

THE NAUGHTY LIST

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Draft

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FADE IN:

INT./EXT. NEWS REPORT

A small, quintessential American town is decorated all-out for Christmas. A dainty flurry of snowflakes falls on the glowing silhouette angels and reindeer suspended from utility poles. Strings of multicolored lights are strung along the quaint streets and the more traveled thoroughfares. Every storefront and business brims with the holiday spirit.

REPORTER

(V.O.)

It is Black Friday, the official start of the Christmas-buying season.

Inside the various stores, people are queued at the registers with loaded arms and shopping carts overflowing with every gift idea imaginable.

REPORTER (cont'd)

(V.O.)

And if you are looking for the home of all things Christmas, look no further-

On the street corners, the lampposts and utility poles are adorned with wreaths. Men in Santa Claus suits and women in Mrs. Claus suits ring hand bells for donations in their kettles.

REPORTER (cont'd)

(V.O.)

-you'll find it in Butler Falls, the American Main Street of Christmas.

The downtown area is the hub of activity. A giant Christmas tree, decked to the nines with ornaments, bright and shining with thousands and thousands of lights, stands at the center of the town square in the middle of a pedestrian park.

REPORTER (cont'd)

(V.O.)

Butler Falls has been the tri-county headquarters for the holidays for nearly half a century now. Families travel from across the state to visit the many shops and eateries the town has to offer. And the one must-see attraction has always been-

A large archway is shown. The signage is handcrafted, seemingly, and stretches over the entrance/exit gate of BUTLER FALLS CHRISTMAS VILLAGE.

REPORTER (cont'd)
(V.O.)
Christmas Village!

The attraction is a classical Christmas village come to life, as if Santa's private city had been built by Victorian architects and transplanted from the North Pole, brick by brick, elaborately engraved woodwork by elaborately engraved woodwork, to these vast acres.

The place is packed with people. The parking lot is so full people park on the roadside and in neighboring empty fields.

REPORTER (cont'd)
(V.O.)
Until last year, this winter wonderland was the work of one man, Arlin Kingsley, last surviving heir of the Kingsley Meat Packing Corporation.

A picture of ARLIN KINGSLEY (late 50s/early 60s, beefy, stout). With his white hair and beard, he looks like the prototypical Santa Claus.

REPORTER (cont'd)
(V.O.)
Kingsley operated Christmas Village himself and kept it free to the public.

File footage of Arlin's Christmas Village: it was amateurish. Mainly light displays and homemade wooden cutouts of holiday figures and the Nativity. It is a vast downgrade from what has been. The new Christmas Village is a state-of-the-art affair.

REPORTER (cont'd)
Due to illness and personal issues, Kingsley sold the attraction and property to a group of Butler Falls business associates known, locally, as The Christmas Coalition. They are the masterminds responsible for the town's annual Christmas celebrations and events.

Footage of SHIRLEY BRUCE (40s, strictly business with perfect posture), president of the Chamber of Commerce, cuts the ribbon on Butler Falls Christmas Village with giant scissors. She and the crowd wear big smiles. She is surrounded by the rest of the Christmas Coalition:

-NORMAN KIMBALL (40s, owns a construction company)

-STEWART and SIMON POHELLA (30s, married, own a boutique)

-PACE ANSON (late 30s/early 40s, African American, engineer/owner of Dynamo, Inc.)

After the ribbon is cut, there is a round of applause.

Next, footage of an interview with Shirley Bruce.

SHIRLEY

We are pleased to open the new and improved Butler Falls Christmas Village. There have been some changes and the community, overall, has been positive about them. This is our inaugural year and there are going to be some bumps along the way. We expected that. Just hang in there with us. We'll work through these growing pains together. And we'll only get better.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

In the near empty dive bar, Shirley Bruce smiles from the television. The image changes to a scene of the Middle East and then the television goes black.

The bartender, MICKEY (50s), sets the TV remote on the bar top.

Arlin Kingsley is the only patron at the bar. He chugs the last of a bottle of beer and SLAMS IT on the bar.

ARLIN

You don't know how sick it makes me.
All that bullshit. They lied to me.

Mickey takes Arlin's empty bottle away. He POPS the TOP on a new bottle and gives it to Arlin.

MICKEY

I know, Arlin. You can't trust them
business types.

Arlin takes a sip of beer.

ARLIN

They said they were gonna keep it free for the people. That's what they said. That's the only reason I agreed to sell it to *them*!

MICKEY

With the crowds that go there, you shoulda known they weren't gonna do that. I hear they're charging out the ass to get through the gate.

ARLIN

It makes me sick. Just sick as a dog.

He takes a long drink.

ARLIN (cont'd)

I never made a profit on the place. Never broke even either. But it wasn't about profits, Mickey. It had nothing to do with money. It was about bringing joy and happiness to people.

MICKEY

I know, Arlin.

ARLIN

Ain't that what Christmas is about? Giving to others? I had it to give, and I gave.

MICKEY

You're a good man, Arlin. Don't let them vampires spoil your Christmas.

ARLIN

They're just so damn greedy.

MICKEY

Hey-

He makes sure Arlin pays attention to his next words.

MICKEY (cont'd)

Hey, they'll pay for it in the next life, buddy. You know that. You gotta believe that.

ARLIN

I do.

MICKEY

You could money-grub with the best of 'em, if you wanted, but you rose above it. That says a lot. That says you're a decent human being. You thought of others. You ain't never been one of these Christmas Coalition shits.

ARLIN

They wanted the Village for so long...it hurt like hell to sell it to them. But my health-

MICKEY

Comes a time you gotta think of yourself, Arlin. You gotta put you first sometimes.

ARLIN

Yeah.

Arlin finishes the beer in a chug. He tosses some money on the bar.

MICKEY

No. On the house, buddy.

ARLIN

Thank you, Mickey.

Arlin picks up the money. He adds some more to it, among them a hundred dollar bill, and slides the wad of cash into Mickey's shirt pocket.

ARLIN (cont'd)

For you and your wife-

MICKEY

No, I can't-

ARLIN

As good as you been to me all these years, you deserve more. It's an early Christmas present.

MICKEY

(honored and humbled)
Thank you.

ARLIN

You're welcome.

Arlin heads for the door.

MICKEY

You're a saint, Arlin Kingsley. A
true, bonafide saint.

ARLIN

(making the sign of
the cross)

Go forth and sin no more.

Mickey laughs, waves off the remark.

MICKEY

You'll always be the best Santa
Butler Falls ever seen.

ARLIN

(going out the door)

Ho, ho, ho!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Snow has been freshly swept from the streets of Butler Falls. Street lights shine in comfortable partnership with the twinkle, glint and glisten of the Christmas lights.

At this late hour, there are no people out on this side of town. Arlin has the street to himself as he walks home.

He passes a store window and something catches his eye. He stops to look at an old, life-size cardboard Santa staring at the world, at *him* through the soap-as-snow frosted glass.

Arlin stares at the cardboard Santa's gentle, happy eyes, its soothing smile and rosy cheeks.

He nods at the cardboard Santa, an understanding passes between them.

EXT. ARLIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Arlin's yard is decorated with shining Santas, snowmen, reindeer, angels-- any and everything Christmas related. Enough multicolored lights are strung on the old Victorian home to see it from space.

The downstairs of the house is dark, but a light is on in the attic. The MUFFLED STRAINS OF HOLIDAY MUSIC SEEPS from the attic.

INT. ARLIN'S HOUSE/DOWNSTAIRS - NIGHT

The MUSIC is CLEARER now: "FROSTY THE SNOWMAN" by THE RONETTES. The NOTES WAFT from above.

The downstairs is a Christmas showcase-- no home has been decorated with so many wreaths, Santa Claus figures (big and large), reindeer. If it's Christmas, it is to be found in Arlin Kingsley's home. But for all the decorations, it is neat and orderly, like a museum dedicated to the holidays.

"FROSTY THE SNOWMAN" stops.

"A MARSHMALLOW WORLD" by DARLENE LOVE begins.

INT. ARLIN'S ATTIC - NIGHT

"A MARSHMALLOW WORLD" CONTINUES, LOUD.

Ornately globed lights illuminate the spacious attic and its ordered clutter. Among antique furniture, boxes are stacked neatly, their contents labeled in permanent marker with excellent penmanship.

A decades-old record player spins a Christmas album.

The doors of an armoire are open. On one wooden hanger is a Mrs. Claus dress. Beside it is the coat of a Santa Claus suit.

Arlin takes the coat off the hanger and slides it on. He fetches the hat then the black leather gloves to complete the ensemble.

MUSIC STOPS.

The record spins.

Arlin checks himself in a full-length mirror, straightens his crooked hat. He looks so much like Santa Claus, anybody would mistake him for the real deal.

In the mirror, just over Arlin's shoulder, a rope dangles from the rafters. It is a noose.

He strokes his white beard, pleased with his appearance.

Arlin places a straight-back chair beneath the rope and steps onto it.

"SLEIGH RIDE" by THE RONETTES PLAYS.

He removes his hat to slide his head into the noose. Once he has it secured, he puts his hat back on.

He inhales, exhales, takes a moment to himself.

SANTA ARLIN
(singing with the
music)
*Let's take that road before us and
sing a chorus or two-*

Santa Arlin kicks the chair out from under him.

The ROPE SNAPS like a bullwhip as it goes tight with weight.

Arlin's booted feet swing mere inches from the ground.

EXT. ARLIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MUFFLED MUSIC from the attic MEANDERS into the night air.

"SLEIGH RIDE" ENDS.

Lights twinkle on Arlin's house.

EXT. BUTLER FALLS - NIGHT

A light snow falls over the shimmering, holiday-colored town.

MUSIC: "SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN" by THE CRYSTALS

The town dreams on in its tranquility.

EXT. ARLIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Police cars and an ambulance are parked in the driveway. The rear doors of the ambulance are open. The paramedics stand around in private conversation with a couple of cops.

A van marked CORONER is parked on the lawn in the middle of the plastic holiday decorations. Crime scene tape has been strung around the smiling Santas and reindeer.

Police officers roam the grounds, they go in and out of the house. They paw at the decorations, some joke, some shake their heads.

INT. ARLIN'S HOUSE - DAY

In the parlor, OFFICER SHOCKLEY (20s) stands over a seated crying woman, EUGENIA LUSTY (early 80s). She wipes at her tears with a soggy facial tissue. She tosses the used ones, pulls more from her sweater sleeve when she needs them. Despite her hysterics, her snow-white hair is immaculately curled, styled and set.

Eugenia clings to Shockley's hand as he tries to comfort her.

EUGENIA LUSTY

Why him, Lord? Why? He was such a good man.

OFFICER SHOCKLEY

Yes, ma'am. He was. Very charitable.

Shockley pats her shoulder.

EUGENIA LUSTY

A good man.

(to Shockley)

And such a generous lover.

The young officer winces.

The old lady sobs.

INT. ARLIN'S ATTIC - DAY

Santa Arlin still hangs from the rafters. His face is contorted in death. The Santa hat still sits on his head. His body sways ever so subtly.

DETECTIVE GIGI RIVAS (late 30s/early 40s) has her gloved hands on her hips. She stares at the Santa Claus-dressed suicide who dangles at the end of the rope.

The CORONER (older, female) writes something on a clip board. She looks at Arlin, checks another box.

CORONER

He's dead.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

(rolls her eyes)

Are you sure?

CORONER

In my expert opinion? Yes. Obviously suicide.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Obviously.

A technician hands the coroner a plastic evidence bag.

CORONER

This was in his pocket.

She hands the bag off to Rivas for examination. The detective smooths the plastic to see its contents clearer.

In the bag is a sheet of paper.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

His note?

Rivas holds it at an angle to reduce the glare.

CORONER

In my expert opinion?
(half beat)

Yes.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

It's names-

CORONER

The Christmas Coalition. From what I could tell.

Rivas glances at Santa Arlin's dead expression.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Time of death?

CORONER

Midnight, not long after. Old neighbor lady, Miss Eugenia Lusty, found him about seven this morning and called it in. Surprised she didn't stroke out.

Rivas considers the corpse.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

(thinking)

Yeah.

She looks over the list of names, again, or at least what she can see of them.

DETECTIVE RIVAS (cont'd)

Let's get somebody up here to cut him down.

INT. SHIRLEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Shirley Bruce, in her powerful, no nonsense pantsuit, has just allowed Detective Rivas into her office.

SHIRLEY
Please, come in, Detective.

DETECTIVE RIVAS
Thank you.

Shirley takes the throne behind her desk and Rivas eases into the guest chair. Rivas, subtly, realizes her chair is lower than Shirley's.

SHIRLEY
How may I help you?
(joking)
I'm not a suspect in something, am I?

Rivas forces a cordial smile.

DETECTIVE RIVAS
I don't think so. Not really.

Shirley's "put-on" charm cracks.

SHIRLEY
What do you mean by that?

DETECTIVE RIVAS
You are acquainted with Arlin Kingsley, I believe.

SHIRLEY
Of course. The whole town is acquainted with that man. Half the state, or more, probably. Why?

DETECTIVE RIVAS
He hung himself last night in his attic.

SHIRLEY
That's unfortunate. But I didn't have anything to do with that.

DETECTIVE RIVAS
In a roundabout way, I believe you do.

SHIRLEY
You're mistaken-

DETECTIVE RIVAS

It seems Mr. Kingsley was upset with what you've done with the Christmas Village-- you and your Christmas Coalition colleagues.

SHIRLEY

True. He didn't take change very well.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Obviously.

SHIRLEY

He made his feelings known. He had some nasty comments about me, and the others. About the way we handled some things.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Word on the street is you lied to him.

SHIRLEY

Word on the street? Listen, Detective, we told him if it were feasible to keep Christmas Village free to the public, we would. We couldn't. Soda and electricity are not cheap. Business is business. We have group rates and coupons for families of four or more, but he didn't approve of any of that either. We didn't cheat Mr. Kingsley, or lie to him. It was all in the fine print, which he neglected to read.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

The fine print's where they always get ya.

Shirley ignores the comment.

SHIRLEY

This is tragic. It is very sad.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

He was a beloved member of the community.

SHIRLEY

In his way. Something like this is not good for business, though. It's a PR nightmare.

(MORE)

SHIRLEY (cont'd)
It can lead to total disaster. I hope
attendance doesn't take a hit.

DETECTIVE RIVAS
(blatantly sarcastic)
That would be a shame.

SHIRLEY
If that's all, I need to get a
statement ready for release.

With only a look of disgust on her face, Rivas stands to
leave.

SHIRLEY (cont'd)
Oh, Detective Rivas-

Shirley opens a desk drawer and pulls out a handful of slips
of brightly colored papers.

SHIRLEY (cont'd)
Would you like some Christmas Village
coupons for you and your squad
people, or fellow officers or
whatever?

Beat.

DETECTIVE RIVAS
No.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

In a private dining room, the Christmas Coalition meets.
Shirley sits at the head of the table; Norman Kimball and
Pace Anson sit along the right side, Stewart and Simon
Pochella on the left side.

They eat as they discuss business.

PACE
The paper only ran a small
announcement about Arlin.

STEWART
I saw that. It was the usual
obituary.
(to Shirley)
Your memorial piece on him was
touching.

SHIRLEY

Thank you. I thought it fitting. The mayor was kind enough to have a talk with the editor and the publisher... suicide at Christmas puts a bad spin on everything we're trying to do here. It can taint all the goodwill.

SIMON

Especially when you kill yourself in a Santa Claus suit.

NORMAN

Damn right. It's still sad, though. Arlin was a good guy.

SHIRLEY

So good he never made a dime on his cheap, penny-ass Christmas park.

She digs into her food.

The others become quiet. They sport guilty, uncertain looks.

Shirley chews her food with disbelief and washes it down with wine.

SHIRLEY (cont'd)

Whatever is wrong with you all, get over it.

PACE

It doesn't bother you that we're the reason Arlin-

SHIRLEY

Stop right there!

STEWART

It doesn't feel right.

NORMAN

He killed himself-

SHIRLEY

We cannot dwell on this.

SIMON

Shirley's right.

Stewart is taken aback by his husband's statement.

STEWART

Simon...really?

NORMAN
(under his breath)
Damn.

SIMON
Arlin was a good person, there's no
doubt about that. He was probably a
better human being than all of us put
together-

Norman, Pace and Stewart exchange glances, but don't object.

SIMON (cont'd)
-but he was a terrible business man.

SHIRLEY
(toasting)
Amen!

SIMON
He was upset. But the terms were laid
out, plainly, in the paperwork.

STEWART
(thinking)
True...

SHIRLEY
I'm not saying it isn't sad. Things
like this are, most of the time. But
we didn't make him put the rope
around his neck. We didn't make him
do anything he probably hadn't
thought about doing a hundred times
before.

SIMON
We're the scapegoats here. If you
think about it, we're the victims.

SHIRLEY
Exactly.

NORMAN
Still...he's dead.

SHIRLEY
It's nothing personal. It's business.
Business isn't always pretty.

PACE
It still feels wrong.

Shirley pours herself some more wine.

SHIRLEY
I get that. That's why-

INSERT: NEWS REPORT

Shirley stands in the lobby of the Chamber of Commerce, a microphone thrust in her face by an unseen reporter.

SHIRLEY
-to honor Arlin Kingsley's years of
dedicated service to the community,
this weekend only, admission to
Butler Falls Christmas Village will
be half price for families and groups
of four or more.

INT. SHIRLEY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shirley is asleep in her bed. She wears a sleep mask over her eyes. Her husband, DARRYL (40s), sleeps beside her, their backs to each other. The soft glow of the street light outside filters in through the windows.

Shirley's CELL PHONE VIBRATES on the nightstand beside the bed.

Instantly, Shirley grabs the phone and pushes up her mask. She stares at the NOISY PHONE in her hand. The notification reads: "New Message".

Darryl wakes. He squints at his wife bathed in the glow of the cell phone.

DARRYL
Who is it, dear? Everything okay?

SHIRLEY
This doesn't concern you.

DARRYL
Yes, dear.

Darryl drops his head back onto his pillow and rolls over to face his side of the room.

INTERCUT SHIRLEY - NORMAN - PACE - SIMON AND STEWART

Each member of the Christmas Coalition wakes in their bedrooms to RINGING/VIBRATING CELL PHONES.

Norman is alone in bed.

Pace's husband snores through the PHONE NOISE.

Both Simon and Stewart's PHONES RING.

They have all received a text message from an UNKNOWN CALLER.

They all open the mystery text. It is an AUDIO FILE.

The CELL PHONES PLAY a SONG: "SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN" by THE CRYSTALS

The CHORUS REPEATS: "SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN, SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN..."

Simon and Stewart are puzzled.

Norman doesn't know what to make of it either.

Pace's husband, GEOFF ANSON (late 30s/early 40s), wakes. He looks over her shoulder.

GEOFF
Who the hell-

PACE
It's a bad joke.

SIMON
What the fuck?

Shirley ENDS the SONG with a violent press of her finger.

EXT. BUTLER FALLS CHRISTMAS VILLAGE - MORNING

Workers are busy dashing in and out of the retail stores and operations buildings. They polish, dust, sweep, vacuum and collect garbage, readying the place for the approaching opening time.

Costumed employees are everywhere. There are multiple, and diverse, versions of Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, snowmen, elves, reindeer, Jack Frost, winter fairies and Victorian citizenry.

Shirley and Pace walk down the main street of holiday attraction. Both women look at their Victorian England surroundings. Pace points out various problems in various shops.

PACE
The oven in Ye Olde Candy Shop is on the fritz.

SHIRLEY

The Candy Shop? I thought the oven in the bakery-

PACE

Is fine. It's the baker in the bakery who's giving us problems. We found him passed out, drunk, again. Slept right in the display window. Pissed all over himself.

SHIRLEY

That son of a bitch. Fire him.

PACE

We can't, there's no one to replace him. The bakers and cooks are spread thin as it is.

SHIRLEY

If we *have* to keep him, whatever. But be on the lookout for a new baker.

PACE

I'll inform the talent scouts.

SHIRLEY

Agreed.

PACE

As for the bakery, right now, I put a cleaning crew on it. Once the baking starts it should cover up the drunk piss smell.

SHIRLEY

What about-

PACE

I got maintenance at the candy shop. The ovens should be up and running by opening time.

SHIRLEY

So what else is going wrong?

PACE

Well-

Pace stops to consult a notebook.

Shirley waits patiently, if annoyed.

PACE (cont'd)

We had to pull an animatronic gingerbread man from Reindeer Lane. It malfunctioned. Only one arm moved. It looked like it was jacking off and it sounded like Satan when it talked-

As Pace recites from the list, Shirley notices an employee dressed as Santa Claus down the block. The man stands on the corner, watching her and Pace.

Shirley narrows her eyes to focus on the Santa Claus...he looks familiar...

PACE (cont'd)

We finally debugged the Christmas Island carousel. It shouldn't spin at warp speed anymore. Those people it threw off, are they gonna sue?

Shirley snaps back to the conversation.

SHIRLEY

No. We gave them season passes for next year.

PACE

They took tickets?

SHIRLEY

Yeah. There weren't any serious injuries anyway.

PACE

A pregnant woman broke her neck.

SHIRLEY

And she was happy with a season pass. I threw in a six-foot, pre-lit Douglas fir complete with mock-antique Victorian-styled ornaments.

(beat)

It was nearly a five hundred dollar value.

Shirley looks past the shocked, speechless Pace-- the staring Santa Claus is gone.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT - NIGHT

The tree lot is busy. Men and women search the trees in pursuit of the perfect one to take home.

Kids run rampant, they scamper around, hide among the branches to jump out and scare each other.

The TREE LOT SANTA, with an obvious fake beard, stands at the entrance He RINGS a BELL. As customers enter and exit, they drop money, mostly coins, into his donation bucket.

The label on the red donation bucket is "BUTLER FALLS BENEVOLENT FUND".

TREE LOT SANTA
(ringing bell)
Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas! Ho, ho,
ho! Happy Holidays!

Norman Kimball leads a female customer along a row of trees near the entrance of the lot.

BELL RINGING CONTINUES OFFSCREEN

NORMAN
Now this one here is a beauty.

The customer looks it over, indecisive.

TREE LOT SANTA
(O.S.)
Merry Christmas!

The customer says something unintelligible.

NORMAN
What? I'm sorry, I didn't catch that.

The customer dismisses Norman with a wave and walks off.

TREE LOT SANTA
(O.S.)
Merry Christmas! Ho, ho, ho!

Norman marches to the front. He pushes through the throng of customers to the sidewalk.

The Santa Claus impersonator RINGS the BELL. He smiles at Norman's approach.

NORMAN
Hey-

TREE LOT SANTA
Merry Christmas, Mr. Kimball!

Norman grabs the man's bell on the downstroke.

NORMAN

Man, listen, you gotta quit with that damn bell.

TREE LOT SANTA

I'm sorry, Mr. Kimball-

NORMAN

I can't hear a goddamn thing. I can't even hear myself think.

A couple entering the tree lot give Norman the evil eye.

Norman smiles at them, offers a friendly nod of his head.

TREE LOT SANTA

Yes, sir, Mr. Kimball. It's just...

NORMAN

What?

TREE LOT SANTA

The bell..it's part of the whole thing, you know. You ring the bell to draw people's attention to the bucket.

Norman runs his hands through his thinning hair, ready to pull it out in fistfuls.

NORMAN

Move that way a little bit, okay. Not so close to the entrance here. We both win.

The Santa looks down the sidewalk.

TREE LOT SANTA

All the way down there?

NORMAN

Christ, you don't have to move to the other end of town. Go stand on the corner or something.

An elderly woman and a little girl walk by, holding hands.

NORMAN (cont'd)

Just move away from here so I can work in fucking peace.

The old woman covers the little girls ears. She gives Norman a stern look.

NORMAN (cont'd)
(to the old woman)
Sorry, ma'am.

TREE LOT SANTA
(to the old woman and
child)
He's been naughty. Ho, ho, ho!

The old woman drags the girl away from the tree lot. She stumbles off the sidewalk and rubs against a black pick-up truck parked at the curb.

NORMAN
Watch my truck, lady. Please. Thank
you. It's a new paint job.

The little girl kicks the truck bumper before they hurry off.

NORMAN
You no good little-
(points to the Santa)
He saw that, you brat!

TREE LOT SANTA
I'll move.

The little girl and old woman both turn and flip the finger to Norman.

NORMAN
You rude bit-

TREE LOT SANTA
I'll move, Norman!

Norman claps the Santa on the back.

NORMAN
Thanks.

TREE LOT SANTA
No problem.

The Santa shoves the bell in his coat pocket. He picks up the money bucket and tosses the stand over his shoulder.

NORMAN
(conspiratorially)
What's the take so far?

The Santa tips the bucket so Norman can see.

TREE LOT SANTA
Gotta be a good two hundred bucks in
here.

NORMAN

Shit! It's been a good night.

TREE LOT SANTA

You ain't kiddin'.

NORMAN

After I close the lot, we'll count it
and I'll give you your take.

TREE LOT SANTA

Sure thing.

NORMAN

Don't skim too much.

TREE LOT SANTA

I won't.

NORMAN

(sarcastic)

Sure you won't.

The Santa crosses his heart, tugs his fake beard.

TREE LOT SANTA

If you can't trust me, who can you
trust? I'm Santy Claus.

The Santa strolls proudly down the block.

TREE LOT SANTA (cont'd)

Merry Christmas!

Norman goes back to work in the tree lot.

At the other end of the street, a man in a Santa Claus suit
has been watching them. He passes out candy canes to people
as they pass him.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT - LATE NIGHT

A chain is strung across the entrance to the Christmas tree
lot. A "Closed" sign is wired to it.

Norman's truck is the only vehicle parked at the curb.

At the rear of the tree lot, Norman sits at a little table
with an open cash box. He counts the stacks of money. He
makes a notation in a memo notepad then tosses it all into
the cashbox. He locks the box with a combination lock.

Norman checks his phone for the time. The winter wind blusters and he shivers in the cold, turns up the collar of his coat.

He paces the lot, glances at the entrance. The place is empty except him and the trees.

NORMAN
I'm not gonna wait all night on you,
you bastard.

Norman scrolls through the contacts on his phone. He selects a number and presses CALL.

Part way down the walkway, RINGING comes from the trees.

Norman looks, but sees nothing and no one.

RINGING

He ends the call on his phone.

SILENCE

He calls the number, again. Seconds pass.

RINGING from the trees.

NORMAN (cont'd)
(loudly)
All right, you asshole. You mad I
made you move?

Irritated, Norman heads to the cluster of trees the RINGING BLARES from. He puts his phone to his ear to listen. As it goes to voicemail, he ends the call.

He calls the number a third time.

RINGING OFFSCREEN

Norman goes to the trees. GRAVEL CRUNCHES under his shoes.

NORMAN (cont'd)
It's Christmas, not Halloween. Try
scaring me, again, in ten months,
dipshit. Let's count the money and
get drunk.

Nearer to the RINGING.

NORMAN (cont'd)
I got some store brand beer waiting
on me at home-

In the trees a cell phone hangs by an ornament hook and string from a branch.

The PHONE is RINGING.

NORMAN (cont'd)

What the-

Norman ends the call.

The CELL PHONE is SILENT.

NORMAN (cont'd)

You goofy fuck.

A RUSTLE among the TREES and the CRUNCH of GRAVEL as someone steps from the evergreens further down towards the entrance.

Norman spins to see a man in a Santa Claus outfit.

NORMAN (cont'd)

What are you doing, dumb ass? Trying to give me a coronary? Give me-

Norman steps closer to the man. The man has his hand behind his back.

NORMAN (cont'd)

Hey, where's the money bucket?

Norman stops short. Closer, Norman clearly sees the man's bearded face, the dark circles around his eyes.

It's Arlin Kingsley.

NORMAN (cont'd)

Holy hell...

From behind his back, Santa Arlin reveals his hand. Gripped in his black leather glove is long, shiny butcher knife. It's point glints.

Norman's jaw drops open. His eyes go wide.

SANTA ARLIN

(serious, deliberate)

Ho, ho, ho!

Not risking a straightforward dash to his truck, Norman runs into the trees on the other side of the walkway.

Santa Arlin darts after him.