phone when Howard ELBOWS him:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Gettin' Howie Junior into game shape! By the time he hits high school, he'll be the biggest lineman in the state. Ever even been on the field, Tommy?

Tom lamely attempts to man-up, as if he were a Navy Seal:

TOM

Nah. Spent most of my younger years in training.

HOWARD

Yeah? Army? Marines?

TOM

Eagle Scouts.

HOWARD

Huh. That where you weave baskets, help little old ladies cross the street?

Jordan and Stevie snicker.

TOM

Actually, there's a lot of survival train-

HOWARD

Tell you what, the only survival training I need is my ol' smoke pole and a box of thirty-ought-six in the truck.

(nods to his family)

A shepherd's gotta protect his flock.

LINDA

Howard, I thought we agreed, no gun talk at the dinner table.

Baby Chrissy flings food to the floor where Rosie slurps it up. Sarah cringes. Seeing this is like nails on a chalkboard.

SARAH

Wow, looks like Chrissy is *really* enjoying my gravlax...

LINDA

(taking the hint)

Careful kids, your Aunt Sarah likes everything clean and perfect. That's why she cooks food you can't pronounce.

SARAH

(eyes Linda's casserole)

Well, I thought you guys might want a break from Mac & Cheese with hot dogs.

Linda shoots daggers at her sister, insulted.

AUNT DOROTHY

Well, you're wrong. Who doesn't at least make ham on Christmas? What are you now, a Jew?

Barely containing her rage, Sarah escapes to the kitchen.

SARAH

Maybe it's time for dessert. Hm?

She gets up while Dorothy enviously eyes Omi's food: a special meal of mashed potatoes, turkey, and green beans. Meanwhile, the kids have their own tense conversation:

STEVIE

Hey Maxi-Pad, you hear what happened to Santa?

Max sighs, knowing what's coming. He looks to Beth for support but she glances away, leaving him to die.

MAX

(rolls eyes)
No, Jordan, what happened to Santa?

STEVIE

I'm Stevie, she's Jordan.

The girls exchange a smile, thinking and speaking as one:

JORDAN

Heard it on the news. His sleigh crashed in the Rockies. Shattered both his legs. Frostbite took care of his pain...

STEVIE

...but not his hunger. So to survive, he had to slaughter and eat his reindeer.

JORDAN

...including Rudolph.

She dangles a slice of meat from her mouth.

STEVIE

Ate tiny reindeer! Get it?!

Max tenses, Beth grabs onto his arm.

BETH
Don't start anything!

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Sarah crispens CREME BRULE with a SMALL TORCH, muttering:

SARAH
Macaroni and Cheese and hot dogs.
Jesus...

From out of nowhere:

AUNT DOROTHY
So why the heck does Omi get *real*
food while the rest of us have to
suffer through your duck plate?

Startled, Sarah FLINCHES and BURNS her finger on the torch.
She turns to Aunt Dorothy pouring herself more egg nog:

AUNT DOROTHY (CONT'D)
You know how all this fancy stuff
wrecks my pipes.

Pushed to her limits, Sarah finally unleashes:

SARAH
Well, how about next year we'll go
to *your* place for Christmas? Hm?
And after *you've* spent weeks
decorating, cooking and cleaning,
I'll just waddle in and start
bitching and moaning about
everything *you've* worked so hard
on.

(Dorothy tries to talk)
No, please, Aunt Dorothy, for your
sake? Stay the fuck out of my
kitchen.

Aunt Dorothy leaves. A slap to the face would've stung less.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

Max is on the verge of exploding from his cousins' jabs:

JORDAN
We know you still believe in the
big fat creeper.

MAX

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

Grinning wide, Stevie pulls out MAX'S LETTER. Max checks his pockets, realizing they swiped it.

STEVIE

You sure about that?

Mortified, Max tries to get up but Beth holds him back.

BETH

Max, stop!

He struggles as Stevie stands and clears her throat. Reading:

STEVIE

"Dear Santa, I know I haven't been great this year and I'm sorry for that, but I was really hoping you could help out me and my family this Christmas. We need you."
Awww, Maxi-pad, that's so sweet!

MAX

Knock it off!

Max breaks loose from Beth and tries to tackle Stevie, but Jordan holds him back. Tom senses where this is heading:

TOM

Guys c'mon. Hey Howard?

HOWARD

Aw they're just playin', Tommy.

Knowing her time is short, Stevie scans the letter:

STEVIE

Blah-blah-blah, bullshit bullshit,
Aha! Here we go, Maxi's *wish list*.

Tom is finally about to step in when:

STEVIE (CONT'D)

"I wish my mom and dad would fall in love again. I know they get upset a lot, but with dad away from home so much I think they really just miss each other."

This freezes Tom in his tracks. The room falls silent except for Max wildly kicking as Jordan keeps him pinned down.

MAX
GET OFF ME!

BETH
(reaches for the letter)
Stevie stop, that's enough.

STEVIE
Wait, you're in here too, Beth!
(reading)
"I wish me and Beth could hang out like we used to. You might've noticed that I don't have tons of friends." -- No, really, Max?

Beth's face drops - this hits home.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
"Also, I wish things weren't so hard for Uncle Howard and Aunt Linda. So maybe you could lend them a hand for the rest of the year too."

Howard and Linda's faces are flush with embarrassment. Stevie's tone changes, suddenly hurt:

STEVIE (CONT'D)
"And... and that..."
(beat, to Max)
SCREW YOU! DAD DOES NOT WISH WE WERE BOYS!

An awkward beat as Sarah proudly enters with dessert:

SARAH
Who wants some Creme Brulee??

MAX BITES JORDAN'S HAND and breaks for Stevie, who PUNCHES HIM, knocking him on his ass. Both girls pile on Max as he fights back with all he's got. Even Howie jumps in.

Tom and Howard struggle to pull their kids apart:

TOM	HOWARD
MAX, CALM DOWN! Howard, will you tell the girls to lay off?	C'mon Tommy, boy's gotta learn to fight his own fights or he'll get eaten alive come high school!

Omi watches as Max grabs the letter and stands up. His heart, his last shreds of childhood innocence, now broken:

MAX

I just wanted Christmas to be like
it used to. But forget it. I hate
Christmas. And I hate all of you.

He storms off.

SARAH

Max? MAX?!

But he's gone. Sarah looks at Tom, urging him to handle it.

AUNT DOROTHY

Aw, lay off him. Kid oughta get a
prize for telling the truth.

INT. MAX'S ROOM - LATER

Max sits at his desk, staring at the letter. A KNOCK:

TOM

Can I come in?

MAX

No.

Tom bears a peace offering of milk and cookies. Sits.

TOM

You know they're leaving right
after Christmas, so we only have to
survive another...

(cringes)

...three days.

MAX

Every year it gets worse. Why do
we have to put up with their crap
just because we share DNA?

TOM

Because that's what a family is,
Max. People you try to be friends
with even if you don't have a whole
lot in common.

MAX

But WHY?

TOM

Because... well... Okay, you kinda
got me there.

(Off Max's look)

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

Or, maybe it makes us work a little harder to find what we do have in common, you know? Put everything aside and think of other people for a change. Friends, family, even the assholes you normally can't stand.

MAX

Like Howard?

TOM

I didn't want to name names.

Beat. Max thinks about this.

MAX

Dad... you really believe all that?

TOM

I want to, Max.

Tom tinkers with an ADVENT CALENDAR on the wall.

TOM (CONT'D)

And hey, I bet it's not too late to drop that letter in the mailbox...

Tom leaves as Max stares at the letter, contemplative.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

The family cleans up broken dishes and food, the air thick with awkward silence and decades of growing tension...

INT. MAX'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Max starts to sign the letter. A glimmer of faith still visible in his young eyes. But then -- RIP.

Heartbroken, he tears the letter in half. Then tears it again and again until he can't tear it anymore. Max then opens a window and throws the pieces outside...

EXT. ENGEL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...but instead of falling, the shreds of the letter are pulled UP into the night air by a sudden GUST OF WIND.

Max watches as they SWIRL higher and higher into the moonlit sky. Satisfied, he closes the window when he notices

SNOW. Just some flurries at first, then a trickle that gives way to full SNOWFALL. Puzzled by the timing of it, Max closes the blinds while IN THE SKY ABOVE we see:

THICK ROLLING CLOUDS. Massive. Unearthly. Ominous. And somehow forming directly above the ENGEL HOUSE, spreading over the surrounding homes like a biblical storm.

HEAVY SNOW and EERIE WIND start filling empty streets, knocking over decorations, bending tree branches. FROST spreads across windows like SKELETAL FINGERS. CHRISTMAS LIGHTS swell to a BRIGHT GLOW then POP OFF.

And FROM ABOVE, we watch as the Engel house, and the entire neighborhood, is engulfed by DARKNESS.

FADE IN:

AN ADVENT CALENDAR. MAX'S HANDS open the next compartment: DEC 23rd, revealing a drawing of a SNOWMAN.

DISSOLVE TO:

A WINDOW. Opaque from frost. Then a BLURRY HAND wipes it away to reveal MAX, gawking at:

A BLIZZARD. Cars, houses, all covered in FOUR FEET OF SNOW. ICICLES cover trees and power-lines. SHRIEKING WIND and SLEET fill the air, as if an Arctic storm swallowed suburbia.

Max is stunned. And it might be the next morning but you wouldn't know it, because the sun can barely penetrate the THICK CLOUDS and FOG, drenching everything in dark hazy grey.

Suddenly a SNOW PLOW rumbles through the fog to reveal: A GRINNING SNOWMAN in the middle of their yard. Only it's facing the house, almost as if it's watching them. Odd.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING (OVERCAST)

Slightly unnerved, Max turns from the window to find his family in a growing state of panic:

SARAH

You don't find it the least bit strange?

Sarah wears pajamas under a winter coat, uselessly adjusting a thermostat. We can hear the SHRIEKS and HOLLERING of their cousins from the living room.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I mean they can see dust specks on Mars but no one noticed a giant blizzard hurtling toward us?

TOM

(inspects a fuse box)

Well, when the power comes back you can send an angry email to the National Weather Service. In the meantime, let's try and stay calm.

MAX

(tugs at Sarah)

There's something weird outside--

Sarah ignores Max, too busy checking a faucet for hot water.

SARAH

I am calm, I'd just be calmer if I knew how we're going to survive Christmas with twelve people stuck in a house with no heat, hot water or electricity.

HOWARD

(at the fridge)

Or food.

SARAH

If you grab a stool and a spatula I'm sure you can scrape some pate off the ceiling, Howard.

He grabs a can from the fridge.

HOWARD

Beer it is.

TOM

Phone is down too.

MAX

MOM!

SARAH

What, Max?

MAX

There's a snowman in our yard.

Tom and Sarah squint outside to see the snowman in questions, but clearly aren't concerned.

SARAH
That's... that's great, Max.

MAX
Who built it?!

This is the least of their worries.

TOM
I can barely see across the street
but it doesn't look like it's just
us. Could walk over and check with
the Turners--

SARAH
The Turners are in Hawaii, the
Lamberts are in Florida, and the
Cartwrights stopped talking to us
after Max's 'noodle incident'.

TOM
After his what?

Sarah spots Omi fiddling around in the fireplace.

SARAH
Max, would you please get Omi out
of there before she burns the whole
house down?

Max rolls his eyes and does as he's told. Suddenly, KNOCK
KNOCK -- someone's at the door. Sarah sighs, now what?

LINDA (O.S.)
I'll get it!

IN THE FOYER

Linda opens the door to a DARK HOODED FIGURE -- SHE GASPS.
But the figure pulls back his hood to reveal a FED-EX GUY.

FEDEX GUY
Merry Christmas! Signature?

Linda looks down to see a pile of BOXES.

LINDA
(into the house)
HOWARD! STUFF TO CARRY!
(then)
Some weather, huh?

FEDEX GUY

Yeah, it's a ghost town out there.
Roads are a nightmare and half the
state's buried with even more on
the way.

As she sighs, Linda also notices a LARGE BAG overflowing with
MORE GIFTS, all wrapped in beautiful, ORNATE PARCHMENT.

LINDA

Those too?

FEDEX GUY

Not mine. Must be from the boys in
brown. Merry Christmas!

Howard appears behind her.

HOWARD

Sup?

LINDA

(snide)

Look, they got even *more* stuff.

HOWARD

(grabs the gifts)

Man, how come rich people get all
the free shit?

IN THE KITCHEN

Beth enters, cell phone glued to her hand.

BETH

I've texted Derek like nine times
and he still hasn't written back.
That is not normal.

TOM

It's the blizzard, honey.
Nothing's working right now.

BETH

Then can I walk over and check on
him? It's only a few blocks away.

SARAH

I don't think that's a good idea.

BETH

I could see if anyone else has
power on the way...

Aunt Dorothy looks up from a tabloid:

AUNT DOROTHY

You know, you kids don't have a damn bit of patience. When I was your age I didn't hear from my boyfriend for two years while he was off fightin' Charlie.

Sarah shakes her head in disbelief, turns to Beth.

SARAH

One hour. And when you're back I want you to spend some girl time with Jordan and Stevie, got it?

We follow Beth's mortified gaze to: JORDAN VICIOUSLY WRESTLING STEVIE IN THE LIVING ROOM. Howie Jr cheers them on as Howard tosses the BAG OF ORNATE GIFTS under the tree.

HOWARD

YOU CALL THAT A REVERSAL?! C'MON JORDY, PLANT YOUR FEET!

BETH

Right...

SARAH

You know what I mean. Just be careful, okay?

BETH

Okay, back later!

SARAH

ONE hour!

And Beth is already out the door. Sarah turns to see Omi still tinkering with the fireplace while Max watches, not doing anything to stop her.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Max! I told you to get Omi out of--

Omi rises and pours hot water from an OLD KETTLE she had in the fire into a TRAY OF MUGS. She mutters as Max translates:

OMI

Heisse Schokolade macht alles besser.

MAX (TRANSLATING)

Hot chocolate makes everything better.

Embarrassed, Sarah stands down as Omi offers the hot cocoa to the room, melting away everyone's tension. For now.

AUNT DOROTHY

About time someone did something
right around here.

AT THE WINDOW: Max watches Beth disappear into the fog. He then looks at the mysterious snowman again, unease creeping over him. SNOW WHIPS PAST THE WINDOW, becoming a

VAST EXPANSE OF WHITE. Then a TINY SPECK appears: BETH. Up to her knees in snow. Freezing.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY (BUT DARK)

The fog is so thick that Beth can barely see more than a few feet in front of her. She stops to look around, disoriented.

The borders between the yards and streets have been erased. The whole neighborhood is oddly desolate. Silent. Dark.

Ribbons, wreaths, and other decorations are strewn everywhere. And other than the wind, it's quiet enough to hear the creaking and crackling of the ice-covered trees.

Beth looks for signs of life in the passing houses. Nothing. Not even smoke from chimneys. Weird. Then she hears something else: a quiet SCRAPING, like nails on a chalk board -- SCREECH. Unnerving.

Beth looks around, trying to find the source. No luck. So she keeps walking, now a little more nervous.

SCREEEECH. There it is again. What the hell? Beth stops and peers into the fog, trying to see, when

A DEEP ROAR makes Beth jump out of her boots. She turns as the fog clears long enough to reveal:

A NEIGHBOR trying to start his TRUCK. He then goes back to scraping ice from his windshield. SCREEEEECH SCREECH SCREECH.

Beth sighs, relieved. Barely audible over the WIND:

BETH

HEY DO YOU GUYS HAVE POWER?

His head is wrapped in a hood and scarf, the neighbor silently shrugs and shakes his head "no."

Beth waves then marches onward while THE NEIGHBOR'S SILHOUETTE begins fading into the fog behind her. But as soon as Beth takes a few more steps, the WIND HOWLS LOUDER and we hear a MUFFLED YELP. She turns back around.

And the neighbor is gone. Only his RED SCARF remains.

BETH (CONT'D)

Hello?

It's as if he vanished into thin air. Confused, but assuming the neighbor went inside, Beth turns and keeps going.

EXT. AROUND THE CORNER - MOMENTS LATER

Beth walks along a freshly plowed stretch of road when she hears a faint sound under all the wind: SLEIGH BELLS.

She stops to listen. They're getting closer, as if reindeer might come tromping by at any moment. Even weirder, it sounds like they're coming from ABOVE.

But as quickly as they came, the bells are overtaken by the wind again. Beth shrugs it off, suddenly distracted by

BLINKING CHRISTMAS LIGHTS on a distant house. An oasis of color among the grey. Apparently someone has electricity.

BETH

Thank God.

Hopeful, she quickens her pace. But then, THE NEXT HOUSE -- its lights flicker on top. Tiny colored beacons pushing through the snow. Even better. And then

A THIRD HOUSE. More lights. Even closer. Beth stops, sensing something isn't right when A LOUD THUMP startles her, followed by faint BREATHING. Deep and raspy.

Beth squints through the haze. The house is about thirty feet away. And on its rooftop she spots --

A STRANGER in a long HOODED COAT crouched near the chimney. But silhouetted by fog it's impossible to see him clearly.

BETH (CONT'D)

Uhh... Hello?

The Stranger doesn't reply. Doesn't move. He simply watches from the rooftop. His hot breath swirling in the frigid air.

Maybe someone checking his chimney? But as Beth gets closer, something about this man feels very, very, off. She stops to get a better look... AS THE STRANGER STANDS.

Frighteningly tall, easily seven feet. A sinewy yet hulking mass drenched by fog and shadow, we can barely make out his DARK CRIMSON ROBES, like tattered fur pelts dyed with blood.

FLICKERING CHRISTMAS LIGHTS illuminate a little more of him, just enough to make out an ashen beard, tangled and matted, encrusted with dirt and ice.

And slung over his shoulder: a huge LEATHER SACK -- a weathered patchwork of animal hides blotched by dark stains and filled with God-knows-what.

Like an obscene vision of ST. NICHOLAS, the Stranger cocks his head, gazing at Beth. Hissing. Then, just as we're wondering how someone that big got on the roof--

HE SILENTLY LEAPS STRAIGHT INTO THE AIR, briefly disappearing in the snowstorm before -- WHOMP! He lands on the house right behind Beth. More lights FLICKER. Somehow he's causing this.

BETH (CONT'D)

Oh my God...

Beth, smartly, runs as THE STRANGER LEAPS AGAIN -- lands on ANOTHER HOUSE -- chasing her from the rooftops -- a preternatural predator playing cat and mouse.

BETH (CONT'D)

Somebody help me! Pleeeeeeease!

She glances back, sees THE STRANGER perched on a CHIMNEY -- a leering gargoyle, *watching her, enjoying the chase...*

BETH SCREAMS AND FALLS, digging herself out over and over, face wet with icy tears. She looks back at the Stranger, scanning the rooftops... but he's gone. Vanished.

Then Beth sees something ahead in the fog: THE FEDEX TRUCK.

BETH (CONT'D)

Oh God HELP MEEE!

She reaches the truck, tries the door -- frozen shut. Climbs up, peers through the door glass to see THE FEDEX GUY INSIDE - FROZEN SOLID MID-SCREAM.

BETH SHRIEKS but quickly covers her mouth -- nervously glances around -- no sign of The Stranger in the fog. Thinking fast, she crawls under the truck.

WE STAY UNDER THE TRUCK as Beth lays perfectly still. Tries not to breathe. Trembles. LISTENING. Just the wind. Then:

WHOMP. The Stranger lands outside the truck. Starts circling. Sniffing her out. Taunting her with HISSING BREATHS.

Beth whimpers, watching his feet CRUNCH the snow. No, they aren't feet, they're HOOVES. STEAM rising with each step.

BETH CLOSES HER EYES, crying, praying. And then -- The Stranger leaves. His hooves abruptly lift straight off the ground with a GUST OF WIND as if he just flew away.

Beth listens. Unsure. Is he gone or trying to lure her out? She quietly looks around -- and freezes. Sees it:

A WOODEN JACK-IN-THE-BOX. Placed in the snow a few feet away. Faded like an antique. Its TINY CRANK starts rotating.

MUSIC PLAYS: an off-key "SILENT NIGHT". And just as it reaches "all is bright" KACHUNK! THE LID SNAPS OPEN.

Beth isn't stupid. She slowly starts crawling BACKWARDS, inching away from this horrid little device. But then--

Inside the box, SOMETHING STIRS. We barely see the top of what might be a SMALL HEAD swaying back and forth like a cobra rising from a basket. But before we fully see this creature, we are back on

BETH'S FACE. TERROR FILLING HER EYES as she takes in this unseen and unspeakable horror. And then

FROM ABOVE, LOOKING DOWN ON THE TRUCK

BETH'S SCREAMS FILL THE AIR. Long and loud, only to be drowned out by SHRIEKING WIND as we--

SMASH TO:

INT. MAX'S ROOM - NIGHT

Max stares out the window when he suddenly spots TWO MORE SNOWMAN in their yard. Both facing the house like the first one, but these guys look a lot less friendly. And they definitely weren't there a moment ago...

CUT TO:

TOM'S CELL PHONE. Battery dying. No service.

SARAH (O.S.)

Anything?

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Sarah enters, hands Tom a sandwich. He's sitting by the window. It's getting darker outside, colder inside. We're starting to see their breaths.

TOM

It's the strangest thing... No cars. No people. Not even a salt truck. Don't suppose you got me a backup generator, did you?

SARAH

Under the tree, next to your ties and underwear.

Sarah sits, wraps a blanket around both of them.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Hey, what time is it? Beth should probably be home by now, shouldn't she?

TOM

She's *fine*, she's at Derek's.

SARAH

All the more reason to worry.

TOM

Hon, relax. Just for once, okay? How's everyone else doing?

SARAH

Cranky. Bored. Sick of the cold. And each other.

TOM

Tis the season.

Sarah smiles, leans her head on his shoulder. Tom seems surprised, as if they haven't been this close in a while. He gives into it. Gently kisses her on the head.

SARAH

I miss us.

TOM

Me too.

Beat. And then THE WIND ROARS, RATTLING THE HOUSE. Frozen trees SCRAPE the windows like phantoms.

SARAH
How long can this keep up?

TOM
Not long. Not at this rate anyway.

MORE WIND. EVEN HARSHER. And then... DISTANT SIRENS. Tom sees Sarah is worried. He is too, but hides it better.

TOM (CONT'D)
At least we know there's someone else out there.

MAX
Mom? Dad?

Max lingers in the doorway, concerned.

MAX (CONT'D)
It's almost dark out -- and Beth isn't back yet.

Tom and Sarah exchange a look, both of them thinking about Beth and the distant sirens they just heard...

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

THE CRACKLING FIRE. Omi adds some logs. Then, oddly, sneaks a glance up the chimney, as if anxiously looking for something.

The rest of the family is huddled under coats and blankets. Junk food everywhere, Rosie the Bulldog snoring on her back.

Howard awkwardly feeds Baby Chrissy a bottle while Howie munches on FRUITCAKE. Dorothy shivers on the couch, nursing a flask and a good buzz.

AUNT DOROTHY
Tellya what, if I was one of those bums freezing in the streets right now?
(finger across her throat)
I'd just end it.

Linda wraps a blanket around Stevie and Jordan, who are busy killing zombies on an iPad.

LINDA
Christ, Aunt Dorothy...

AUNT DOROTHY

What? Even on a nice day you wonder why they bother.

Tom, Sarah, and Max enter, clearly worried.

TOM

Hey Howard, think your Hummer can get through this mess?

HOWARD

Lucinda? Hell, I could point her due east, hit the gas, and be storming the beaches of Normandy by sunrise. What's up?

SARAH

Beth. She went to her boyfriend's earlier but should be back by now.

AUNT DOROTHY

See, let 'em out of your sight for one second and BOOM -- shotgun wedding.

LINDA

Aunt Dorothy, please.

AUNT DOROTHY

You oughta know...

Linda shrinks, stung by the truth. Max then notices Omi becoming agitated. Oddly so.

TOM

It's probably nothing but I thought we'd pick her up and do a quick swing around town, see what's going on out there.

HOWARD

A little recon mission, eh?
(hands Chrissy to Linda)
Thought you'd never ask.

But they turn to leave, Omi GRABS Tom's arm.

OMI

Kein Aufenthalt... nicht gehen...

TOM

What? Why?

AUNT DOROTHY
The hell she all riled up about?

OMI
Warten, bis der Sturm voruber ist.

MAX
She says not to go. That it's too dangerous, and that we should wait... until the storm is over.

Tom and Sarah exchange a concerned look, as if this isn't the first time they've seen Omi act irrationally.

SARAH
Tom...

TOM
I got it. Hey mom, we have to pick up Beth but Max and Sarah will take care of you while I'm gone, alright?

Omi shakes her head, tries to reply, but...

TOM (CONT'D)
Mom, mom, listen -- everything's going to be okay. I promise.

But Omi doesn't seem so sure, nervously biting her lip while Tom and Howard head for the door. Seeing how agitated she is, Max gently holds his grandmother's hand.

EXT. ENGEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Sarah and Linda watch from the doorway, hiding their unease as THE HUMMER ROARS TO LIFE and rumbles into the icy streets.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BIRD'S EYE - HIGH ABOVE THE NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

The Hummer is a tiny dot slowly navigating a dark hazy maze.

HOWARD (O.S.)
Global warming my ass. Must be at least negative twenty.

INT. HUMMER - NIGHT

FWIP FWIP FWIP -- WINDSHIELD WIPERS fight a losing battle with sleet and fog. Tom rides shotgun while searching for a radio channel, but only finds STATIC.

TOM

It just doesn't make any sense...

HOWARD

Try A.M.?

TOM

Tried everything.

HOWARD

Guess the storm knocked out all the stations too.

TOM

Yeah, guess so...

Then Tom funds something -- the familiar long BEEP of the EMERGENCY BROADCAST SIGNAL fighting through HISSING STATIC:

AUTOMATED EBS VOICE

*--National Weather Ser-- has iss--
a blizz-- warn --entire Central Oh--
area, including Franklin Coun--,
Dela-- Chagrin Falls, and Warren
Vall-- temper-- negative -- degrees--
- urged avoid trav-- seek shelter--*

Neither man wants to admit how bad this sounds.

HOWARD

What I wouldn't give for some Bing Crosby right about now.

Tom quietly agrees when he notices something outside.

TOM

Wait, wait, slow down. What is that...?

They see a WIDE PATH freshly cut through the street.

HOWARD

Looks like a plow came through...

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT

The Hummer turns, followed by the plow trail. MISTY HEADLIGHTS reveal CARS buried under huge sweeping SNOW DRIFTS.

THE HUMMER continues along the carved path. It's almost like a frozen canyon, with snow piled high on either side. Then the Hummer's beams cut through the eerie mist to reveal:

THE SNOW PLOW. Rammed into a tree.

INT. HUMMER - SAME TIME

HOWARD

Jesus H...

Tom and Howard climb out.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

They cautiously approach the crashed plow. Flashlights scan the driver's door, hanging open. The plow is empty.

Tom finds a SHATTERED WINDSHIELD while Howard notices a trail of FRANTIC FOOTPRINTS scrambling away from the crash.

HOWARD

Must've lost control somehow.
Maybe smacked his head on the
windshield... stumbled that way?

Tom checks inside. Notices a PHOTO of a MAN AND HIS FAMILY clipped to the visor. WRAPPED GIFTS in the passenger seat -- all covered in SHATTERED GLASS.

TOM

I don't think it was his head that
did that, Howard. Look...

Howard now notices the GAPING HOLE was punched INWARD. On edge, Tom checks his phone again: NO SIGNAL. Battery 5%.

TOM (CONT'D)

We gotta find Beth.

HOWARD

Snow's too high, Tom. Lucinda's a
tough broad but she ain't gonna cut
through the rest of this mess.

TOM

Well, Derek's place is only a few blocks from here. Same way as those tracks.

Howard is already walking back to the Hummer, where he opens a LOCK BOX to reveal a SHOTGUN and .357 REVOLVER.

TOM (CONT'D)

You really think we need--

HOWARD

I ain't taking any chances.
(hands him the revolver)
Just point and shoot, my friend.

TOM

Kinda heavy.

HOWARD

Yeah, it's Linda's.

As Howard SLAMS the trunk shut--

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - LATER

MOVING WITH TOM AND HOWARD -- flashlights following the erratic footprints. Looks like there was a struggle. Then the white snow becomes dotted with red specks leading to

A HUGE PUDDLE of icy blood-soaked snow. Tom and Howard gawk at the frozen blood. Howard looks down, sickened to realize he's standing in some of it.

HOWARD

Sweet Lord...

Howard is about to puke or run as Tom kneels down, inspecting some SHREDS OF CLOTHING, A WALLET, and KEYS.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Tom, what kind of godforsaken neighborhood do you live in?

Tom pockets the wallet and keys, then looks around at all the eerily quiet homes and notices:

FONT DOORS ajar. SMASHED windows. MORE ERRATIC FOOTPRINTS leading from the porches into yards -- but none of the tracks seem to make it past the sidewalks...

Tom's mind is racing, thinking only of Beth.

TOM

Come on.

HOWARD

But...

Tom keeps going. Howard reluctantly follows, gun raised, still glancing back at the puddle of frozen blood as we--

CUT TO:

POP, HISS -- a MATCH lights an old SANTA CANDLE, his chubby face already melted into a demented scowl.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sarah and Linda light candles, trying to keep things cozy. Max is trying to read a comic book but keeps stealing glances at the Santa candle, oddly uneasy. His cousins snore nearby.

Looking at the Christmas tree, Linda's eyes light up:

LINDA

Oh my gosh! You had Mom's angel this whole time?

SARAH

I thought you knew.

LINDA

No! Ohhh, remember how we used to fight over who got to place her?

SARAH

(smiles)

Yeah and you fought dirty. Think I still have the scars.

Linda inspects the tree, touched to find old HANDMADE ORNAMENTS and a FADED PHOTO of her and Sarah as kids.

LINDA

Sis, you saved everything...

SARAH

Yeah, I figured it's what Mom would've done, you know?

Beat. As Sarah and Linda share a nostalgic moment.

LINDA

You always do everything right...

SARAH

Nah, I'm just really good at making it *look* like I do. Truth is, there isn't a day that goes by where I don't wake up with one hand on the panic button.

LINDA

Oh c'mon, *you*? You've got everything! Your whole house is like one big SkyMall catalog.

SARAH

Yeah but with Tom traveling, Max always holed up in his room doing... whatever it is boys do, and Beth spending all her time with Derek, things can get a little, I don't know... quiet.

LINDA

Grass is always greener, sis, trust me. I'd *kill* for some quiet. Look at me, three years younger but somehow managed to squeeze out *twice* as many kids. Do *that* math.

SARAH

I know, but you guys always seem so... happy. Like you could care less what anyone else thinks.

LINDA

Don't you dare say you're jealous.

SARAH

No, I only... It's nice to have some company. That's all.

The sisters smile. Their first real conversation in years. Suddenly, the WIND HOWLS, rattling the house. Even the FIRE FLICKERS. Max and his cousins perk up, alarmed, when:

THUD! More wood lands in the hearth, piled on by Omi. She stokes the flame higher, checks the heat. Adds another log.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Omi, try not to use up all the firewood, okay? We need to make it last.

But Omi waves her off: *Yeah, yeah*. Suddenly: SCRATCH SCRATCH.
From above. Something on the roof? Everyone hears it.

MAX

Mom...?

SARAH

Probably just squirrels

AUNT DOROTHY

In this weather>

SCRATCH SCRATCH -- they listen as it scurries towards the chimney. Rosie whimpers at the ceiling when

WHAM! *Something else* hits the roof. Bigger. Heavier. SCRATCH SCRATCH, SCURRY SCURRY -- all eyes are glued to the ceiling. Max notices Omi clutching the FIRE-POKER like a weapon, staring at the fireplace. Then, to herself:

OMI

Elfen...

Then with a final MASSIVE BOOOOOOM that makes everyone jump out of their seats -- silence. It's gone.

SARAH

See? Squirrels.

But Max can tell she doesn't seem so sure.

AUNT DOROTHY

Right. Probably playing with their nuts.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEREK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Howard anxiously trails Tom as they approach the front yard, passing by an icicle-draped SNOWMAN, just like the one Max saw earlier but even more grotesque.

HOWARD

I'm tellin' ya, Tommy, these damn gangs wait for natural disasters then swoop in like vultures and start lootin'. We gotta get back to the house, warn the others--

TOM

And we will, but first we find Beth.

ON THE PORCH: they find the door smashed open, pummeled by something huge. Tom and Howard exchange a look, then raise their guns and enter--

INT. DEREK'S HOUSE, FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Flashlights reveal everything in SHAMBLES. SHATTERED ORNAMENTS. Broken CANDY CANES. Crushed GIFTS. As if someone shook the entire house like a snow globe.

TOM
Beth...? Derek?

Howard waves at Tom using military hand signals, but Tom shrugs -- he has no idea what Howard's saying. HUSHED:

HOWARD
I said I'll check upstairs!

TOM
Don't be stupid, we stick together.

The proceed down the hall into--

INT. DEREK'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Flashlights sweep the room. GLASS crunches under their feet. The walls and floors are splattered with MILK... and BLOOD. Howard takes photos of everything with his phone.

Noticing the open refrigerator, Tom closes the door to find a GINGERBREAD MAN pinned to the other side by a KITCHEN KNIFE, its tiny face twisted in agony. Weird.

HOWARD
Whoever did this was one demented sonofabitch.

He snaps off one of the gingerbread man's legs and eats it.

SOMEONE'S POV: watches Howard and Tom search the room. But this POV is oddly small enough to hide under a table.

Then a SOUND from the living room. Something moving? Tom and Howard follow it, but as they exit, SOMETHING SMALL darts across the kitchen and into the shadows.

INT. DEREK'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They find the room COVERED IN SNOW, windows SMASHED, SMOLDERING LOGS and ASH all over the floor.

Tom inspects some BROKEN TOYS next to shattered photos including DEREK AND BETH'S PROM PICTURE. He picks it up, flooded with emotion.

HOWARD
We'll find her, Tommy.

Tom nods, holding it together as they continue their search.

It looks like the FIREPLACE exploded all over the room, and in the spewed ash, Tom spots CLAW MARKS. Two long trails scraped along the floor and into the blackened hearth.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Maybe some poor sap fell into the fire, so they dragged him out.

TOM
Yeah, or dragged *in*...

Howard looks closer, Tom might be right. But wait--

HOWARD
What about that?

Howard points to strange footprints in the ash.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I've hunted a lot of game in my day, Tom. Those are goddamn HOOVES. Big ones too. Maybe an elk or a goat.

TOM
Yeah, but what kind of goat walks on its hind legs?

Howard snaps more photos when DISTANT SCREAMS ECHO OUTSIDE.

TOM (CONT'D)
BETH?!

EXT. DEREK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tom charges into the snow, listening to the shrieks, as Howard struggles to keep up.

HOWARD
TOM! TOM, WAIT!

Tom reaches the street -- spins around -- BETH'S screams seem to echo all around him, bouncing off the darkened houses.

TOM
BETH?! Where are you??

HER SCREAMS echo everywhere. Tom heads into the fog while

BEHIND HIM: Howard is to his thighs, wading through snow when he's STUCK. His right foot won't move. Caught on something?

HOWARD
 What the--

CRUNCH! SOMETHING UNDER THE SNOW BITES INTO HOWARD'S LEG. HOWARD SCREAMS, FLAILING -- DROPS HIS SHOTGUN AS HE'S TOSSED AROUND LIKE A RAGDOLL.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
TOM!!! GAH -- HELP ME! HELP MEEEE!

We can hear the sounds of some UNSEEN CREATURE growling under the snow like a monstrous shark. Howard's then DRAGGED AWAY, about to get pulled under the snow when

TOM'S HAND LUNGES -- GRABBING HOWARD.

TOM
 HANG ON, HOWARD! JUST HANG ON!

HOWARD
 SOMETHIN' DOWN THERE -- it's got me
 -- think it's *eating* me!!

Then, even in this chaos, Tom suddenly catches a glimpse of A DOZEN SNOWMEN watching from the yards. They're perfectly still, but they are WATCHING. And SMILING.

And each time Tom's eyes dart to look at one, somehow, impossibly, the snowmen seem to get CLOSER. Tom is stunned.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
GODDAMMIT TOM!!!

Tom snaps out of it -- tries pulling Howard free again -- playing a painful game of TUG-OF-WAR with whatever the hell is under the snow. All we hear are its carnal GRUNTS.

Tom almost has Howard free when CRUNCH! THE THING BITES DOWN AGAIN. HOT BLOOD SPREADS through icy white.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
 OH GOD OH GOD IT HURTS IT HURTS!
 PULL ME OUT, PULL ME OOOUTTT!

IN A FLASH, Tom stands -- GUN raised.

ON HOWARD. Ashen.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Tommy...?

POP! POP! POP! TOM FIRES -- and on the fourth POP --

SMASH TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

The whole family springs to their feet, hearing the GUNSHOTS.

AUNT DOROTHY

Suppose those were squirrels too.

THEN BACK TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - SAME TIME

Tom has fired INTO THE SNOW, missing Howard by inches. Then A PAINED MUFFLED CRY as the unseen creature SCREECHES and tunnels away under the snow like a demented Bugs Bunny.

Tom grabs the shotgun, helps Howard to his feet. Howard cringes in agony, sees the BLOODY BITE WOUND on his leg.

HOWARD

What the hell was that thing!?!?

TOM

I don't know but we have to move,
NOW!

They take off, Tom supporting Howard as he limps along.

EXT. ON A ROOFTOP - NIGHT

SOMEONE'S POV: watches the men hobble through the street below. RASPY BREATHS condensing into swirling clouds...

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - MOMENTS LATER

They round a corner and both freeze in their tracks, gawking.

HOWARD

No no -- oh God... LUCINDA!?!

THE HUMMER IS IN FLAMES. And Howard is in tears. And then a LONG HOWL echoes in the darkness inhuman and terrifying.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Why is this happening?

TOM
Christ, c'mon!

They keep going.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Sarah puts on a coat while Linda cradles the crying baby.

LINDA
Where do you think you're going?

SARAH
To find them. I don't like this.

LINDA
What are you talking about? Howard
and Tom know what they're doing,
they're fine!

SARAH
Are they?

Sarah stares at Linda, hinting at the gunshots, when--

MAX
Mom?

Sarah pauses, sees Max looking at her helplessly, Softens:

SARAH
Honey, I'll be right back, I
promise. Just lock the door and--

THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN. Tom and Howard shamle in and slam it shut again, locking every deadbolt and chain. They're trembling from the cold, their skin already FROSTBITTEN.

TOM
MAX GET THE FIRST AID KIT!

LINDA
Oh my God. Howard?!

HOWARD
(collapses on the couch)
Oww, ow... I gotta sit, gotta sit--

SARAH
Oh my God... Where's Beth?

LINDA
We heard gunshots--

TOM
I'll explain, but right now we need
to keep everyone calm and--

HOWARD
GET AWAY FROM THE WINDOWS! Guns,
swords, knives, pots, pans, round
up whatever you can find--

TOM
HOWARD! Not. Here.

Tom gestures to the frightened kids. Wincing in pain, Howard
does his best to calm down. Linda gasps at his wound.

LINDA
Jesus, Mary and Joseph, what
happened out there?!

Howard grits his teeth, eyes Tom-- *See? I'm playing along/*

HOWARD
Nothin... it's just a scratch.

LINDA
Ut it looks like something bit --

HOWARD
-- It's a scratch. Must've stepped
in a bear trap under the snow.

MAX
We don't have bears.

Beat. Linda finally catches on, reading between the lines.

LINDA
Hey kids, why don't you go to the
kitchen and make something to eat?

MAX
Aw c'mon! You guys just don't want
to tell us what's really going on.

SARAH
All of you into the kitchen, right
now. Aunt Dorothy, will you keep
an eye on them?

AUNT DOROTHY
Why me? I never liked kids even
when I was one.

LINDA

Please.

Seeing the fear in the kids' eyes, Aunt Dorothy's heart starts to warm -- just a little.

AUNT DOROTHY

Alright, alright, I'll show you guys how to make Peppermint Schnapps.

They follow her out. All except Max, who defiantly GLARES.

TOM

Max. Go.

Max leaves as Tom approaches Omi at the fireplace:

TOM (CONT'D)

Mom, will you please help them?

Beat. Omi is eerily calm. Stoic. Something tells us she knows more than she's letting on. She nods, then:

OMI (SUBTITLED)

Keep the fire hot.

Tom thinks about this as Omi heads to the kitchen.

EXT. ENGEL HOUSE - NIGHT

The only house with any sign of life within.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lit by candles, Stevie, Jordan, and Howie Jr sit at the table, mesmerized as Aunt Dorothy mixes PEPPERMINT SCHNAPPS and HOT CHOCOLATE, then stirs it with a CANDY CANE.

AUNT DOROTHY

See? A little sugar, a little spice... makes *everything* nice.

She sips it, smiles. Sees them begging with their eyes.

AUNT DOROTHY (CONT'D)

Alright, just don't rat me out.

Dorothy lets the kids pass around the mug, each taking a sip. Even she can't help but enjoy this quiet moment with them.

AT THE DOORWAY: Max tries eavesdropping but only hears HUSHED WHISPERS. CLANGING SILVERWARE then turns his attention to

OMI sorting through KNIVES and MEAT CLEAVERS, creating a pile of makeshift weaponry on the counter.

A PAINFUL CRY echoes from the living room. Max turns back to eavesdropping as Dorothy and the kids follow his lead.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Howard writhes in pain while Tom applies antiseptic and bandages to the BITE WOUND. Linda and Sarah are scrolling through Howard's phone, shocked by images of DEREK'S HOUSE.

SARAH

But what, who -- did all this?

HOWARD

Your guess is as good as mine.
Thought it mighta been some kind of
gang thing, but this--
(his wound)
And all the other crazy shit we saw
just don't add up.

LINDA

Could be terrorists...

HOWARD

Yeah sure, maybe they traded
suicide vests for rabid tunneling
pit bulls - OW! Easy there, Tommy.

Tom finishes dressing the wound. Sarah is pacing.

SARAH

And... Beth?

TOM

Nothing. I thought I heard her for
a second, but--

SARAH

So she's still out there--

TOM

And we'll find her, I promise, but
first I need to make sure you guys
are safe--

SARAH

I don't care how long it takes,
Tom, but we have to keep looking,
maybe pair up and take turns--

Tom pulls Sarah close, hugs her.

HOWARD

We can't go back out there! You
see this?

(his frostbitten hands)

Took less than four minutes! And
besides being subzero, there's
someone tearing through all these
fancy-ass McMansions, picking
everybody off one by one! Hell,
your whole neighborhood looks like
a goddamn ghost town, Far as I can
tell, we might be the only ones
left.

LINDA

We could leave. Squeeze everyone
into the truck and--

HOWARD

--Lucinda's gone too. Even if she
wasn't, the streets are beyond
screwed.

Tom nurses the fire, keeping it hot just like Omi said to...

TOM

Howard, how much ammo do you have?

HOWARD

Couple shells still loaded.
Another dozen in my pocket. Why?

Tom checks his pistol, only a few rounds left.

TOM

I think our best bet is to stay out
for now. Board up the doors and
windows. If we're smart and stick
together, we can ride this out.

The others aren't as sure, but it's the best plan they have.

HOWARD

Might wanna put out that fire while
we're at it, Tommy. Nothing says
'come murder us' like a big cloud
of smoke.

Linda and Sarah exchange a nervous look.

SARAH
They- they already know we're here.

TOM
What do you mean?

LINDA
We heard something earlier. Maybe
someone walking around. On the
roof...

A nervous beat as everyone glares at the ceiling.

HOWARD
(to Linda)
Told you we shoulda gone to my
brother's.

LINDA
Oh sure, Howard, Christmas on a pig
farm!

HOWARD
Hey, Jesus was born in a barn!

SARAH
Knock it off! What about the kids?
What do we tell them?

TOM
I don't know... the truth?

HOWARD
Sure. Which version of it?

A SNEEZE. And everyone turns to see THE KIDS peeking from a doorway. Aunt Dorothy too. All more frightened than ever.

LINDA
Hey, how much did you guys just
hear?

AUNT DOROTHY
Enough.

The kids run to Linda's arms.

JORDAN STEVIE
Mom, did someone take Beth? Are they coming for us?

LINDA

Don't be silly, Beth is just with her boyfriend and we're all gonna be fine. See? You've got your whole family here. And besides, it's Christmas, right? And nothing bad's gonna happen on Christmas.

Linda wishes her words were more comforting. She hugs her kids then looks at Sarah, trying to hold it together.

Dorothy sits next to Howard and offers up some PAINKILLERS. He's surprised by the gesture but takes it. Cheers.

HOWARD

Welp, guess that cat's outta the bag.

Hiding her anguish, Sarah turns to gaze out a raging storm. Tom approaches, doing his best to console her.

TOM

We'll find her honey, I promise.

Max and Omi solemnly watch their struggling family. While outside, the SCREECHING WIND crescendos as we--

CUT TO:

KA-CHUNK! KA-CHUNK! A NAIL GUN boards up windows with PLYWOOD. Howard and Tom work together, turning 2x4s into BRACKET BARRICADES for the front door while Howie Jr helps.

IN THE KITCHEN: Max shows Stevie and Jordan how to operate some KEROSENE LANTERNS while Dorothy makes them sandwiches. The kids gawk, surprised by the gesture.

IN THE GARAGE: Linda and Sarah gather FIREWOOD, FLASHLIGHTS, BINOCULARS, CANDLES, AXES, BATS, and other equipment.

A STOCKED LIQUOR CABINET OPENS: Aunt Dorothy gazes at the bottles, beaming like a kid in a candy store.

IN THE DINING ROOM: Food, supplies, and weaponry are neatly laid out. Tom looks over everything, hoping it's enough, when Max suddenly scampers by with TOM'S LAPTOP BAG.

Confused, Tom follows him into the living room where Max removes a PORTABLE TRAVEL BATTERY and plugs in THE TREE, filling the room with soft white light.

Touched, the family stares in awe, basking in its warmth. And all while this is happening, we see Omi keeping to herself, keeping the fire tall and hot as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ENGEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Wind moans. Windows are dark and boarded shut. But then, inexplicably, we hear the familiar and comforting sounds of the CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS SPECIAL?

LINUS (O.S.)

And lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them. And they were so afraid.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

LINUS (ON TV)

And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not. For behold, I bring you tidings of great joy...'

PULL OUT to reveal this isn't a TV, but Linda's iPad, The girls are camped out in front of it, wrapped in blankets, while Howie munches on a FRUITCAKE. Offers it to Jordan.

JORDAN

Gross. How can you eat that crap?

Howie shrugs, keep eating. Sarah enters with more pillows.

SARAH

Won't the battery die?

LINDA

Gotta go sometime. Might as well enjoy it.

AUNT DOROTHY

Yer tellin' me...

Dorothy swishes a brandy glass, already half asleep.

LINDA

Been a while since we had a slumber party.

SARAH

Yeah, first one asleep gets her hand dipped in warm water.

LINDA
That never actually worked, did it?

SARAH
(nods to Aunt Dorothy)
We could find out...

The women quietly laugh, but Linda sees her sister's smile fade fast, obviously still anxious.

LINDA
Hey, Beth's a tough girl. Takes
after her mom. I'm sure she's
fine.

Sarah's smile returns, grateful.

SARAH
Thanks, sis.

At the windows, Tom and Howard use binoculars, peering outside through slits between the boards. Howard looks like he wants to say something, finally musters up the courage:

HOWARD
Hey... uh, Tom? I, uh, wanted to
say thanks. For, you know, savin'
my ass back there.

TOM
Oh. Sure. No problem.

Tom is taken aback by this little bonding moment.

HOWARD
And sorry for thinking you were
such a spineless prick all these
years.

This is news to Tom. Howard reads his surprise.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Now look, I know you don't think
much of me either.

TOM
No, Howard you're--

HOWARD
--*Linda's life sentence*. That's
what her dad called me at the
wedding, Still, that was the
happiest day of my life.

(MORE)

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I promised myself I wouldn't be the loser everyone thought I'd be, but now... here I am.

TOM

A loser would've walked out ten years ago, Howard. What matters is that you're always there for them. That you come home every night to see your wife and put your kids to bed, you know?

(quieter)

I mean, at least you're not spending half the year in hotels and airport lounges. And I'm not saying all this just because you're holding a shotgun.

Howard smiles, oddly moved.

HOWARD

Thanks, Tommy.

Max joins them, eating a cookie,

TOM

You should get some sleep, champ.

MAX

How?

TOM

Good point.

Max spots the EERIE SNOWMEN outside, now covered in sharp icicles, their grins sending chills up his spine.

MAX

Dad.. Are we gonna die?

Tom and Sarah exchange a look. Then, calm and collected:

TOM

No.

THUD. They see Omi toss more logs into the fire.

MAX

Omi's been acting different. Ever since the storm...

TOM

Yeah, but she always gets weird around Christmas.

MAX

How come?

TOM

Dunno. She never wanted to talk about it.

Max considers this when BOOOOOOOOOOM! THE ENTIRE HOUSE SHAKES - FLASHES OF LIGHT BURST THROUGH THE BOARDS - EVERYONE SCREAMS, HITS THE DECK - CHRISSY NOW AWAKE AND CRYING.

AUNT DOROTHY

What the hell was that?!

HOWARD

Sure as shit wasn't fireworks.

TOM

Everybody stay down! Howard?

Tom and Howard carefully climb back up to the windows.

BINOCULAR POV: A FIERY GLOW on the horizon, PLUMES OF SMOKE.

TOM (CONT'D)

Looks like some kind of explosion.

HOWARD

What's out that way?

TOM

Main Street...

The kids flock out to Linda and Sarah, near hysterics. The women comfort them despite their own splintered nerves.

LINDA

Shhh, it's alright. It was far, far away from us, It's okay...

But Tom spots something else on the horizon: the PAINT GLOW of street lights and flickering electricity?

TOM

Wait... looks like someone still has power. Maybe the MegaMart?

HOWARD

Could've been a gas line. Some poor bastard trying to turn his heat back on.

AUNT DOROTHY

Yeah or maybe it was them.

SARAH

I think I'm more worried about what I'm *not* hearing. No sirens, no police or fire. So where is everyone?

The listen -- she's right. Dead silence.

AUNT DOROTHY

Maybe they're the ones who got blown up...

LINDA

GUYS.

Linda points out the kids, all shuddering with fear.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Hey, how about we finally get some sleep? Maybe tomorrow we can open some presents early. *If you're good.*

The kids relax and climb back into their sleeping bags. Howie nuzzles up against Aunt Dorothy, who reluctantly lets him.

Howard and Tom watch as Linda and Sarah tuck everyone in. A moment of calm in the surreal chaos.

HOWARD

You know Linda might be a ripe pain in the ass sometimes, but she has a way with little ones that I'll never understand.

Tom looks at Sarah, more in love with her than ever.

TOM

Yeah... I know what you mean.

They're all huddled next to a crackling fire. Probably the closest this dysfunctional family has ever been.

HOWARD

We should stay up and keep watch. Make sure the neighborhood doesn't come crashing down.

TOM

Good idea, I'll go first.

HOWARD

Nah, you catch some winks with your family. Besides, 'bout time I put my Reserve Training to good use.

TOM

You sure?

CLICK-CLACK. Howard checks his shotgun. Good to go.

HOWARD

A shepherd's gotta protect his flock.

Howard settles next to the window, gun raised and ready as we-

SMASH TO:

Howard. Slumped in his chair. Snoring. Linda's iPad plays a quiet and haunting rendition of "SILENT NIGHT" as WE GLIDE past the sleeping family.

SONG (ON IPAD)

*Silent night, holy night...
All is calm, all is bright...*

LINDA on the floor, surrounded by her kids like a mother hen. OMI asleep in a chair, clutching the fire poker.

SONG (ON IPAD) (CONT'D)

*Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild...*

AUNT DOROTHY on the sofa nestled protectively with Howie. TOM, SARAH, and MAX huddled together on the floor.

SONG (ON IPAD) (CONT'D)

*Sleep in heavenly peace...
Sleep in heavenly peace...*

The music lulls us into a sense of serenity, at least until the iPad battery finally dies. And then--

Silence. We can only hear the family's SOFT BREATHING and a TICKING CLOCK. But something is missing. Something crucial.

THE FIREPLACE. With no one watching, its flames have been reduced to smoldering embers.

Still asleep, Max shivers and pulls his blanket tighter. We can see everyone's BREATH CLOUDS, as if the room is getting even COLDER. And with the wind comes the sound of

TINY FOOTSTEPS padding across the roof. Someone has arrived.

STRANGE WHISPERS echo from the chimney. IMPISH VOICES arguing in some cryptic ancient tongue become STIFLED GIGGLES as

POWDERY ASH trickles down the chimney. We then hear something slowly descending, getting closer and closer until A FIGURE lowers into the cold fireplace:

Suspended from a RUSTY CHAIN adorned with TINY BELLS, it is a JUMBO GINGERBREAD MAN, the size of a doll. It comes to rest in the dying hearth while MORE QUIET GIGGLES echo from above.

Then, with a TUG OF THE CHAIN, the chain's bells softly JINGLE... But everyone continues sleeping.

The chain twitches again, JINGLING louder -- the Gingerbread Man dancing with each tug. Finally--

HOWIE JR stirs. Sniffs the air. Groggily wakes up and spots the Gingerbread Man dangling in the fireplace. His eyes light up. A dream come true.

He carefully gets up and tip-toes over his sleeping family as MORE WHISPERS echo from the top of the chimney, shushing each other, barely able to contain their glee.

Grinning as dumb and wide as the Gingerbread Man itself, Howie picks up the oversized cookie and takes a DEEP WHIFF, relishing its warm sweet smell...

He RAISES IT TO HIS MOUTH, angling its head for the biggest possible bite, then -- CHOMP!

Howie's eyes roll back in bliss. Crumbs tumble down his chubby cheeks, It's perfect. Howie munches away, then opens his mouth for another bite and--

CHOMP! HOWIE SHRIEKS IN PAIN. Gaping in horror to see that THE GINGERBREAD MAN HAS BITTEN INTO HIS HAND. Somehow, this bizarre demented cookie has COME TO LIFE.

Howie tries shaking it loose, but the Gingerbread Man laughs maniacally as it runs circles over and around his body TIGHTLY WRAPPING HIM UP IN THE CHAIN like a spider,

HOWIE SCREAMS as the CHAINS GO TAUGHT and EVERYONE SPRINGS AWAKE just as HOWIE IS YANKED UP AND INTO THE FIREPLACE.

HOWARD

HOWIEEEEE!

HOWARD RUNS but TRIPS over Aunt Dorothy.

HOWIE'S FEET are about to disappear up the shoot when HANDS LATCH ONTO HIS ANKLES -- held tight by SARAH.

SARAH
HANG ON HOWIE!

HOWIE'S SCREAMS are mixed with the bizarre CHITTERING LAUGHTER of the Gingerbread Man and his unseen cohorts above.

SARAH PULLS as hard as she can when she too is VIOLENTLY YANKED UP and into the chimney.

SARAH (CONT'D)
TOMMMM!!!

TOM LUNGES -- GRABS SARAH'S LEGS -- Howard recovers and joins the insane TUG-OF-WAR. Even Max rushes to help -- EVERYONE PULLING -- trying to wrench Sarah and Howie free,

HOWARD
WE GOT YOU, WE GOT YOU!!

THE KIDS SCREAM - Baby Chrissy WAILS - ROSIE howls and barks.

LINDA
PULL HARDER GODDAMN IT!!

EVERYONE TUGS -- KICKS -- sending SMOLDERING LOGS into THE CHRISTMAS TREE. It CATCHES FIRE, DRY BRANCHES and GIFTS quickly BURSTING INTO FLAMES.

TOM
MAX -- THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER!

MAX RUNS OFF as the room fills with fire and smoker. Omi pulls Linda and the girls away, COUGHING and HACKING while Aunt Dorothy at the inferno with a blanket.

INSIDE THE CHIMNEY

Sarah clings to Howie, barely able to see in the darkness and soot. But when she finally glances up, she's horrified to see

THE GINGERBREAD MAN -- inches from her face -- SCREECHING. AND SARAH SCREAMS as her sanity is shattered.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Tom and Howard seem to be winning -- Sarah's legs are almost out of the chimney, followed by Howie's.

HOWARD
WE GOT YA BUDDY, WE GOT --

But then MORE FOOTSTEPS rush across the roof. Reinforcements?
Followed by LOUD GRUNTS and then -- EVERYONE LURCHES AS HOWIE
SLIPS FROM THEIR GRIP AND VANISHES UP THE CHIMNEY.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
NOOOOOOO!!!!

HOWIE'S SHRIEKS are overtaken by WHOOPS OF SINISTER
CELEBRATION and a stampede across the roof before -- Silence.
They're gone. Just as mysteriously as they arrived.

Linda sobs, cradling the baby.

LINDA
HOWIE?! Oh God, no...

Max returns and SPRAYS THE TREE with the extinguisher.

HOWARD
LET GO OF ME! HE'S ALIVE! I gotta
go after him-- I gotta--

TOM
Howard-- HOWARD STOP! You can't
open that door!

Beat. Howard glares at Tom... then sees Linda and the kids.
His rage becoming despair, Howard looks down and realizes
he's still holding one of HOWIE'S ORTHOPEDIC SHOES.

HOWARD
Oh dear lord, this ain't happening.
My boy...

He collapses to the floor. Smoke clears. Ash settles. The
tree SMOLDERS, now a charred skeleton of gnarled branches and
melting ornaments. THE HEIRLOOM ANGEL shatters on the
ground.

TOM
Sarah, are you hurt? Honey?

She's in shock, still unable to grasp what she saw in the
chimney. The whole family is pretty much a disaster.

AUNT DOROTHY
They were laughing! Did you hear
them?!

HOWARD
It's my fault... I-- I fell asleep.
My boy's gone and it's all my--

VWOOSH! THE FIREPLACE ROARS BACK TO LIFE, filling the room with flickering light and shadow. Everyone turns to see

OMI SILHOUETTED BY FLAMES. The old woman looks at them with tears in her eyes, Barely a whisper:

OMI

Das ist alles unsere Schuld. Er ist für uns alle kommen...

LINDA

Tom? What's she saying?

Tom is just as confused, hesitantly translating:

TOM (TRANSLATING)

This is all our fault, he's come for us all...

Sarah looks at Tom, once again worried that Omi is losing it.

TOM (CONT'D)

Mom... are you feeling okay? Have you taken your pills--

MAX

Dad, let her talk!

OMI

Please... listen...

The room drops into stunned silence. For the first time, Omi has spoken in English.

AUNT DOROTHY

(under her breath)

I *knew* it.

This is difficult for Omi, physically and emotionally.

OMI

I... I must tell you something... All of you.

Beat. As she takes a deep breath and begins telling her story, wrestling out the words with a thick German accent:

OMI (CONT'D)

It started with the wind... On a cold winter night, much like this.

FLICKERING SHADOWS on the walls become more animated, transforming into GNARLED TREES... then a DARK FOREST...

OMI (V.O.)
*The war was over. But times were
 still difficult for my village...*

We are watching Omi's story come to life via ornate ANIMATED SHADOW PUPPETS as we descend onto:

EXT. SMALL GERMAN TOWN, 1946 - NIGHT (SHADOW PUPPETS)

SNOW FALLS on the skeletal remains of a once quaint town. Shattered buildings shiver and creak in the cold winter wind.

OMI (V.O.)
*It was almost Christmas. But unlike
 years past, this Christmas was
 darker. Less cheerful...*

We PUSH through fog and rubble to the TOWN SQUARE where we see what seems to be the silhouette of a LARGE DEMON: TWO RED GLOWING EYES and a LONG TONGUE twisting from an OPEN MOUTH.

But as we move through the mist, we see THE EYES are actually the TAIL LIGHTS of a RED CROSS TRUCK, and the long black tongue is a LINE OF STARVING PEOPLE awaiting their rations.

We move down the line of SOMBER FACES until we find a LITTLE GIRL, clutching a tattered SANTA DOLL. This is YOUNG OMI.

OMI (V.O.)
*But I still believed in Santa. In
 magic and miracles. And the hope
 that we could find joy again...*

Young Omi is handed the LAST LOAF OF BREAD by a RED CROSS WORKER. For a moment it's the perfect Christmas image until--

Omi is violently knocked to the ground. Her Santa doll and bread sent flying into the air...

OMI (V.O.)
*But our village had given up. On
 miracles... and on each other.*

Realizing the rations have run out, the crowd has turned into a mob. In SLOW MOTION (ala opening credits):

An OLD MAN is knocked over. A RED CROSS WORKER is attacked. TWO STARVING MEN fight over A BAG OF GRAIN while their ANGRY WIVES scream at each other.

THE BAG RIPS and grain flies everywhere. Falling to the ground around Young Omi, who looks up at the scene in shock.

OMI (V.O.)
*They had forgotten the spirit of
 Christmas. The sacrifice of giving.*

The crowd clears and Omi picks herself up, There's no food left, but she manages to find her SANTA DOLL. Its face now trampled into a twisted mask, eyes glaring.

OMI (V.O.)
And my family was no different...

Off this grotesque version of Old Saint Nick we DISSOLVE TO:
 OMI'S FATHER'S SCREAMING FACE. We then PULL BACK to reveal:

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT (SHADOW PUPPETS)

Omi's FATHER, MOTHER, and TWO OLDER SISTERS. Yelling at her for coming home empty handed. Omi offers up all that she has in consolation -- her SANTA DOLL.

OMI (V.O.)
*I tried to help them believe again,
 but we were no longer the loving
 family I remembered...*

But OMI'S MOTHER snatches the doll from her hands and rips it in half, tossing the pieces to the ground.

OMI (V.O.)
*They had given up. And eventually,
 so did I.*

Heartbroken, Omi throws the torn doll into the FIREPLACE.

OMI (V.O.)
*And for the first time, I didn't
 wish for a miracle... I wished for
 them to go away.*

And as the doll is swallowed by flames, we follow the SMOKE up the CHIMNEY and into the NIGHT SKY. Twisting into rumbling BLACK CLOUDS, choking out the STARS and MOON.

Below, one by one, the LIGHTS OF THE TOWN BELOW follow suit until we only see BLACK and hear the SOUNDS OF ROARING WIND.

OMI (V.O.)
*And that night, in the darkness of
 a howling blizzard, I got my wish.*

Suddenly, we hear DISTANT THUDS on the roof. Again and again. Closer and closer until they're right above us like a heartbeat racing in the dark -- BOOOOM!

YOUNG OMI'S EYES burst open as we PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. OMI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (SHADOW PUPPETS)

Young Omi shivers in bed. Listening.

OMI (V.O.)
I knew Santa was not coming this
year.

We hold on a CLOSE UP OF OMI as we LISTEN to the horrors happening in the rest of the house (but never see them).

OMI (V.O.)
*Instead, it was a much darker, more
ancient spirit.*

HOOVES CLOMPING. RUSTY BELLS jingling. The dull THUD of something heavy hitting the floor. The DERANGED GIGGLES and PITTER-PATTER of tiny feet racing through the cottage.

OMI (V.O.)
*The Shadow of St. Nicholas... It
was Krampus.*

And then... THE SCREAMS.

OMI (V.O.)
*And as he had for thousands of
years, Krampus came not to reward,
but to punish. Not to give, but to
take.*

We hear the shrieks of Omi's family as they're ripped from their beds. Unbearably loud. WALLS CRACK as someone smashes into the other side, followed by CHITTERING LAUGHTER.

OMI (V.O.)
He and his helpers.

Tears stream down Omi's face as she covers her ears. But THE SCREAMS continue building to a deafening crescendo. Her eyes dart around the dark room, when, THROUGH THE CRACK OF HER DOOR, Omi catches a BRIEF, fleeting glimpse of:

TINY FIGURES darting through the halls, snickering. They are followed by their leader, the DARK SILHOUETTE of:

KRAMPUS. A lanky figure clad in dark ragged robes, huge twisted horns, and a matted beard framing his GLEAMING EYES.

Krampus is about to leave when he suddenly stops. Sensing something, the demon turns and PEERS THROUGH THE DOOR CRACK, STARING RIGHT AT OMI -- trembling. Terrified.

OMI (V.O.)
But Krampus didn't take me that night...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Still shaking, Young Omi enters the living room, gawking at:

OMI (V.O.)
He left me as a reminder of what happens when hope is lost...

THE CHARRED RUBBLE OF THE FIREPLACE. Split down the middle.

OMI (V.O.)
When belief is forgotten...

And in the ash: A RUSTY JINGLE BELL inscribed with *Gruss Vom Krampus*.

OMI (V.O.)
...and the Christmas spirit dies.

As Young Omi picks up the bell, the light of Christmas morning washes over her as we--

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

THE SAME RUSTY JINGLE BELL, now clutched in Omi's wrinkled hands. Exhausted by the memory, Omi collapses into a chair. Max moves to her side and consoles her while--

THE REST OF THE FAMILY stares in silence, unsure of what to make of her story. The kids seem to believe it, but...

HOWARD
 And here I thought I was the one losing it.

LINDA
 Howard!

HOWARD

WHAT? You gonna believe this pile of senile horseshit? Evil Santa Claus -- Jesus H. Almighty... Suppose she'll be yammering about rabid Easter Bunnies come Spring.

TOM

That's enough.

HOWARD

DAMN RIGHT IT'S ENOUGH! Whoever the hell's messing with us just took my boy and your daughter and we're sittin' here listening to some twisted bedtime story?! Screw that!

Howard grabs his shotgun and limps for the door. Tom moves to stop him but Howard COCKS THE GUN.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Don't, Tommy. I'm starting to like you. I am. But this is my choice.

Howard starts removing the 2x4 barricade over the door.

LINDA

JORDAN & STEVIE

Oh God Howard, *please* don't go out there! Just calm down, we can figure this out!

Daddy don't go! Stay with us please!

HOWARD

This is how I figure things out.

HE THROWS OPEN THE DOOR -- WIND POURS IN -- but when Howard turns to leave, he FREEZES in his tracks, gawking.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

No...

The rest of the family gathers around him, staring at:

DOZENS OF SNOWMEN covering the yard. Twisted, obscene faces glaring at the family, all covered in long sharp icicles.

Howard's lip starts to quiver when he spots a FAT LITTLE SNOWMAN wearing HOWIE'S VARSITY JACKET, positioned right up front for all of them to see.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Oh God...

Howard is about to step outside when they notice TINY GLISTENING EYES watching them from the darkness.

DOZENS OF STRANGE SILHOUETTES scurrying across rooftops while a chorus of SNICKERS and WHISPERS fills the air.

TOM
Shut the door, SHUT IT!

SLAM! Tom re-barricades the door.

MAX
Dad... what are we gonna do?

Tom stares at Omi, unable to shake the feeling that the old woman might be right about everything.

TOM
We keep the fire hot.

Off the petrified faces of the family and SHRIEKING WIND we--

FADE OUT.

FADE IN ON:

MAX'S ADVENT CALENDAR. The next door is opened to DEC 24th, revealing an eerie illustration of SANTA himself.

EXT. ENGEL HOME - DAY (BUT DARK)

Now almost completely swallowed by snow drifts. Gnarled icy trees crackle like bones. It might be morning but it's still completely dark out, as if the sun itself has died.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY (BUT DARK)

THE FIRE CRACKLES. No one can sleep. It's too cold and everyone is too scared. A GRANDFATHER CLOCK quietly ticks away. Exhausted from crying, Linda leans against Sara.

Tom and Howard keep watch at the windows, but Howard is still devastated, clutching his son's tiny shoe. Shivering from the cold, Aunt Dorothy wraps her scarf around the baby.

AUNT DOROTHY
There you go, like a fat little pig
in a blanket -- oink oink oink.

The baby laughs. Dorothy suddenly catches Sarah staring. Surprisingly, Sarah smiles warmly... and Aunt Dorothy returns the gesture. A silent but meaningful reconciliation.

Still in shock, Stevie and Jordan look up to find max holding a BAG OF CANDY.

MAX

From my Halloween stash.

A peace offering long overdue, the girls take some.

Tom is lost in thought, staring at THE CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS. At BETH'S in particular. A long quiet beat until--

POP! EVERYONE JUMPS AND GRABS WHOEVER'S CLOSEST FOR DEAR LIFE... But it was just the firewood cracking.

Tom looks at his arm: Howard is still clinging to it. Max breaks the tension with some bad news:

MAX (CONT'D)

We're almost out of firewood.

Tom solemnly nods, then notices something: the Grandfather Clock has stopped ticking. Tom looks at his family, on the verge of falling apart. With grim determination, he heads for the kitchen...

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Tom rummages through a junk drawer, pulls out a STREET MAP. Sarah pads in and pours some very cold coffee, hands trembling so badly she spills it all over the counter.

She starts wiping it up when Tom stops her and takes her hands in his. Gently:

TOM

When they took Howie... what did you see in there?

Sarah stares into her coffee, unable to say it out loud. Her mind still struggling to make sense of it.

SARAH

You believe her, don't you? That story?

Beat. Tom doesn't answer, but his face says he might.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I...I'm going out there to find Beth, Tom. I have to. I don't care if I die trying, I can't sit around here--

TOM

I know. Grab Howard and Linda. I have an idea.

INT. ATTIC BEDROOM - MORNING

Linda sits on the attic floor, sorting through the CHARRED CHRISTMAS GIFTS salvaged from the living room. Some need fresh wrapping, others are melted into goo. Linda fights back her despair while Chrissy gurgles nearby.

LINDA

That's right, honey, there's still hope.

Linda then comes across the parchment-wrapped ORNATE GIFTS, the ones that were on the porch when the FEDEX GUY came. They're HALF-BURNED but she optimistically keeps them.

SARAH (O.S.)

Linda?

Linda turns to her sister, trying to stay upbeat:

LINDA

Hey, do you have any superglue?

SARAH

Yeah, maybe... Hey, could we talk to you and Howard for a second?

LINDA

Can it wait? I really want to rewrap these. For the kids.

SARAH

It's important.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Max translates as the girls fire off questions. This is the most attention Omi has gotten from her grandkids in years.

JORDAN

But what if you were good all year?

STEVIE

And you leave out milk and cookies and do everything else right?

OMI

Es ist nicht das, was Sie tun, aber
was Sie glauben. Was Sie schon
aufgegeben. Hier.

MAX (TRANSLATING)

It isn't what you do, but what you
believe. What you've given up...
(point to his heart)
In here.

Omi looks right at Max when she says this... and Max notices.

STEVIE

But can't we make him go away?

Omi answers but Max has trouble understanding.

JORDAN

What's she saying?

MAX

I'm not sure, she--

AUNT DOROTHY

She says we're fucked.

Omi shrugs in confirmation.

MAX

How'd you--

AUNT DOROTHY

Because I'm old enough to know when
life is comin' at you with its dick
out.

Kids look at each other -- gross.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Tom plunks KEYS onto the counter. Howard recognizes them.

HOWARD

The snow plow?

TOM

It was beat to hell, but if it
still runs I can drive it back
here, then everyone piles into the
car and follows while I clear a
path in front of us.

LINDA

And go where?

SARAH

(points to a map)

The MegaMart doubles as an emergency shelter. That might be why they still have power. If that's empty, we try the police station.

LINDA

And if they're... gone?

TOM

We keep driving until we see some lights. People, plowed road, somewhere safe for the kids.

SARAH

And then we'll come back with help. For Beth and Howie.

Howard looks at Linda, uneasy. But Howard then realizes:

HOWARD

Hang on, you're not talking about going for the plow by yourself, are you?

Tom nods, eyes Howard's injured leg.

TOM

Shepherd's gotta protect his flock.

INT. ATTIC BEDROOM - SAME TIME

PUSH IN on the pile of gifts. Suddenly, one of the ORNATE BOXES starts MOVING. Something inside THROBS and UNDULATES. Other gifts follow, twitching like eggs about to hatch as we--

SMASH TO:

BINOCULAR POV: SNOWMEN

Now filling the yard, all more monstrous than ever. All staring at the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Max uses the BINOCULARS. Behind him, Omi tends the fire.

BINOCULAR POV: Frozen trees... the yard... and then that STRANGE GLOW on the distant horizon. The same FLICKERING LIGHTS of the MegaMart Tom saw earlier.

Max stares at the lights, his curiosity growing...

HIS BINOCULAR POV then pans across the dark houses across the street until we see a HUGE FIGURE PERCHED ON A ROOF.

MAX GASPS -- fumbles with the binoculars -- but when he looks outside again, the hunched figure is gone. Max blinks, wondering if he imagined it, but knows he probably didn't...

AT THE FIREPLACE

Stevie reaches into a STOCKING looking for something to eat. Nothing. She moves to the NEXT STOCKING, not noticing that SOMETHING DEEP INSIDE IS MOVING. Twisting and turning.

STEVIE'S HAND reaches deeper... deeper... getting closer when

A HAND lands on her shoulder. She whirls around in surprise and points a MOTORIZED SPINNING LOLIPOP at:

JORDAN

Stevie?

STEVIE

WHAT?!

JORDAN

I think Aunt Dorothy clogged up the shitter.

STEVIE

So use the one upstairs.

Jordan bites her lip, hesitant.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

What? You afraid to go by yourself?

(off Jordan's look)

Jesus. C'mon.

They grab flashlights and leave -- not noticing as SOMETHING SMALL darts through the shadows behind them...

INT. AIR DUCT - SAME TIME

SOMEONE'S POV moves through the air ducts, accompanied by the PITTER PATTERN of tiny feet. The POV darts and weaves, following the sounds of ECHOING VOICES until it finds:

THE ADULTS talking in the kitchen. The POV spies through the VENT as they look over a MAP of the town.

TOM

The plow's only three blocks away.

LINDA

Yeah but three blocks will feel like three miles in this mess.

HOWARD

And what about that thing under the snow?

TOM

We hurt it once. We can do it again.

LINDA

Have you guys told Max.

SARAH

No. Not yet...

BEHIND THEM: A KNIFE rises towards the CEILING AIR VENT, suspended by a LONG RIBBON, hoisted by something unseen.

Chrissy spots it and starts pointing, but by the time Linda turns around, the knife has already vanished into the vent...

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Stevie shivers, anxiously waiting for Jordan outside the bathroom. We can hear her messing around inside.

STEVIE

(pounds on door)

You giving birth in there or what?

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Eyes brimming with tears, Jordan stares at a photo of HOWIE eating a cheeseburger as big as his head. Suddenly -- PITTER PITTER PITTER PITTER -- from the air vents. Jordan freezes. Listens closer, but hears nothing.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SAME TIME

THE BATHROOM DOOR OPENS and Jordan steps out.

STEVIE

You done?

Jordan nods when they both hear a MUFFLED VOICE coming from the ATTIC. The words are unclear, but it sounds like...

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Beth...?

The girls approach the ATTIC STAIRCASE. Listening.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

Beth? You up there?

A long silence. Uncomfortably long. And then:

BETH (O.S.)

Stevie? Jordan? What are you doing?

It really is Beth. As clear as day. The girls smile, happy to hear her cousin's voice. Head upstairs.

JORDAN

Where've you been? Everyone's
freaking out--

But there's something off about Beth's voice. Unnatural.

INT. ATTIC BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The girls ascend into the shadow attic. The candles Linda lit earlier are still burning, casting shadows on the wall.

JORDAN

Where are you?

BETH (O.S.)

Over here.

The girls follow Beth's voice to the PILE OF BURNED GIFTS Linda was re-wrapping. Then they notice something odd...

THE ORNATE GIFTS. They're open. Ripped and shredded from within, like something clawed and chewed its way out.

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

No peeking before Christmasssss...

Startled, the girls spin around. And then they SCREEEEAM.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

...which echoes through the house. Everyone jumps, looks up.

LINDA
JORDAN?! STEVIE??

Linda runs from the room and into --

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Linda follows the SCREAMS which seem to come from everywhere. Rosie the Bulldog whimpers and stares up the staircase.

LINDA
Oh my God where are they?! BABIES??

But the screams abruptly stop. Howard, Sarah, Tom enter as Linda zeroes in on Aunt Dorothy accusingly.

LINDA (CONT'D)
WHERE ARE THEY?!

AUNT DOROTHY
They were just here, I think they
went to the bathroom!

LINDA
And you just let them go?!

AUNT DOROTHY
Was there another option?!

LINDA
(calls upstairs)
JORDAN?! STEVIE??

Just the creaking house and wind. Linda starts up the stairs but Howard grabs her, holding her back.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Let me go! HOWARD!

But Howard smartly senses that something is very wrong.

HOWARD
Shh. Listen...

They hear TINY FOOTSTEPS followed by GIGGLES.

LINDA
Jordie! Stevie? Oh God, please
answer...

Tom draws his gun.

SARAH
What are you doing?

TOM
You guys stay, I'll check--

LINDA
Forget it, those are our kids, Tom.

SARAH
And no one's going anywhere in this house alone.

TOM
Well someone's gotta stay behind.

HOWARD
I'll stay.

SARAH
You sure?

Howard looks at Max, Omi, Dorothy and Chrissy -- the family members who need the most protection.

HOWARD
Yeah. I'm sure.

MOMENTS LATER

Each carrying FLASHLIGHTS, Tom, Sarah, and Linda climb the staircase. Tom has the gun, Sarah the axe, Linda a hammer.

Linda makes brief eye contact with Howard before disappearing into the shadows. Howard mouths "I love you."

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Darkness and eerie silence. Tom leads the way, gun raised. They're all shaking from fear, the cold, or both.

TOM
(whispers)
Stay together.

A LOUD CREAK echoes from the attic stairwell, followed by more FOOTSTEPS and WHISPERS.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Lit only by fire and candles, Max, Omi, Dorothy and Howard anxiously listen to every sound from upstairs. Dorothy cradles Chrissy, trying to comfort both herself and the baby.

Feeling an impalpable sense of guilt, Max turns to Omi.

MAX

Omi, I think this might all be my
fault...

Omi gently pulls him closer. And then, BEHIND THEM, we notice something in the firelight. Something on the mantel that wasn't there a moment ago:

A LARGE NUTCRACKER. Designed to look like a TOY SOLDIER, but with eerily realistic teeth. It stands perfectly still, but its appearance is more than unnerving..

Suddenly, a METALLIC CLANG echoes from the kitchen followed by BREAKING GLASS. Howard spins and aims his shotgun. ROSIE growls. Sounds like someone rummaging around.

MAX (CONT'D)

Uncle Howard?

HOWARD

Shh.

Howard peers down the hall. More CLANGING. Dishes break.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Rosie, c'mon girl.

But Rosie whimpers and hides behind a couch.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Useless turd.

(to the others)

Alright. Wait here.

Howard grabs a KEROSENE LANTERN and heads for the kitchen...

INT. ATTIC - SAME TIME

Tom leads the way up the stairs. It's pitch black and even colder up here. A layer of MIST hangs in the air while ICICLES and FROST creep over the walls and piles of junk.

TOM

Jordan? Stevie?

They hear a faint MOAN from the far end of the attic -- where it's darkest. And disturbingly, it's accompanied by what can only be described as moist CHEWING.

They hesitantly follow the sounds, flashlights shaking.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Chrissy whimpers. Even the baby can feel the dread.

AUNT DOROTHY

It's okay, I got you, we're gonna
be okay...

Gripping the fire poker, Max stands guard. But he fails to notice that THE NUTCRACKER that was on the mantel a moment ago... is now gone.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Howard creeps in. Heart racing. Light and shadows playing tricks on his mind. POTS and BROKEN GLASS litter the floor, as if something tore across the counter knocking things over.

Howard then inches past the KITCHEN ISLAND, where a GINGERBREAD HOUSE sits. And inside, *something* moves...

INT. ATTIC BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Weaving their way through a maze of junk, Tom, Sarah, and Linda follow the CHEWING NOISES to the far side of the attic.

Tom readies his gun. Linda is shaking so badly that she can barely aim her flashlight. They exchange nervous glances as they slowly peer over some old furniture and boxes.

Their flashlights first illuminate what looks like a small WOODEN BOX, a faded JACK-IN-THE-BOX with a tiny handle -- similar to the one Beth found when she was taken.

The lid is already open, but instead of a toy, *something else* has emerged from the box. Some sort of "creature"...

Flashlights pan across its thick serpentine abdomen -- like a massive fleshly intestine sprawled across the floor, only at least eight feet long and horrifyingly bloated and distended.

A scream rises in Linda's throat, but it isn't until their flashlights find the Jack-in-the-Box's torso that the screaming really begins. Because its upper body is that of

A CLOWN. A dirty, ragged HARLEQUIN TOY that clawed its way out of a childhood nightmare and into reality.

Even worse, the Clown's stubby arms are clutching JORDAN'S LEGS -- shoving her head first into its dislocated jaws, trying to swallow her whole.

The Clown then winks its black soulless eyes as GULP -- Jordan is fully devoured. Then, horribly, it wipes his putrid mouth and SMILES. *Deliciousssss.*

As Linda finally SCREAMS.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Dorothy and Max hear the screams.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

So does Howard.

HOWARD

LINDA?!

He bolts for the door when TWHIP TWHIP TWHIP -- he's hit by something small and fast, then falls to the floor in agony.

Howard looks down to see SIX NAILS embedded in his leg. Hearing something, he looks up to see

THE NAIL GUN on the counter -- and holding the gun, unbelievably, is a bizarre trio of

SINISTER GINGERBREAD MEN.

No doubt cousins of the one that took Howie, THE GINGERBREADS try to aim the nail gun while bickering and slapping each other like the little assholes they are.

Howard blinks. Momentarily stunned to say the least.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

But I was a good boy this year...

TWHIP TWHIP TWHIP -- the Gingerbreads fire again but Howard grabs a CUTTING BOARD, using it as a shield.

INT. ATTIC BEDROOM - SAME TIME

The Clown bends over the grab his next victim: STEVIE, sprawled and unconscious on the floor.

SARAH
SHOOT IT, TOM! FOR GOD'S SAKE,
SHOOT IT!!

TOM FIRES, hitting a cluster of junk -- Startled, THE CLOWN drops Stevie and SCREECHES off into the shadows.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

SCREAMS fill the house.

AUNT DOROTHY
Jesus, what are those sounds?!

Max clutches the fire poker, too scared to move.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

DISHES SHATTER all around Howard as he crawls on the floor, dodging a rapid-fire volley of nails. Pinned in a corner, he recovers, trying to get a bead on the Gingerbreads.

He can hear them moving, knocking over pots and pans, still whispering and bickering with each other.

INT. ATTIC BEDROOM - SAME TIME

LINDA
(rushes to Stevie)
Oh God baby, wake up, please wake
up!

Stevie moans, groggy but alive. Linda cradles her, when *pitter-patter pitter-patter*. Something moves behind them. They spin. Flashlights barely illuminating the attic.

Pitter-patter. In front of them. They spin again, shaking. And then A NOISE. WHISPERING from ABOVE. Everyone shines their flashlights upwards to see

A FACE glaring down from the rafters. But it isn't human, it's a demented PORCELAIN CHRISTMAS CHERUB clinging to the beams SCREECHING like a bat, her tattered wings spread wide.

THEY SCREAM as the CHERUB LUNGES, knocks Sarah to the ground.

LINDA rushes to help when SOMETHING SMALL AND FURRY leaps from the shadows and CRUNCH! BITES INTO HER ARM. And when we finally get a good look at it, we realize it's a

TEDDY BEAR. A dirty patchwork toy that has somehow sprung to life. It GROWLS and sinks its very real teeth and claws into Linda's arm, MAULING her like a rabid animal.

Tom tries pulling the bear away when he suddenly CRIES OUT, arching backwards, hands trying to reach for a KITCHEN KNIFE that has been stabbed between his shoulders.

But even weirder, a clanging RUSTY TOY ROBOT is clinging to the handle, TWISTING the blade deeper into Tom's back.

These grotesque holiday toys are what "hatched" from the mysterious ornate presents and they are ALIVE -- attacking with shocking strength and speed. Meanwhile...

IN A CORNER: THE CLOWN slithers to a VENT, straining to pull it open and escape with Jordan in its belly.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Still pinned against a corner, ANOTHER NAIL hits Howard's shoulder -- ANOTHER in his forearm. He SCREAMS as

THE GINGERBREADS LAUGH, enjoying their sadistic fun.

Howard finally spots the little fuckers clustered on the kitchen island, right next to SARAH'S CREME BRULEE TORCH.

Howard aims his shotgun and BOOM! THE TORCH EXPLODES and the Gingerbreads are blasted off the counter. One is blown to pieces while the other two hit the floor, hilariously screeching and running around on fire.

And Howard enjoys watching them burn.

But the Gingerbreads won't give up. Spotting howard, the flaming hellspawns let out an ANGRY SCREAM and start running right at him, scampering across the floor.

HOWARD FIRES AGAIN, blasting one away, but the final Gingerbread LUNGES THROUGH THE SMOKE, about to latch its burning body onto Howard's face when

A PAIR OF JAWS snaps the Gingerbread in mid-air. It's ROSIE. The fat dog shakes and mauls the cookie to pieces.

TINY HANDS suddenly grab Howard, who shrieks and flails until he realizes it's just MAX.

MAX

C'MON!

Max drags Howard away as Rosie lingers behind, staring at THE GINGERBREAD MAN'S HEAD, still alive, angrily screeching. Rosie curiously watches it for a moment, then EATS IT.

INT. ATTIC BEDROOM - SAME TIME

THE CHERUB CACKLES and wraps a string of CHRISTMAS LIGHTS around Sarah's throat, STRANGLING her as it sadistically SINGS in BETH'S VOICE while

LINDA bashes TEDDY with her flashlight but it won't let go, its gruesome face spattered with fresh blood, as

TOM battles the TOY ROBOT, still trying to pull the knife from his back. They careen around the room before Tom SLAMS his head against an exposed PIPE and is knocked out cold.

But even in all this chaos, Linda catches a glimpse of THE CLOWN trying to escape into a vent across the room.

LINDA

NO!!!

Fueled by a mother's rage, LINDA SCREAMS, breaks off a SHARP ICICLE from an attic beam and STABS IT into Teddy's eye.

THE BEAR SCREAMS as Linda HURLS IT across the attic, disappearing behind some clutter.

Her perky Christmas sweater now torn and bloodstained, Linda lunges for THE AXE and--

LINDA (CONT'D)

HEY!

THWACK! She cuts the robot in half with a shower of sparks.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Tom? You need to get up.

(he doesn't move)

I said UP!

Linda yanks the knife out and he instantly awakens--

TOM

GAH!

She uses her scarf to cover Tom's wound.

LINDA

Keep pressure on it.

Her fierce eyes snap to THE CHERUB still strangling Sarah. Enraged, LINDA CHARGES -- the once passive, chubby soccer mom now wielding an axe like a battle-hardened warrior.

CHERUB

Wuhoh!

The Cherub smartly lets go of Sarah and scampers into the shadows. Linda helps Sarah to her feet.

LINDA

Sis, you okay?!

SARAH

Yeah... I think --

LINDA

Good, help Tom!

Linda leaves and rushes towards

THE AIR VENT. Where the Clown has pulled the grate off and is now trying to SQUEEZE its way inside, but its bulbous body is STUCK. IT SHRIEKS, desperately trying to get away just as

LINDA comes rushing at it, axe raised.

LINDA (CONT'D)

GIVE ME BACK MY DAUGHTER!

With one final SQUEEZE, the Clown disappears into the vent just as THWACK -- Linda's axe misses it by inches.

The Clown cackles as it escapes into the ducts. Linda tries going after it but she can't fit.

SARAH is helping Tom to his feet:

SARAH

It's okay honey, you're gonna be okay--

Suddenly THE ROBOT LUNGES, still alive -- but Sarah grabs Tom's gun and BLAM BLAM BLAM -- blows it to pieces. Tom stares at his wife, amazed by her reflexes.

SARAH (CONT'D)

(off his look)

What?

Linda returns with Stevie in her arms.

LINDA
C'mon, it's in the vents. We have
to find it before--

MORE SCREAMS suddenly join the fray -- from downstairs.

SARAH
Oh my God...

TOM
MAX! HOWARD?!

They bolt for the stairs.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Max helps Howard limp into the living room as Tom, Linda, and Sarah come rushing back down. Dorothy holds the baby close.

AUNT DOROTHY
What happened up there?!

Linda sits Stevie down in a chair.

LINDA
They got Jordan.
(to Stevie)
It'll be alright, baby. Just
breathe, that's it. Breathe...

Howard's face turns white upon hearing this.

AUNT DOROTHY
WHO?!

LINDA
Those things that took Howie.
(looks at Omi)
Whatever they are.

Tom and Sarah rush to Max.

TOM
Hey you okay?

MAX
Yeah, fine, I'm fine--

Max wraps a blanket around Stevie, who is trembling in shock.

JORDAN'S SCREAMS FILL THE HOUSE, Followed by more THUMPING as the Clown slithers its way through the vents.

Enraged, Howard springs to his feet and reloads his shotgun.

HOWARD

This ends right here, right now.

Their eyes are glued to the ceilings and walls, trying to follow the noises but they seem to be coming from EVERYWHERE.

LINDA

I think it's panicking, trying to find a way outside.

TOM

We boarded everything.

HOWARD

What are we dealing with Linda?!
What'd you see up there?

LINDA

You don't wanna know.

HOWARD

Hon, I just got my ass kicked by a bunch of Christmas cookies, so trust me when I tell you I can take it!

SARAH

SHH!

Everyone anxiously listens to the THUMPING and SCREAMING. Sometimes close, sometimes distant.

Max suddenly notices ROSIE whimpering and scratching at a LARGE VENT near the floor. An idea sparks and Max rushes to pull the vent open.

TOM

Max, what are you doing?

MAX

GO GET EM, GIRL!

Rosie charges into the vent, barking and growling.

The family listens as the dog starts hunting the Clown -- sniffing... padding around the vents... and then they hear

THE CLOWN SHRIEKING IN TERROR as it's chased, attacked, and mauled. We hear a flurry of BARKING and SCREECHING as their off-screen battle becomes more vicious and intense.

Chunks of walls and ceiling BULGE and CRACK from the pursuit. PIPES BURST, WATER SPRAYS, Sarah's gallery of FAMILY PORTRAITS shatter on the floor.

But it sounds like Rosie is WINNING -- slowly dragging the panicked creature towards the vent...

HOWARD

Get 'em Rosie... kill it...

But then they hear a LOUD WHUMP. Followed by SILENCE. Everyone looks around.

LINDA

Rosie?

More uncomfortable silence, for far too long. And then THE LIVING ROOM CEILING CRACKS AND CAVES IN -- Everyone ducks, dodging falling debris as

THE CLOWN'S MASSIVE BODY hits the floor with a sick wet THUD.

The beast is now even more horrifying, covered in dirt, grime, and cobwebs -- and it has devoured ROSIE. The dog's shape now visible in the Clown's swollen belly with Jordan.

THE CLOWN SCREECHES AND HOWLS, futilely attempting to crawl away but it's now too fat to move.

Howard is frozen with terror while the rest of the family surrounds the Clown, trying to keep it from escaping again.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Kill it, Howard!

But the Clown viciously defends itself -- hissing and clawing at them like a trapped animal.

Sarah lunges with a knife, tries to cut its belly open, but the Clown BITES her hand. Tom pulls her back to safety.

Finally snapping out of his daze, Howard raises the shotgun, aiming for the monster's head, about to pull the trigger when

SOMETHING SMALL AND FAST flies through the air and latches onto Howard, slamming him to the ground. IT'S THE CHERUB -- its tattered wings wrapped around Howard's head as it scratches and bites his face.

HOWARD

GET IT OFF ME, GET IT OFF!

Tom and Sarah rush to pull the little monster away.

Suddenly, the Clown arches back and lets loose with a TERRIFYING PRIMAL HOWL -- as if crying for help.

It's so chaotic that no one notices as THE TEDDY BEAR rises up behind Omi, standing on a shelf -- holding a ROLLING PIN.

MAX

OMI!

THWACK! It hits her. She falls.

Furious, Aunt Dorothy grabs Howard's shotgun off the floor and BOOM -- blows the Teddy Bear to pieces.

Max rushes to Omi -- dazed but alive. And that's when THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER goes off, filling the room with billowing clouds of white. And when the clouds dissipate, Max sees

THE NUTCRACKER, clutching the extinguisher. It scampers away.

MAX (CONT'D)

Dad...?

TOM AND SARAH finally pull the Cherub off of Howard and hurl it against a wall as BOOM -- Aunt Dorothy nails it with the shotgun too. Feathers and porcelain fly everywhere.

Everyone then turns their attention back to the Clown.

TOM

Aunt Dorothy... finish it...

AUNT DOROTHY

With pleasure.

She raises the shotgun, but the Clown no longer seems afraid. A sick smile spreads across its face as if it knows something they don't. And we--

PUSH IN on Omi, her face filled with dread, realizing:

OMI

Elfen...

SMASH! SMASH! SMASH! Multiple pairs of TINY ARMS start breaking through the windows -- GRABBING DOROTHY and wrestling the gun away from her.

WIND fills the room, candles are blown out.

It's difficult to see these new creatures in the darkness, but they clearly aren't toys. Bigger, meaner and stronger, they are ELFEN. THE DARK ELVES.

Laughing and snickering, the Elves quickly tear through the boards and barricades and tumble into the living room.

There are seven of them, all similar but slightly different. Dressed in dirty pelts and furs, their leathery skin is chapped and cracked from the cold.

Their faces covered by primitive masks carved into terrifying expressions while strings of BONES and BELLS clatter around their necks.

THE ELVES surround the Clown, protecting it like a prized pet, while the Nutcracker obediently scampers to their side.

One of the elves even examines the remains of the Cherub and Teddy Bear -- mourning their loss. It's as if the toys were hunting dogs and the Elves are the hunters.

TOM grabs the axe, about to attack, but the Elves press a DAGGER against Dorothy's throat. It's a stand-off.

AUNT DOROTHY

Goddamnit, Tom! I'm pushing seventy
with nothing going on but booze and
re-runs -- DO IT!

But Tom can't. Suddenly, HEAVY RUSTY CHAINS adorned with THICK HOOKS smash through the broken windows. Moving quickly, the Elves attack the chains to the Clown, then wrap them tight around Aunt Dorothy.

HOWARD can't take it. He breaks free from the others and LUNGES at the Clown, grabbing onto its sick "tail" just as

THE CHAINS ARE PULLED TAUGHT and Dorothy, the Clown, and Howard are all yanked out the window and into the darkness.

LINDA SCREAMS as she's held back by Tom and Sarah.

Only Max, Tom, Sarah, Omi, Linda, and Baby Chrissy remain, hopelessly surrounded by the Elves.

The snarling creatures inch closer, toying with the family, jabbing at them with daggers and spears.

Linda clutches Chrissy and Stevie while Tom and Sarah slash at the elves, trying to keep them at bay. Max holds onto Omi, terrified.

The family braces themselves, but suddenly -- the elves stop in their tracks, staring upwards as if hearing something. *Sensing* something. And then

THE ELVES SCATTER, scrambling and leaping out at the broken windows. Beat. Silence. As the family looks around.

LINDA

H-h-howard...? Aunt Dorothy..?

Sarah comforts Linda, whose mind is starting to crack. Tom moves fast, sorting through the rubble for the SHOTGUN.

TOM

Max, the ammo.

Max scrambles, grabbing shotgun shells off the floor, scattered next to crushed ornaments and cookies.

SARAH

Where -- Where'd they go?

TOM

I'm more worried about when they come back. I say we make a break for it.

SARAH

For what?!

TOM

The snow plow. It's our only shot.

LINDA

(panicking)

This is a nightmare -- it has to be, it can't be real. God, why is this happening to us? Why is this happening to our family?!

POP HISS - Max turns to see Omi with a match, trying to re-ignite the fire. The wind blows it out but she keeps trying.

TOM

Mom, stop -- we're leaving.

But she won't.

TOM (CONT'D)

MOM, YOU HAVE TO STOP!

Tom grabs her, forcing her. They stare at each other. Tom sees the pain and fear in his mother's eyes when

FAINT SLEIGH BELLS ring in the distance. Getting closer. Everyone freezes, straining to listen as the bells get closer and closer. Louder. And then--

BOOOOOM! THE HOUSE SHAKES AS SOMETHING LANDS ON THE ROOF.

And as it does, the CHRISTMAS LIGHTS begin to eerily FLICKER and STROBE. A RECORD PLAYER kicks on, blasting a warped and distorted rendition of "HERE COMES SANTA CLAUS".

Everyone gawks, listening to BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. Whatever's up there CLOMPS towards THE CHIMNEY, accompanied by HOARSE BREATHING and CLANKING CHAINS.

MAX

It's him.

The temperature PLUNGES. FROST spreads across walls. ORNAMENTS JINGLE with each THUD, heralding his arrival.

Everyone backs away from the fireplace as BLACK ASH trickles down the chimney, THE HOARSE BREATHING growing louder.

TOM

C'mon!

IN THE FOYER

Tom removes the barricade, clutching the shotgun, bracing for whatever awaits them outside.

SARAH

Tom?

Tom stares at his family. Doesn't know what to say, except:

TOM

Everyone hold onto each other.

CRACK! THE CEILING SPLINTERS as the creature starts forcing its way down the chimney.

Tom flings open the door. WIND fills the room. The family grabs each other and starts trudging outside...

EXT. FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Nearly knocked over by wind, everyone does their best to help each other. Max and Omi are about to leave when Omi abruptly stops just shy of the door.

MAX

Omi? What's wrong?

She tearfully stares at Max, then:

OMI
Be good.

AS OMI SLAMS THE DOOR SHUT, locking them outside.

MAX
OMI!!

Everyone stops, sees Max pounding on the door.

TOM
MOM?!

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Omi slides the barricade back into place, then calmly approaches the hearth, watching as the chimney BULGES and BREAKS from the descending monster.

TOM (O.S.)
MOM, OPEN THE DOOR! MOM!!!

But Omi has resigned herself to this sacrifice.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - SAME TIME

TOM
MOM!!!

Watching Tom futilely pounding on the door, Max realizes:

MAX
Dad... she wants us to go...

Tom stops. Knowing Max is right.

MAX (CONT'D)
She's trying to help.

Suddenly, they all flinch as A HOWL pierces the air -- the terrifying roar of THE SNOWBEAST... and it's getting closer.

Resigned, Tom looks at his son. At Sarah and Linda. It's an agonizing choice no son or father should have to make. Choking back tears, Tom backs away from the door.

THEY LEAVE, carefully keeping away from the SNOWMEN. But as the family is engulfed by the storm, one of the snowmen seems to turn its head... watching them.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Omi gawks as BLACK SMOKE pours out of the fireplace. The bricks and mantel CRACK as THE MUSIC STOPS, skipping on a static loop as the record has reached its end.

Suddenly TWO LONG SKELETAL ARMS reach out from the hearth like pale spider legs covered in ash and soot.

TALONED HANDS then clutch the lip of the hearth and PULL the massive body out of the chimney. Bones CRUNCH and SNAP as it twists and contorts to squeeze through.

THUD. A HUGE HOOF hits the floor, crushing a Santa Claus ornament. THUD. The other hoof follows.

Omi is oddly unafraid as this ancient, old world demon begins to RISE, slowly unfurling itself to stand at its full height.

Meet KRAMPUS.

His hulking form is draped in heavy layers of pelts and furs, all dark red as if dyed with blood. LONG CHAINS and RUSTY BELLS clank with each step.

And while we see his silhouette in the flickering lantern light, we never see the details of his horrid face. We only see a mane of wild hair and a matted beard covered with frost and ice, framing two sunken GLISTENING EYES.

Krampus looms over Omi, HISSING with perverse glee. A LONG SERPENTINE TONGUE emerges from his mouth as he caresses her cheek, savoring their reunion.

Krampus then turns and opens his huge BAG OF TOYS and a chorus of WHISPERS and SNICKERS rises within...

Terror fills Omi's face as this MISCHIEVOUS CHITTERING grows louder. But before she can scream, a flurry of TINY MONSTROUS FORMS bursts from the bag as we --

SMASH TO:

SCREAMING WIND.

Reaching its apex, the frigid storm is a deadly combination of snow, sleet, and hail.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - CONTINUOUS

The neighborhood is unrecognizable. Houses and cars are completely buried. Broken trees covered in ice. It looks more like a dark fantasy landscape than suburbia.

A LONE FLASHLIGHT pierces the darkness as the muted sound of a CRYING BABY barely rises over the tempest.

THE FAMILY wades through waist-deep snow, trying to stay together. Tom leads, doing his best to guide them.

Max looks back at their house one last time as its CHRISTMAS LIGHTS FLICKER AND GO OUT. His heart breaks, realizing Omi is gone...

WE HEAR NOTHING BUT THE SCREECHING STORM. It's too cold for the family to even speak. They can only point and gesture. Faces frost-bitten. Hands turning blue. They are freezing. This is a death march.

LINDA stumbles, nearly dropping Chrissy, but Max and Stevie help her back up.

TOM looks around, trying to get his bearings, when he spots

THE CHARRED WRECKAGE of Howard's hummer, only ten feet away. Which means the snow plow isn't far...

Tom gestures for everyone to follow when they hear THE SNOWBEAST'S ROAR in the distance. Getting closer. They try to move faster, fighting the wind, trying to help each other. Either they'll all survive this or no one will.

SINISTER EYES watch them from the darkness. Prowling in the trees. Crawling across roofs like wolves hunting their prey.

Suddenly Max spots SOMETHING MOVING under the snow, tunneling towards them. Max tugs at Tom, frantically pointing. Tom sees it, aims the shotgun and BOOM!

THE SNOWBEAST HOWLS in agony but keeps burrowing under the snow... getting closer and closer...

Sarah, Linda, Stevie and Max keep running as Tom fires again and again until BOOM! Black blood erupts -- and the monster seems to retreat and disappear. For now.

THE FAMILY desperately moves as fast as they can but it's like running through quicksand. They turn a corner and spot

THE SNOW PLOW, only thirty feet away. Their last hope, LIGHTNING FLASHES. And in the burst of light they see

THE SNOWBEAST coming at them again.

TOM waves for the others to keep going as he lingers behind, putting himself between the creature and his family.

SARAH cries, begging Tom to come, but he won't budge. All he can do is mouth "I love you" in the harsh wind.

Max watches as his parents gaze at each other in a final heartbreaking good-bye. And then Tom looks at Sarah and Max, hands the keys to Sarah, and urgently mouths "GO."

And as much as it pains them -- they do.

Tom watches until they fade into the mist. He then scans the darkness, trying to see through the storm, when he spots

THE SNOWBEAST, circling him -- TOM FIRES -- SNOW EXPLODES -- Tom keeps shooting until CLICK. He's empty.

Tom closes his eyes, bracing himself. And in a burst of wind... he's gone. Pulled under the surface.

AT THE SNOW PLOW

Stevie climbs in first, then helps pull Max up to safety. Linda is lagging, struggling to carry Chrissy. Sarah turns to help when she spots

THE CREATURE tunneling at them, closing in. Linda sees it too. Panics. Tries moving faster but it's impossible.

THE CREATURE is fifteen feet away... ten... six...

Stevie and Max helplessly watch as the monster descends on Linda and Chrissy, and in the blink of an eye -- mother and daughter are pulled under.

SARAH

NOOO!

Without hesitating, Sarah dives into the snow. A long tense beat as Stevie and Max scan the sea of white. And then--

SARAH RESURFACES next to the plow with Chrissy in her arms. She hands the baby and keys to Max.

SARAH (CONT'D)

M-m-max... t-t-take it... g-g-go...

MAX

No-- Mom, you can make it, you can--

Sarah weakly smiles just as she's PULLED BACK UNDER. Beat. Silence. As Max trembles, clutching the baby.

MAX (CONT'D)
MOM?! MOM!!!

But she's gone. Everyone is gone. Max and Stevie gaze at each other, realizing they're the only ones left as we--

SMASH TO:

MOMENTS LATER

Max slams the door, hands the baby to Stevie. Fumbles with the keys and tries the engine. It sputters but doesn't start. He tries again... again...

MAX
C'mon... c'mon!

OUTSIDE THE WINDOWS: LIGHTNING FLASHES revealing DOZENS OF SNOWMEN -- now a throng of horrid icicle-covered monsters. Getting CLOSER just as THE ENGINE FINALLY RUMBLES TO LIFE.

Max throws it into reverse and backs it out from the tree.

EXT. STREET - SAME TIME

The tires spin for a beat before catching. The huge metal scraper blade lowers as Max lines it up to face the snowmen.

MAX
Merry Christmas, assholes.

MAX PUNCHES IT and the plow starts BARRELING THROUGH SNOWMEN, smashing them to pieces.

INT. SNOW PLOW - SAME TIME

Max mows them down with a vengeful smile when CRASH! SOMETHING HUGE LANDS ON THE ROOF, buckling the metal. Stevie SCREAMS and shields Chrissy, holding her tight as

KRAMPUS' CLAWS TEAR THROUGH THE ROOF like tissue paper. Cold wind rushes in while the kids stare in horror.

BIRD'S EYE KRAMPUS POV: rising high into the air, gazing down at the kids. We hover for a beat, then SWOOP BACK DOWN ON THE SCREAMING CHILDREN until we--

SMASH TO:

DARKNESS.

Silence. For an uncomfortably long time. We might even expect the credits to start rolling. Until...

Max opens his eyes. Still sitting behind the wheel. Snowflakes float down around him through the torn roof. The WIND has stopped. We only hear the idling motor of the plow.

Confused, Max looks at the seat next to him -- EMPTY. Stevie and Chrissy are gone. And then he spots it:

A RUSTY SLEIGH BELL. Just like the one Omi found decades ago when her family was taken, when she was left behind.

Max hesitantly picks up the bell and looks closer, finding the same inscription: *Gruss Vom Krampus*.

Trembling, he stares through the windshield where he notices something: the GLOWING LIGHTS of the MegaMart on the horizon.

Max bites his lip, gears turning. Wondering. Hoping. Then, clutching the rusty bell, Max makes a decision as we:

CUT TO:

EXT. SNOWY STREETS - NIGHT

The snow plow rumbles through desolate streets, heading TOWARDS the mysterious lights.

INT. SNOW PLOW - SAME TIME

Max nervously stares out the window, getting a firsthand look at the destruction Krampus has brought upon the town:

Cars overturned. Houses burning. Decorations littering the streets. A POLICE CRUISER sits empty, red and blue lights randomly flickering. And snowmen lurk EVERYWHERE.

Trying to stay calm, Max anxiously hums a Christmas song to himself. It doesn't help. Then he sees SOMETHING HUGE emerging from the fog ahead:

THE MEGAMART. But the store is unrecognizable. Completely frozen over, it's now an ominous mountain of frost and ice.

EXT. MEGAMART - SAME TIME

The plow comes to a stop in front of the store. Max climbs out, clutching a TIRE IRON as his only weapon.

Dread grips him as he stares up at the cave-like entrance. It resembles a demon's gaping maw, rimmed with hundreds of icicles for teeth.

But this profane place is far from abandoned. FAINT LIGHTS are visible deep within its icy walls -- a mix of blinking Christmas lights and flickering fires.

And then Max hears something in the desolate quiet: CHRISTMAS MUSIC. Erie and haunting, it echoes from INSIDE the store.

Mustering what little courage he has left, Max grips the tire iron and enters...

INT. MEGAMART - NIGHT

Warbling CHRISTMAS MUZAK echoes everywhere, slowed down and distorted as if played from a warped and broken record.

And it is a far cry from the bustling holiday scene we saw before. The store is in ruins, ransacked, its dark aisles now covered in ten feet of snow.

Max enters cautiously, eyes darting between dark corners and strange shadows. GIANT TOY SOLDIERS greet him, all pointing the way to SANTA'S VILLAGE. Max doesn't trust them one bit.

Moving past the Village's empty cottages, Max tries to head deeper into the store but he's blocked by a wall of SNOW MOUNTS and frozen junk, at least fifteen to twenty feet high.

So with no other way to go but up, Max begins to climb...

ON TOP OF THE SNOW MOUND

Nervously reaching the crest, Max peeks over the edge and a mix of terror and wonder fills his eyes as he gawks at:

MAX

What the...

INT. KRAMPUS' WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

Like a Christmas card painted by Hieronymus Bosch, the store has been transformed into a musty factory filled with strange CLANKING MACHINERY, all being run by a dozen DARK ELVES.

THE MACHINES form a bizarre Rube Goldberg device cobbled together from equipment scavenged from the store: bits of washing machines, lawn mowers, exercise gear and appliances.

The store's GIANT CHRISTMAS TREE dominates the room, but it's now frozen, broken, and surrounded by PILES OF LEATHER SACKS. Like giant treasure mounds scattered as far as they eye can see, the sacks look as if they might contain FROZEN BODIES.

Max gapes at this nightmarish sight, when he slowly realizes he didn't just climb a snow mound -- HE CLIMBED ONE OF THESE BODY PILES. Hands shaking, he opens an icy bag to discover

A MAIL MAN. Frozen solid. And next to him, a WAITRESS. And there are hundreds more. At least one bag for every person.

Gathering himself, Max then watches as the Elves get to work and we see exactly what this workshop creates:

The elves first toss the FROZEN BAGGED VICTIMS onto a clanking CONVEYOR BELT one by one. Max watches as the belt carries the bodies through the store, sloping upwards until it finally dumps the sacks into...

A HUGE VAT at least twenty feet tall and fifteen feet wide, welded together from chunks of sheet metal and roofing.

A RAGING FIRE burns beneath as one frozen towns person after another plummets into the vat, disappearing under a THICK LAYER OF STEAM AND SMOKE, into who-knows-what.

MORE ELVES stand at the vat's edge, cranking a huge MIXING BLADE that stirs this horrid "pulp" together. And it gets worse:

THICK TUBES connect the vat to a network of STEAMING PIPES that split off and feed the pulp into a NETWORK OF MACHINERY.

ONE MACHINE injects the pulp into different sorts of tiny limbs, heads and torsos, which are then assembled into NEW CREEPY TOYS before they're boxed up by a team of elves.

ANOTHER MACHINE mixes the batter with flour, eggs, and spices before they're rolled, pressed, and BAKED to become fresh hot GINGERBREAD MEN -- already smiling with maniacal glee.

Then, a FINAL MACHINE feeds the pulp into a network of STOVES and GRILLS rigged together to create a GIANT CHUGGING OVEN. A FINAL CONVEYOR BELT rolls out from this oven, revealing...

LOAVES OF FRUITCAKES. Yes, fruitcakes. The sticky loaves are then wrapped, ribboned, and stacked by a final team of elves. At least now you know what they're really made of.

Suddenly a CRYING BABY echoes. DOORS BURST OPEN and Max watches as freshly frozen victims are wheeled in on a cart -- and BABY CHRISSY is one of them.

The elves are oddly fascinated, poking and playing with her. And it's her SCREAMS they savor the most.

The elves then begin encasing the other frozen victims in burlap bags: TOM, SARAH, LINDA, HOWARD, DOROTHY, JORDAN, STEVIE and HOWIE JR. Even ROSIE THE BULLDOG is here.

Max gawks as his entire family is prepped for their doom.

MAX

God... no.

SOMEONE'S POV: creeps through the mountains of bodies, coming up behind Max, scurrying low and quick until it POUNCES.

MAX SHRIEKS but a HAND covers his mouth, gawking at

MAX (CONT'D)

BETH?!

Alive but traumatized, Beth is shaking and frostbitten.

BETH

(rambling, in shock)

He took me... S-s-s-anta... He came...he's real, Max...he's REAL! Oh God, I'm so sorry we made fun of you... I mean, who knew, right? Are we in hell?!

MAX

NO! That wasn't Santa, we're not in hell, and yes you guys were jerks, but we gotta save them -- LOOK!

Max points to their frozen family, who are now being dumped onto the conveyer belt by the elves. Chrissy included.

BETH

Mom? D-d-dad?

MAX

Beth, we have to do something. Do you understand?

Beth nods, trying to shake off her shock.

BETH

But... what can we do?

Max looks around the store and spots THE SPORTING GOODS DEPARTMENT, ideas brewing...

INT. MEGAMART - ON TOP OF THE VAT - MOMENTS LATER

The elves are startled by a classic FAMILIAR VOICE:

JIMMY STEWART (O.S.)
*Clarence! Help me, Clarence! I
 don't care what happens to me!*

A LEAD ELF points for the others to investigate.

INT. MEGAMART - ELECTRONICS DEPARTMENT

JIMMY STEWART (ON TV)
*Please give me back my wife and
 kids! I want to live again! I want
 to live again!*

The elves arrive to find rows of TVs playing *It's A Wonderful Life* with Jimmy Stewart running through the streets:

JIMMY STEWART (ON TV) (CONT'D)
*Merry Christmas movie house! Merry
 Christmas, emporium!*

For a moment, the elves seem confused and even touched by the old movie when BAM! The elves turn to see Beth holding a baseball bat.

And she has just knocked out a support leg for the display which tips the TVs over and crushes the elves like bugs -- SCREECHING, POPPING, AND CONVULSING as they're electrocuted.

INT. MEGAMART - ON TOP OF THE VAT

THREE ELVES are still working at the top of the vat when THUNK! AN ARROW suddenly pierces the lead elf's eye, BLACK BLOOD spraying everywhere as he plunges into the vat.

The remaining two elves whirl around, trying to find the culprit when THWIP TWHIP TWHIP -- a VOLLEY OF ARROWS HITS THEM. They fall in, SCREAMING, as we WHIP PAN to reveal:

MAX. Concealed among the frozen bodies, wielding a HUNTING CROSSBOW like a tiny assassin.

INT. MEGAMART - UNDER THE CONVEYER BELT - MOMENTS LATER

Max crawls under the machine, working his way towards a CONTROL BOX that powers the complicated system of GRINDING GEARS and PISTONS.

He pauses as MORE ELVES scurry past, rushing towards the commotion Beth just caused.

Finally reaching the CONTROL BOX, Max tries finding a way to shut it down. He turns a knob but it only makes the conveyer belt move even FASTER.

MAX

Aw, c'mon.

INT. MEGAMART - VARIOUS AISLES

Beth darts and weaves through aisles with the elves in pursuit. She turns a corner and SLIDES ON A PATCH OF ICE, but grabs a nearby shelf, catching herself.

Looking up, she sees the shelves are packed with GLASS ORNAMENTS and SNOW GLOBES. CRASH! Beth knocks them off the shelf, shattering dozens of glass baubles and globes across the floor.

The elves turn the corner and slip on the ice, tumbling through shards of glass, HOWLING in pain.

Beth smiles to herself, until she sees a LARGER ELF racing at her, wielding SHARPENED BLADES in each hand. She frantically turns a corner and bolts down another aisle.

INT. MEGAMART - ON THE CONVEYER BELT - SAME TIME

THE FAMILY is beginning the final ascent to the vat...

INT. MEGAMART - NEAR THE VAT - SAME TIME

Panicking, Max starts tearing at random hoses, wires and cables but the machine still won't shut down...

INT. DRESSING ROOM - SAME TIME

The elf SCRAPES a blade across an icy wall, hunting for Beth.

INSIDE A DRESSING ROOM, Beth cringes at the sound.

THE ELF starts looking beneath the doors. Spotting a PAIR OF FEET, he smiles and KICKS OPEN THE DOOR revealing

...MANNEQUIN LEGS?

WHACK! From behind, Beth hits the elf with her bat again and again, RAGING as black elf blood splatters everywhere.

INT. MEGAMART - ON THE CONVEYER BELT - SAME TIME

The family is approaching the vat's edge...

INT. MEGAMART - NEAR THE VAT - SAME TIME

Max finally lurches for a FIRE AXE on the wall and THWACK!
Hits the control box again and again, SHRIEKING WITH RAGE.

SPARKS FLY as the giant machine finally clanks to a halt.

Max climbs up the conveyer belt and reaches his family,
starts shaking them wildly.

MAX

Mom, Dad - wake up!

No one stirs. He hears THE ELVES SCREECHING in the distance,
chasing after Beth... they're getting closer.

MAX (CONT'D)

Guys c'mon! WAKE UP!

SARAH'S EYES POP OPEN. She looks around, about to scream, but
Max puts a hand over her mouth -- *Shh!*

TOM'S HANDS MOVE, frost and ice cracking away. Bleary eyed:

TOM

Max...?

Max smiles, tears brimming as everyone starts to awaken,
frightened and disoriented. But -- AN ELF is quietly rising
up behind max, wielding a HUGE WOODEN MALLET.

SARAH

MAX!

Max spins around as the mallet comes down, but CRACK! The elf
screams as it plummets off the conveyer belt, revealing

BETH. Clutching the baseball bat.

MAX

Help me untie them!

Beth and Max start freeing their family, cutting through the
ribbon and garland wrapped around their hands and ankles.

But an eerie chorus of CHITTERING WHISPERS is building around
them. Max looks around to see

DOZENS OF CREEPY TOYS emerging from boxes and shelves all around the store, like spiders crawling from their nests.

MAX (CONT'D)
Faster, Beth, faster!

BETH
I'm trying!

THE TOYS start crawling towards the conveyer belt, joined by the bruised and battered elves Beth dispatched earlier.

BETH (CONT'D)
I almost have it--

But a HUGE SKELETAL HAND suddenly reaches through the smoke and GRABS BETH. An arm hoists her up, revealing

KRAMPUS. Looming over them. And this time we finally see him clearly, illuminated by fire and flickering lights.

HIS WRINKLED FACE is like a saggy mask made of leathery skin, sewn together to resemble Santa Claus, but with dark hollow eyes that hint at something much worse lurking beneath.

In fact, his whole appearance seems to be some sort of perverse DISGUISE to conceal a much more sinister entity.

WITH A DEEP HISSSS Krampus gestures to his minions below. The toys and elves scramble to repair the machine.

BETH KICKS AND SCREAMS as Krampus curiously inspects her. Sniffs her. HIS SERPENTINE TONGUE emerging from his jaws--licking his chapped lips.

He then turns and dangles Beth over the vat, about to drop her in when a SNOWBALL HITS HIS FACE.

MAX
LET HER GO!

Krampus pauses and looks down at Max -- a tiny angry mouse. Max stares up defiantly, then he throws something else...

MAX (CONT'D)
I said let her go!

THE SLEIGH BELL hits Krampus then bounces to the ground.

Krampus cocks his head, considering the demand. Surprisingly, he then places Beth back on the conveyer belt with the rest of the family -- all staring in shock.

SARAH

Max, what are you doing?!

Krampus and max face off like gunslingers. Max is struggling to stay brave. He has nothing up his sleeve, he's making this up as he goes along.

Then an idea hits him. A very difficult one. Softly:

MAX

Take... Take me instead.

The family is stunned.

THE FAMILY

Max?! No! Are you crazy?!

Max ignores them as he walks *towards* Krampus.

MAX

Let them go. All of them. This is all my fault. TAKE ME!

Krampus suddenly grabs Max and LIFTS HIM into the air like a puppy dangled by its nape. He pulls Max close. Close enough for Max to feel the demon's hot stinking breath.

Close enough for him to SEE a hint of Krampus' TRUE FACE under the mask of skin, and a glimmer of the demon's REAL EYES staring back at him.

And as Krampus and Max gaze at each other, something unspoken seems to pass between them. Krampus' darkness and rage seems to soften. It's almost as if the demon's heart is about to grow three times...

ON THE CONVEYER BELT: Max's family watches. Waiting.

ON THE GROUND BELOW: Even the toys and elves seem oddly moved by Max's courage. But then...

Krampus quietly starts to LAUGH. Soft and rasp, but slowly building into a deep, RAUCOUS CACKLE.

Krampus sneers at his minions. A silent order is given, and the minions spring into action, TURNING THE MACHINE BACK ON.

MAX (CONT'D)

NO! What are you doing?! Take me! I SAID TAKE ME!!!

Shocked, Max helplessly watches as BETH, HOWARD, LINDA, AND HIS COUSINS go over the edge first, SCREAMING and clutching each other as they disappear in the vat's coiling steam. Omi, Tom, and Sarah are next...

Krampus then turns and dangles Max over the vat. They stare at each other one last time, Max's eyes full of regret.

MAX (CONT'D)

I'm sorry...

And then KRAMPUS DROPS MAX INTO THE VAT.

AND FROM ABOVE, we watch as Max and his family fall together IN SLOW MOTION...

We plummet with them... Falling down... Down...

Until they're consumed by clouds of steam and smoke, completely filling the frame with

PURE WHITE. As THE FAMILY'S SCREAMS FADE, leaving only the machine's CHUGGING and GRINDING.

Beat. WE PULL OUT from the solid white frame, revealing

A WINDOW. Covered with frost. Hazy morning light pours through. We can still hear the MACHINE'S GRINDING, although now it sounds more like a passing SNOW PLOW.

We continue PULLING OUT from the icy window until we find

MAX. Asleep in bed. UNTIL HE SPRINGS AWAKE, screaming and flailing as he tumbles to the floor with a painful THUD.

INT. MAX'S ROOM - MORNING

Max slowly sits up and looks around. Confused, he then moves to the window and looks outside.

It's snowing. Only this time it's not an arctic storm, but a picturesque White Christmas: kids building snow forts, FEDEX dropping off gifts, and a SNOW PLOW clearing the street.

Stunned, Max turns to his ADVENT CALENDAR and opens the final door to... DECEMBER 25th. What the hell?

Suddenly, FAMILIAR VOICES echo downstairs...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Max races down the steps and into the living room where he's greeted by THE CHRISTMAS TREE, once again standing tall and bright, surrounded by colorful gifts.

BETH

About time you got up, we've been waiting forever.

Beth breezes by and joins THE REST OF THE FAMILY.

HOWARD

Yeah kiddo, we were worried the sugarplum fairies got ya.

A WARM FIRE crackles. BING CROSBY fills the air. Rosie the Bulldog lounges on her back, SNORING.

MAX

You... you're all alive...

Tom and Sarah look at each other, slightly worried. Aunt Dorothy plops into a chair, pouring rum into her egg nog.

AUNT DOROTHY

Barely. Haven't had a hangover like this since the pope died.

Trying to make sense of this, Max sits down between his parents as Omi walks by with a tray of hot chocolate.

TOM

What's up, champ? You okay?

Max stares at Linda, Howard, Jordan, Stevie, Howie and Baby Chrissy... His whole family. All here.

MAX

Yeah... I... Yeah. Just a bad dream I guess.

STEVIE

Enough with this sappy crap, let's open our damn presents!

LINDA

Okay, okay, I've got it...
(passes out gifts)
Howie! Tom! Aunt Dorothy! Howard!
Jordan! Sarah! Dad! Omi! Stevie!

Ribbons and wrapping paper fly. Max braces himself, half expecting something monstrous to leap from the boxes, but it's nothing but a sea of toys, clothes, and gadgets.

Linda hands Max one final gift.

LINDA (CONT'D)
This one's for you, Max.

But instead of opening it, Max suddenly gives his parents a BIG WARM HUG.

SARAH
Whoa, hey -- what's this for?

MAX
Nothing, I -- I just...
(to everyone)
...Merry Christmas.

SARAH
(shrugs)
Oh. Well, Merry Christmas, Max.

TOM
Merry Christmas, son.

Max finally opens his gift to find THE RUSTY SLEIGH BELL.

And his smile drops. In fact, everyone's smiles fade as they gaze at the bell, dark surreal memories suddenly resurfacing.

Memories of something impossible. Something horrifying. The creeping realization that the Christmas magic they all once denied is terrifyingly real.

THE FIREPLACE flickers as a DEEP WIND shakes the house. And barely audible somewhere in the air: fading SLEIGH BELLS.

The family stares in total silence. All of them remembering. Krampus. His minions. Everything. While ON THE STEREO:

BING CROSBY
*You better watch out, you better
not cry, better not pout I'm
telling you why... Santa Claus is
coming to town...*

We PULL OUT from the puzzled, shaken family... OUT THE WINDOW... and into their FRONT YARD.

BING CROSBY (CONT'D)

*He's making a list, and checking it
twice, gonna find out who's naughty
and nice, Santa Claus is coming to
town...*

The Engel house then becomes a new SNOW GLOBE being placed on a shelf by familiar BONY HANDS.

BING CROSBY (CONT'D)

*He sees you when you're sleeping,
he knows when you're awake. He
knows if you've been bad or good so
be good for goodness sake!*

KRAMPUS' RASPY BREATHING echoes as we continue pulling out from the snow globe to reveal DOZENS MORE just like it, some new, some old, all lit by candles in a DARK MUSTY WORKSHOP.

BING CROSBY (CONT'D)

*Oh, you better watch out, you
better not cry, better not pout I'm
telling you why...*

We hold on this odd collection of snowglobes until

A HORDE OF MONSTROUS TOYS AND ELVES lunges from the shadows, screeching and clawing at us until we--

SMASH TO BLACK

BING CROSBY (CONT'D)

Santa Claus is coming to town...