

KILLING SANTA

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND/BASEBALL FIELD - DAY (1988)

HIGH ABOVE a playground on a cold, cloudy Christmas Eve, a working-class Newark, New Jersey neighborhood.

A single SNOWFLAKE drifts toward SCHOOLCHILDREN playing a game of catch. They look like ants from here. The snowflake blows toward a pale skinned BOY standing on the pitcher's mound: RICHARD FLEETING (6).

He watches the kids throw the ball, reacts with anticipation when they catch it, but the ball is never thrown to him. The kids ignore him like he's not even there.

He's wearing a thrift store sweater, two-sizes too big, a "Star Wars" image on it, and it's dirty, needs a wash. He holds a big Christmas picture BOOK.

The snowflake falls toward Richard. He looks up.

The school bell RINGS. Children march to class.

TODD BORUTSKIE (6), tall and thin like a noxious weed, and three BULLIES (6), walk by Richard.

Richard opens his mouth to catch the snowflake and then... SPLOOSH! A snowball hits him in the face. He drops the book.

TODD

Think faster, white trash!

BULLIES

Good one, Toddy! Fun-eee! Cool!

Richard picks up the book - and the boys attack. They circle him and kick. Richard curls into a ball, covering his head.

CHARLES (6), a boy with DOWN SYNDROME, shouts:

CHARLES

Hey! Stop it!

Todd and the bullies chase after Charles. Richard dusts himself off, picks up the book. He reads the title:

RICHARD

"Wanted: Santa Claus, a.k.a.,
Father Christmas."

He hangs his head, the last kid to go to class, eyes on the ground.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A photograph of President Ronald Reagan hangs next to an American flag and a CALENDAR, open to: DECEMBER, 1988.

Richard sits at a desk in the front of the classroom.

His teacher, MRS. DONALDSON (41), scribbles on the chalkboard: "Days that matter in December: The 26th, 1893." She's wearing a shirt that has "Baby Boomer and Proud" on it.

MRS. DONALDSON
Can anyone tell me whose birthday
this is and why it matters?

RICHARD AGE 6
Santa's!

MRS. DONALDSON
Wrong again, Richard.

TODD
Yeah, Richard Retard.

MRS. DONALDSON
Todd. Don't be unkind. Richard is
not retarded. He's slow. Say it
with me class: sloooow.

CLASS
Sloooow.

MRS. DONALDSON
The truth is, Santa doesn't have a
birthday. I'm talking about people
that matter. Santa doesn't matter.

Richard carves "I hate Toddy!!! I hate Mrs. Donaldson!!!" on his homework.

DRAWINGS of penis shaped rocket ships flying to round vagina-like planets fill the paper's edges - Richard's "Star Wars" doodles - but at a glance the artwork looks like hardcore space porn.

MRS. DONALDSON (V.O.)
Mao Tse-Tung was born in China...

Richard writes "I love Santa and Santa loves me" next to a doodle of a BASEBALL BAT with "Oakland A's" on the barrel.

MRS. DONALDSON (V.O.)
...on December 26th, 1893...

Beat. Richard continues to write, then freezes, looks up.

Mrs. Donaldson stands in front of him, arms crossed, holding a stapler. She snatches the homework, eyes shooting to: "I hate Mrs. Donaldson!!!" She squeezes the stapler. It clicks out a staple.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Snowing hard now, school in the background. Richard walks home, a DISCIPLINARY NOTE STAPLED to his jacket. He cradles the Santa book.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

A poky, run-down Newark brownstone spruced up with cheap decorations. A frayed artificial Christmas tree twinkles in the corner.

LYNETTE FLEETING (28) hurries into the kitchen. She slips on a waitress apron with "Joy's Freedom Diner" printed on it, checks the oven, the time, running late. She has the face of a grieving mother, bitter as hell.

JOE FLEETING (35) stomps into the house, snow and New Jersey steelyard blues all over him. He goes straight to the kitchen, opens the fridge, slapping Lynette's ass with the door. Pops a beer, guzzles.

A beat, then Lynette pushes by.

JOE
(sarcastic)
Honey? I'm home.

She hustles it to the front door. Richard opens it as she reaches for the handle. She kneels in the doorway.

LYNETTE
Hi, baby. How's school? Holidays start tomorrow, huh? Woo-hoo! Guess who's coming tonight?

RICHARD AGE 6
Santa!

LYNETTE (CONT'D)
Santa!

She kisses Richard's cheek - doesn't notice the note stapled to his jacket. On her way out, she hisses over her shoulder:

LYNETTE (CONT'D)
Joe! Better not forget the milk and cookies this time!

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Richard sits on the floor, an uneaten plate of food by his side, inches from the TV. Watching a CARTOON about Santa.

Drinking a beer, Joe walks by and ruffles his hair.

JOE

Hey, Richie. Eat your dinner.

Richard shoots his father a smile, face immersed in blue pulsating television light.

In the background, Joe climbs the staircase like he's scaling Everest, oxygen deprived - lights a cigarette, takes a swig of beer, keeps climbing.

Santa ELVES from the cartoon TALK in high-pitched elf VOICES, the characters reflected in Richard's wide eyes.

ELF 1 (V.O.)

But don't forget the secret!

ELF 2 (V.O.)

To make sure Santa knows what you want for Christmas...

ELF 1 (V.O.)

You wish upon a star!

ELF 2 (V.O.)

You wish upon a star!

The elves sing a SONG about wishing on stars, no doubt from Richard's expression that he believes every word.

INT. SECOND STORY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lights off - not your typical messy bedroom, but a serious garbage dump of PARENTAL NEGLECT the darkness cannot hide.

Oakland A's paraphernalia covers every inch of the bedroom, including a POSTER on the wall opposing the window: an Oakland A's BAT bathed in a glorious beam of light.

VHS classic claymation Christmas movies lie scattered around.

In his pajamas, Richard looks out the window, finds a star to wish upon, and like magic it twinkles.

RICHARD AGE 6

Santa, oh, I wish, I wish...

Moonlight falls through the window, highlighting the Oakland A's poster behind him.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Christmas morning - we pull out of Richard's screaming MOUTH and see the tear-stained face of the most disappointed boy in the world.

Joe and Lynette stare uncomprehendingly at him.

LYNETTE

Shifts are killing me. I gotta go.

She wipes Richard's tears.

LYNETTE (CONT'D)

Mind your father, OK? I'll bring a chocolate shake for Christmas dinner, for desert. Love you.

(to Joe)

Fix it. I'm tired of fixing everything. And this is strike... It can't be one. Can it, Joe? This is strike...? Ah, hell, let's start over and call it one. Understand, Joe? Strike one. Two more and I'm out.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Playing catch in the snow and cold.

RICHARD AGE 6

Catfish Hunter knocks it outta the park! Go Oakland A's!

JOE

Nice. But watch your grip - if that's supposed to be a four seam fast ball, thumb placement, Richie, thumb placement.

(beat)

So, uh, Richie?

RICHARD AGE 6

Yeah, dad?

JOE

Your mom and me, we're sorry Santa fucked up this Christmas, OK? Maybe he'll do better next year.

(beat)

I'll do better. You'll see. I'll fix it. Like your mom said.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

Next Christmas I will do fuckin'
better, son. I Promise.

RICHARD AGE 6

So will I, dad. I promise too.

Richard's face glows with determination and hope - and then a
MALE VOICE dripping with sarcasm and ridicule drowns
everything out:

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Look at you, Richard. You're
pathetic. Nothin' but a liar...

INT. DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY (2022)

And now we see Richard - at 40, tall and thin, face of a man
who stared too long into the abyss, dark circles under
bloodshot eyes, heavy five o'clock shadow.

He's being chewed out by his boss, TODD BORUTSKIE (40), his
former classmate and bully - overweight, balding, Santa hat
perched on his head.

TODD

...a thief...

Cheerful HOLIDAY MUSIC plays in the background.

A pack of short FEMALE EMPLOYEES wearing elf hats encircle
Richard like angry pagan elves.

High shelves stacked with ladies undergarments and a display
stand with an image of STONEHENGE and a lingerie product line
called NAKED WOMYN tower above them.

Richard stands in the middle, the potential human sacrifice,
pockets stuffed with lingerie.

TODD (CONT'D)

...and surprise, surprise, you're
drunk.

Not just drunk. Annihilated.

RICHARD

And... you're a big fat fuck,
Toddy. You've always been a big fat
fuck. Even when you were a skinny
little prick and beat the shit out
of me? A big fat fuck. The only
difference now is, you are a big
fat fuck.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 My god, what happened to you?
 You're as wide as Santa, the
 biggest, fattest fuck of 'em all.

Richard jiggles Todd's belly.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 Got a boooowl full of jelly.

The employees GROAN.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 Oh, shut up! You... all of you
 should call this place Big Fat
 Fucks For Fuckin' Fat Fuckups
 'cause each and every one of you
 looks like a big, fat, fucking
 Santa, and you're tiny, tiny little
 people, and that's fucked up.

TODD
 Empty your pockets.

Richard pulls out a micro-g-string thong, holds it up.

RICHARD
 As you can see, ladies, when I
 pocketed this I was not thinking of
 any of you.

TODD
 You're fired.

RICHARD
 There is a God!

TODD
 Leave. Now.

Richard snags a handful of lingerie and RUNS.

INT. DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Richard runs down an aisle toward the exit, three SECURITY
 GUARDS wearing Santa hats giving chase.

TITLE OVER: IT'S 34 YEARS LATER

Richard tosses lingerie left and right, LAUGHING wildly.

RICHARD
 Merry fuckin' Christmas, you big,
 fat, fuckin' fuckups!

INT. APARTMENT DOOR/HALLWAY - DAY

Richard reads a NOTE stuck to his apartment door, stolen lingerie dangling from his fingertips.

There's an EVICTION NOTICE on the door: "You are hereby notified of your right to avoid eviction by payment..."

A METAL LOCK-OUT COVER prevents Richard from opening the door. He studies it, touches it, got it all figured out, then ATTACKS the lock-out, wiggles and jiggles it, slams a foot against the wall and pulls.

No good.

Defeated, he hangs his head, slumps his shoulders, walks down the hallway. He chugs a bottle of YUENGLING BEER.

INT. MANAGER'S APARTMENT - DAY

Richard argues with his apartment manager, PHILLIP (50s), a soft spoken, six-foot-five Canadian of English/Scottish descent with a waxed handlebar mustache.

RICHARD

You Canadians are special.

PHILLIP

We are, eh?

RICHARD

Oh, yeah, Phillip. Canadians are superior to Americans. Sooo European.

PHILLIP

Richard.

RICHARD

You're not America's abandoned bastard children no one wants. Everybody loves you. I mean, what's not to like? You put gravy on your french fries, add cheese curds and call it poutine. And you're all so fuckin' nice all the fuckin' time, so I know you're gonna let me -

Phillip yanks Richard's finger and bends it backward.

Richard SHRIEKS!

PHILLIP

In B.C., where I'm from, we call it fries and gravy. We use brown gravy, not curry sauce, and fuck the cheese curds. You want poutine, go to Toronto. Now, I'll let you into your apartment...

Richard offers a handful of bras and panties to Phillip.

RICHARD

Here! Ow! Take 'em!

PHILLIP

...when you pay your back rent.

RICHARD

Let go, Phillip, let go! I love Canada! I love Canadians! Shit! Merde!

PHILLIP

We on the same page? Good. Now, happy holidays and take off, eh?

Phillip slams the door in Richard's face.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Creepy place, dark, empty, made for drunks like Richard, the name of the bar etched into a mirror: NICK'S DIRTY MARTINI.

Alone at the bar, Richard watches a beer splattered TV showing the claymation classic "The Year Without Santa Claus."

RICHARD

Tarbender! Another Yuengling if you please!

The BARTENDER (40s) replaces his bottle with a fresh beer.

BARTENDER

Last one, mister.

RICHARD

Tarbender! Change the channel.

BARTENDER

Now why should I do that, huh? I love this one. Everybody loves this one, except for pixie's like you.

RICHARD

But think about it, man: a year without Santa? Really? That's all? If I had my way, it'd be for-fuckin'-ever. Goodbye, Mr. Claus!

He points his fingers like cowboy pistols and fires them at the TV, making shooting SOUNDS. The bartender moves the beer away from Richard.

BARTENDER

Tarbender says you're eighty-sixed. Pay up and go, either through the door or out the window, I don't care.

Richard opens his wallet, takes a long, drunken look inside: three twenties and two dollar bills. He smiles at the bartender, digs into his pocket, and dumps a pile of change on the bar.

RICHARD

(bad Oliver Twist accent)
Please, sir, I want some more.

The bartender points at the door. Beat, then Richard grabs the beer and guzzles it as he runs for the exit.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Richard weaves down the sidewalk, vomit on his chin, thick globs of it stuck to the front of his shirt.

Christmas lights and decorations adorn the neighborhood. He smiles at them in drunken awe, then spots a small ceramic SANTA DECORATION at the bottom of a steep flight of stairs leading to a brownstone.

He pulls out some of the stolen lingerie, picks a bra and puts it on the decoration.

RICHARD

There. That's better. Sexy Santa.
(to the decoration)
What? What's that? Take off, eh? Is that what you said? You and my landlord Phillip must be... Oh! I get it. You're not from the North Pole, are you? Not with an accent like that. Shhh. I won't tell on you, Santa. I never tell. I am a good secret keeper.

He unzips his pants and pees on the decoration. Then he puts a finger down his throat and vomits on it.

The light bar from a passing POLICE CAR flashes red/blue. The vehicle emits a Yelper Burst and pulls over. Two unimpressed and gigantic COPS (30s) get out.

Richard faces them, fly open, crotch stained with pee, fresh vomit on his clothes.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Oh, come on! I just wanna celebrate Christmas in my own way. Is that so wrong?

INT. HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

CLANK! A drunk-tank gate locks tight, the bars shuddering as a cynical female COP (35) says:

CYNICAL COP

Welcome to the sobering station, boys!

Richard takes in his new surroundings. Lots of DRUNKS, most of them old and ruined by booze. He steers himself to a cot.

RICHARD

I have an announcement to make, my friends! I am not supposed to tell, it's a secret, but it's a Canadian conspiracy and I must do my patriotical duty: Santa is from Toronto!

He reaches the cot and falls face forward onto...

...a DRUNK sleeping there: the BUM (60s), a short little fellow with snow-white hair, cheeks like ripe tomatoes, and a face full of stubble, a lovable-looking CHRONIC SEVERE ALCOHOLIC in filthy street clothes.

The Bum CRIES OUT. Richard bounces off him and lands on his back, THUMP!

The Bum peers over the edge of the cot. Their eyes meet. Richard squints as if he recognizes him, then passes out.

The Bum shakes his head.

INT. HOLDING CELL - DAY

The Cynical Cop beats the bars with a billy club.

CYNICAL COP

Rise and shine, boys! Your six
hours is up! See you tonight!

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Sunrise - on the steps, Richard half-drunk, shivering.

The Bum staggers out of the station in the background as POLICE OFFICERS, BAIL BOND AGENTS, and an assortment of LOSERS file in and out.

The Bum walks by Richard, then jerks to a stop as if he remembered something important. He spins around, wobbles, takes a beat to settle his stomach, belches.

BUM

Sorry. Yuengling did this to me.

He offers Richard a bottle of Yuengling.

Bum (CONT'D)

Here. You need this more than I do.
Take it. It's Yuengling. The oldest
beer in the country. Take it...
It's your favorite. Damn, you're
stubborn. Come on, take it...

Richard takes the bottle. The Bum hooks his arm like an old drinking buddy.

Bum (CONT'D)

"Beer is living proof that God
loves us and wants us to be happy."
Know who said that?

Richard shakes his head, allowing the Bum to lead him toward the highway.

Bum (CONT'D)

Benjamin Franklin, so I'm told, a
wise man if ever there was one.

They STEP INTO THE STREET and...

...a WHITE 1968 375 hp 440 magnum V8-powered Dodge CHARGER,
parked on the road, revs its engine, VROOM, VROOM!

The Bum and Richard look at the car and freeze.

All that can be seen of the DRIVER (60s) is an unnerving BEARDED silhouette. A slash of light cuts across his face, revealing COLD BLUE EYES.

The car shoots forward!

Richard steps back, dropping the bottle. It smashes by his feet.

The Charger aims for the Bum, who leaps into the air, rolls onto the hood and into the windshield. The Driver hits the brakes and...

...LAUNCHES the Bum. He arcs through the air, lands on his feet, uninjured, then pats himself down to make sure he's OK.

The Driver WHISTLES at Richard through the open passenger window, face concealed in darkness. He tosses a handful of leaflets at him. They flutter to the ground, piling around Richard's beer soaked feet.

Richard peers at the driver, then looks at the PERSONALIZED LICENSE PLATE on the back of the vehicle: it's unreadable, the number covered in mud.

But the province - ONTARIO - and the words "TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS" written inside a BLUE CANADIAN MAPLE LEAF can be seen clearly.

The Driver hits the gas and the mag wheels spinout. The car pulls away, splattering Richard with mud and snow.

The Bum flips the Charger off as it drives away.

Bum (CONT'D)

Asshole!

(to Richard)

I'm so sick and tired of that rotten son of a bitch. And you. Yeah, you! You're freakin' exhausting. I need a break. I don't care. I'm takin' five! I need a little me time, man. And drinks. Lots and lots of drinks. Alone!

Hand on a hip, the Bum limps away.

Richard picks up a leaflet, the headline big and clear: "Seasonal jobs! Hiring now! Call us today!" He crumples the leaflet into a pocket.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

Richard and Phillip stare one other down, Phillip blocking his way.

Richard's clothes drip with mud, snow, and gelatinous vomit from the night before. He pokes Phillip with a finger. Phillip does not budge.

Richard looks up at him, puppy dog eyes sad and imploring, and then... he shoots between Phillip and the wall, trying to push by. He's knocked back instead, THUNK!

He tries again. THUNK! A beat, then he shoots to Phillip's other side and THUNK!

Impossible.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAY

Richard scrambles up a ladder access FIRE ESCAPE, clawing his way to the 5th floor. When he reaches the top, he looks over the edge. Long way down.

Out of breath, he lights a cigarette, takes a deep, necessary drag: ah, that's better.

He spots a DUMPSTER in the alley, overflowing with trash. Raising thumb to eye, he sizes up the distance from his apartment's window to the dumpster.

He steps off the platform, toes and fingers on the brick molding above and below the windows, and scrambles across the wall like an inept spider. He slips once, twice, and finally reaches his apartment window. He LAUGHS in triumph.

The SOUND of a window opening catches his attention: Phillip, next door.

PHILLIP

Get your dumb ass back to the platform before you kill yourself.

Richard tugs at his window. Won't open.

RICHARD

I'm not gonna fall, Phillip. But if I do, the dumpster will save me. Look at it. It's full.

PHILLIP

Of what? That's the question you should ask yourself.

Richard checks the dumpster, shoots a look at Phillip, holds a beat and then... inches himself back to the platform.

RICHARD

OK, OK. I get it. You're right. But I don't know what the big deal is, Phillip. I mean, how about showing a little Christmas charity, huh? All I'm asking is...

He slips. Falls. Disappears from view. Moments later, there's an awful sounding CRUNCH!

Phillip shakes his head, pulls out his cell, dials 911.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Richard lies in a hospital gurney, a busted-up mess: face lacerated, eye with a patch over it, half his head wrapped in white gauze, ribs bandaged.

A plastic hospital MUG filled with water stands on the table next to him. A CHRISTMAS MOVIE about Santa plays on TV.

Richard watches the show with one raging eye: a MOTHER and FATHER (30s) talk to their DAUGHTER (8), telling her how it all works, SANTA himself close by, ho, ho, hoing it up:

TV MOTHER (V.O.)

If you tell Santa what you want.

TV FATHER (V.O.)

You get what you wished for for Christmas.

TV DAUGHTER (V.O.)

Yay!

RICHARD

That's the worst possible thing you could tell a child. You don't get what you wished for: you get shit! Because Santa isn't real! It's the Santa Lie! What are you stupid fucking people thinking...?

He throws the mug at the TV. SPLASH! Water DRIBBLES down the screen.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. 7-ELEVEN - DAY (1989)

Richard (6) exits the store, Big Gulp in hand. He hears JINGLING BELLS and stops. Jingle, jingle!

Curious, he follows the sound, crossing to the back of the store. He peers around the wall: there's Todd with SWEET GIRL (6) and KNOW IT ALL BOY (6).

Know It All Boy wears a winter hat with bells attached to it so that whenever he moves his head they jingle.

SWEET GIRL
You can't tell, huh?

KNOW IT ALL BOY
Right. You have to mail a letter to Santa. And he's the only one you can tell.

TODD
What about my parents?

KNOW IT ALL BOY
No, Toddy! You dummy! Especially not your parents! You tell them and you won't get the present you asked Santa for - that's a fact!

SWEET GIRL
Yes. And you have to do good things, huh?

Richard inches closer, trying to hear better.

KNOW IT ALL BOY
"Good deeds." That's how you get on Santa's good boys and girls list.

The Bum appears behind Richard, taps him on the shoulder. He looks the SAME AGE and just as dirty drunk as he did when he was with Richard as an adult in 2022.

BUM
Boo!

Richard CRIES OUT. The children turn and look - wide eyes.

Bum (CONT'D)
Gimme some money, kid, so I can buy a soda...

TODD
 (to Know It All Boy)
 It's a Santa test. Richard won't do
 it. He'll fail.

Richard does his first deliberate good deed.

RICHARD AGE 6
 I... I... I don't have any change
 left, Mr. Bum, just pennies. But
 you can have my Big Gulp.

BUM
 You think I'd actually drink that
 sugary shit, kid? I'm a Yuengling
 man. Got some standards. Fuck off.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Richard walks home, sipping his Big Gulp.

RICHARD AGE 6
 Do good deeds. Do good deeds. Do
 good deeds.

Big, confident smile.

INT. SECOND STORY BEDROOM - DAY

TITLE OVER: 11 MONTHS OF GOOD DEEDS LATER

Richard writes a LETTER to Santa on his bedroom desk: "Dear
 Santa..."

He has two black eyes, a bruised and bent nose with blood-
 soaked toilet paper stuffed in one nostril, lips swollen, a
 missing tooth. He reads the letter.

RICHARD AGE 7 (V.O.)
 "Dear Santa. I did everything I was
 supposed to do this year. It was
 not easy. The hardest one was -
 no..."

Richard scratches-out the error, then continues.

RICHARD AGE 7 (V.O.)
 "...the hardest one is Charles.
 He's mentally handicapped and I
 like him, but he's a big mouth and
 gets himself in trouble."

INSERT - HAND HELD VIDEO

-- CHARLES (7) at a baseball game, jumping up and down, cheering. Some parents and students, including Todd/bullies, don't like it.

RICHARD AGE 7 (V.O.)
 "He gets beaten up all the time."

INSERT - HAND HELD VIDEO

-- Charles at the baseball game, Todd/bullies pushing him around behind the bleachers.

RICHARD AGE 7 (V.O.)
 "I protect him."

INSERT - HAND HELD VIDEO

-- Todd takes a swing at Charles, but Richard jumps between them and takes the punch to his face, KA-POW!

RICHARD AGE 7 (V.O.)
 "I protect him a lot."

INSERT - HAND HELD VIDEO

-- Richard takes a punch to the gut.

RICHARD AGE 7 (V.O.)
 "And I don't punch back even though I want to!"

INSERT - RAPID MULTIPLE ACTION SHOT PHOTOS

-- Richard taking a slap intended for Charles.

-- Richard in the school cafeteria getting a lunch dumped on him instead of on Charles.

-- Richard jumping in front of Charles and taking a kick to the balls.

RICHARD AGE 7 (V.O.)
 "I have done a lot of good deeds, Santa. A whole lot, and they have hurt. Todd has kicked my ass all year long. Look at my face! So this Christmas, I expect to get that darn Oakland A's baseball bat. It's for me and my dad."

Richard seals the letter. He grins, revealing the knocked out tooth.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND/BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

HIGH ABOVE the playground/field, the sky black with heavy clouds - hail storm coming. Far below, the CHILDREN play in cliques, laughing, shouting.

As usual, Richard watches from a distance, this time sitting all alone in the center of the bleachers, face bruised from his good deeds.

A small, hard HAILSTONE drops toward the earth, straight for Richard and falling fast. The SOUND of the WIND gets louder and louder as it gets closer and closer, WOOSH!

Richard looks up and... BLAMO! The hailstone hits him in the cheek. He falls backward and slips through the bench-seats, tumbling like a gymnast through the scaffolding, WHAM, CRASH!

He hits the ground hard, doesn't get up. The bell RINGS. He doesn't move. The storm breaks - ping, ping, ping! of hailstones on the bleachers - and he still doesn't move.

Charles appears and stares at him, then crosses to Richard and helps him to his feet. They walk to class together, arm in arm, supporting one another.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A photo of President George H. Bush hangs next to a CALENDAR open to: DECEMBER, 1989.

Wearing a bandana like Rambo, a tee-shirt with "Question authority" printed on it, and black combat boots, Mrs. Donaldson writes on the chalkboard: "Days that matter in December: The 21st, 1879."

MRS. DONALDSON

Josef Stalin was born in Georgia,
Russia...

Sitting at his desk in the front, Richard writes on his homework "I believe in Santa!"

Doodled penis-shaped-rocket ships flying toward vagina-like planets and an Oakland A's bat fill the edges of the paper, but this time the bat is SWATTING Mrs. Donaldson in the head.

Stapler in hand, Mrs. Donaldson appears before Richard, snatches the paper and shows it to the students.

MRS. DONALDSON (CONT'D)
 Class? You see what Richard
 Fleeting has drawn on his homework?
 Penises. Vaginas. And dildos.

RICHARD AGE 7
 What? No, no, no, those are rocket
 ships! And those are planets!
 They're rocket ships flying to
 planets! Like "Star Wars"!

LAUGHTER from the CLASS.

MRS. DONALDSON
 It's filthy, dirty pornography.

RICHARD AGE 7
 And that's an Oakland A's baseball
 bat. And it's hitting...

Mrs. Donaldson squeezes the stapler. Clicks out a staple. The
 entire class stares at him like he's a freak.

SWEET GIRL
 Mrs. Donaldson? What's a dildo?

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Richard walks home, schoolyard in the background. This time,
 he has SEVERAL disciplinary notes STAPLED to his jacket.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Crappy Christmas decorations adorn the walls, the fake
 Christmas tree twinkling in the corner. Bags of groceries
 fill the breakfast bar.

Joe looks more tired than before, and Lynette, dressed for
 work, more strained, both in the kitchen.

JOE
 You're never here, Lynette.

LYNETTE
 I work all the time, Joe. And when
 I am here? You're never here. Go
 figure.

JOE
 What's his name?

LYNETTE

Oh, that's right, that's right,
pull the "cheaters card" - so
predictable. God, you embarrass me.

Richard opens the door and enters. Joe and Lynette step apart and stop fighting. They don't look at him. He waves and runs upstairs.

INT. SECOND STORY BEDROOM - DAY

Richard rushes into the room, shuts the door. A new POSTER of a SMILING SANTA is tacked next to the Oakland A's baseball bat poster.

Richard throws off his jacket with the notes stapled to it and slips into his thrift store "Star Wars" sweater - it fits better now.

He turns the TV on. A Christmas CARTOON about Santa has just started. The show's title appears on the screen: "Father of Christmas."

Richard's parents SHOUT in the background, the fight resumed, but the VOICE of a CARTOON SANTA drowns them out.

CARTOON SANTA (V.O.)

Ho, ho, ho, my boy. Do you know my
real name...?

RICHARD AGE 7

Father Christmas.

CARTOON SANTA (V.O.)

Father Christmas!

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Richard and his mother unpack the bags of groceries.

LYNETTE

Those go here, not there. And put
that there, not here. And don't put
the Diazinon under the sink this
time. It goes in the basement, got
it? And wash your hands afterward.

Richard's facial bruises catch her eye - maybe for the first time - and everything for her stops.

LYNETTE (CONT'D)

Now, wait a minute. Wait a minute.
Let me look at you... Oh my god.

The kitchen wall-phone rings. She answers.

LYNETTE (CONT'D)
 Yes? Hello? Mrs. Donaldson?
 Disciplinary notes...? Penises...?
 Vaginas...? Dildos...?

Richard grabs the Diazinon and runs to the basement door.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

The door opens, Richard enters, hits the light switch. Bright florescent light floods the room, revealing...

...more neglect: dust, cobwebs, stacks of forgotten garbage bags, a hydraulic powered TRASH COMPACTOR, and greasy rectangular street-level windows. One of the windows is broken, a spiderweb crack with a jagged hole in the center.

Richard bounds down the staircase, puts the Diazinon in a cupboard and slams the door hard enough to make it spring back. It stays open.

He runs up the stairs, turns the light off and exits.

A beam of sunlight punches through the hole in the broken window, falling on the box of Diazinon.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Lynette in the kitchen, arms crossed, body rigid, frowning at the floor. Richard tries to sneak up the staircase.

LYNETTE
 Stop! Right there, young man! I...
 I don't... I have to be at Joy's
 at.... I can't believe...
 Pornography? My son drawing
 pornography on his homework...?
 Your father will have to deal with
 this.
 (beat)
 Now, if you want to live longer
 than your last name, go to your
 room and don't you dare come out
 until...
 (beat)
 Give me a hug. Your mom needs a
 hug.

They hug. She looks at his bruises again.

LYNETTE (CONT'D)

When did this happen? Why haven't I seen this? I'm a terrible mother.

Lynette pushes him away. Not unkind, more like desperate. She makes a move for the door, calling out over her shoulder:

LYNETTE (CONT'D)

Make sure your father leaves the milk and cookies out for Santa tonight.

Lynette swallows a sob and SLAMS the door on her way out, leaving Richard alone in the living room.

INT. SECOND STORY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Richard lies on his bed, tossing a baseball into his mitt, up and down, up and down.

JOE

Well... if I was your teacher, I might'a stapled a note to your forehead. Your mother, she is real mad.

RICHARD AGE 7

She's always mad. Dad...? You think Santa'll put me on the naughty list now?

JOE

Uh... for drawing penises and vaginas on your homework?

Richard stops throwing/catching the ball. Holds a beat - try to explain? - then tosses the ball again.

JOE (CONT'D)

Um, well. No - no. I'm sure Santa understands. He's a man, right? He loves vaginas and he's got a penis. So... yeah, no. You're not on the naughty boy list. You'll get what you wished for, Richie. But you better be extra-fuckin'-good for goodness-fuckin'-sakes.

(winks)

Now, you keep your eyes wide open tonight, son. I gotta feeling. Magic's in the air, right? Stay awake and keep your eyes wiiide open.

INT. SECOND STORY BEDROOM - NIGHT

The door to Richard's bedroom is open enough so that the staircase banister, part of the living room below, including the top of the artificial Christmas tree, can be seen.

It's dark down there, but the twinkling colored Christmas tree lights cast shadows on the walls and ceiling, the effect hypnotic and wondrous.

Richard lies in bed, fighting off sleep, and then... a SOUND from downstairs! A slight KNOCK.

Half-asleep, Richard crawls out of bed, crosses to the door, peeks through the opening, looking for Santa. He opens the door, sneaks to the staircase bannister, looks over the edge and sees...

...the MILK and COOKIES left for Santa in the kitchen. A figure appears! White bushy beard, dressed in red and carrying a big red sack: Santa!

Richard's sleepy eyes go wide as they fill with awe.

Santa goes straight to the milk and cookies, gobbles them down so fast he CHOKES, chugs the milk to stop the choking, and then spews it all out. He opens the fridge, pops a beer, and staggers from view.

Richard blinks once, twice, and falls asleep at the top of the stairs, a look of serenity on his face.

INT. KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Christmas morning - we PULL OUT of Richard's wide open MOUTH as he cries, hysterical now. Santa failed again!

Joe, in bathrobe/slippers and wearing sunglasses, and Lynette, dressed for work, stare in open-jawed disbelief, coffee cups in hand.

RICHARD AGE 7

Where's the ba... ba.... bat?

JOE

Bat? What bat?

RICHARD AGE 7

I saw Santa! He was here! I did everything I was supposed to! For a whole damn year! Why didn't he leave me the bat?

JOE

You wanted a baseball bat?

RICHARD AGE 7

An Oakland's Aaaaaaaaaaaaa's!

JOE

But, Richie, you've got, like, ten of 'em in the backyard...

(beat)

OK. OK. Look, uh, the thing is, see, son, Santa... Santa kinda struck out this year. Didn't fuck up as bad as he did last year, right? But... see, he... he didn't make enough bats this time. Santa's real sorry about that, but I tell you what. Let's go to Al's right now and buy you a new bat, what do you say?

RICHARD AGE 7

It's not the same!

Richard runs up the staircase, slams his bedroom door.

LYNETTE

Nice job, asshole. Strike two.

INT. SECOND STORY BEDROOM - DAY

Richard SMASHES anything that has Santa's face on it, Christmas ornaments, mugs, etc. He stomps on his VHS copy of the claymation classic "The Year Without Santa Claus."

Then he turns and looks at the big Santa POSTER. He grabs a black marker and writes "LIAR!" under Santa's smiling face.

RICHARD AGE 7

I hate you, Santa.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Joe enters the brownstone with a new BASEBALL BAT, Lynette on his heels.

LYNETTE

God, I need a drink.

She pushes by Joe and goes for the booze in the kitchen.

Richard appears on the staircase, face a furious and tear stained red. Joe and Lynette fake it with big smiles.

LYNETTE (CONT'D)

Look what your father did. Yippee!

JOE

Got it from the jolly old Fat Man himself. Special order, son. Just for you.

Richard comes down and takes the bat.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH!

Richard watches his new baseball bat get crushed in the trash compactor. The wood splinters and explodes.

Joe and Lynette throw the door open in the background.

Richard ignores them, angry eyes locked on the bat as it gets pulverized: CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH...

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY (2022)

BACK TO PRESENT:

...CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH: blue retro-MOON BOOTS crunching snow on a sidewalk as a MALE NURSE (30s) pushes Richard in a wheelchair.

Free of bandages, Richard's face is an unsightly mess, bruised, lacerated, one eye a nasty red ball. His clothes have been washed and pressed.

The nurse stops at the curb, locks the wheelchair and waits.

Richard doesn't get out of the chair. Annoyed, the nurse rattles the wheelchair. Richard doesn't get out. The nurse rattles the chair again, harder this time. Richard holds on.

The nurse jerks the chair up and down, trying to jostle Richard out, but he rides it out. Worn out and breathing heavy now, the nurse stops jerking the chair and points.

MALE NURSE

Go!

RICHARD

Where?

MALE NURSE

I don't know! Don't shoot the messenger! I push wheelchairs for a living! People like you ruin my Zen! FUUUCK!

The nurse storms away.

Richard pulls himself out of the wheelchair and stands there - doesn't know what to do.

A car passes by, slows down, TODD behind the wheel, his WIFE next to him. She looks exactly like Todd. She rolls the passenger window down. Todd shouts through the window:

TODD

Richard Fleeting? That you?

Richard frowns - who is this guy?

TODD (CONT'D)

It's Toddy. Toddy Borutskie. Well, my goodness. Looks like you've had a bad day.

(to his wife)

Looks like he's had a bad day, huh, honey?

TODD'S WIFE

Looks like he's had a bad week.

TODD

How about a bad year?

TODD'S WIFE

How about a bad life?

They LAUGH and Todd drives away.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Richard limps down the street, cradling his banged-up ribs.

A homeless shelter SIGN glows in the distance: the neon flashes "WONDERFUL LIFE RESCUE MISSION." Nearing the shelter, Richard stops, turns away, and then... walks to the shelter.

EXT. SHELTER - NIGHT

Richard stands at the door. It opens.

ABIGAIL SUMMERS (35) appears in the doorway, a petite African American woman with an angelic face that's showing signs of wear - from too much kindness and giving.

Light spills out the doorway, falling on Richard. He shields his eyes - so bright. Abigail steps into the light, blocking it with her body, and it looks like she has an aura.

She wears an APRON/UNIFORM that has "Abigail Summers, Wonderful Program Director" printed on it.

ABIGAIL

Don't go. Come in. Please.

INT. SHELTER SLEEPING ROOM - NIGHT

Richard sits on the edge of a cot shoved against a wall, close to an open door, rows of bunk beds, cots and sleeping PEOPLE in the background. A pillow rests on his knees, a Wonderful Life Bible on top.

The room is dark. Light filters through the open door.

The MAN sleeping on the cot next to him faces the wall: it's the Bum and he's filthy. Richard takes a sniff, pulls a face, sniffs again and realizes the stink is coming from the Bum.

RICHARD

Whoa.

He waves the fumes away.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Mister, you smell like hell...
damn... my eyes are watering... I
can't see!

He makes a sudden move away from the Bum - fight or flight - but his awkward seated position on the cot causes him to slip and tumble to the floor.

INT. SHELTER SLEEPING ROOM - NIGHT

Richard stands by the cot, using the Bible as a fan to clear the air. Abigail walks in with a blanket. She wrinkles her nose, looks at him, revulsion washing over her features.

ABIGAIL

Oh my god.

RICHARD

No. No, no, not me. It's him.

He points at the Bum, then uses the Bible again, trying to fan away the stink.

ABIGAIL

That's a handy book. Useful. I encourage you to read it.

She offers him the blanket. He takes it and... a static bolt of electricity shoots between them, ZAP! Abigail pulls away, stifling surprised laughter.

Richard steps into the beam of light falling through the doorway - as if drawn toward her laughter - and he's smiling. But it's a tired, very sad smile.

Abigail's features soften the instant she sees his face in the light: underneath all the cuts, bruises, big red eyeball, Richard's not bad looking, and as for that sad smile...

She places a hand over her heart, takes a steadying breath.

RICHARD

Thank you. You're very kind.

He backs out of the light, lies down, blanket balled up, Bible on his chest, already breathing heavy, falling asleep.

She watches Richard for a beat, then crosses to him, picks up the Bible, smooths out the blanket, generating another static shock, ZAP! She pulls away fast, a defensive move.

But she can't take her eyes off him.

ABIGAIL

Oh my.

INT. SHELTER SLEEPING ROOM - NIGHT

Fast asleep amid an ocean of SNORES, Richard's eyes dart about beneath his eyelids. He is crying. He WHIMPERS like a frightened child. His muscles spasm. Having a bad, bad dream.

EXT. JOE'S FUNERAL - DAY (1990) - DREAM SEQUENCE

Richard (8) weeps over his father's grave. MOURNERS in the background walk away. Lynette stands on the opposite side of the grave, glaring at her son - nothing but hatred.

Richard keeps his eyes down. Lynette crosses to him and kneels by his side.

RICHARD AGE 8

I'm... I'm so-so-sorry, mom.

She whispers in his ear. Her LIPS brush his earlobe as she speaks, but we can't hear what she says.

INT. SHELTER SLEEPING ROOM - NIGHT (2022)

Richard wakes up with a horrified start, body covered in sweat, cheeks wet with tears. No way he can go back to sleep now.

INT. SHELTER SLEEPING ROOM - DAY

Morning - PEOPLE waking up, walking in and out, etc.

Richard rifles through his pockets, in a state of panic. The "Seasonal jobs! Hiring now!" leaflet falls onto the cot, a rolled up ball, unnoticed by him.

He checks his wallet. It's empty. He throws the wallet to the floor and stomps on it - regressed to a child throwing a tantrum. So angry he can't form words.

RICHARD

Fffuuurrrrshhhiiifffft!

ABIGAIL (V.O.)

Use your words.

He freezes. Then looks around.

ABIGAIL (V.O.)

Use your words, Matthew.

Her voice is coming through the doorway. Curious, Richard takes a careful peek.

INT. SHELTER HALLWAY - DAY

Abigail talks to her son, MATTHEW (8), a child with DOWN SYNDROME - throwing a tantrum just like Richard. She struggles to pull off his winter coat, hat, gloves.

SHARA (55), Hispanic, wearing a shelter APRON that has "Wonderful Volunteer" printed on it, helps her out.

SHARA (IN SPANISH)

Oh my god. Give it to me.

(in English)

Abbie, your hands are full.

As Shara takes the winter gear, Matthew sees Richard's head by the door. His crying stops so fast it attracts the attention of Abigail and Shara. They turn and look.

INT. SHELTER SLEEPING ROOM - DAY

Richard ducks behind the door. He picks up his wallet and sinks to the cot, head in his hands.

Sudden SOUNDS in the background, getting closer: a CRYING BABY, complaining CHILDREN, a desperate MOTHER'S VOICE, FOOTSTEPS in the hallway - sudden, hectic, desperate, LOUD.

Abigail and Shara's VOICES enter the fray.

A beat, then Matthew peeks through the doorway. He steps into the sleeping room, eyes on Richard.

Richard senses someone staring at him, looks through his fingertips. Matthew is covered in tears and snot.

Richard wiggles his fingers at Matthew: Hi. Matthew wiggles his fingers: Hi back.

Richard points at Matthew, then gives him the "thumbs up" sign: You OK? Matthew shakes his head and wipes his nose: Nope. Then he mimics Richard, pointing and giving him the "thumbs up" sign: You OK? Richard shakes his head: Nope.

Matthew points at Richard, then taps his chest. Puzzled, Richard mimics Matthew: he points at him, then taps his chest. A beat passes, then Richard gets it. They're both sad.

The LOUD FAMILY VOICES AND SOUNDS fade away, Shara among them - and then RAPID FOOTSTEPS follow, coming toward Richard and Matthew.

ABIGAIL (V.O.)
Matthew? Matthew...!

Richard pulls himself up, grabs his jacket, turns his back to Matthew and makes a move for the exit door.

Matthew sees the ball of wadded up paper on the cot.

Abigail enters.

ABIGAIL
Hey, baby. Come to mama.

The EXIT DOOR OPENS with a squeak. Abigail looks in the direction of the sound. Richard is leaving, the door closing behind him.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
Mr...? Mr. Fleeting?

She goes after him, Matthew following. As they pass Richard's cot, Matthew picks up the balled up leaflet.

INT. SHELTER KITCHEN - DAY

Abigail and Richard converse at a table, sipping coffee.

Homeless PEOPLE mill about, some waiting in line as kitchen STAFF prepare/serve food.

Festive holiday decorations hang next to POSTERS that promote positive attitudes, including these THREE:

A POSTER of a see-through plastic cup half filled with water, the words "The cup is half full" above it. But someone SCRIBBLED in BLACK MAGIC MARKER "of vodka" at the end of the sentence so that it reads: "The cup is half-full of vodka."

A POSTER with "Cut along the lines and take what you need." Below are: "Joy. Hope. Change. Love," but they've been altered by a black Magic Marker so that they read: "Joyless. Hopeless. Changeless. Loveless. Shitoutofluck."

A POSTER of a smiling Santa with milk and cookies, the words "Santa prefers milk and cookies" next to an image of drugs/alcohol, a black Magic Marker line drawn through "~~milk and cookies~~" and an arrow pointing to the drugs/alcohol.

ABIGAIL
All of it? Stolen?

Richard nods: Yes.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry. We do our best to prevent such things, but...

RICHARD
It's my fault. I was...

ABIGAIL
Tired.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Stupid.

Matthew runs into the area, goofing off with some KIDS.

Abigail watches him play, then looks at Richard. Their eyes connect and she gives him a warm, inviting smile.

Richard looks away, eyes falling on the Santa/milk and cookies/drugs poster, which causes him to snap his eyes shut.

When he opens them, Matthew has stopped playing and stares at Richard very intently, like he's studying him.

Richard looks from Matthew to Abigail, then back to Matthew. Then shrugs his shoulders. Matthew gives him a big smile.

INT. SHELTER LOCKER ROOM/HALLWAY - DAY

Abigail leads Richard to the Mens Locker Room, Matthew following behind. She gives Richard a bag stuffed with a plastic razor, travel shaving cream, toothbrush, toothpaste. Matthew tugs his shirt.

MATTHEW

I'm Matthew.

ABIGAIL

Oh. Um... And, yes, this is, uh, this is my son. Who is full of surprises today. Matthew, this is Mr. Fleeting.

RICHARD

Richard. Call me Richard, please. Hi, Matthew.

ABIGAIL

I couldn't find a sitter.

(beat)

It's hard to find a sitter for Matthew and I can't afford home-care. No one here seems to mind.

RICHARD

I used to know a boy like...

ABIGAIL

Like what?

RICHARD

It was a long time ago. A kid with... My friend.

ABIGAIL

He's mine and I love him.

(beat)

He's just got a little too much chromosome 21 in him, that's all. Three instead of two.

RICHARD

Sorry?

ABIGAIL
 (with a little sting)
 Like the boy you used to know. Your
 friend.

RICHARD
 My only friend.

MATTHEW
 Hi, Richard.

Matthew waves at Richard. Richard waves back, then gives him the "thumbs up" sign: You OK? Matthew returns the gesture, nodding once: Yes, sir.

ABIGAIL
 And, boy, does he seem to like you.
 He doesn't do that. Ever. He's
 really...

Matthew crosses to Richard and takes his hand.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 ...very

Matthew tugs Richard.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
 ...shy.

He leads him back to the kitchen area. Baffled, Richard and Abigail follow.

INT. SHELTER KITCHEN - DAY

Matthew takes Richard and Abigail to the poster of Santa eating milk and cookies.

Shara counsels a homeless COUPLE in the background, eyes locked-on Abigail.

Matthew points at Santa and then shows Richard the balled up leaflet.

MATTHEW
 I found it and then Santa told me
 that I should give it to you.

Richard takes the leaflet and unfolds it one crease at a time until it's readable: "Seasonal jobs! Hiring now! Call us today!"

RICHARD
Oh... Boy. Well.

Shara excuses herself and crosses toward them.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Thanks, Matthew.

Shara - coming fast.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
I tell you what. I'll check it out
today, after I clean up, let you
know how it goes. OK?

Matthew gives him a "thumbs up." Richard does it back. He
moves toward the exit.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Mrs. Summers.

ABIGAIL
Ms. It's Ms. But call me Abigail.

Richard makes a hasty exit.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
(to Matthew)
What has gotten into you, young
man?

Shara arrives, a little out of breath, and nods in the
direction Richard went.

SHARA
Careful with that.

INT. SHELTER BATHROOM/WASH BASIN - DAY

Richard dabs white shaving cream on his cheeks, looking in
the mirror.

A skeletal-thin METH-HEAD (20s) brushes his teeth next to
him. Blood mixed with toothpaste stains the basin.

Richard glances at the Meth-head, who fires a scary, intense
look back, then smiles, showing us the few teeth he's got
left. Spits bloody toothpaste into the basin and leaves.

Richard continues with his shave, dabbing white shaving cream
on his face. He freezes, then pulls away from the mirror: he
looks like Santa. He addresses his Santa-like reflection:

RICHARD
 (Santa voice)
 Ho, ho, ho! And what do you want
 for Christmas, Richard Fleeting?

Starts to shave again.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 (high pitched boy's voice)
 Oh, geez, well, I wish I could kill
 you, Santa, so that all the boys
 and girls in all the world won't be
 lied to anymore. I wish I could
 stab you, light you on fire, shoot
 you in the face, and beat you to
 death with a baseball bat.

He cuts himself shaving.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 Ow. Dammit.

He examines the cut in the mirror, gets the sense that
 someone is staring at him, and sees the Meth-head and his
 creepy smile in the mirror, watching and listening.

INT. SHELTER LAUNDRY - DAY

Richard sits on a bench, wearing a white towel around his
 waist and nothing else.

Shelter FAMILIES cross back and forth in front of him, his
 bruised ribs drawing attention, awkward glances.

On the wall directly opposite Richard another motivational
 POSTER says: "Rise up and attack the day with enthusiasm!"

A HOMELESS GIRL (14) passes Richard. She has a BLACK MAGIC
 MARKER. She stops in front of the poster and draws a line
 through "~~the day with enthusiasm!~~" so that the poster reads
 "Rise up and attack..."

She turns and faces Richard, sticks out her tongue and flips
 him off with both hands, then takes off.

INT. SHELTER HALLWAY - DAY

Barefoot, wearing the towel, Richard walks to the bathroom.
 He massages his injured ribs. VOICES filter down the hallway:
 Abigail and a MALE VOICE. Richard stops and listens.

ABIGAIL (V.O.)
Take your hands off me.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
I miss you, baby.

Richard follows the voices.

INT. SHELTER OFFICE - DAY

A small office space, Abigail pressing her back against the wall, the door open to the hallway.

SIMON CARRION (28), Puerto Rican, holds her wrists.

SIMON
Damn, girl. Be nice.

ABIGAIL
Simon. Let. Go.

He FORCES her to kiss him. She pulls away, slaps him hard.

SIMON
Wanna play rough?
(in Spanish)
I can play rough, if you want to,
bitch.

Simon takes a small step back and holds his arms up.

SIMON (CONT'D)
But I won't. I'll be nice. You be
nice. Everything'll be nice. Got me
a job, babe. A temp, but pay is
decent, three weeks guaranteed.

ABIGAIL
You come here again, I'll call the
police.

SIMON
Start training today, and Matthew's
gonna love it 'cause you wouldn't
believe who I'm...

Abigail pushes by, stepping into the hallway. Simon follows.

INT. SHELTER HALLWAY - DAY

Richard stands in the middle of the hallway. Abigail marches toward him, head down, Simon not far behind.

RICHARD
You OK, Abigail?

She looks up, jerks to a stop, reacts to Richard's bruised torso - a banged-up wreck in a towel - then...

ABIGAIL
I'm... I'm fine, Richard - Mr. Fleeting. Everything is fine. Thank you.

SIMON
"Richard?" Wow. First names and everything. Oooooo.

Matthew appears in the hallway behind Richard, walking toward them. When he sees his mother, he gives her a bright smile and rushes to her. And hits the brakes soon as he sees Simon.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Matthew! Budinski. Miss you, my man.

Matthew makes a beeline for Richard, takes his hand. Richard reacts in a big way, unused to this kind of attention. Abigail reacts - unused to it too.

Simon crosses to Matthew and Richard, hips swaying, arms swinging, cocky as hell. Richard TIGHTENS his hand around Matthew's.

ABIGAIL
Matthew. Come here.

Matthew does not move. Richard does not let go of his hand.

SIMON
(referring to himself in the third person)
Simon says, Richard stay away from Abbie-wabbie.

ABIGAIL
Now!

Richard NUDGES Matthew toward his mother and releases his hand. The boy makes a run for Abigail, but Simon reaches over and grabs him. Matthew CRIES OUT. Abigail rushes to him.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)
TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF MY SON!

She pulls Matthew from Simon, hides him behind her back.

SIMON
Or what, huh? What...? I'm not
afraid of you, Abigail.

ABIGAIL
I'm not afraid of you, Simon.

SIMON
You should be.

Shara appears in the hallway.

SHARA
Hey! Pendejo! What's going on here?

Simon reacts, then PUSHES Richard, who stumbles backward. The
towel DROPS from his waist, revealing his naked torso.

ABIGAIL
Shara! Call the police!

Simon runs down the hallway, kicks open an emergency exit
door with a BANG, exits. A tense beat follows, everyone quiet
and still.

Matthew starts LAUGHING. He's pointing at Richard's penis.
Shara steps forward.

SHARA
Oh. Is that little shriveled thing
what all the fuss is about?

A GIGGLE bursts from Abigail. She covers her mouth, but can't
stop it. Even though she's smiling, she's frowning and her
hand trembles - angry, concerned for Matthew.

Richard picks up the towel, wraps it around his waist.

RICHARD
I think my work here is... done.

Richard salutes Abigail and Shara, turns and walks away.

EXT. SHELTER - DAY

Richard leaves the shelter, crumpled leaflet in hand.

The Bum watches him through a window.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Richard limps along, but there's more determination in his step. It's a subtle change, but noticeable.

The Bum shadows him.

EXT. SEASONAL JOB STORE - DAY

Dirty place, neglected, cracked windows taped up, a closed-up dollar store. Needs a paint job. Richard walks to the store, eyes on a banner slung above the front door: "Seasonal Jobs! Hiring now! Apply Within!"

PEOPLE enter/exit the building.

As Richard reaches for the door, the Bum is in the background, across the street, agitated and uneasy. He raises an arm in alarm! Runs into the street, hands around his mouth, about to shout at Richard.

VAROOM!

The white 1968 Dodge Charger CRASHES into the Bum, flipping him end over end. He lands behind the car in a heap.

The UNDAMAGED Charger fishtails into the Seasonal job store parking lot, tires smoking and squealing. It slows down, engine idling, passing Richard by the front door. All that can be seen of the Driver is his bearded silhouette.

The Charger pulls into a parking space, the front of the car aimed at the Bum. The engine continues to purr. Oblivious to it all, Richard enters the store.

A concerned PASSERBY runs to the aid of the Bum, but the Bum pulls himself up, dusts himself off, pushes the person away, then looks at the parked Charger.

BUM

Asshole!

The Charger's engine REVS, growling like a grizzly defending its cub. VAROOM! The Bum flips the Driver off.

INT. SEASONAL JOB STORE - DAY

Lots of PEOPLE filling out forms, waiting for interviews.

IRMA CHOE (30s), Korean, no-nonsense, sits behind a glass window with a pass-through slot, studying Richard's paperwork.

Richard rocks back and forth as he watches her. He flinches, reaches for his ribs.

IRMA
You were laid off from your
previous job?

Richards gives her a pathetic half-smile and nods.

IRMA (CONT'D)
Uh-huh. I need to make copies.

She crosses to a photocopier and chats it up with another EMPLOYEE. Richard watches them. Irma and the employee study Richard like a lab rat, then resume their conversation, LAUGHING now. Richard closes his eyes.

RICHARD
What... a... heartless... bitch.

He opens his eyes and oh shit: Irma is standing right there with a steaming cup of coffee.

After a beat, she takes a seat, makes herself comfortable, cracks her neck, takes a big, long sniff, exhales, rotates her shoulders, gets the kinks out, slurps her coffee. She slips his ID cards through the slot.

IRMA
We'll keep you on file, Mr.
Fleeting. If you haven't been hired-
out in thirty days, you can come
back and re-apply.

RICHARD
The season'll be over by then...

He leans forward, reading her name tag.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
...Irma.

Irma shrugs. Richard winces in pain.

IRMA
What's the matter? Richard.

RICHARD
I fell five stories into a dumpster
filled with cardboard boxes, broken
glass, bricks, and boxes of
individually wrapped fortune
cookies sealed in puffy plastic
bags.

IRMA

Well, you should consider yourself lucky there was a Chinese restaurant nearby. Not that this Korean cares. I'm a heartless bitch. Happy Holidays. Next!

INT. SEASONAL JOB STORE - DAY

Richard stomps to the exit door. A grey-haired man, HUBERT (60s), rushes into the waiting room, scans the area.

HUBERT

You!

Richard freezes.

HUBERT (CONT'D)

Yeah, you. You'll do. Available?

RICHARD

Available...? What...? Yes. Oh, yes! Yes sir, I need a job, I really need a job, doesn't matter what it is, I'll do it, just give me a chance, please.

HUBERT

(shouting)

Got my last Santa! Hustle him through, Irma!

RICHARD

Uh... I'm sorry. Your last what?

HUBERT

Santa. You. Job.

(to Irma)

Get him to Boot Camp ASAP!

RICHARD

I can't do that.

HUBERT

What?

RICHARD

No.

HUBERT

You can't?

RICHARD

It's insane.

HUBERT

It's the freakin' holidays.

(beat)

Come on. Gimme a break, pal. I need a Santa. Post-haste. What's your beef? Everybody loves Santa.

RICHARD

Not me.

HUBERT

You gonna say no to forty-five bucks an hour, ten hours a day for three weeks?

INT. SANTA BOOT CAMP - DAY

OSCAR (55), an ex-Marine in full Santa costume, faces Richard and ELEVEN BOOT CAMP SANTAS - including Simon - all wearing Santa costumes. They stand to attention, shoulder to shoulder.

Oscar inspects his Santa troops.

OSCAR

I am Oscar, your senior Santa drill instructor. For the next six hours you will speak only when spoken to and the last words out of your ignorant mouths will be Santa sir. As far as you pukes are concerned, I am Santa Fuckin' Claus and you ain't nothing but Santas-In - Training whose diapers are full of baby Santa bullshit.

He marches up and down the line.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Now, there are two ways out of this room: my boot up your ass or you stick it out and pass my class a Grade A Fuckin' Santa. Got it, maggots?

RICHARD/BOOT CAMP SANTAS

(shouting)

Yes, Santa sir!

Oscar blows a whistle.

OSCAR
Ho, ho, ho!

RICHARD/BOOT CAMP SANTAS
Ho, ho, ho!

OSCAR
That the best you can do?

RICHARD/BOOT CAMP SANTAS
Ho, ho, ho!

OSCAR
I can't hear you!

RICHARD/BOOT CAMP SANTAS
Ho, ho, ho!

Richard doubles over in pain, coughing.

OSCAR
What's your name, cocksucker?

RICHARD
Richard.

OSCAR
"Dick" you say? Ho, ho, ho like you
got a pair, Dick Cocksucker!

RICHARD
Ho, ho... I'm sorry, Santa sir.

OSCAR
What we have here, men, is a
failure to ho, ho, ho.
(to Richard)
If I was a child I would see
through your ho, ho, ho. Do you not
understand that? I would know you
are a phony Santa. I would not
believe in Santa anymore and then I
would cry to mommy and daddy,
broken fucking hearted - all
because you can't ho, ho, ho worth
shit. Do you want to do that to a
little child, Dick? Fuck 'em up for
life? Do you? Do you?

SIMON
Yeah, do you?

OSCAR

Was I talking to you, maggot? Drop
and give me forty!

Simon glares at Richard and drops, doing pushups.

INT. SANTA BOOT CAMP/CHAIR TEST - DAY

Oscar stands in front of a chair, Richard/Santas shoulder to
shoulder.

OSCAR

Dick Cocksucker, get your ass in
the chair!

Richard limps forward, sits in the chair.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Santa loves children sitting on his
lap. That does not mean he's a card
carrying member of the North
American Man/Boy Love Association.
Santa is not a child molester, a
pederast or a pedophile. What is
he, men?

RICHARD/BOOT CAMP SANTAS

A saint, Santa sir!

Oscar shows them a 25 pound MEDICINE BALL.

OSCAR

In a few short years, 70 percent of
this fine American nation will be
clinically obese. We will be a
country of fat asses, fat bellies,
fat thighs, and fat fucking man-
boobs. Why do we need to know this,
men?

RICHARD/BOOT CAMP SANTAS

Because Santa is a fat saint, Santa
sir!

OSCAR

No! Because this is what happens
when a happy fat fuckin' five year
old jumps in your lap.

He THROWS the ball HARD into Richard's lap, knocking Richard
right out of the chair. Simon smiles, loving it.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Why are you smiling, scumbag? Drop
and give me forty!

Simon drops and gives him forty.

EXT. OBSTACLE COURSE - DAY

Oscar barks orders as the Boot Camp Santas run through an OBSTACLE COURSE made of child MANNEQUINS spray painted numerous colors. They hold their hands out like beggars.

Speakers are fastened to their mouths with black electrical tape, spewing out children's voices that say, "I want a bike. I want a toy plane," etc.

Richard and the Boot Camp Santas jump, tuck, and roll through the obstacle course. Every time they land in front of a mannequin they say "Merry Christmas" in 12 different languages.

The Boot Camp Santas go through the drill as Oscar monitors their progress. Richard weaves through the course second to last, hobbling along, hand on his ribs, Simon behind him.

Simon pushes him into a mannequin. Richard knocks it over and he falls to the ground.

OSCAR

Stop right there, Simon, you
cheating motherfucker! Drop and
give me forty!

Simon shoots Richard a lethal look, then drops. Arms behind his back, Oscar leans over Richard, waits for him to explain.

RICHARD

I... I'm sorry. I can't, Santa sir.
I got injuries. From a fall.

OSCAR

Are you a pussy, Dick?

RICHARD

No, I'm a fat fucking saint!

OSCAR

Then act like one! Santa eats pussy
for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
That's all he eats, all year long:
elf pussy, reindeer pussy, all the
pussy on the island of misfit toys,
Mrs. Claus's pussy.

(MORE)

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Santa is a pussy eating machine!
 You are merely a pubic hair in the
 mouth of pussy eating Santa, that's
 what you are, Dick. Unless you get
 the fuck up...! I will fail this
 entire class if Dick Cocksucker
 keeps fucking up! What is your
 major malfunction, Dick? Didn't
 your parents teach you about Santa
 when you were a child?

Richard points his index finger, raises his thumb, aims his
 finger into his mouth, and pulls the "trigger."

EXT. SEASONAL JOB STORE REAR ENTRANCE - DAY

Simon and the rest of the Boot Camp Santas have formed a
 circle as they talk to one another.

Richard is in the background, smoking a cigarette.

SIMON

Are you with me or what? We gotta
 teach him a lesson or we're all out
 of a job.

The Boot Camps Santas chime in:

BOOT CAMP SANTAS

(at the same time)

Yeah, but why should we listen to
 you, you're a douche bag, Simon?
 Shut up, I got two mouths and a
 bitch to feed. I can't afford to
 not get this job. I'm broke, man.
 We're all broke, huh? Why else we
 be here?

SIMON

All of you shut the hell up and
 come on. Come with me. Simon says.

Simon and the Boot Camp Santas break their circle and face
 Richard.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Hey, Dick?

He crosses to Richard.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Why you such a whiny bitch,
 Cocksucker?

BOOT CAMP SANTAS

(at the same time)

Yeah, why? Why you such a pussy?
 Why you making this so hard for us?
 We need this job! Got mouths to
 feed! We're broke, selfish son of a
 bitch! Kick your ass!

Simon signals them.

SIMON

All of us, we talked it over. We
 gonna motivate you.

They encircle Richard.

RICHARD

You got a problem with me, boys?
 Get in line. And here's an idea
 that might help: why don't you
 write your problems down on your
 dicks and then fuck Simon in the
 ass?

Oscar opens the back door.

OSCAR

Ten-hut!

Everyone stands to attention.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Fall in, sleazebags! We got
 shitloads of saintly work to do!

INT. SANTA BOOT CAMP - DAY

Oscar addresses the graduating class of Boot Camp Santas.
 They stand shoulder to shoulder.

OSCAR

Today, you are no longer loser
 pukes. Today, you are Santas. You
 are part of a saintly brotherhood.
 From now on, every department store
 Santa you meet is your brother.
 Most of you will go to 5th Avenue
 during this holiday season. One of
 you will not. One of you will go to
 New Jersey. But no matter what
 happens to you in that shit-hole,
 remember that you live for the
 children and Santa never dies.

(MORE)

OSCAR (CONT'D)

He lives forever and so will you.

(beat)

Finally, if I hear of any of you laying a hand on Dick Cocksucker, betraying your Santa brother, I will personally hunt each and every one of you Santas down and kill you.

Oscar hands out the LIST OF JOB ASSIGNMENTS.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Santa Lash. Santa Chavez. Santa Ormand. Santa Oda. Santa Satterfield. Santa Molinaro. Santa Bernstein. Santa Holguin. Santa Shayne. Santa Mayank. Santa Carrion. Santa Fleeting.

(beat, to Richard)

Make me proud, you whiny-assed titty baby.

Richard takes the list and looks it over: every name has "Santa" before it and a "5th Avenue" address across from it, e.g., "Santa Simon Carrion... 5th Avenue..."

Using a finger as a guide, Richard goes down the list and finds his name/location at the bottom: "Santa Fleeting... Phlegmington Mall, New Jersey."

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Dismissed!

The Boot Camp Santas congratulate one another. When Richard passes, they whisper ridicule at him:

BOOT CAMP SANTAS

Watch your ass. Loser. Pussy.
Douche bag.

As Simon nears Richard, he gives him a one-two-three boxing move. Richard flinches and Simon LAUGHS.

OSCAR

Holy mother of hell! If my dog's asshole was as dumb as you, I'd call it Shitty Simon Assface! What a disgrace! Drop and give me forty!

SIMON

Aw, come on, Oscar.

OSCAR

I mean all you fucksticks. Or the only one who graduates today with a job is Santa Richard Fleeting!

Oscar points to the floor. The Boot Camp Santas drop. Richard watches them struggle to do pushups, then he gives Oscar a two-fingered salute and leaves.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Sunset - Richard limps back to the shelter, the change to his walk even more noticeable. He almost looks happy.

Something RED on the other side of the street flashes by. Richard looks: a Boot Camp Santa. Richard glances over his shoulder: a Boot Camp Santa follows. He looks forward: a Boot Camp Santa blocks his path.

He picks up his pace, crosses the street, but two more Santas appear. A rat in a maze, Richard ducks down an alley.

Boot Camp Santas block his way at the far end of the alley. Richard stops, turns, intending to go back, but the rest of the Boot Camp Santas enter the alley. The Boot Camp Santas circle him, ten in all. And then Simon pushes through.

SIMON

Simon says you gotta pay to play,
Saint Dick. Not a word to Oscar or
next time it's...

Simon pulls out a small caliber PISTOL, aims it at Richard.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Boom. Done.
(beat)
You are gonna let us kick your ass.

RICHARD

Not in the face.

Simon slugs Richard in the gut and down he goes. The circle of Boot Camp Santas closes in, kicking, punching - brutal.

INT. SHELTER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dark, most of the lights off.

Richard is hunched over, upper torso bare. His body has taken a beating worthy of a visit to the hospital ER, but his face looks OK, not so bad that he can't play Santa. He coughs, spits, wipes his mouth with a bloody towel.

Abigail wraps his ribs in medical gauze, tears flowing. He stares at her with distant wonder, clear from his reaction that he is unused to such kindness.

ABIGAIL

What they did to you... What he did to you. This is just the beginning, you know that. Simon won't quit. Please. Let me take you to the -

Richard shakes his head.

RICHARD

No. I've got to get some sleep. Santa's got to work tomorrow.

EXT. MALL - DAY

Morning - Richard at a service entrance, his Santa suit folded over an arm, waiting with ELLE (25).

She's dressed like a late 1970s punk, black fishnets, combat boots, tattooed/pierced, looks intimidating. She bangs on the door, snarls, cigarette jammed between her teeth.

ELLE

(sugary, high-pitched voice)

Grrr! Open! Open up, oh please open! Grrr! Darn! Double darn and grrr...! We gonna be late! Darn it.

(beat)

Come on. I know another way in.

EXT. BACK OF MALL - DAY

Richard follows Elle as they walk along the backside of the mall, trash everywhere, some feral cats/dogs.

ELLE

My boyfriend manages Melzter's. His dad owns it. Family business. You know Melzter's? Everybody knows Melzter's.

Richard shakes his head: No.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Like a Jewish deli with guns. I'm Elle, by the way, your elf.

RICHARD

Richard, your Santa.

ELLE

Pleased to meet you, don't you know? I love Santa. Santa makes me happy. Does Santa make you happy?

EXT. MELZTER'S BACK DOOR - DAY

Elle bangs on a beaten-up steel door with Meltzer's name/logo on it: "Melzter's Gun & Ammo Warehouse. Cogito, ergo sum armatus." ("I think, therefore I am armed.")

ELLE

Ewald! Ewlad! Open up! Gotta go to work! Grrr! Ewald? You big turkey!
(beat)
Are you trustworthy? You look trustworthy. I know when to trust people and I trust you.

Elle points at a weatherproof OUTDOOR RECEPTACLE.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Don't tell no one, kay? You do, we're dead. Ewald hides it there. Open the flap.

Richard opens the flap. Standard outdoor electrical outlet inside.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Pull the electric thingy out.

Richard pulls on the white plastic electrical outlet, it slips out - a dummy outlet - revealing an empty space behind - and the key. Elle claps her hands together, overjoyed, CLAP, CLAP, CLAP! Richard throws her the key.

RICHARD

Outdoor surveillance, video cameras?

ELLE

It's Meltzer's, dummy. No one screws with Meltzer's. Ever. Everybody knows that, even the cops. You do, you're dead.

She unlocks the door, enters and taps an alarm system keyboard on the inside wall, code number: "1989." Richard watches.

RICHARD

Huh. The year the Oakland A's won the World Series.

INT. MELZTER'S GUN & AMMO WAREHOUSE - DAY

Richard follows Elle, passing shelves of AMMUNITION and GUNS. She turns and stops him.

ELLE

You know your guns, don't you? I'm good at this. I can tell. I bet you're... Army. You look like Army. I like Army. Army makes me happy.

RICHARD

Yeah. Army Infantry.

ELLE

OK. So - listen Army - Melzter's is totally legal all the way, except for when it ain't.

She points to a big WOODEN CRATE.

ELLE (CONT'D)

You wanna know what's in that?

RICHARD

If you tell me, you're going to have to kill me.

ELLE

A belt-fed, gas-operated M240 machine gun firing 7.62 mm NATO cartridges. I won't kill you. But if Ewald finds out...

RICHARD

Right, right, I'm dead.

She puts a finger to her lips, holds it there until she's certain Richard understands, then they start walking again.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Fired a lot of those in the Army.

ELLE

What?

RICHARD
M240s. Only thing I was good at.

ELLE
My kind of Santa.

INT. MALL - DAY

A trashy old mall, plenty of stores boarded up/closed. Cheesy holiday MUSIC plays on blown-out speakers.

A battered Santa's WORKSHOP and THRONE occupy the middle of the mall, leaving little room to walk around the display.

A tall, ragged artificial Christmas TREE leans to one side, the star atop the tree perched at a crazy angle - looks like the whole thing might topple over any second.

Meltzer's is behind the Santa workshop. Lights come on in the store. Elle and Richard jog toward the glass doors/rolling security grille.

INT. SANTA WORKSHOP - DAY

Richard stares at his reflection in a small, cracked mirror. He's in full Santa costume.

RICHARD
(Santa voice)
Ho, ho, ho... Ho, ho, ho... Ho, ho,
oh shit.
(to his reflection)
I want to kill you and now I am
you. Oh my god. Oh my god. Oh my
god. I can't do this.

Looking at his reflection, his eyes tear up.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. BASEMENT - DAY (1989)

CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH!

Richard (7) watches his new bat get crushed by the trash compactor. Joe and Lynette stand at the top of the staircase behind him, jaws open, eyes wide with shock.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Cold out, but Richard practices his pitching anyway, throwing a baseball at an angled wooden box filled with sand, an image of Santa Claus in the center.

He throws the ball over and over, a four seam fast ball with perfect thumb placement, hitting Santa's face every time.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Richard watches a TOM AND JERRY CARTOON on TV: "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Mouse" (1947).

Joe and Lynette fight in the kitchen.

JOE (V.O.)
I did what you told me to do, you
stupid bitch. Fix it you said!

INTERCUT - CARTOON

-- Tom sees milk bottles in a basement.

LYNETTE (V.O.)
Are you kidding me?

INTERCUT - CARTOON

-- Tom pours chemicals, acid, and poison into the milk.

JOE (V.O.)
I fucking fixed it like you said!

INTERCUT - CARTOON

-- A fly dies after it drinks the poisoned milk.

LYNETTE (V.O.)
You made it worse, you moron! I
hate you. I hate you so much, I...

Richard's eyes are huge, sad orbs reflecting the cartoon.

INT. SANTA WORKSHOP - DAY (2022)

BACK TO PRESENT:

Richard covers his mouth with both hands, as if he's stifling a scream, tears streaming down his cheeks. Elle knocks on the door.

ELLE (V.O.)
 Richard? Hurry. They're lining up.
 The kids, they're... Oh, this is so
 exciting! Richard? Santa? Are you
 coming out?

INT. MALL - DAY

Elle is dressed up as a punk tattooed/pierced elf.

Richard steps out of the workshop. When she sees him, she
 takes a step back. He looks half-mad.

But he gives her a shaky smile and a "thumbs up," then spots
 two grubby KIDS standing behind a red plastic chain. Waiting
 in line, no parents in sight. Richard stumbles into the Santa
 throne, turns to the kids.

RICHARD
 (Santa voice)
 Ho, ho, ho!

The kids run away in terror.

INT. MALL - DAY

Richard sits on the Santa throne, no kids, no line, the mall
 almost empty. He plays the finger game "here's the church."

Elle smokes in the workshop, blowing smoke up the chimney.
 Nothing happening, nothing to do, and then...

BEGIN MONTAGE

Holiday MUSIC over scene.

A long line of grumbling, tired PARENTS and CHILDREN waiting
 to meet Santa.

-- A SCREAMING GIRL (8) sits on Richard's lap, bouncing up
 and down.

SCREAMING GIRL
 I want Justin Bieber, Justin,
 Justin BieberBieberBieberBieber!

-- TWIN BOYS (8) stare at Richard.

TWIN 1
 You're not the real Santa.

SHARA
 It's hot. Wouldn't want you to burn
 yourself. And you...
 (in Spanish)
 Mr. Face of Death.

Points to Richard.

SHARA (CONT'D)
 I know karate.

She crosses to the light switch.

ABIGAIL
 You survived. Santa and Shara.

Shara turns off the lights and exits. Richard and Abigail's heads are close together, silhouetted, as they converse with hushed voices, intimate and comfortable.

INT. SEASONAL JOB STORE - DAY

Irma's window, Richard waiting to get his paycheck. Simon stands at the back of the line. Hubert enters, in a hurry, shouts as he passes:

HUBERT
 Richard! Hearing good things! Keep
 this up and I'll keep you employed!

He exits.

Irma passes Richard's check through the slot. They have a minor tug-of-war, then she releases it. Richard walks to the exit door, passing Simon, who slams his shoulder into him.

SIMON
 You don't learn, do you? I see you
 with Abigail. She ain't your girl.

RICHARD
 She isn't yours either.

SIMON
 Simon says stay away.

RICHARD
 And if I don't?

SIMON
 Simon says I will shoot you in the
 face - remember?

He aims his finger at Richard.

RICHARD
Go ahead, Simon. Do it. Right now.
Kill me. I won't stop you.

He holds a beat, then shows Simon a cold, dead smile.

SIMON
Next time.

RICHARD
One can only hope.

INT. APARTMENT DOOR/HALLWAY - DAY

Phillip pulls the eviction NOTE off Richard's apartment door and opens it, swinging an arm: free to enter.

RICHARD
Thanks, Phillip.

Richard enters the apartment, takes it in.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
Good to be home.

PHILLIP
Merry Christmas, Richard.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sleeping, Richard tosses and turns in his bed. Another NIGHTMARE.

EXT. JOE'S FUNERAL - DAY (1990) - DREAM SEQUENCE

Richard (8) weeping by his father's grave. Lynette on the opposite side, glaring hate at him, Richard unable to make eye contact, looking down. She crosses to him, kneels by his side.

RICHARD AGE 8
I'm... I'm so-so-sorry, mom.

She WHISPERS in his ear. Her LIPS brush his earlobe, but we can't hear what she says.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT/BEDROOM - NIGHT (2022)

Richard in bed, wide awake and WEEPING.

EXT. SHELTER - DAY

Sunset - PEOPLE file in and out.

A SALVATION ARMY BELL RINGER stands by a red kettle, ringing the bell.

INT. SHELTER SLEEPING ROOM - NIGHT

Richard wears an APRON that has "Wonderful Volunteer" printed on it. He carries dirty sheets in a laundry basket, walks through the sleeping room, heading to the laundry.

INT. SHELTER HALLWAY - NIGHT

Richard passes the homeless girl, busy scribbling on a motivational POSTER with her black Magic Marker.

The poster says: "If you're waiting for a sign, this is it." She draws a NUCLEAR EXPLOSION on the poster, adding a smiley face inside the mushroom cloud. Richard points to her handiwork.

RICHARD

That's funny. And good. You've got talent.

She stares at him like a deer in the woods, cautious and fearful. Then takes off.

INT. MAIN LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

Richard loads a commercial washing machine, the door to the laundry room open.

Passing in the hallway, Abigail sees him and skids to a stop. She pokes her head through the doorway.

ABIGAIL

"Wonderful Volunteer"? Since when?

RICHARD

Since I got my apartment back.

Matthew pushes by Abigail with a basketful of laundry.

MATTHEW
Got another load, sir!

RICHARD
One more and we're done, matey.

MATTHEW
Aye aye, Cap'n!

Matthew exits.

RICHARD
(calling out)
And don't forget, you need to ask
your mom if we can go ice skating
when we're done...!

Abigail steps into the room, hands on her hips.

ABIGAIL
He does, does he?

EXT. ROCKEFELLER CENTER ICE RINK - NIGHT

Richard, Abigail, and Matthew ice skate. Matthew speeds away like a pro.

MATTHEW
Mommy! Look at me! Look at me!

They turn to watch. Richard slips, falls, grabs his ribs. Abigail helps him up. They skate to the retaining wall, holding each other for balance.

ABIGAIL
You OK?

Richard nods, gritting his teeth.

MATTHEW
Richard! Look!

Matthew raises a foot, keeps his balance. Richard and Abigail cheer and applaud.

RICHARD
Great job, Matthew!

Richard and Abigail look at one another - at the exact same time. It's hard for him to do, but he levels his eyes at her and this time Abigail is the one who looks away.

MATTHEW

You go, Richard!

Richard gives Matthew a "thumbs up." Abigail sneaks a look at Richard and her eyes linger on him.

INT. CAFE - NIGHT

Richard and Abigail at the ROCK CENTER CAFE, table by a window, watching Matthew as he skates. The restaurant is decked out for the holidays, humming with CUSTOMERS.

ABIGAIL

We were young and stupid. I got pregnant. He... didn't. And I never saw him again. Simple story, you've heard it all before, same-oh, same-oh.

(beat)

I attract...

(corrects herself)

I'm attracted to men with problems.

RICHARD

Like me.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Like Simon.

Beat. They pick at their food in silence, and then...

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Matthew adores you. And you're so good with him. I've never seen anything like it.

Matthew waves at them as he skates by. They wave back.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

But... you haven't told me your story.

RICHARD

Not much to tell.

She puts her fork down, folds her hands and waits.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Um. OK. I see how it is. You ask, I'll answer.

ABIGAIL

Tell me about... your mother.

RICHARD

Died when I was ten.

ABIGAIL
Oh no, Richard.

RICHARD
If nothing else, she... had a sense
of humor.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT (1992)

Wearing an Oakland A's baseball jersey and cap, Lynette JUMPS
off the Washington Bridge and falls TO HER DEATH.

INT. DINING TABLE - NIGHT (2022)

BACK TO PRESENT:

Almost afraid to ask, Abigail whispers:

ABIGAIL
And your... your father?

RICHARD
Died when I was eight.

ABIGAIL
Oh my god, no. I'm sorry.

RICHARD
Me too. He, uh... it was...
different - from my mother.

Abigail waits for Richard to explain, then...

ABIGAIL
You don't have to.... if you
don't... It's OK. But what - what
about you? What happened to you?

RICHARD
(half-joking)
Oh, you know, simple story, heard
it all before, family rejects you,
foster parents physically and
sexually abuse you, Army says
you're too dangerous, and your
girlfriends want someone more risk-
averse, same-oh, same-oh.

He laughs, but Abigail does not laugh with him. Silence. They
both turn and watch Matthew skating.

EXT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

Richard and Abigail stroll toward a subway station, Matthew walking ahead of them.

RICHARD

Look. I've never been lucky in life.

ABIGAIL

Well... neither have I. Maybe our luck's about to change?

She knocks her shoulder into him.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Play your cards right, mister. Know what's good for you.

She laughs, then reaches for his hand and a tiny static bolt of electricity shoots between them, ZAP! Abigail jerks her hand away.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Oh!

Richard takes her hand and squeezes. They walk toward the subway station.

INT. MATTHEW'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Matthew's tucked in bed, fast asleep, Abigail brushing the hair from his forehead. Richard leans on the door frame, watching.

ABIGAIL

My sweet boy. You are my life.

She kisses him on the cheek. Abigail and Richard hold for a beat, then she closes the door, keeping her eyes on her son until the door shuts.

INT. ABIGAIL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Decorations everywhere, some of them homemade. A Christmas tree with white lights and hanging SILVER BELL ORNAMENTS is adjacent to a WINDOW by the entrance-hall and front door.

Abigail and Richard enter the room.

ABIGAIL

Wine? I'm offering you wine, but...
you probably don't need wine and,
yeah, you probably should.

Richard understands, slips into his jacket, zips it up, walks to the door. Abigail follows, rushing after. He turns and she's there, close to him. She plays with his jacket's zipper, zip up, zip down.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

I want Matthew to see you as Santa.
That OK?

Richard nods: Yes.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

I... I told him the truth.

RICHARD

About Santa?

ABIGAIL

No, no, just that you're a pretend
Santa working at the Phlegmington
Mall in Jersey. Next week?
Christmas Eve OK?

RICHARD

Santa Richard will be there.

She let's go of the zipper, wiggles her fingers as if they're hot and she needs to cool them down.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

If there's anything you want for
Christmas, just ask.

She KISSES him.

She breaks the kiss, pushes him out the door, shuts it, leans against the door, breathing hard.

ABIGAIL

Smart girl.
(beat)
Stupid girl.

EXT. ABIGAIL'S DOORSTEP - NIGHT

Richard looks up at the sky.

RICHARD

Please, God, don't let me fuck this
up.

BEGIN MONTAGE

GLIDING through the air like an angel, looking down, the world passes by below.

Holiday MUSIC over scene.

-- 5th Avenue, aglow with Christmas lights and decorations, everyone in a festive spirit.

-- Simon and the Boot Camp Santas working in 5th Avenue department stores, lines of parents/children.

-- Richard and Elle working as Santa/elf in the mall, the line of parents/children longer than before.

-- The shelter's sleeping room overflowing with people, Abigail passing out pillows and blankets, Matthew helping.

-- New York City, night, a breathtaking image full of possibility and magic, and then...

END MONTAGE

EXT. APARTMENT WINDOW - NIGHT

...an apartment window in the city comes into focus, Simon working on a computer, his back facing the window. We slip through the window, enter his apartment and...

INT. SIMON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

...move toward Simon and the computer, passing over his shoulder.

He's reading a news ARTICLE displayed on the computer screen - can't read the entire headline, but part of it can be made out: "Christmas Calamity!" And the date: "December 25, 1990."

Simon grins.

SIMON

Simon says what a naughty boy you
were, Dick Cocksucker.

INT. SEASONAL JOB STORE - DAY

Tucked in a corner of the waiting area, Simon and Hubert huddle together. Hubert reads the article Simon found on the Internet.

HUBERT

I'll have to...

SIMON

I know, sir. You will.

HUBERT

I'm no Scrooge, Mr. Carrion. Fire a man just before Christmas. But I can't have a Santa with a history like this on the payroll.

(beat)

Oscar'll handle it. Thank you.

SIMON

Sir? Oscar made me the Boot Camp Santa squad leader, sir. A Santa's gotta be discharged? It's my job to give him the boot.

HUBERT

Is it?

SIMON

Yessir - and, look, I'll talk to Oscar right now, make sure we're on the same page, then I'll take care of Mr., uh, Fleeting, like I'm supposed to. You won't have to worry about nothin', sir. I'll do my duty.

Beat.

HUBERT

Fine. That's fine. Don't be unkind. Be discreet. And remember, you represent me.

Simon lays a finger aside of his nose.

SIMON

I'll be in and out like Santa. No one will even know. Boom. Done.

INT. APARTMENT DOOR/HALLWAY - DAY

Abigail sneaks to Richard's apartment door. She slides a SEALED CHRISTMAS CARD underneath the door.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - DAY

Preparing his Santa costume, the SOUND of the CARD sliding under the door catches Richard's attention. He picks it up.

The card is addressed to: "Santa, the North Pole." The sender's address is: "A Good Girl." Richard opens the card and reads:

ABIGAIL (V.O.)
Dear Santa, I want you for
Christmas. Won't you hurry down the
chimney tonight?

An ARROW with a SMILEY FACE next to it directs Richard to turn the card over. He flips it and reads:

ABIGAIL (V.O.)
"Better eat your milk and cookies
tonight, Santa. You're going to
need the energy. Abigail."

Richard drops the card. He closes his eyes.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND/BASEBALL FIELD - DAY (1990)

HIGH ABOVE the playground/field, a beautiful, sunny Christmas Eve, schoolchildren playing.

Once again, Richard (8) is alone. This time he stands on home plate, watching the kids play. A low-flying PLANE passes over, WHOOOOSH! He looks up.

A clumpy blue-black LIQUID falls out of the sky, below the plane's belly: chemically treated lavatory waste, leaked out of the outer skin of the aircraft.

It falls toward the playground/field, heading straight for Richard. A BOMB DROP WHISTLE, the kind from a Looney Tunes cartoon, accompanies the excrement. Richard is still looking up when...

...SPLASHDOWN! Richard is covered from head to toe in jettisoned blue-black human excrement, the FORCE of it KNOCKING him to the ground. The school bell RINGS. He does not get up.

Charles walks to him and the boys stare in silence at one another. Charles reaches out a hand.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Photo of President Bush, an American flag, classroom paraphernalia, and a CALENDAR, open to DECEMBER, 1990.

Mrs. Donaldson, wearing military fatigues, black combat boots, beret, and a tee-shirt with the trendy imprint of Che Guevara, writes on the chalkboard: "Days that Matter in December: The 9th, 1964."

MRS. DONALDSON

Che Guevara speaks to the world at the United Nations.

Richard is not at his desk.

MRS. DONALDSON (CONT'D)

He coined the phrase, "Power to the people." Would you like to try it class? Raise a fist and say it with me, "Power to..."

Charles opens the door, drawing everyone's attention.

MRS. DONALDSON (CONT'D)

Charles? Yes, Charles?

Richard staggers into the classroom, dripping with blue-black lavatory waste. Mrs. Donaldson drops her stapler. When it hits the floor it clicks out a staple.

MRS. DONALDSON (CONT'D)

Blue. Oh. Shit.

The class GROANS in disgust.

EXT. 5TH AVENUE DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Richard waits with his parents to meet Santa, cleaned up and wearing a fresh set of clothes, hair slicked back like he just stepped out of the bath.

The chemically treated lavatory waste has STAINED his TEETH and FINGERNAILS BLUE.

Lynette has a BODY HARNESS shaped like a stuffed MONKEY strapped to Richard's back. He runs. She reels him in.

Two exhausted ELVES (20s) hoist Richard onto the lap of SANTA (50s). They pull disgusted faces: Richard smells like shit.

SANTA
Ho, ho - oh!

Santa GAGS.

SANTA (CONT'D)
(recovering)
...ho there, young man! And what do you want for Christmas this year?

RICHARD AGE 8
Nothing from you, motherfucker.

Joe and Lynette's EYES GO WIDE. Same with the elves and Santa. Lynette drops the leash. Richard jumps onto Santa's thighs and kicks him between the legs, CRACK!

RICHARD AGE 8 (CONT'D)
I hate you!

Santa jerks forward, eyes clenched tight, tears streaming.

RICHARD AGE 8 (CONT'D)
You're not the Father of Christmas!
You're a liar! You've ruined my life!

Richard punches him in the nose. Santa's eyes open wide. Richard pokes him in the eye. Santa howls!

RICHARD AGE 8 (CONT'D)
I wish you were dead!

Richard HURLS himself at Santa's head, attacking him with punches, kicks, and a barrage of unintelligible curse words.

RICHARD AGE 8 (CONT'D)
Fuckinqliarpigfuckersshithead!

In a wild panic, Santa struggles to get away.

SANTA
Holy, mother, God! Help me!

As Richard beats Santa's head, Lynette locates the leash and yanks the monkey harness, LAUNCHING him from Santa.

TIME SLOWS DOWN as Richard sails through the air and lands on his back, THUMP!

BACK TO NORMAL TIME:

Joe, Lynette, Santa, and the elves stare at Richard.

RICHARD AGE 8

I'll get you, Santa. If it's the last thing I do, I will get...

Richard passes out.

INT. SECOND STORY MASTER BEDROOM/RICHARD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Another Joe and Lynette fight.

LYNETTE

That's right. It's all Santa's fault! Never yours!

We start to FLOAT UPWARD, like a piece of swirling dust, away from Lynette and Joe, toward the ceiling and a VENT, its louvered dampers open.

JOE (V.O.)

That your way of saying I suck as a father?

SLIP THROUGH the vent's dampers, the VOICES of Lynette and Joe echoing as we float through the central ventilation duct.

LYNETTE (V.O.)

That's my way of saying you suck at everything, including being a father.

Another VENT appears, we pass through its open dampers, enter Richard's bedroom and SINK toward Richard lying in his bed, tossing a baseball, catching it over and over.

JOE (V.O.)

Our son just beat the shit out of Santa! What you think's gonna happen? That Santa's gonna sue our asses to the North Pole and back, that's what!

Float down to Richard, closer and closer.

LYNETTE (V.O.)

Keep your voice down, Joe. Or I swear, I'll kill you myself.

JOE (V.O.)
 We'll lose the house, the car, our
 savings, everything...

LYNETTE (V.O.)
 You lost me, Joe.

JOE (V.O.)
 ...might as well start
 packing, honey 'cause we're
 gonna end up on the street
 just like the neighborhood
 bums and all thanks to Santa
 Fuckin' Claus!

LYNETTE (V.O.)
 Keep your damned voice down!

Close to Richard's face now. He is listening to every word.
 We float to his EYEBALL, enter his iris, and...

...see what his CHILD'S MIND is IMAGINING:

-- Richard STABS the CLAYMATION SANTA from "The Year Without
 Santa Claus."

-- then he lights him on FIRE.

-- then he SHOOTS him in the face.

-- and then he BEATS him to DEATH with a baseball bat.

We PULL OUT of Richard's IRIS. He is no longer throwing the
 ball. He is calm, even serene.

He gets up, leaving his mitt and ball on the bed. He tiptoes
 to the door, exits. The baseball rolls off the bed and hits
 the floor with a deadened THUD.

INT. SECOND STORY MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

LYNETTE
 ...strike three, you're out. A
 failed father's Christmas legacy.

JOE
 You're such an unforgiving...
 (beat)
 I'll fix it, you motherfucker.
 You'll see. I'll fix it for Richie.
 Fuck you and fuck that department
 store Santa. Tonight. Santa Claus
 will be here and make everything
 right.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Richard turns on the lights. He dashes to the cupboard with the Diazinon, grabs the box. The POISON SYMBOL on the back, a death's head with a warning, is clear and readable: "Danger, ingestion can cause sudden death."

INT. KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Richard pours Diazinon into the milk left out for Santa. Sprinkles it on the cookies.

RICHARD AGE 8

What's red and green and flies? An
airsick Santa Claus.

He mixes the milk.

RICHARD AGE 8 (CONT'D)

What's red and green and dies? A
poisoned Santa Claus.

Richard walks backward, toward the staircase, fading into darkness, his features lit up by the Christmas tree.

RICHARD AGE 8 (CONT'D)

That's what you get for being a
liar, Santa.

INT. SECOND STORY BEDROOM - DAY

Christmas morning - a SHRIEK wakes Richard. His mother.

Richard freezes - guilty as hell, but he's smiling a little. Another SHRIEK, this one lasting longer.

He jumps out of bed, runs to the door, opens it, looks over the bannister and down into the living room/kitchen.

LYNETTE (V.O.)

Help! Help me! Oh my god!

Lynette is in the kitchen, hunched over Joe's DEAD BODY. He is dressed as SANTA CLAUS, foam around his mouth, vomit, blood, milk, cookies, shattered glass.

Richard's eyes WIDEN as they fill with understanding.

LYNETTE

Oh, god! Oh my god, Joe! Joe!
Joeeeee!

Lynette's shrieking turns into a HIDEOUS SCREAM.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. JOE'S FUNERAL - DAY

Richard (8), MOUTH wide OPEN - as if he's screaming in horror - but no sound comes out.

Lynette whispers in his ear. Her LIPS brush his earlobe, but we can't hear what she says. She walks away, does not look back.

A single tear rolls down his cheek.

INT. MALL - NIGHT (2022)

BACK TO PRESENT:

Christmas Eve - Richard/Elle working as Santa/elf.

HUNDREDS of PARENTS/CHILDREN form a NOISY line, frazzled, tired, impatient, a crowd with a short fuse, waiting to be lit. Abigail and Matthew step forward, next in line.

Richard removes a CHILD from his lap and sees them waiting. He smiles behind the beard, fails badly - more like a grimace - then pulls out Abigail's Christmas card and waves it.

A faint WAILING coming from somewhere in the line! It sounds almost the same as Lynette's HIDEOUS SCREAM.

Richard's eyes go wild, hunting for the source - he's close to losing it - then he sees a CRYING BABY in the arms of a MOTHER. She shushes the baby.

Matthew sits on Richard's lap.

RICHARD
(Santa voice, shaky)
Matthew... my boy. Ho, ho, ho!

Matthew gives him a wink, then whispers in his ear.

MATTHEW
Hi, Richard. I know it's you. Mommy
told me.

Richard whispers in Matthew's ear.

RICHARD
 (natural voice)
 How you doin', matey?

Matthew gives him a "thumbs up."

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 (Santa voice)
 And this must be your lovely
 mother! Come, come!

He waves Abigail closer.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 (Santa voice)
 Santa knows what your mother wants
 for Christmas and he can't wait to
 give it to her tonight, ho, ho, ho!
 But what about you, young man? What
 do you want?

Matthew leans in close to Richard's ear again.

MATTHEW
 A father. Like you.

Richard pulls away, staring at the boy in disbelief.

Dressed in Santa costumes, Simon and an overweight YOUNG MAN
 (20s) force their way through the crowd. Simon has several
 PAPERS in hand. He steps up to Richard on the Santa throne,
 leans in close.

SIMON
 You're fired.

Shoves the ARTICLE in Richard's face.

INT. MALL - DAY

Richard and Simon stand nose to nose, Simon egging him on.

Abigail reads the article, horror-struck, Matthew holding her
 hand, frightened by what's happening.

Babies WAIL, children GRUMBLE, parents SHOUT at their kids -
 stress levels peaking, the fuse lit, the crowd about to blow.

SIMON
 Fatty Arbunckle here is replacing
 you, then I'm going to 5th Avenue
 like the rest of the Boot Camp
 Santas 'cause I got a job to do.
 (MORE)

SIMON (CONT'D)

But you don't. You're done as Santa.

RICHARD

Abigail.

Richard moves to Abigail, but Simon pushes him away.

SIMON

Get outta here. She don't want to talk to a freak like you.

Abigail lowers the article, looks at Richard, eyes tearing.

RICHARD

Abigail.

SIMON

Security!

Two mall SECURITY OFFICERS (late 20s) push their way through, agitating the crowd.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Escort this murdering psycho off the property!

Richard tries to force his way by Simon.

RICHARD

Abigail!

A MALE VOICE catches Richard's attention:

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Richard, Richard, Richard. Why am I not surprised?

Richard looks at the man who spoke and it's TODD with his CHILDREN, a BOY and a GIRL who look just like him. Todd holds their hands. The girl looks at her father and says:

TODD'S DAUGHTER

He's just like you said, dad.

TODD'S SON

Such a loser.

Simon palms Richard's chest, grinning at him as the Security Officers step up. Richard snaps and PUNCHES Simon in the jaw.

The crowd EXPLODES, swelling forward, others scattering - an instant mall riot!

Abigail takes Matthew and disappears into the chaos.

Richard and Simon go at it hard, two Santas beating the shit out of each other. The Security Officers try to pull them apart. Elle attacks.

Simon takes a swing at Richard and punches the Young Man in the nose. He falls like a tree, out cold.

Richard picks up a plastic reindeer and SLAMS it on Simon's head. Unfazed, Simon throws Richard into the Santa workshop, knocking him through a wall, then he jumps on him.

The fight continues inside the workshop - see them through the windows, slugging it out until they knock one another through the rear wall.

The Santa workshop falls down in a heap! Richard crawls out and backs away as Simon pulls himself out of the rubble.

Simon charges. Richard plucks ornaments from the tree, throwing them at Simon, one after another. Simon plows into Richard like a bulldozer, they hit the tree and it topples over with an enormous CRASH!

EXT. MALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

SHOPPERS flee the mall, some carrying stolen items. Police cars flash red/blue in the background. Simon jogs toward us, stops and scans the area.

SIMON

When I find you, Richard, you are a fuckin' dead man.

EXT. ABIGAIL'S HOUSE/FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Wrecked Santa costume, beard pulled aside, face bruised and bloody, Richard BANGS on Abigail's front door.

RICHARD

Abigail!

No answer.

EXT. 5TH AVENUE

Abigail hurries down a sidewalk with Matthew, unable to hide her anguish or tear stained face. She spots a department store with a long line of FAMILIES streaming out of it.

ABIGAIL

There. You see? It's all going to be OK, Matthew.

(to herself)

It's all going to be OK, it's going to be OK.

MATTHEW

I'm scared, mommy.

ABIGAIL

But this is the real Santa, baby. I promise. And then we'll go to your favorite restaurant and... yeah, it'll be fun. Like how Christmas Eve is supposed to be.

Fighting off a fresh batch of tears, she pulls Matthew toward the store.

MATTHEW

I'm not scared for me, mommy. I'm scared for Santa Richard.

EXT. SHELTER - NIGHT

RICHARD

Abigail! Matthew!

The front door opens and Shara steps out, blocking his way.

SHARA

That's enough, Mr. Fleeting! Go home.

RICHARD

But... please.

SHARA

She does not want to see you.

RICHARD

Shara, I just....

SHARA

Stay away from her. Stay away from Matthew. You're not welcome here. You understand that? She told me to tell you she does not love you. She does not want to see you again. Ever. Go away and never come back.

The door slams.

Richard backs away until he's standing beneath the Wonderful Life Shelter SIGN. The neon flickers once, twice, then TURNS OFF, leaving Richard in darkness.

EXT. EDGE OF THE HUDSON RIVER - NIGHT

SNOWING - a corner of the George Washington Bridge.

Wearing his Santa costume, Richard watches the river pass by, glassy-eyed, an almost empty bottle of Yuengling in hand, drunk, smoking a cigarette.

MOVEMENT in an apartment building window catches his eye, curtains drawn open, lights on inside, revealing...

...a FATHER, MOTHER, a BOY (6) and a lighted Christmas tree.

Richard turns his attention back to the icy waters, toes hanging over the edge. Sudden LAUGHTER. Richard turns at the sound and sees the father standing at an open window, pointing at the sky.

APARTMENT FATHER

I think I see him! Oh, sorry. Nope.
Just a plane.

More laughter.

APARTMENT FATHER (CONT'D)

Geez, it's cold!

The father closes the window. A beat as Richard stares at the family/window and then...

...he steps AWAY from the river.

BUM (V.O.)

No, no, no, no. Jump. Jump! You're
supposed to jump!

The Bum crosses to Richard, points at the Hudson.

BUM

Brrr. Cold. Should do the trick.

(beat)

I'll cheer you on. How's that?

(cheerleading)

Hey, hey, get out of the way! Today
is the day we put you away! Goooooo
Richard!

RICHARD

How... Who? How you know my name,
old man? Who are you?

BUM

I'm a bum. Seen you at the shelter.

RICHARD

(remembering, with
pleasure)
Yuengling!

BUM

And the drunk tank, yeah, yeah. So.
Come on. You gonna do it?

RICHARD

Huh?

BUM

Kill yourself - that's why you're
here, Richard. That's why I'm here.
Let's not kid ourselves.

RICHARD

Oh, I see. You're going to stop me,
that it?

BUM

No. I'm here to make sure you do
it. I mean, look at your life. Look
at how badly you've fucked it up.

RICHARD

Me?

BUM

Who else?

Richard looks to heaven, gives the sky an angry nod.

Bum (CONT'D)

Right, right, you're a victim. We
all are. I know. God, I know.

(beat)

So let me make this easier for you:
what happens if you don't kill
yourself, Richard? Ask yourself
that.

RICHARD

Oh, uh... well, I never see Abigail or Matthew again, probably lose my apartment, then drink myself to death.

BUM

And if you kill yourself?

RICHARD

I drown!

BUM

A fast and easy fix, and almost painless! One, two, three and away you go. Jump.

Richard takes a step toward the edge again, then shoots a look at the family in the apartment window. The father and mother place milk and cookies for Santa on the dining room table. Richard watches, horror-struck, and then...

RICHARD

If I could just kill that fat fucking, milk and cookies eating...
(beat)
No. No more lies.

BUM

Oh, no, you mustn't say things like that, Richard.

Richard looks at the Bum, eyes clear now, focused.

RICHARD

I can fix it. Like my father wanted to.

BUM

How can you do that? You've got nothing to live for.

RICHARD

But I do. I... I do. I'm not gonna kill myself. I'm gonna kill that son of a bitch, Santa. Forever.

BUM

But you can't do that.

RICHARD

It's what I've wanted to do all my life.

BUM

Richard, just shut up and listen...
You can't do it 'cause you already
did do it. You killed Santa when
you killed your father.

Richard takes another step back from the edge.

Bum (CONT'D)

(big sigh)

That information was supposed to
push you over the edge, not away
from it.

RICHARD

You're a bum, a dirty, filthy,
homeless bum, and you know I killed
my father. Does everybody know now?
That it?

BUM

I know everything about you. I know
what your baby shit smelled like.
Cupcakes? Buttered popcorn? Nope.
Sour, like your mother. Awful.

RICHARD

You're right. It is awful. And it's
all Santa's fault and I'm gonna fix
that tonight.

BUM

Awww. Shit!

The Bum **THROWS** himself into the Hudson.

EXT. HUDSON RIVER - NIGHT

The Bum splashes in the icy water.

BUM

Help! Help!

Richard does not hesitate. He jumps in and swims to the Bum.

RICHARD

I got you! Hold on!

But the Bum places both hands on the top of Richard's head
and **SHOVES HIM UNDER THE WATER**, holding him down. Richard
frees himself and kicks to the surface.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

What are you doing? I'm trying to save you!

BUM

I'm trying to drown you!

The Bum does it again. Richard fights his way back up, gasping for breath.

RICHARD

Stop... stop it!

The Bum pushes him under again and this time holds him under for a long time. Richard struggles, can't hold his breath much longer, he's going to drown.

At last, he wrestles free, breaks the surface, takes a lungful of air.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Help! Help!

A ROPE splashes next to him. HEADLIGHTS from the white 1968 Dodge Charger light up the darkness, the rope tied to the front bumper.

The bearded silhouette of the Driver slips into the car, the door SLAMS, engine REVS. Richard grabs the rope, the tires squeal, the Charger reverses, pulling Richard toward shore.

BUM

What am I? Chopped liver?

EXT. EDGE OF THE HUDSON RIVER - NIGHT

Richard lies on his back, choking, panting. The Charger rumbles in the background. The Bum crawls out of the Hudson, flops next to Richard.

RICHARD

What the hell were you doing?

BUM

I tried to make it easy for you.

RICHARD

By drowning me?

BUM

Yes. For all the good it did.

Richard pulls himself up, shivering now, his wet Santa costume freezing up. He looks at the Charger.

The passenger door swings open: an invitation. It's dark inside, can't make out the mysterious Driver. The engine revs, VROOM, VROOM! A beat, then Richard shakes his head.

RICHARD

I wish he'd never been born.

BUM

What? What'd you say?

RICHARD

I said, I wish he'd never been born.

BUM

Who? You?

RICHARD

No. Santa.

BUM

Ooooh.

RICHARD

'Cause of him I have to fix everything.

BUM

Well... OK. But you can't do that, Richard.

RICHARD

Oh, yes I can. I'm going to Melzter's, gonna get some guns and hunt me some Santas on 5th Avenue.

BUM

No, no, no. You don't understand - you drunk, fucking moron. Listen.

RICHARD

What? What don't I understand, Mr. Bum?

BUM

I've granted you your wish. There's nothing for you to... fix.

RICHARD

You've had one too many Yuenglings.

BUM

Santa was never born. He's never existed. The world has never known him. Can't you feel it? I can. Everything's changed.

RICHARD

Screw you. Screw your goofy alcoholic bag of magic tricks. And screw that -

Richard points to the Charger. It is gone.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

- guy... wherever he went.

BUM

He's an asshole. Doesn't matter.

RICHARD

When I'm finished tonight? No one will want to believe in Santa anymore.

Richard walks into the night.

BUM

OK. Be that way. Don't believe me. Doesn't matter. 'Cause you got your wish, Richard Retard! Santa was never fuckin' boorn! Yeah, you heard me! Careful what you wish for, Richard! Careful what you wish foooooor!

EXT. MELZTER'S BACK DOOR - NIGHT

It is NOT SNOWING - a clear, starry, cold night, the mall and parking lot dark and vacant.

Richard's Santa costume is dry.

The back door to Meltzer's is much more formidable - more like a bank vault door. Richard touches it.

RICHARD

Hm...

He looks at the outdoor receptacle, holds a beat, shrugs his shoulders, then gives it a try. It opens. There's a key.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Well. Must be my lucky day.

INT. MELZTER'S GUN & AMMO WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Richard searches for weapons. He doesn't notice, but there are MANY MORE WEAPONS in the store than before.

Store windows in the background, showing the mall interior - low light, no Santa village/throne or Christmas decorations.

Richard grabs a SHOTGUN, a couple of HANDGUNS. Freezes. Sensing something behind him - police? Ewald? - he does a slow turn around: and there's the WOODEN CRATE.

Richard opens it with a prybar, exposing the M240 MACHINE GUN. He pulls it out of the crate.

RICHARD

Suck on this, Santa.

EXT. MALL PARKING LOT/TRUCK - NIGHT

Richard scurries through the parking lot with a BIG RED SACK filled with his cache of weapons, thrown over his shoulder.

The M240 has a sling attached, so the weapon hangs from his other shoulder, ammunition belts slung around his neck.

He BREAKS the PASSENGER WINDOW of an old, battered TRUCK, opens the door, lays the M240/ammunition belts on the floor, tosses the sack on the seat.

Gets in, flips the visor, opens the glove compartment, then the ash tray - finds what he's looking for: keys.

RICHARD

It is my lucky day.

Richard starts the truck, hits the gas and races away.

INT/EXT TRUCK/GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE - NIGHT

The truck speeds along the bridge, heading toward Manhattan.

Richard searches for cigarettes, finds a pack of cigars in the glove compartment. Lights up. Takes a puff.

The BOOT CAMP SANTA LIST OF JOB ASSIGNMENTS lies on the seat next to him. Richard has placed a GUN on the list to stop it from blowing away. All the work addresses are on 5th Avenue. Richard pats the gun and list with his hand.

He looks up and sees the city through the steel of the bridge:

Roadways in the city are lit up, but almost everything else is dark, an eerie black outline of towers. Searchlights at Rockefeller Center scan the sky - could be London, during a blackout in World War II.

RICHARD

What the...?

Traffic ahead! Slams on the brakes! The truck skids to a stop. He's at a ROADBLOCK/CHECKPOINT in the middle of the bridge. A heavily armed CHECKPOINT OFFICER (30s) taps his window. Richard rolls it down.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER

ID.

RICHARD

Oh? Uh...

Richard searches for his wallet.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER

Come on, come on, come on, pal,
don't got all night. Lots of folks
behind you. Big show tonight.

Richard finds his wallet, pulls out his driver's license, hands it to the Officer.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER (CONT'D)

What the hell you wearing? What you
dressed up as?

RICHARD

Santa.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER

Who?

RICHARD

Santa Claus.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER

The hell's Santa Claus, wiseass?

RICHARD

Jolly Old Saint Nick...? Saint
Nicholas?

The Checkpoint Officer pulls out a ticket book.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER

Well, I don't know who Jolly Old Fuckin' Nick is, pal, but one thing I do know is that's a citation, right there. What's in the red sack?

RICHARD

Uh. Christmas presents?

CHECKPOINT OFFICER

Another citation.

The Officer goes to the passenger side of the truck, looks through the broken window.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER (CONT'D)

You got a busted window here. Open the sack.

Beat. Then Richard opens the sack.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER (CONT'D)

I don't see no presents. All's I see is a shitload of guns. Got a permit for these?

Richard nods.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER (CONT'D)

That an M240?

Richard nods.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER (CONT'D)

Gonna do a little Trigger hunting, huh? Before the show tonight. Well, all right then. I'll waive the citations, but consider yourself warned, pal. Have fun tonight. Don't drink and drive. On your way.

Beat as Richard reacts. Then, as he pulls away he says:

RICHARD

Thank you, Officer, and uh... merry Christmas.

The Checkpoint Officer steps in front of the truck.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER

Out of the vehicle.

RICHARD
You want me to get out?

CHECKPOINT OFFICER
You're under arrest.

RICHARD
What for?

CHECKPOINT OFFICER
Being a stupid butthead.

RICHARD
Why?

CHECKPOINT OFFICER
Why he says.

RICHARD
All I said was merry Christmas.

The Checkpoint Officer pulls his weapon.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER
Out of the vehicle, asshole. Now!

Richard hits the gas, punches a hole in the traffic, and the truck roars away. The Checkpoint Officer fires his weapon, BLAM, BLAM, BLAM! Jumps into the cruiser, radioing dispatch.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER (CONT'D)
10-38! Requesting backup!

The cruiser is about to pull away, but the Bum steps in front of the vehicle.

CHECKPOINT OFFICER (CONT'D)
Get outta the way, you bum!

INT/EXT TRUCK/5TH AVENUE - NIGHT

Richard sucks on his cigar as he drives down 5th Avenue at high speed.

Sidewalks are filled with PEDESTRIANS, but everything in the city is dark. Central Park is a black hole, buildings dimly lit, hardly any traffic.

The truck blasts through a stoplight, bouncing through the intersection, tires in the air. Crashes back down, sparks flying. Richard laughs WILDLY.

At 5th and 51st, Richard SLAMS ON THE BRAKES. The truck skids to a stop, St. Patrick's Cathedral to the left, the church blacked out.

Just ahead, on the corner of 50th, a BRIGHT NEON SIGN says "WELCOME TO FABULOUS TODDYVILLE."

Richard stares at the sign. His jaw drops open and the cigar falls onto his lap.

RICHARD
(after a beat)
Oh, shit, ow.

He wipes away the ash, stuffs the cigar in a pocket, then looks out the windshield, eyes wide as he sees everything beyond 50th:

Unlike the rest of the city, this part of 5th Avenue and all of MIDTOWN MANHATTAN is lit up.

There are THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE before him - business people, locals, tourists, and prostitutes, human traffickers, drug dealers, addicts, drunks, etc.

BARS, NIGHTCLUBS, STRIPCLUBS, MASSAGE PALORS, GO-GOS everywhere, so overfilled with patrons they spill out, filling up the streets.

Fights have broken out in some places and people CHEER them on, some betting on them.

Even though they're hard to see because of the foot traffic, large WHITE CIRCLES are painted on all the sidewalks, spaced out evenly on every block, both sides of every street.

A MINE-RESISTANT POLICE ASSAULT UTILITY VEHICLE with heavily armed POLICE stands guard on a corner close to Richard. The cops smoke, shoot the shit, relaxed.

A WOMAN pushes through the crowd, running toward Richard's truck. She is wearing an orange jumpsuit with the letter "T" sewn on the left breast pocket.

WOMAN
Help me! God, help me! Someone!

She is ignored.

A GANG of YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN with BASEBALL BATS push through the crowd and chase after her, laughing and celebrating. A GUN FIRES, BLAM!

The woman falls to the ground, shot in the back. The YOUNG PEOPLE gather around her body and bring their bats down.

Richard opens the driver's door and slowly gets out of the truck. As he does this, a light breeze picks up the BOOT CAMP SANTA LIST OF JOB ASSIGNMENTS. Richard doesn't notice, but we see it blow away and vanish into the night.

He is reading a BILLBOARD, eyes wide, jaw open: "NEW YORK CITY MAYOR TODD BORUTSKIE, FOR THE GREATER GOOD."

Across the street - Rockefeller Center - SEARCHLIGHTS shine in the night sky like a Hollywood movie premiere. Richard walks in a daze toward 50th Street, abandoning the truck.

RICHARD

Holy... shit.

The Bum appears behind him.

BUM

You said it, buddy. It's a crazy party, ain't it?

(beat)

Amazing, when you think about it, though, how much one person impacts the whole damned world, from dorkwad Jimmy Dolittle Nothing in New Brunswick to Emily Dickfacenson in Mass to Chinese waitress Wang Fang and her backassward feet to -

RICHARD

Santa.

BUM

Bada-bing bada-boom. Shit for brains connects the fucking dots. Mind blown. Poof. Especially someone like Santa!

RICHARD

But he's not... real.

BUM

Does this look not real to you, dumbass? Take away Santa and this is as real as it gets. Why? 'Cause he touches so many fucking lives, the way he gets around on that freakin' stupid sleigh of his. When he ain't around, leaves a pretty awful hole, don't he?

Richard stares at the Bum like a cow at a passing train.

BUM (CONT'D)

OK, you're in shock. I get that.
Let me slow it down for you:
Santa's like... George Lucas' midi-
chlorians, a microscopic bug in the
ass of the universe that connects
us all to the Force. Helps keep
things balanced, in a way. I prefer
Preparation H, much more effective,
smells better, I think - but you
get what I'm sayin', right?

(beat)

You see, Richard, you've really had
a terrible life - you've fucked it
up royally - but your terrible
life, without Santa in it, is...
well... Say hi to your mother.

RICHARD

My mo - ?

A strung out PROSTITUE steps out of the crowd, missing teeth,
emaciated, track marks running up an arm.

LYNETTE

Hey, baby. Let's celebrate the big
show tonight. Twenty bucks for
whatever you want.

Richard steps away, horrified.

LYNETTE (CONT'D)

Aw, you're shy.

She grabs his arm.

LYNETTE (CONT'D)

Come on, let me fix it for you. I'm
a fixer. I fix things.

Richard pulls away.

RICHARD

You're not my mother. She's dead.

LYNETTE

I might be old, baby, but I'm not
dead. You want Kinky? I can do
kinky. You want me to be your dead
mother, I'm your dead mother. Come
on, baby. Come to mama.

RICHARD
You're not my mother!

BUM
Wait till you see your dad. Yeah.
Gimme that look. He's alive too.

RICHARD
But, no, that's...

BUM
You didn't kill your father 'cause
there's no Santa to eat the milk
and cookies you poisoned! Your
father's alive. Not well. But
alive. Times Square. Check him out,
if I'm lyin', I'm flyin'.

Richard runs into the crowd, heading to Times Square.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - NIGHT

Richard fights his way through throngs of people. The large white circles painted on the sidewalk can be seen as he runs.

Portable STAGE ahead. A BLACK WOMAN stands in the center, wearing an orange jumpsuit with the letter "T" sewn to it, feet, neck, hands shackled.

An AUCTIONEER stands at the base of the stage wearing a wireless microphone, voice amplified through speakers. MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN stand around the stage, participating in the sale.

AUCTIONEER
Sold! Sold! To the wonderful family
from sunny California!

As Richard gets closer, the woman is removed from the stage and a WHITE MAN replaces her, wearing an orange jumpsuit with the letter "T" sewn to it, wrists, feet, neck shackled - Richard's FATHER.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)
Now, what we have here is a strong,
healthy steel worker! From New
Jersey, my friends! Nothin' like
some fine local color!

Richard slows down, then comes to a complete standstill, watching. He and his father's eyes connect. Joe doesn't recognize him at first, then... his eyes fill with tears.

JOE

Richie...? Richie...? Is that you?
Son? Richie!

The Auctioneer jerks on Joe's collar, shuts him up.

AUCTIONEER

Sorry about that folks, Joe -
chattel number 10 in the catalogue,
you'll see - has a credit rating in
the dumpster, but he's a bonafide
pack horse, willing to work hard to
pay off his debt. First bids?
Anyone...? Anyone...?

Richard backs away, bumps into the Bum.

BUM

Life's a horror show, Richard, as
you well know. Life without Santa?
Takes the horror up a notch.

RICHARD

If this... if this is all real and
Santa was never born... What's that
mean for Mathew? What about
Abigail?

BUM

Well... I don't wanna... I can't...

RICHARD

Look, I don't know how you know
these things, but if you know where
Abigail is, you tell me.

BUM

You're not gonna like it, Richard.

RICHARD

What's happened to her?

BUM

She was a single mother. She's
worse than an old maid, a spinster,
a thornback. She's a Big Bitch.
Know what that is? A criminal with
a death sentence, my man.

Richard grabs the Bum and shakes him.

RICHARD

Where is she? Where is she!

BUM
Rockefeller Center! The big show!

Richard throws the Bum to the ground.

BUM (CONT'D)
Ohhhh, I am way too old for this
shit.

EVERY SCREEN in Times Square changes, projecting a LIVE IMAGE OF RICHARD in his Santa costume. The words "SANTA" and "ARMED AND DANGEROUS TRIGGER" flash over the image.

All the people stop what they're doing and look at the screens. Then they look at Richard. Richard slowly turns around and sees his image on the Times Square Mega Screen.

A FEMALE VOICE addresses everyone over the PA SYSTEM.

CALM FEMALE VOICE
(repeats)
Alert. Alert. Trigger Warning. Go
to a safety zone immediately.

The people obey the voice and walk to the white circles painted on the sidewalks and stand inside them. The Bum pulls himself up, dusts himself off, winks at Richard, walks into one of the circles.

Richard stands totally alone in the center of Times Square with thousands of people looking at him. Then he runs.

EXT. ROCKEFELLER CENTER - NIGHT

Massive crowd. All standing obediently in the white circles. The female alert voice repeats like a civil defense siren.

A FUNERAL PYRE made of wood, with a single pole on top, stands where the Christmas tree is traditionally placed. Podium and microphone set up before the pyre.

Abigail's hands are tied as a HOODED EXECUTIONER leads her toward the pyre, pulling the rope. She wears an orange jumpsuit with the letter "T" sewn to it.

Richard fights the crowd, pushing himself toward Abigail.

RICHARD
Abigail! Abigail...!

A BIG MAN blocks his way. Richard tries to get by - impossible. It's PHILLIP - he turns around and stops Richard with one of his giant hands.

PHILLIP
Hey, mister, calm down.

RICHARD
Abigail...!

PHILLIP
Sh! Don't make me hurt you.

RICHARD
What are they doing to Abigail?
What's going on?

PHILLIP
Abigail Summers? She broke the law.

RICHARD
What? She broke - what?

PHILLIP
She had a downer.

RICHARD
A what? I can't hear you, she had a
what?

Phillip leans in close and whispers in Richard's ear.

PHILLIP
She had a kid with Down syndrome
and kept him secret for eight
years, if you can believe it. Geez,
they cure it and then she goes and
does this. Selfish bitch, eh?
Deserve's what she gets.

The calm female alert voice stops.

RICHARD
What... what happened to her son?

PHILLIP
Recycled. Oh, look! There's Mayor
Todd! Woo-hoo!

The crowd CHEERS as MAYOR TODD BARUTSKIE with his WIFE, TWO
CHILDREN, AND ENTOURAGE appear by the podium and pyre,
waving. The Bum steps up to Richard.

BUM
It's all very 1932, Germany, isn't
it, Richard?

Richard grabs the Bum.

RICHARD

Stop this! Please! Help her! This
is insane!

In the distance, heavily armed POLICE part the crowd. Richard runs. When the police near the Bum, he points in Richard's direction.

EXT. TRUCK/5TH AVENUE - NIGHT

Richard runs to his truck, opens the door, grabs the M240 and ammunition belts, locks and loads the weapon.

EXT. ROCKEFELLER CENTER/PYRE - NIGHT

The executioner ties Abigail to the pole. She weeps. The crowd watches, enthralled.

With his family and entourage behind him, Mayor Todd Barutskie steps up to the podium and microphone.

TODD

Speaker, members of the Council,
distinguished guests, and every-day
New Yorkers! Please remain calm.
Stay in your safety zones.
Everything is under control.

(beat)

And let me add this: no warped,
frustrated man in a red suit is
going to stop the big show! No
miserable little retard is going to
make us crawl on our hands and
knees, begging for mercy! No one
can hide in a big town like this!
This is Toddyville and we will not
be intimidated!

The crowd chants:

CROWD

Todd-eee! Todd-eee! Todd-eee!

KUGGA-KUGGA-KUGGA - M240 MACHINE GUN FIRE! Silences everyone.

Richard appears behind Todd, chewing on his cigar. He pushes Todd aside, walks to the podium, smoke rising from the M240's hot muzzle.

RICHARD

(into the microphone)

My name is Santa and I'm a fat
fucking saint. And you - all of you
- are very bad boys and girls and
you've made it on my naughty list.
No one is burning anyone tonight.

Hundreds of POLICE move through the crowd, toward Richard, weapons drawn. A POLICE SERGEANT (55) steps before the podium.

POLICE SGT

(megaphone)

Santa. Put down your weapon and
surrender. You're surrounded.

RICHARD

Santa says, ho, ho, fuckin' ho.

Richard raises the M240.

The cops OPEN FIRE. Richard pulls the trigger, KUGGA-KUGGA-KUGGA! Shooting into the cops and the crowd, mowing them down. Total carnage in the safety zones, panic, SCREAMS.

Ammunition belt runs out, CLICK! Richard has to reload.

A wave of police fall on him. He resists. They lift him up, carrying him on their shoulders, and march him toward the pyre - going to toss him on it.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Abigail...! Abigail...!

Todd signals the executioner to LIGHT the pyre. Colorful fireworks at the base of the pyre ignite - so spectacular the crowd OOOOHS and AAAAAHS over the GROANS and CRIES of the wounded and dying.

The pyre catches fire quickly, the flames racing to the top. The crowd CHEERS and APPLAUDES. Abigail SCREAMS as the flames get close.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Bum! Get me back! Get me back! I
don't care what happens to me! Take
me back and I'll do it! I'll kill
myself! I promise! Get me back to
Abigail and Mathew! Help me, bum!
Please!

EXT. EDGE OF THE HUDSON RIVER - NIGHT

It's SNOWING.

Richard lies by the Hudson River, the Charger rumbling in the background, the wet rope tied to its front bumper. The Bum flops next to him.

RICHARD

Wha...? What the hell?

Richard's Santa costume is WET.

The Charger's passenger door swings open: an invitation. The engine revs, VROOM, VROOM! Richard pulls himself up, shakes his head like he's trying to wake from a dream: he's seen this before.

After a beat, the Charger takes off. VAAAROOOM! The passenger door slams shut as it roars into the night.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

But... wait... I was... we were...

BUM

I am so glad you didn't get in his car. I hate that son of a bitch.

RICHARD

They were... going to...

BUM

Burn you alive. Yeah. Hello? You made a wish. Wish granted.

RICHARD

Am I dead? Is this heaven?

BUM

Hell, no. Who do you think I am, Frank Fuckin' Capra?

RICHARD

Are you an angel?

BUM

Of course I'm an angel! God, what a doofus.

RICHARD

But you're a bum.

BUM

So? You're a fuckup. Does that make you less human? I'm angelic. Ask my father.

RICHARD

But you're a bum, bum. I mean, you talk, walk, and smell like a bum. Where are your wings?

BUM

They were clipped. So sue me already. Call me your guardian bum angel. That better? Make you feel all gooey inside? We're not allowed to intervene, you know, none of us, just suggest, show you things, possibilities. See, like, I'm not allowed to kick you in the balls.

The Bum kicks Richard in the balls.

Bum (CONT'D)

But like you, I'm stubborn.

(beat)

For a bum, you can't fall much lower. I mean, look what I get to work with.

He points at Richard.

BUM (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Least I get to drink Yuengling. That's something.

Richard staggers away, cupping his balls.

RICHARD

This is crazy, this is crazy... I've lost my freakin' mind.

BUM

Still don't believe me, huh? You really are hard to convince, Richie. OK then, here's the real ball breaker: I know what your mother whispered in your ear at your father's funeral.

Richard whirls around, stunned.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. JOE'S FUNERAL - DAY (1990)

Lynette WHISPERS in Richard's ear. Her LIPS brush his earlobe.

LYNETTE
Kill yourself, Richard.

BUM ANGEL (V.O.)
Kill yourself, Richard.

She releases him, walks away, does not look back. Richard's eyes go wide and his mouth opens as if he's screaming - but no sound comes out. A single tear rolls down his cheek. After a beat, he crumbles to the ground and sobs.

EXT. EDGE OF THE HUDSON RIVER - NIGHT (2022)

BACK TO PRESENT:

BUM
That's what she said and I know you never told a soul, so don't even think about denying it. Now, look, I granted you your wish. You got to see what the world would be like without Santa. Dream come true. Yay! But ask yourself this: why'd I do that, Richard? Why did I show it to you? 'Cause I'm a nice fuckin' guy?

RICHARD
No. Because it's not about... Santa.

BUM
It's never been about Santa.

RICHARD
It's about me.

BUM
Halleluja. The boy has finally seen the light.

RICHARD
The world is better with Santa in it.

BUM
Now, wait a second, let's not get carried away, but, yeah, you're on the right track. The world is better with you not in it, huh? Get it? Besides, you promised!

(MORE)

BUM (CONT'D)

You made a fuckin' promise and you got to keep your promises!

RICHARD

I have to stop blaming him. It's my fault. I did it. I killed my father.

BUM

That's right. You kill everything you touch, Richard. You destroy Abigail and Mathew, one way or the other, brother. In a world with Santa, in a world without Santa - you're such a fuckup you couldn't save Abigail from the pyre in the non-Santa world. In the end, it's not just about you, it's all because of you, and I guarantee - trust me when I tell you this - the only way to save Abigail and Mathew from a fate worse than you in any world is to listen to your mother.

Richard breaks down and weeps. The Bum hands him a tissue.

RICHARD

Can I... can I say goodbye?

BUM

Mister, you are in no position to negotiate.

RICHARD

I swear to God, I'll do it.

BUM

No, no. You don't have to go that far.

RICHARD

Let me make it right with Abigail and Matthew. Please.

BUM

Aw... It's my soft heart that gets me in trouble, every freakin' time. I know I'm gonna regret this. OK. Here's how it's gonna work.

He shows Richard an ivory-handled .442 Webley British Bulldog REVOLVER, loads it with black powder rounds.

Bum (CONT'D)
 She's at her house now. Go. You got
 till Twelve Midnight. One second
 after that, Cinderella, and it's...

He puts the revolver to his head.

Bum (CONT'D)
 Boom. Your head turns into a
 pumpkin with a big, fat hole in it.

The Bum gives the revolver to Richard.

Bum (CONT'D)
 Nice, huh? It's an 1872 Webley.
 Never misses, always fires, hasn't
 failed me yet. Just pull the
 trigger, it'll do the rest.

Richard checks his watch, reacts - not much time. He puts the
 revolver into his Santa suit pocket and runs off.

Bum (CONT'D)
 One second after, mister!

The Bum watches Richard run into the snowy night.

Bum (CONT'D)
 Gonna have to cover my ass on this
 one, cover aaall my bases.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

SNOWING HARD now - Richard jogs down the middle of a street.
 He passes some late SHOPPERS.

SHOPPERS
 Merry Christmas, Santa! Happy
 Holidays!

RICHARD
 Merry Christmas!

Tears of acceptance wash down his cheeks as he fully embraces
 the spirit of Christmas. He passes a group of CAROLERS.

CAROLERS
 Happy Holidays!

RICHARD
 Ho, ho, ho!

Richard reaches Abigail's home.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Merry Christmas, Abigail. Merry
Christmas, Matthew.

EXT. ABIGAIL'S HOUSE/FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

He pounds on the door.

RICHARD
Abigail! Matthew!

Abigail opens the door.

ABIGAIL
Oh my god. Oh my...

Matthew pushes by Abigail and hugs Richard.

MATTHEW
Richard!

Abigail joins them in the hug.

ABIGAIL
Oh, Richard, Richard, Richard.
We've been so worried. You're wet!
You're soaking!

RICHARD
Let me touch you, Abigail.

He cradles her face with his hands.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
You're alive. You're real. Thank
God, you're alive and real.

They enter the house, close the door.

INT. ABIGAIL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

They cling to one another in the entrance-hall.

ABIGAIL
I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.

RICHARD
No, no, I should have told you. I
should have told you everything.

ABIGAIL

I just - it's so much, Richard. And then everyone went crazy at the mall and, and...

MATTHEW

Richard? After you and that mean fake Santa got in the fight, Mommy took me to see the real Santa downtown.

RICHARD

Oh... Oh yeah? She did? Did you tell Santa what you wanted for Christmas?

Matthew smiles big, nods: yes, yes, yes.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Good. That's good. 'Cause Santa's good, Matthew. He is so good. And you know what? He's real. I believe in him.

(to Abigail)

I wish I could, I wish... You wouldn't believe what happened to me tonight. But I had to find you. I had to see you before... Forgive me.

Abigail KISSES Richard.

Afterwards, she folds into him and they cling to one another. Deep in the embrace, Richard closes his eyes. When he opens them, he looks at a grinning cat CLOCK with swishing tail and moving eyes. The time: 11:59.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I'm the happiest I've ever been.

ABIGAIL

I'm in love with you, Richard. We both are.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The Bum stands in the street, snow falling, checks his watch.

BUM

OK, Richard. Showtime.

INT/EXT AMC PACER - NIGHT

The headlights of a 1980 AMC PACER appear in the distance. The car speeds along the road, Simon at the wheel, wearing his Santa costume. His PISTOL lies on the passenger seat.

He slows the Pacer down as he nears Abigail's house, parks across the street. He grabs the pistol, gets out.

BUM

Pst!

Simon crouches low and creeps toward the Bum. They hide behind a parked car.

SIMON

(whisper)

What are you doing here?

BUM

(whisper)

You're late, shit-weasel. Don't do anything 'til I say, got it?

EXT. ABIGAIL'S HOUSE/FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Richard steps onto the porch. He looks at the sky and closes his eyes. Snowflakes fall on his face. His BREATHING is the only sound that can be heard, nothing else.

The Bum and Simon peek over the car, watching him.

Richard withdraws the Webley from his Santa suit pocket, glances at the door behind him, then looks at the sky again.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

SIMON

He's got a gun. You didn't say nothin' about a gun.

The Bum swats Simon in the head.

EXT. ABIGAIL'S HOUSE/FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

RICHARD

I'm not a praying man, but... if you're up there and you can hear me... I wanna live. I wanna live. Please, God, let me live.

The Bum stands up.

BUM

Now you have gone too far! Damn you! No! No, sir! No way! We had a deal! It's after Midnight! Kill yourself now!

Richard DOES NOT HESITATE. He puts the revolver to his temple and pulls the trigger, CLICK! Simon rises, standing next to the Bum. Richard tries again. CLICK, CLICK, CLICK! Nothing.

RICHARD

(to the Bum)

It won't fire.

BUM

Bullshit! It never misfires! It has never misfired once! It can't misfire! Do it again!

CLICK! Richard waves the gun at the Bum.

RICHARD

See?

He pulls the trigger. The revolver fires, KA-BLAM! The Bum and Simon drop.

A beat, then Richard looks at the sky. He takes a big breath, puts the revolver to his head, closes his eyes and pulls the trigger. CLICK!

Abigail and Matthew open the door and react to Richard holding the gun to his head.

SIMON

Now?

BUM

Shoot him, shoot him, shoot him, you idiot!

SIMON

Simon says, goodbye Dick Cocksucker.

Simon aims the pistol at Richard. His finger tightens around the trigger, but just before he fires: VAAAROOOOM!

The white 1968 Charger EXPLODES from the darkness, the COLD BLUE EYES of the Driver seen behind the wheel.

BUM

Asshole!

The Charger SLAMS into Simon, sending his body high above the vehicle. He hits the pavement on the other side with a bone shattering CRUNCH!

Simon's pistol soars into the air. It spins in SLOW MOTION.

BACK TO NORMAL TIME.

The Dodge screeches to a halt, FISHTAILING into the Bum and knocking into him like a baseball bat, CRACK! The Bum sails down the road in the opposite direction.

Simon's pistol hits the ground and fires, BOOM!

Richard, Abigail, and Matthew duck and... the bullet SHATTERS the window by the door, hits the Christmas tree inside, RINGING one of the hanging SILVER BELL ORNAMENTS, DING!

MATTHEW

Mommy! An angel just got his wings!

The Driver opens the door of the UNDAMAGED white 1968 Charger and steps out. There's a BROWN PAPER BAG on the passenger seat with a fast food company logo on it: "POUTINE O' TORONTO, the best in town."

The Driver is SANTA CLAUS: fat belly, white beard and hair, cold blue eyes. He wears black boots, jeans with a black belt, and a plaid red flannel shirt with a BUTTON pinned to it that says "I heart Canada."

Richard and Abigail's eyes GO WIDE with wonder. They hold for a beat, then focus on the Webley in Richard's hand.

RICHARD

I'll try to explain... later.

Matthew smiles at the Driver. The Driver smiles back, touches his nose with a fingertip. His eyes TWINKLE. He gets into the Charger, hits the gas and peels out. VAAAROOOOOM!

This time, the PERSONALIZED CANADIAN LICENSE PLATE on the back of the car is clean, the number readable as it pulls away: "SAINT NIK."

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. JOE'S FUNERAL - DAY (1990) - DREAM SEQUENCE

Richard (8) weeping by his father's grave. Lynette on the opposite side, glaring hate at him, Richard unable to make eye contact. She crosses to him.

RICHARD AGE 8

I'm... I'm so-so-sorry, mom.

Someone stands above him now - his mother? The person bends at the knees, lowering himself down. It's Richard (age 40).

RICHARD

I know. I forgive you.

The boy hugs Richard and weeps into his shoulder.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Richard wakes from the dream, but not with a jolt this time, not in tears. His eyes open slowly, and he's calm.

Abigail is in bed with him, deep asleep. He looks at her for a beat, then reaches a hand out and touches her. He closes his eyes, falling into a peaceful sleep.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD/PARK - DAY

SUMMER - a gorgeous day in New Jersey, Richard on the pitcher's mound, Matthew at bat, Abigail playing catcher. Richard wears an Oakland A's baseball cap, Matthew an Oakland A's jersey. Abigail has her cap on backwards.

ABIGAIL

Batter up, batter up!

Matthew pumps an official Oakland A's baseball bat. Richard winds up, pitches, and Matthew knocks the ball out of the park.

The baseball arches high in the blue sky and falls toward a MAN staring up at it: the Bum.

BUM

Awww, shit.

The baseball hits him in the forehead. POW!

FADE OUT.