

CLAWS

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FADE IN

MONTAGE

Darkness. The gradual sound of POLICE SIRENS. Then, 3 FLASHES-
A MAN'S FOOT is chopped off, then a WOMAN'S, then a CHILD'S.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT appears:

"Be damned and behold the Devil's Image,
Be cursed and behold the Devil's Artwork,
Be fearful and behold the Devil's Monster,
Be sinful and behold the Devil's Spawn - 3rd Century"

As the text fades away, the word "MONSTER" is the last to go.

NEW SUPERIMPOSED TEXT appears: "30 YEARS AGO".

FLASHBACK INT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD FOYER NIGHT

Outside a house window, kids Christmas carol, almost eerily,
while RAY and MONA, 30's, argue in whispers in a dark foyer.

RAY

Enough Mona. I'm not turning Tom
away due to some damn superstition.

MONA

Ray I don't want to be responsible.

RAY

Then you shouldn't have shown them
the damn thing. Not one more word
about it or your kook brother Chad.

MONA

Suzy isn't ready for-

RAY

She'll be fine. Now here they come.

Mona snuffles and adjusts. The door opens to TOM and CAROL,
30's. With them is LITTLE NICK, age 4. Ray rubs Nick's hair.

RAY (CONT'D)

Hey! Nick! Want to meet a friend?

INT. MALL NIGHT

Our 4 ADULTS stand in line to see the MALL SANTA with NICK
and a 3 year old girl SUZY. Nick is excited. Suzy is nervous.

RAY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about your Dad, Tom.

TOM

Ya, thanks. Thanks for taking our son too. Nick is just too young for church, death and funerals. Minds are delicate. But you know about that with your brother-in-law.

RAY

Chad was fine until priesthood. But after that weird mission in Turkey-

Meanwhile Carol pressures Mona, who pats her nervous girl.

CAROL

I've never seen art like it. You said you couldn't bare to part with it. Now your brother's selling it?

MONA

Chad's been offered a down payment.

While Mona's distracted a BLONDE LADY dressed as an ELF leans down to take the children to Santa. Mona starts to intervene, but Ray stops her. Nick is all a twitter. But Suzy whimpers.

ELF LADY

Santa can't wait to see you!

SLOW MO: Sound fades. Tense Suzy is taken to Santa-he reaches out, a glint in his eye that seems evil. She's lifted to his lap-scared unlike any kid should be. Cameras FLASH us back to-

NORMAL MOTION: In the REAL WORLD people coo at the cute view.

SANTA

Dear, can you tell Santa what you want for Christmas this year? Hmmm?

A sudden howl. Suzy hits, kicks, scratches Santa in hysteria. Santa tries to protect face, but Suzy has tangled with his costume. His white beard shows blood. Her folks pull her off with a SECURITY GUARD. Suzy in Mona's arms keeps SCREAMING!

EXT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD FRONT YARD NIGHT

Mona takes Suzy in the door. Ray talks with Tom by Tom's CAR.

RAY

And Mona wonders why I won't take her to church yet.

TOM

We should get to the airport early. It's Christmas Eve. I'll grab Nick.

INT. SUMMONS FAMILY (TOM AND CAROL'S) CAR NIGHT

Tom enters. Nick watches his parents talk from the back seat.

CAROL

No Tom. They've got it right next to where he's going to be sleeping.

TOM

It's in a closet in another room.

CAROL

They already showed it to us. They even showed it to little Suzy. If it gives her nightmares, then-

TOM

Nick can't go now-the plane's full.

CAROL

I can't get it out of my head.

TOM

Well neither can I, but my father just died. What's your excuse?

(Smiles, turns to Nick)

Ready to have some fun, champ?

EXT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD LITTLE SUZY'S BEDROOM NIGHT

Nick peers out the window, watching his folks's car leave. In BG, Suzy wanders. Mona bites her nails. Ray picks up toys.

RAY

Kids, if you don't go to bed, Santa-

(Suzy spins, scared)

P-Presents! You won't get presents!

Suzy calms and starts wandering again. Ray quietly swears. As he pulls the shade, a reflection shows someone outside.

INT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD LITTLE SUZY'S BEDROOM NIGHT

Nick's in bed across the DIM room from Suzy. Ray tucks him in-

RAY (CONT'D)

I'm leaving the door open, so if you need to potty, just call.

Ray turns to kiss Suzy. She's fast asleep. He sighs, leaves. As the door is swung to, Nick catches Mona's worried face. Then Nick's alone in the moon light. He watches the ghostly trees beyond the window shade. Then, muffled voices.

RAY (O.C. THROUGH DOOR) (CONT'D)
You chose to hide stolen property.

MONA (O.C. THROUGH DOOR)
They insisted that Chad leave it
 out back. After midnight.

RAY (O.C. THROUGH DOOR)
 Then until midnight, the painting
 stays put. The deeper asleep she
 is, the less afraid she'll be.

Through the cracked door, Nick sees, between the struggling hands of Mona and Ray, a white sheet covering something large flat and rectangular. Faint light hits an uncovered corner.

It's a PAINTING FRAME, twisted, dusty and gothic. The bit of the canvas in view displays a dreary blood red moon.

MONA
 We can't risk more empty promises.

RAY
 It's not just you okay. It's not.
 I've also had problems sleeping. I
 think I'm-. Let's not let our
 imaginations effect our daughter.
 (Long pause, Mona giggles)
 Want to burn some midnight energy?

A hug. Nick looks about, hops out of bed and goes to the door-

INT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD HALLWAY NIGHT

Nick's door opens up just as Ray and Mona disappear into the bedroom across the hall. Nick runs for their door, but it shuts on him. Giggling is heard. Nick looks to the dark scary hall. He looks back at the door. He runs off into the house.

INT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD KITCHEN NIGHT

Nick runs into the lighted kitchen. He turns, makes sure all is clear. Then he sees a cookie bag on the table. He grins, peeks inside. Suddenly a clock gongs 12. He runs into a wall.

INT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD FAMILY ROOM NIGHT

Nick walks into the family room with cookies, milk and a NOTE FOR SANTA. He puts it all on a STOOL mid room and hides under the Christmas tree. He waits. -Suddenly Ray and Mona walk in.

RAY (CONT'D)
 I always get so hungry afterwards.
 -Uh-oh. We've got a sleep walker.

MONA

How cute! Nick must have done it.

RAY

Sure as hell wasn't Suzy. We better eat them, because I'm not telling him there's really no Santa Claus.

The adults take the dish and return to the hall.

Nick tears up. He starts to emerge when he knocks off the tree a SPHERICAL ORNAMENT WITH A CROSS SHAPED TOP. It rolls. So he crawls after it. But he halts at a BANG on the roof- Ray yells from the hall, making Nick go back under the tree.

RAY (O.S. FROM HALLWAY) (CONT'D)

What the hell was that? Nick?

When suddenly in the chimney-MOVEMENT. Nick looks transfixed.

He waits. Sure enough the movement comes again. A tiny smile; bewilderment in the boy. He waits, until- From the dark fire screen comes an odd WHEEZING, almost a voice, like a weak old man in pain, mixed with the eerie sounds of...an animal.

WHEEZING (O.C. THROUGH FIRE SCREEN)

Hooooo. Hoooooo. Hooooooo-

Slowly, Nick's expression turns to fear. The wheezing builds. It sounds like Ray is in the room, but Nick hardly notices.

RAY (O.C.)

Damn snow must've snapped a branch!

Then the FIRE SCREEN rustles. The wheezing gets louder-louder- BLACK. Silence.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT appears: "PRESENT DAY".

END FLASHBACK INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE DAY

An angry PATIENT (late 20's) is on a couch next to a SHRINK.

PATIENT

Shopping! That's why the suicides this year! My wife wigs out because she can't buy some grisly Santa art- that wasn't even for sale! Ugh! You a religious man Dr. Stone? I am. So scary. It does more harm than good.

SHRINK (O.C.)

I've met my share of shady priests.

PATIENT

Exactly-So why commercialize Santa?
Betsy won't shut up about it to the
kids. He's real! He's real!- So now
my son's scared of the bastard! I
say it matters how a kid finds out
the truth about Santa. Don't you?

PAN TO: The shrink, NICK, now adult, 30's, clean cut, tie.

NICK

Actually, I do. My time's up.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE NIGHT

Tie loose, Nick turns off the lights. There's no change due
to the CHRISTMAS LIGHTS outside. He shakes his head. He lifts
a PHOTO off his desk. It's Nick and a SMILING OLDER LADY. He
eyes it reminiscently. Then he sighs and puts it in a drawer.

He turns to his mail stack. On top of the stack is a GIFT.
When he sees it's labeled only NICK SUMMONS, he rolls his
eyes. He unwraps it, playing his ANSWERING MACHINE.

SAL (V.O. FROM SPEAKER)

It's Sal. Parleys tonight-Be there!

The gift turns out to be a big BIBLE. Nick grits his teeth.

NICK

God damnit, not again.

He throws it on his desk and grabs his coat. The phone rings.
He ponders answering. Just as the machine starts he picks up.

NICK (CONT'D)

This is Doctor Sum- Uuuh, Stone.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S. THROUGH PHONE)

Finally, I found you. My name is D.
Artemis. I was told by my priest
you were the doctor for me. And I
was curious if you could see me?

NICK

I'm sorry Miss Artemis, not until
after New Years. Between now and
then I'll be at the local bars.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S. THROUGH PHONE)

Umm-oh-well, just remember it's
Christmas. You're being tested.

Nick chunks the Bible in the trash.

NICK
Yes, I sure am.

INT. PARLEE'S PUB NIGHT

Nick enters. At a table is SAL (30's, jokester) and FRIENDS. They all wear COATS. Sal waves Nick over. Nick is suspicious.

SAL
Run! Another shrink! Come here, I gotta joke. -Why should you have taken that class with me called "Brain Manipulation"? -Because your dumb ass would've seen this coming!

They shed their coats, sporting CHRISTMAS ATTIRE and GIFTS. Everyone laughs but Nick. Sal hands Nick a GRINCH T-SHIRT.

NICK
I hate you Sal.

INT. PARLEE'S PUB NIGHT

Clock reads 11 p.m. The crowd is large and drunk. Nick wears the T-shirt, escapes in a COFFEE CUP. Sal hands out presents.

SAL
It only counts if it's insulting and doctor related guys.

A waif thin guy gets GROWTH HORMONE. Sal gets VIAGRA and a pair of SPECS. He puts the specs on, examines his own crotch. Nick gets a tiny case with a NEEDLE AND A VIAL OF LIQUID.

SAL (CONT'D)
Adrenaline so our hum bug driver doesn't fall asleep at the wheel!

All laugh as Nick looks to the bar and spies a LAVISH BLONDE. She's alone, is drinking COFFEE, and crunches on an APPLE. She's wearing a T-SHIRT reading SCROOGE ME. Sal makes a toast-

SAL (CONT'D)
To many great Christmases to come!

All here-here. Sal sits, giving Nick a friendly nudge.

SAL (CONT'D)
Or a few that aren't so bad, huh?

NICK
Ask me when they find Chad Watson.
Say, speaking of presents-

SAL
 Don't get started. I've had the job
 3 weeks. One more holiday without
 the police files won't kill you.

NICK
 Who'd care? Its a 30 year old case!
 Anyway-At least the view isn't bad.

Then the blonde sees Nick staring. She gives him a once over.

NICK (CONT'D)
 Wow. Getting merry pretty quick.

SAL
 (Quickly squinting)
 Ooo! Where! Where is she!

NICK
 Damn, you do need glasses.

Nick gulps his cup and goes to the bar. An odd beat, then:

NICK (CONT'D)
 I like your shirt.

GIRL
 I bet you do. That's because you
 know I've got yours beat.

NICK
 No, it all depends on how much you
 hate Christmas.

GIRL
 I curse it. Your move.

NICK
 Is that why you're over here alone?

GIRL
 No, It's just funny watching
 someone else trying to keep
 themselves from drinking.

NICK
 In my work, you do that every day.

GIRL
 Really? Then you might be just the
 guy I'm looking for. -Diana.

NICK
 I'm Nick.

DIANA

You know, a guy named Nick is one of the reasons we're in this mess.

NICK

Well, I don't believe in bad omens.

Just then the bartender yells to the crowd, holding beers up.

BARTENDER

Merry Christmas! Free rounds on me!

Diana shrugs, defeated. She grabs 2 beers, offers 1 to Nick.

DIANA

Shame. This time of year I am one.

INT. PARLEE'S PUB NIGHT

The bar clock reads 1 a.m. Nick and Diana, both tipsy, slow dance in a crowd.

DIANA (CONT'D)

A shrink huh? Someone's making money off this Christmas suicide epidemic. You guys date your moms right? I hope yours was blonde.

NICK

I don't remember my mother. Hell, I don't remember anything before the age of four. So I hop from girl to girl and go on touch.

DIANA

That can't get you far. Nothing before 4? I'll bite. What happened?

NICK

My parents died in a plane crash on Christmas Eve. And I spent the next year getting my head erased because that same night, my God parents were mauled by a serial killer. It happened right in front of me. Asshole got away too.

DIANA

Oh I get it. You're Nick Summons.
-Oh Please. You're not serious?

NICK

About my parents or about hopping from girl to girl?

DIANA

-Both.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT BEDROOM NIGHT

A bright night through a cracked balcony door. Nick and Diana laugh in bed, drunk and happy. He points at the full moon.

NICK

Last night it looked like a sliver.
Must come out for Greek goddesses.

DIANA

I love moons bright enough to paint
by. Now hurry up. I need immortal
kids so I can take over the planet.

NICK

You badgered me about my past. I
don't even know where you're from.

DIANA

Uh-grew up in an elite world. I did
anything I chose, archery, hunting.
Thought I was some kind of goddess
until Daddy threw me out and made
my life hell. So for revenge, all I
do is chase men and hang out at a
shop called Things Remembered.
Sounds lame, but- I'll bet my
Christmas story beats yours.

Nick slowly goes into a strange pensive trance.

NICK

The only two people who died on the
plane that night were my parents.
Hit some damn radio tower and out
they went. -And The murders I saw?
The guy was only in jail a year
before he escaped. The hypnotherapy
left no memories of it for me
except the nightmares. Strange
visions of some weird, two-legged
...beast.

(He snaps to, laughs)

My aunt raised me through high
school, so I took her name. I moved
4 times in college, came home for
my doctorate. Story of my life.

Diana gives a slow nod. She smiles at him. Nick smiles back.
He rolls over and grabs a beer on his night stand. He drinks
from it as Diana speaks sweetly behind him.

DIANA (O.C.)
 You know, I think I've been waiting
 for you the last 30 years.

NICK
 (Eyes go wide, rolls back)
 Wow, that's a bold statement to-

She is gone. The bedroom door is swaying like it got bumped.

NICK (CONT'D)
 Diana?

Nick hears his front door open. Then, the clacking of heels. He goes to the balcony. Diana's down the street, clothes in hand, coat on, running into the night. So he lays back down.

NICK (CONT'D)
 God damn story of my life.

DREAM SEQUENCE: BLACK INTERCUT WITH NIGHTMARE FLASHES

IN BLACK. An eerie, wind-like tone. Then comes the distant, echoing screams of the WELLER FAMILY crying for help.

CUT TO: A flash of SOMETHING, walking at us in a narrow hall of some kind. Then, back in BLACK. The far voices still plea.

CUT TO: More clear this time; something silhouetted. A man? No, something ELSE, slouched and huge, forcing it's way toward us in the claustrophobic confines of a filthy CHIMNEY.

BLACK AGAIN: The Weller voices are more forced, coughing, spitting, gasping with frantic bursts of inhaling, exhaling.

CUT TO: The figure drags something DAMP in the chimney behind it. And it holds something else METALLIC in it's other hand- if you call it a hand. Closer-closer-closer.

END DREAM SEQUENCE INT. SUBWAY TRAIN DAY

Nick's starts AWAKE. He's with Sal on a crowded moving train.

SAL
 You okay?
 (Nick readies to exit)
 Nick, what are you trying to prove?

NICK
 Well she said she worked near here.

EXT. THINGS REMEMBERED DAY

Nick and Sal exit onto a street with a big CHURCH PARADE.

NICK (CONT'D)
What the hell's all this?

SAL
Some circus huh? Catholic church
has got a display on at the museum.

Sal points to THINGS REMEMBERED across the very busy street.

SAL (CONT'D)
Want to take it as a sign?
(Nick cuts into parade)
Answered like a true agnostic.

NICK
I'm not agnostic. I'm an Atheist.

Then a HORSE almost runs Nick over! He leaps for the far curb-
And lands on ICE, crashing down before the store. Sal laughs.

SAL
I'm sorry, are you a religious man?

Sal helps Nick slip and slide to the shop. Unknown to them, a
spooky RED ROBED CARDINAL in the parade WATCHES them go.

INT. THINGS REMEMBERED MAIN FLOOR DAY

Our heroes enter. A dim shop. Odd art and relics. Nearby is a
STATUE of a woman with a big headdress and chest made of eggs-
Nick and Sal cringe. Then Nick sees Diana sitting at a coffee-
bar eyeing a BUFF BALD BARTENDER. Nick nudges Sal. Sal looks.

NICK
Any advice Mr. Police Interrogator?

SAL
He's cute but his hair's too short.
When you're done I'll be over here.

Sal walks off. Nick heads towards Diana. She writes something
on a COASTER and slides it to the bartender, who misses it,
turning to put a glass up. When she sees Nick coming, she
guiltily takes her coffee and rounds a corner. Nick follows.

She goes into the lady's room. Nick sighs, sits at the bar.
The bartender hasn't noticed the PHONE NUMBER on the coaster.

NICK
Uh Coffee.-Any luck with that girl?

The bartender gives Nick a rude once over. He turns to the
register, slides a REVOLVER to one side, puts some cash in.
Nick submissively smiles, then quietly pockets the coaster.

SLOW MO: Something strange has come into the air. Nick notices a crowd gathered at a distance. They're drawn by something. He leans side to side, looking, until he beholds-

The mysterious PAINTING from his childhood! The same gothic frame. The same red moon. Jaw open, he stands. He sifts through onlookers, slowly approaching until he comes to...IT.

A PAINTING of a 2-legged creature, like a gargoyle, in burlap robes stained red with blood, with a smiling mouth of gaping, jagged, teeth. Its feet are hoofed, giving a boot like shape.

It has a beard of dirty ice. Its hair is white, yet blood stained, tied at the end to form a cap-like knot. The eyes, a cat-like yellow with green pupils, stare right through us.

A full moon lights the creature's rear hand, which drags a bag filled with ancient blades and a SPIKED GOLD CLUB. But it's the closer hand grabbing at us with its disproportionate falcon-like CLAWS that clinches the feeling of no escape.

The most macabre satire of Santa Claus one could imagine. A cold draft. Nick shudders. Just then a voice startles him.

NORMAL MOTION: LIZZY, 30's, brunette sales girl, likes Nick.

LIZZY

Is it too cold in here?

NICK

Uh, No-This weird Santa painting is-

LIZZY

It's not for sale. Shame. I'd do my job better without it around. Mr. Kafka pulled it out just this year. Says people line up for it because it's weird and has no signature, but that never helped my paintings.

Then Nick sees Diana outside the shop window. When their eyes meet she turns and crosses the street. He turns back to Lizzy-

NICK

Where is Mr. Kafka?

INT. THINGS REMEMBERED STORAGE ROOM DAY

Nick and Lizzy enter a dark room divided into halls via tall dusty shelves. On a high ladder is KAFKA, 60's, too dark for details except for long unkept hair and a gruff deep voice.

LIZZY

Mr. Kafka? There's a cust-

KAFKA

If they're from the church, tell them I've turned their offer down.

LIZZY

No, he's not from-

NICK

I-I'll only be a minute.

She turns to Nick, twirls a finger around her temple, leaves.

NICK (CONT'D)

Umm, my name's Nick Stone, and-

KAFKA

I'm busy. Your question, Mr. Nick.

NICK

Well, there's a painting out there-

KAFKA

It's not for sale.

NICK

Ya, she told me. But where did you-

KAFKA

I stole it from an old flame. Now if you don't mind.

NICK

Well, see, it reminds me of-

KAFKA

(Stops work abruptly)
Reminds you of what?

NICK

Ol-old memories. Is it a duplicate?

Then Sal wanders in looking for Nick. But before he can speak-

KAFKA

There are no duplicates. And it holds a price-no man can afford.
Good day, Mr. Nick.

Kafka moves boxes again. So Nick takes Sal by the shoulder and leaves. But as he does, Kafka turns and WATCHES them.

EXT. PARK BENCH DAY

Nick and Sal sit eating pizza. Sal laughs. Nick just stares.

SAL

You see that fucked up painting? A priest, like in big red robes comes in! You should have seen his face!

(Holding up the COASTER)

I'm telling you this number doesn't exist. Why play this game when you could bang that hot clerk instead?

Nick listens, but something's wrong. Sal's voice fades, then:

MEMORY FLASHES: Blood. Entrails. LITTLE NICK hides with terror under the Christmas tree, shadows dancing across him.

BACK ON: Nick gets startled by Sal grabbing his shoulder.

NICK

Huh? Sorry. Sal, I think I'm having memory flashes. And my recurring nightmares? I'd be damned if that painting could be any closer to-

SAL

Memories? Yes! What did I tell ya! I knew you'd shake memories loose if you sold your folk's house! You said you wanted to remember, and I said sell that sucker! I was right!

Nick, paranoid, rubs his face. Then he lightens and chuckles.

NICK

The house is jarring memories-cool.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT FRONT ROOM DAY

Nick and Sal enter. Sal stands in the doorway like a mother.

SAL

I didn't expect to drive last night- I think our gag gifts and my work ID are in your car. Check, okay? So- Really selling it at five, huh?

Sal smiles. Nick smiles. Sal gives Nick a hug. Then he leaves. Nick walks to a pair of closed doors. He opens them.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT STUDY DAY

The room's coated in articles about the WELLER FAMILY MURDERS-

-Plus 6 OTHER FAMILIES-all murdered in that one night!

Headlines read: MURDERS ON CHRISTMAS EVE!...7 FAMILIES SLAIN!

As Nick looks about the room, he suddenly has some more-

MEMORY FLASHES: Blood. Guts. 3 Feet tacked to a fireplace!

BACK ON: Nick squints like the flashes are abnormal. He sighs and sits at his desk. He pulls out Diana's COASTER. An unsure beat. He grabs the phone, dials. A few rings-a woman answers.

VOICE (O.S. OVER PHONE)

Newsroom.

Nick rolls his eyes. A long dreaded sigh.

NICK

I've talked to many reporters. None have ever slept with me for a story-

VOICE (O.S. OVER PHONE)

What? Who is this?

NICK

It's Nick. This isn't Diana?

VOICE (O.S. OVER PHONE)

Bob, I don't have time for jokes. You want the recap on the Summons plane deaths by six? I've gotta go.

NICK

No, I'm sorry. I'm looking for- Did you say Summons plane deaths?

The phone goes to elevator music. Nick gawks at the receiver. Then A SUDDEN POUNDING. Nick starts, looks over his shoulder.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT FRONT ROOM DAY

Nick exits his office with the phone, and stares at the front door. Bam! Bam! Bam!-Again! Then Silence. He starts to the door. But he stops cold when something MASSIVE casts a shadow across the huge den window. -Nick creeps to the peep hole.

Whatever's outside makes Nick gawk and lock the bolt. Then a-

Huge smash! The door frame shakes. Another smash. Paint chips crack. The pounding becomes rampant. The hinges are giving. Nick races for a shotgun above the fireplace, dialing 9-1-1.

RECORDING (V.O. OVER PHONE)

Sorry, all circuits are busy-

He grabs a box of shells off the mantle, drops it in panic. Someone tries to get Nick's attention over the phone, but he sees the door caving.

He drops down before the fire screen, snatches at shells. That's when a huge CLAW-LADEN HAND juts out from the screen and yanks him into it head first.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT STUDY DAY

Nick AWAKES on the desk!...A dream. His phone is off the hook beeping. He hangs up. His PC flashes NEW EMAIL. He opens it.

NICK

Realtor Art DeMasse- I'll be at the house earlier than planned? Shit!

EXT. HIGHWAY DAY

Nick's CAR speeds onto the highway. We hear him on the phone.

NICK (V.O.)

Sal, I'm coming to your place at 6. Record the news-I'll explain later.

EXT. NICK'S PARENT'S HOUSE DAY

A WOODEN HOUSE off a COUNTRY ROAD. Nick pulls up. He gets out and goes to the door. A NOTE on it reads CALL TO RESCHEDULE.

INT. NICK'S PARENT'S HOUSE FOYER AND FAMILY ROOM DAY

The door creaks open. Dusty light beams fill a room covered in old white sheets. Nick enters, looks about reminiscently. He goes to a picture, wipes the dust off. It's a U.S. MAP.

MEMORY FLASH: A weapon of GOLDEN BRISTLES slashes human skin.

BACK ON: Nick. He gathers, takes a breath, focuses on the MAP-

FLASHBACK INT. POLICE STATION NIGHT

A CAPTAIN talks to some cops before a wall sized U.S. MAP. SIX RED TACKS and ONE GREEN TACK are placed across 5 STATES.

CAPTAIN

Suspect's name is Chad Watson. He's a priest-merry fuck'n Christmas-that we think killed 6 of his peers, and all of their families.

The captain points to the 6 RED TACKS. A shocked rookie asks:

ROOKIE

Peers? So they were all priests? Okay, what's the green tack?

The captain nods, pointing to the 1 GREEN TACK.

CAPTAIN

That is his own sister and her family -Killed them too. Last name Weller. So that's 7 families total.

ROOKIE

His own sister? Shit. Got a motive?

CAPTAIN

All we've got is-Watson is a famous church historian. Old school. Wrath of God and all. Possibly crazy. But he was caught with blood types on him from all seven crime scenes.

ROOKIE

Ya but no murder weapon right? Plus we're talking 5 different states. Who could do all that in 3 hours?

The rookie points to the distance between tacks. Meanwhile, LITTLE NICK sits nearby, covered in dry blood. His concerned AUNT wipes the stains away as Nick talks to a SKETCH ARTIST.

SKETCH ARTIST

It's okay, your aunt's right here. So you said he had dark skin? Yes? So he was black? No? Was he white?

Nick keeps shaking his head. Meanwhile, two cops talk nearby.

COP ONE

Church freaks. You hear this? The guy claims he was framed! Says he was attacked in his sister's back yard by a bunch of hooded monks.

COP TWO

Ya, said the real killer was inside the house dressed like Santa Claus!
(They both laugh)
They didn't find any bodies, only severed feet. They were tacked to the fire place. Gotta be a monster.

At the word MONSTER, Nick nods. Then...the RED ROBED CARDINAL from the PARADE shows. He softly murmurs to the SKETCH ARTIST-

SKETCH ARTIST

Who? The Mayor? Guys, take the God freaks to the Captain, not me, huh?

The cops escort the Cardinal off. As they leave-Nick watches.

END FLASHBACK INT. NICK'S PARENT'S HOUSE NIGHT

Adult Nick COMES TO. He squints. A wry smile. A slow nod.

INT. NICK'S CAR NIGHT

Pensive Nick drives with COP TWO's voice echoing in his head.

COP TWO (V.O.)

They didn't find any bodies, only
severed feet, severed feet, severed-

Then Nick kicks the break. It seems to be sticking. He looks down and sees his feet are bloody stumps! Nick loses control, plowing into a field, and hitting a scarecrow holding up THE PAINTING! It shatters through his windshield DECAPITATING him!

INT. NICK'S CAR NIGHT

ASLEEP at the wheel, Nick AWAKENS just in time to miss an oncoming truck. He skids to a stop. He sits there, panting.

INT. SAL'S APARTMENT NIGHT

Sal watches TV. Anchor SYLVIA JOHNSON reports by a photo of a FIERY PLANE. Nick enters. Sal rewinds it and gets Nick a COKE-

NICK

Damn right I'm back on the wagon! I had a full memory! A full one!

SAL

Ya well-hold on tight to that coke.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (ON TV)

-30 years since Tom and Carol Summons died aboard a Trans-Way airplane. The craft hit a radio tower on takeoff. So the couple flew out of the plane over the eastern coast. But the copilot, now retired, says there's more to it-

The plane graphic changes to the COPILOT speaking into a mic.

COPILOT (ON TV)

Rumors were, the captain was drunk. But that's not why the airline kept it out of court. I'll reveal why.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (ON TV)

See my Christmas Eve Special about what really happened on Flight 801.
(Graphic fades to a grave)

(MORE)

SYLVIA JOHNSON (ON TV) (CONT'D)
 Now on to the recent epidemic of
 Christmas related suicides-

Nick hands the Coke back to Sal. Sal nods and grabs some gin.

INT. SAL'S APARTMENT NIGHT

Nick and Sal sit, pensive. Sal drinks Coke. Nick drinks gin.

SAL
 You'd think any memories as vivid
 as this would have shown up by now.

NICK
 Ya well, you'd also think if an
 airline killed my parents, they'd
 do a better job of covering it up.

SAL
 Nick, you're showing signs of-
 psychosis. Please tell me you won't
 try to make these dogs hunt.

DREAM SEQUENCE INT. SAL'S APARTMENT NIGHT

Nick sleeps on Sal's couch, a blue glow coming from the FULL
 MOON in the window. Then, snowflakes fall on him. He stirs to
 a silhouetted DOCTOR above-shining a PEN LIGHT into his eyes.

DOCTOR
 Seven families, through five
 states, in-how many hours?
 (Nick holds up 3 fingers)
 Wow, that's impressive.

NICK
 Watson was a very devoted Catholic.

DOCTOR
 So devoted that God actually let
 him escape from prison? That's odd.

NICK
 He broke out of prison. On his own.
 Exactly 1 year later, on Christmas-

DOCTOR
Christmas Eve? Like I said. Odd.
 Now, tell me. What do you see?

The doctor is gone. On the ceiling is THE PAINTING.

NICK
 Chad Watson?

DOCTOR (V.O.)
 No. But it has to do with the
 families. And also-your parents.

Now on the ceiling is a pile of rotting Christmas gifts,
 decayed, covered with flies. Leaning against them is a huge
 stocking-labeled "PRESENT" in blood. Something in it squirms.

A bare foot hangs out the opening, along with a GOLD BRANCH,
 rubbing, causing toes to bleed. A voice from the sock moans.

MOANING VOICE
 Open me Nick. The truth is in here.

END DREAM SEQUENCE INT. SAL'S APARTMENT DAY

Nick starts AWAKE on Sal's couch, the gin bottle next to him.

INT. THINGS REMEMBERED MAIN FLOOR DAY

Lizzy makes morning java as Nick browses in the quiet store.

LIZZY
 You mean the new girl? I've never
 seen her blonde, but she's always a
 different color. Are you-going out?

NICK
 If you see her, ask her for me.

Nick stops. The painting is gone, replaced by the goofy egg
 STATUE. He frets, until Lizzy speaks with odd clairvoyance.

LIZZY
 He put it back in the storage room.
 Not sure why. I'd be thankful but I
 keep going in there like a fool to
 look at it. Do you-want to see it?

INT. THING'S REMEMBERED STORAGE ROOM DAY

Lizzy and Nick enter in total dark. She points to a far glow.

LIZZY (CONT'D)
 Down there. He never shows til 8 so-

She leaves. Nick approaches the mouth of a long hall made up
 of shelves. The hall is dark save for the far end where the
 PAINTING sits, eyes glowing. He proceeds.

The hall seems to grow in length. But his focus never wanes.
 Farther-Farther. He keeps walking. Suddenly, a small sound.
 He looks back. Only the hall, so dark he can no longer see
 the opening. He looks ahead. Just the painting. He continues.

But from above comes a FIGURE, landing on Nick and slamming him into the shelves. The GUN from the register is shoved into Nick's jaw, and into the light thrusts the face of Kafka-

-TOTALLY SCARRED one side with wriggling crevasses. Beneath a mop of mangled hair, his one working eye is all penetrating.

KAFKA

Back again are we? Tell me Mr. Nick-
If, for a church's higher purpose,
you were about to steal something
from a man, but before you could,
that man shot you dead-would either
one of you have committed a sin?

NICK

(Hammer cocking, panic)
No! I wasn't here for that! A girl!
She works here! Diana! I just-just-

Kafka pushes his eye in, studies Nick suspiciously.

NICK (CONT'D)

I came down here to wait for her!
The-the painting gives me memories!
Memories, that's it!

Nick waits. Several tense beats. Finally, the gun uncocks.

KAFKA

Then remind Diana that I've found
fucking religion and that I'll no
longer see her. Goodbye, Mr. Nick.

Shaken Nick nods as Kafka floats back into the dark, the bad eye, solid white, watching and waiting. Nick briskly exits.

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS LOBBY DAY

Nick and Sal walk down a hall towards a service desk, arguing-

SAL

Why today? After what happened-Why?

NICK

I need a distraction. Look it's the
copilot of my folks plane. What he
knows might end some of these
demons in my head. And he's about
to bring down a major airline. Once
he "retires," we'll never hear from
him again. So I need to talk to him
directly.

SAL
But why today? With the memory
flashes! Kafka! What's her name!

NICK
So your new job only hires pussies?

They stop. Nick grins. Sal smiles, nods. He takes out an ID
BADGE marked POLICE INTERROGATION and pins it on his chest.

SAL
Okay asshole. Follow my lead.

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS CONFERENCE AREA DAY

Our heroes talk to a TEEN with a name tag labeled BJ: INTERN.

BJ
Ms. Johnson's books don't show you.

SAL
That's okay. You'll learn. Just
tell Johnson her 2 o'clock is here.
And if she asks-

Sal walks the kid out of earshot. Meanwhile, a GIRL wheels in
a cork board labeled SUMMONS PLANE DEATHS. She faces it to a
wall and leaves. Nick strolls over for a peek. A creepy mood.

Tacked to the board is a TOP DIAGRAM of a 747. The LEFT REAR
passenger area has a hole in the hull marked 10 FT X 9 FT.

NICK
Damn big hole.

Nick's eyes move to the isle and up, through a red colored
area marked BLOOD. 9 rows up, there are 2 seats on the RIGHT
circled together, labeled SUMMONS COUPLE. He counts the rows.

NICK (CONT'D)
9 rows away? That can't be right.

Just above SUMMONS COUPLE is another small circle. A line
extends from it reading 2 FEET. Nick's brow furrows.

NICK (CONT'D)
What, another hole in the plane?

A whistle makes Nick jump. It's Sal, giving Nick a thumbs up.

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS STUDIO DAY

Nick and Sal talk to news anchor SYLVIA JOHNSON (attractive,
50's). Nearby, cameras are filming a news story.

SYLVIA JOHNSON
No, that's contractual information.

NICK
I know. I was actually looking to talk to this copilot directly.

SYLVIA JOHNSON
Please. Hand over my source so you can get paid by- Who are you with?

Nick sighs like he's caught. He thinks, looks to Sal. Sal's eyes are the yellow eyes from THE PAINTING!

Nick starts, shakes his head. He looks again. Sal's now normal. Sal looks at Nick quizzically. Nick slowly gathers.

NICK
I lied-I'm not a reporter. But I've dealt with enough of them to know there's always a trade. My real name isn't Stone. It's Summons.

Johnson slowly stands. She eyes the cameras. She eyes Nick.

SYLVIA JOHNSON
Summons? Nicholas Gene Summons?

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS OFFICE DAY

Nick and Sal sit before a CONTRACT. Johnson's by the door.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (CONT'D)
You do this interview, you get the copilot-and maybe even the ratings to reopen your folks' airline case.

She nods, leaves. A long silence. Sal puts his hand on Nick.

SAL
If you spill your guts, it'll start again. Media, politicians, God nuts-

NICK
Come to think it, someone did send Nick Summons a bible the other day.

SAL
I'm behind you. But you have 2 days till Christmas Eve. Think about it.

Nick slowly lays the pen down. As he and Sal leave, we PAN over to a STUDIO window. The RED ROBED CARDINAL is in an interview seat. Sylvia Johnson enters the studio, asking him:

SYLVIA JOHNSON

Are you ready?

INT. NICK'S CAR DAY

Nick pulls his CAR up to Sal's place. As Sal's about to exit:

NICK

They wore my aunt down. I wasn't like this before she died. So sure.

SAL

About what?

Nick eyes a near CHURCH and snorts. Sal pats Nick's shoulder. He exits. Nick looks at himself in the mirror. His TEETH are long and jagged like in THE PAINTING! He double takes, looks again. -His teeth are normal. He lies his head on the wheel.

NICK

Noooo Nick. No, no, no-

EXT. THINGS REMEMBERED DAY

Nick stands before Lizzy with her head out the shop door.

LIZZY

No! He refused 20 people today that wanted to see that painting. Only you got a gun in your face. He said alert him especially if you show. I'll text you when its clear.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT BACK KITCHEN ENTRY NIGHT

Nick enters the dark apartment with some rum. He opens a cabinet to get a glass. Suddenly he hears an APPLE crunch. He whirls. Diana is standing in the dark wearing a thick coat.

DIANA

Took you forever to come around.

NICK

You wanna tell me how you got in?

DIANA

(She holds up a key)
You really don't remember much.
(Wiggles the rum bottle)
Are we wondering why yet?

NICK

Yeah, why you keep ditching me.
What was that at your work place?

DIANA

Mr. Clean at the bar was a problem.

NICK

Not exactly what I meant.

DIANA

What? You mean the ghost digits I slipped him from the Channel 5 News Billboard? I had to give him something. Besides-

(Slowly unzips her coat)

I play hard to get for a reason.

Diana drops her coat, grinning. She wears nothing underneath. She gropes him, melting his poker face. He nods, plays along.

NICK

Okay.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT FRONT ROOM NIGHT

Nick and Diana spoon nude on a window sill under a full moon. He drinks. She flips through an album of his murder articles.

DIANA

Why would a model priest kill a bunch of his own peers?

NICK

Because that model priest got kicked out of his own church. All Watson talked about in jail was how he'd been kept down, held back, how they'd dumped everything on him.

DIANA

Uh-His sister? 7 innocent families?

He flips to a new headline: WATSON ESCAPES-KILLS 8TH FAMILY!

NICK

Actually-more. The night he escaped he killed an 8th family. Cops knew it was him because he cut himself chopping off their feet. He bled. Odd thing was, Watson didn't know this 8th family. So why kill them?

DIANA

So 7 families, his own sister, plus a family he even didn't know. And a year before, also on Christmas Eve I'll add...he left you alive? Hmmm.

NICK

We were talking about the painting.

DIANA

The artist just wanted to scare ya. So he used Artistic Juxtaposition. Dad always said, "Fear is the curse that makes Satan's kids immortal".

NICK

He also kicked you out because you had sex out of wedlock. Your dad was an authority on Paul and his silly Book of Ephesians, not art.

DIANA

Please. One look at that painting gave you nightmares. Piece of work. I have a store key. Sometimes at night, I sneak in just to study it.

NICK

Wanna die? Sal said you're trouble.

DIANA

Sal's why I didn't ride with ya the other night. That's a church goer.

NICK

Sal's not into church. Just faith.

Diana reads in bold: CHAD WATSON ESCAPES ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

DIANA

Still might explain why he has better luck than you.

Nick's about to reply. He looks. Diana is DEAD in his arms, wrapped in Christmas lights that are plugged into her EYES.

CUT TO: Nick AWAKES, tumbling off of the sill. He jumps up, runs and hits the lights. He's alone, but okay. There's a note sitting on a chair. It reads, WENT TO THE NIGHT GALLERY.

EXT. THINGS REMEMBERED NIGHT

Nick crosses the snowy street to the closed store, no soul in sight. As he nears the front window, he slips on the ICE and at the noise, checks his back. That's when he sees footprints leading to the window. Written in frost is: DIANA WAS HERE.

Nick shakes his head. He looks through the window. Inside, Kafka sits, studying the PAINTING. Kafka lifts it, turns it around. There's a PASSAGE of odd GREEK SYMBOLS on the back.

SLOW MO: Nick seems entranced by the eerie Greek passage.

NORMAL MOTION: Nick snaps to, shivers. He glances up. And Kafka is staring right at him with a very calculated smile.

Nick pulls back, ready to run. But Kafka doesn't chase him. Instead, Kafka disappears into a hallway with the painting. The store lights dowse, leaving bamboozled Nick-

IN BLACK

FLASHBACK INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE DAY

LITTLE NICK sits by some law books as his AUNT talks to a LAWYER. Through a window, a PRESS crowd shoots photos of Nick. But Nick is taken with an ITEM on a desk.

AUNT

No. IRS will pry. I'm all Nick has.

LAWYER

Watson is the church's mess. Let them clean it up. They'll pay you-

AUNT

Pay me to not sue an airline? The 2 cases are unrelated. It's bribery.

LAWYER

If they pay you through the airline it's family aid. It's charity.

AUNT

They're laundering the money. Why else would a church want to keep a plane crash out of the public eye?
(She points at Nick)
That's what they're paying for.

LAWYER

A 4 year old's testimony? I doubt it. The jury's not buying Watson's hooded monk story anyway.

AUNT

Somebody else was at that house... The footprints in the snow outside?

LAWYER

They're inadmissible-as is Watson's story about a "Santa Suit" Killer.

AUNT

Santa Su-? That's Nick's testimony.

LAWYER

I mean uh, yes, right. Nick's.

AUNT

They are putting Nick on the stand?

LAWYER

Right, but remember his therapy is already making things-fuzzy.

AUNT

Yes I-guess it is.

Then the lawyer sees what Nick is playing with. -The ORNAMENT WITH A CROSS SHAPED TOP from the night of the murders. The lawyer rushes over, forcefully grabs it away from Nick.

LAWYER

No! Don't touch that!

AUNT

Hey! Be careful! He's just a boy!

LAWYER

I-I'm sorry. But that's e-evidence.

EXT. LAWYER'S OFFICE DAY

LITTLE NICK follows his AUNT through a crowd of reporters forcing questions. The aunt sounds unsure of her answers.

REPORTER

Do you believe Chad Watson's story?

AUNT

Attacked by monks-I don't think so.

REPORTER

What about all the footprints?

AUNT

Police contamination. And I don't believe in the Santa Suit Killer.

REPORTER

But there's all those coat threads!

AUNT

Coat threads? I haven't-

REPORTER

Matching coats threads, at all 7 crime scenes across the country.

As Nick shies away, a LIMO SPORTING U.S. FLAGS starts up.

AUNT

Watson's clothes had blood on them
from all 7 crime scenes, alright?

REPORTER

But there's no murder weapon. Could
your son be lying?

AUNT

He was my sister's son and back off-

The Limo guns for Nick! Before it hits, 2 male arms scoop the
boy to safety. When Nick is back on the ground, he sees the
RED ROBED CARDINAL running away. The crying aunt grabs Nick.

END FLASHBACK INT. NICK'S APARTMENT BEDROOM DAY

Sal shakes Nick AWAKE, hands him a KEY. Nick has on galoshes.

SAL

Where the hell were you last night?

INT. HEALTH CLUB BASKETBALL COURT DAY

Nick and Sal trade shots, even though Nick has a beer, and
Sal's reading a book labeled PSYCHOLOGY OF CHRISTMAS.

NICK

I'm telling you, she knows some-

SAL

Diana's fire. And you're fanning it-
"She's cool. She hates Christmas.
She knows what I'm thinking and
digs weird sex."-You're chasing her
around at 3 AM! Given your holiday
depression, your alcoholism, and
your sleep walking nightmares, I'd
say it's a good idea to ignore her.

NICK

Don't mince words, man.

SAL

Now then. You know there was a real
St. Nick, right? He was a real man.
This guy treating Christmas phobia
says don't ignore holidays. Instead
focus on the history-Let's do that.

NICK

Or, we join the suicide bandwagon.

Nick turns and shoots- At a goal made of a slimy CANDY CANE pole, an oozing brown WREATH for a basket and a GINGERBREAD backboard with a PSYCHOTIC FACE. The ball misses, hits a far wall. Nick shakes his head, looks again. The goal is normal.

SAL
Hey. You okay?

EXT. HEALTH CLUB PARKING LOT DAY

Nick finds a Christmas FLYER on his car. Sal yanks it from him. It reads: RELICS OF ST. NICK: NOW AT THE ROSS MUSEUM.

SAL (CONT'D)
Hey, the museum tour! "See the real tomb artifacts of the legendary St. Nicholas." It's Perfect. Let's go!

NICK
Speaking of suicides.

EXT. ROSS MUSEUM AND OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH DAY

Sal watches Nick open a beer at a cart outside a MUSEUM. Next door is a GOTHIC CHURCH. Reporters and CROWDS are everywhere.

SAL
Hurry, we're taking the noon tour.
(Off photos flashing)
What the hell do they got in there?

NICK
Probably the coat threads from
Watson's missing "Santa Suit".

Nick notices the RED ROBED CARDINAL at a podium before a MOB.

NICK (CONT'D)
You've gotta be kidding me.

SAL
Hey I saw him in the news studio.

NICK
What?!

SAL
Ya, talking to Sylvia Johnson. He was at Kafka's too. Totally flipped at that painting. Why-you know him?

Photos flash. Nick squints. Photos flash, flash, flash.

FLASHBACK INT. NICK'S AUNT'S OLD HOUSE NIGHT

Lightning flashes as LITTLE NICK looks out a window. Nick's AUNT is on the phone. Outside SPOOKY VOICES chant in Latin.

AUNT

He has a 500 foot restraining order-
But he follows us wherever we move!

She smacks a newspaper down on a chair. It pictures the RED ROBED CARDINAL and is headlined REAL LIFE ILLUMINATI. And- In the yard, swaying with candles, is a clan of HOODED MONKS helmed by the RED ROBED CARDINAL. A storm billows his robes.

AUNT (CONT'D)

I've taken the issue as high as the mayor. We did everything Cardinal Hain wanted at the trial. Why doesn't he leave us alone?-Hello?

She slams the phone down. Nick sees her pour a huge drink of LIQUOR and gulp it. HAIN lifts his arms as lightning flashes!

END FLASHBACK EXT. ROSS MUSEUM AND OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH DAY

Nick SNAPS BACK to reality. Sal's still waiting for a reply. Then Nick sees SYLVIA JOHNSON at the church with a NEWS CREW. Nick storms her way. Sal follows, confused. Nick palms her camera-barking at Johnson and pointing to HAIN. Sal watches.

NICK

You damn news people. You knew that guy screwed my whole childhood up. That bastard killed more of my aunt than just her faith. And when you announced that airline story, you hoped I'd show up-and he'd follow!

SYLVIA JOHNSON

The airline story has nothing to do with him-There's an outcry over all these suicides. People are blaming the Catholic Church's museum tour.

Johnson points out the MASSIVE CROWD shouting up at HAIN.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (CONT'D)

Hain showed up to clear the air on my Christmas Eve Special.

NICK

What a coincidence you wanted me to do an interview the same night.

(Counting on 3 fingers)

My story, the airline story, and-

(Points to Cardinal Hain)

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

A story with the 1 man who has the biggest connection to Chad Watson.

(Grabs Johnson's Mic Away)

You want a story? Find out what Hain did to drive Watson mad. Find out why Hain sent Watson to Turkey!

Nick chunks the mic into the crowd and walks off. Sal smiles at her and shrugs. He catches up to Nick, blocking his path.

SAL

Yo, that's Cardinal Hain? I'm lost.

NICK

Hello? Hain made Watson a priest?

SAL

Ya I know-

NICK

And he made Watson part of a secret clan? Like the Illuminati?

SAL

Yes I know all that.

NICK

Made Watson do kooky shit? Flogging-Exorcisms? It all drove Watson mad?

SAL

Ya, Watson went mad, so Hain kicked him out of the church. I know. But back there you mentioned Turkey?

NICK

I did? Ya, I did-

Nick cringes, having another sudden:

FLASHBACK INT. NICK'S PARENT'S HOUSE NIGHT

LITTLE NICK hides in a corner. In BG, CAROL consoles MONA by a TV with eerie static. Next to them is the SHEETED PAINTING.

MONA

Chad's a church history genius. He was elected for this elite mission in Turkey. So why would they wanna excommunicate him? Then I saw this.

She plays a VCR. It's a news story. CHAD WATSON, a brown robbed priest, is being arrested in BARI, ITALY. And a TITLE on the screen reads U.S. PRIEST ROBS 3 HOLY DEPOSITORIES.

CAROL
Sweet Chad? The model priest?
Robbing churches in Europe?

MONA
When I sent bail, Chad said to not
warn the church he was coming home.

CAROL
Wait, I thought Cardinal Hain is
the one who sent Chad to Turkey.

MONA
He is. And he's also the one-that
kicked Chad out of the church.
Chad keeps ranting how God has
abandoned him. The other day he
said he renounced God completely.
Carol-Chad begged me not to look at
whatever's under that sheet.

END FLASHBACK EXT. ROSS MUSEUM AND OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH DAY

Nick SOBERS. He sees a SIGN above Hain reading DIE FOR THE
BROTHERHOOD! He views the red figure with a child's paranoia.

NICK
I've never even talked to Hain.

INT. OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH MAIN HALLWAY DAY

Sal pats Nick, walks him down a big hall with a stained glass
roof towards the faceless HAIN, who talks with some priests.

NICK (CONT'D)
I thought Watson was only nuts.

SAL
He killed 8 families. It qualifies.

NICK
But I don't get it, over what?

SAL
You kidding? Excommunication
practically damns his soul.

NICK
No Sal-What was he looking for? The
depositories he robbed were ancient-

MEMORY FLASH: Of the VCR. Little Nick reads-BARI TOMB ROBBED!

BACK ON: Sal GRABS Nick's shoulder, keeps him moving forward.

NICK (CONT'D)
He even robbed tomb in Bari, Italy.

SAL
A tomb! Ya what was he looking for?

NICK
Whatever it was, he said the fate
of the world depended on it.

SAL
Fate of the world? That's Nuts.

HAIN sees them. He turns, glides through a door. They follow.

INT. OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH PRAYER ROOM DAY

Nick and Sal enter a room LINED with HOODED MONKS. At the far end Hain exits another door. Nick and Sal follow. The monks eye them, chanting Latin, faces shadowed. Our heroes whisper.

SAL (CONT'D)
I wonder. Why didn't Watson just
kill Hain? Why kill his own family
and friends? And that 8th family?

NICK
-An 8th family he didn't even know.

INT. OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH LOCUS CUSTODIAE FLOGGING ROOM DAY

Nick and Sal enter to see monks FLOGGING themselves. Again Hain exits another door. Nick and Sal wince as they follow.

SAL
Then again he was like this. Wasn't
he ranting in public about demons?

NICK
Demons, witches and most of all God-
But I guess he quit showbiz. Once
he escaped and got an 8th family...

INT. OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH MAIN HALLWAY DAY

Nick and Sal exit back into the main hallway. Hain's nowhere.

NICK (CONT'D)
...It was like Watson disappeared.

SAL
Okay. I'm leaving this spook house.
The next museum tour is in 3 hours.
I have to go shopping. You coming?

Then Nick's PHONE gets a TEXT. He reads it. He looks at Sal.

INT. THING'S REMEMBERED STORAGE ROOM DAY

Nick and Lizzy stand before THE PAINTING as if in a trance.

LIZZY

That crap on the back is an ancient dialect called Classical Greek-It's used by devil worshipers. They used it in Turkey before Turkey existed.

NICK

Turkey? That's odd. What's it say?

LIZZY

Something like being damned or fear-

NICK

I assume it was hard to translate?

LIZZY

And the harder part is my obsession-Which reminds me, don't tell anyone I let you back here. Or everyone else will want back here.

NICK

What do you mean everyone?

LIZZY

Everyone. Patrons. Employees. I let your friend back here yesterday.

NICK

Diana?

LIZZY

No, Sal. He said he needed to analyze it to help a friend. But I think he's just obsessed, like us.

NICK

The artist just wanted to scare us. So he used artistic juxtaposition.

LIZZY

What's that? You a religious man?

NICK

No. I'm a shrink.

LIZZY

Good. Help me with the nightmares.

Nick is taken aback. He's about to speak when a MATCH STRIKES in the dark. Kafka's face startles them. He lights a pipe.

KAFKA

Or at least provide an explanation for them. Correct? Doctor Nick?

Lizzy grabs her apron and exits. Nick and Kafka are alone.

KAFKA (CONT'D)

What warrants the audacity? Looking for your illusive girlfriend maybe?

NICK

I have no idea where Diana is.

KAFKA

So to find her you frequent a shop where she's no longer welcome? No.
(Motions to painting)
Psychiatrists don't confuse obsession with petty love.

NICK

And store owners don't flaunt ugly art they never intended to sell. Lizzy said you put it up this year.

KAFKA

Perhaps it generates customers.

NICK

Ya, like with youth group teachers?

KAFKA

Now you diagnose me in my own shop.

NICK

No. But I do get paid to recognize bullshit when I hear it.

KAFKA

Then we'll agree you came here not for a girl, but for a painting. And the painting is not for sale.

Beaten, Nick starts to leave. But then he whirls back.

NICK

You love the reactions you get when people see that thing. Don't claim you don't like me coming here, just like anyone that hates Christmas!

KAFKA

(A greedy, knowing smile)

Tell me. Why do you hate Christmas!

Nick backs up into the doorway. He runs out, Kafka laughing.

EXT. THINGS REMEMBERED DAY

Nick comes out the front door, shaken, sliding on ICE. As he steadies himself on a corner, DIANA exits behind him. Not noticing him, she crosses the street. He follows, suspicious.

EXT. CITY STREETS DAY

Nick trails Diana talking to Sal via CELL. Passing folks have the BLOODY HAIR from THE PAINTING. Nick shakes the sight off.

SAL (O.S. OVER PHONE)

It's fine for me to go look at the painting. Dealing with you, I get nightmares either way. Now call it off, 007. What are you hoping for?

EXT. CITY LIBRARY DAY

Nick's still on the cell. He watches Diana enter the library.

SAL (O.S. OVER PHONE) (CONT'D)

I got it. She's the little girl you saw die. She's back for her foot.

NICK

She's not limping. So, next theory.

INT. CITY LIBRARY MICROFILM ROOM DAY

Nick sneaks in with his cell. Diana is at a dark empty booth.

SAL (O.S. OVER PHONE)

Nick, we've got no idea where Diana came from or why. Any answers from her could be a godsend, or a curse.

Diana is reading a newspaper headline; EXCOMMUNICATION DRIVES WATSON INSANE. She yawns--then speaks to Nick without turning.

DIANA

Watson claims here he was framed.

Nick sighs. He texts to Sal, BUSTED. Then he hangs up.

NICK

Framed? By spooky monks and a phantom in a Santa Suit?

DIANA

His DNA was at your crime scene-but no others. Wow. Only 1 out of 7.

NICK

Cute-DNA testing didn't exist then. However Watson did have blood types on him from all 7 crime scenes.

DIANA

Watson's DNA...was at your scene alone.

The words hang in the air. Nick looks at her, squints.

DIANA (CONT'D)

5 states in 3 hours sure doesn't leave much time to hide bodies.

NICK

Timing was a police miscalculation.

DIANA

In my experience police are capable of a lot more than miscalculation.

NICK

Why did you let me follow you?

DIANA

You're the kind of guy I can lay with, okay. I want to help you find answers. But I don't work for Sylvia Johnson and I don't work for Kafka. I've been burned by plenty of bitter old merchants. I've got no interest in helping a guy like that get back at the world. Authorities and I don't mix.

NICK

Diana, why hide? Who are you?

She stands up with endearment, helps him sit, massages him.

DIANA

You do see I'm walking about in plain sight while you're sneaking around chasing me? That's because you're the one with no faith here.
(She gives a cutesy smile)
Even Greek goddesses need help from their followers sometimes. Besides, there's something else bugging you.

He plays along, doodling with a pen and paper on the desk.

NICK

I needed to let my folks go. But no one really explained what happened to the plane. Somehow the black box recording was never made public.

The doodle is a 747. He drags a line down the isle of it.

NICK (CONT'D)

What I just don't get is, how can two people fly backwards, over 9 rows, and get sucked out of a 10 foot hole, without a single other person going with them-

DIANA

Maybe the museum tour can tell you.

Nick turns, about to speak. But Diana is nowhere. Somewhere in the very dark room, it sounds like someone's GAGGING. He stands and creeps forward, hands out, calling her. No answer.

Then he sees, at the end of a rope made of Christmas ribbon, her eyes bulging, face blue; Diana HANGS by her neck. He plows into her, trying to lift up. As he does, she clasps him tight, stabbing him with a massive ICICLE. She stabs!-stabs!

INT. CITY LIBRARY MICROFILM ROOM DAY

Nick JOLTS AWAKE, still seated at the booth. He sighs. A note is taped to the monitor reading PUT THE FILM UP SLEEPY HEAD. So he removes it. And underneath, displayed on the monitor is a newspaper headline reading WATSON BLAMES SANTA SUIT KILLER.

INT. ROSS MUSEUM BARI TOMB EXHIBIT DAY

Nick, Sal and a CROWD follow a TOUR GUIDE past some relics. As they go, Sal sees a painting of a girl being burned at the stake by monks. He points it out to Nick.

SAL

See blondes were always a nuisance.

The crowd passes a FILM showing an EPHESIAN TEMPLE. Sal roles his eyes as it shows a big copy of Kafka's weird egg STATUE.

FILM NARRATOR (V.O.)

St. Nick helped convert the Ephesians to Christianity.

The film shows a EUROPEAN MAP emphasizing a dot labeled MYRA. The word Myra fades to TURKEY.

FILM NARRATOR (V.O.)

When he died, his relics settled in Myra, which is now modern Turkey.

Nick mouths to himself the word TURKEY. The mood gets creepy. On the film, a tiny ship sails from Turkey to BARI, ITALY.

FILM NARRATOR (V.O.)

During the crusades-Roman Catholics hired pirates to steal Nick's remains, taking them to Bari Italy. So today, Nick's body is in Bari.

MEMORY FLASH: Nick and Sal follow Hain at the GOTHIC CHURCH.

NICK

Watson even broke into a tomb in Bari, Italy.

BACK ON: Nick SNAPS TO, shaking. The tour guide takes the crowd over to some photos of ST. NICK'S TOMB in Bari.

TOUR GUIDE

Here are Bari Tomb photos. The pirates that stole Nick's relics took all sorts of stuff; gold, art, tapestries. Even his body! So today in Bari they have a yearly ritual.

Nick sees the room spinning. The guide shows a MODERN PHOTO of a high priest EXTRACTING SOMETHING from St. Nick's coffin.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

It's said to this day the Saint's remains exude an oil called myrrh which is bottled into these flasks-

The guide holds up an ORNAMENT WITH A CROSS SHAPE TOP!

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

This myrrh is distributed to churches worldwide for its magic healing properties!

Nick wobbles. He studies a SKETCH of monks trying to stop the pirates as they steal Nick's relics. In it, a pirate takes a PAINTING away from the crying guardians. The tour guide says:

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

Some think a few relics were hidden by the pirates for financial gain.

SAL

By pirates? No. See Nick, it's fun!

INT. ROSS MUSEUM SANTA SKETCH EXHIBIT DAY

The crowd views FOREIGN SANTA SKETCHES. One is DEMONIC—it has a GOLD BRANCH. Nick scowls at Sal, who has his face covered.

TOUR GUIDE

Many cultures claim Santa punishes the bad kids. Even tortures them.

SAL

Awww-Shiiit!

TOUR GUIDE

This is Krampus, a beast with horns and nails, celebrated in Austria on December 5. Bad kids always make his list, but some say fear of the monster alone will make him visit.

In a sketch, Krampus passes a brave kid to get a scared one.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

He's also the Devil of fertility. Those who see the Krampus and live become ripe with the seeds of sin.

Nick and Sal both peer at Nick's crotch, then each other.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

Ironically, Krampus comes from the Old High German word Krampen, which in English, translates to...claws.

She points to a card displaying 2 words: "CLAUS" and "CLAWS".

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

To see Santas from other countries, try the book Santas Global Listing, on display at the city library.

Nick looks at Sal. Sal looks back, face still covered.

INT. CITY LIBRARY THEOLOGY SECTION DAY

Nick and Sal sit and read. Sal shamefully reads PSYCHOLOGY OF CHRISTMAS. Nick reads SANTA'S GLOBAL LISTING. He nervously flips through PICTURES OF EVIL SANTAS. The mood is eerie.

NICK

All these countries have bad Santas—Sweden, Finland, Mexico. It's where the "lump of coal" thing came from.

Nick views various PICTURES. A TROLL slaughters farm animals trapped in barn. A red BAT-CREATURE has a whip around a tot's neck. A blue SIMIAN CREATURE stuffs an adult man into a bag.

NICK (CONT'D)
 Santa demanded porridge, or he'd
 kill your farm. Or whip your kids.
 Or bag you up and take you away.

An ARMORED DEMON rides a white and bloody 8-LEGGED HORSE.

NICK (CONT'D)
 Sometimes Santa had an evil helper.
 Sometimes Santa was the monster.
 Crazy names; Tomten, Zwarte Piet,
 translated as Black Peter or The
 Christmas Goat. Instead of a
 sleigh, he rode an 8-legged horse
 called Sleipnir. Reindeer came from
 a poem. The Night Before Christmas.

Nick runs his finger along a line in the book, reading.

NICK (CONT'D)
 In these regions, the drastic
 change into the Sweet Santa we know
 today can be traced back to the
 Roman Catholic's need to hide what
 was originally-a pagan myth.

Nick looks up for a response. Sal is slumped over with a GOLD BRANCH in his head. Nick slowly closes the book-and his eyes.

INT. PARLEE'S PUB NIGHT

Sal sits by drunk Nick at the bar. Nick points to Sal's COKE.

NICK (CONT'D)
 Coca-cola is what made the red and
 white suit famous. You know those
 weird coat threads at all the crime
 scenes? I bet Coke planted them.

Nick's PHONE hums. Sal answers. It's LIZZY. She's on then off-

SAL
 Hey Lizzy. No, I'll get him. Hello?
 (Sal hangs up)
 She sounded scared shitless. Said
 she finally translated something?

Then Nick's phone gets a creepy TEXT. Nick and Sal read it:

ON PHONE SCREEN:

Be damned and behold the Devil's Image,
 Be cursed and behold the Devil's Artwork,
 Be fearful and behold the Devil's Monster,
 Be sinful and behold the Devil's Spawn

SAL (CONT'D)
 What is Lizzy, a witch?

INT. SUBWAY STATION NIGHT

A leery Sal walks Nick to the train. Nick is in a drunk rant.

NICK
 Be fearful and behold the Devil's
 monster-Get it? If you're scared of
 that monster, it's coming. Ya dead!

SAL
 Forget the train, I'm driving you.

NICK
 No-I'm not afraid! Nick Stone isn't
 afraid of "The Devil's image"! Nor
 "The Devil's Artwork"! Nor The
 Devil's Spawn"! He fears nothing!

Giddy Nick runs through the train doors. But Sal doesn't make it. So Sal pounds on the door. And when Nick looks back, Sal's pounding hand is the CLAW HAND from THE PAINTING. Nick squints. The hand is now normal.

NICK (CONT'D)
 Don't worry Sal. I know just how to
 end my problems. And Lizzy's too!

The train pulls away-taking Nick into the DARK of the tunnel.

FLASHBACK INT. POLICE CAR NIGHT

LITTLE NICK and his AUNT are rushed from her HOUSE into a COP CAR. As they drive off, she talks to a DETECTIVE in the car.

AUNT
 Escaped? On Christmas Eve?! How do
 you know he killed this new family?
 Last year they found no weapon.

DETECTIVE
 Forensics said it's a branch-like
 club made of gold. It left behind
 the same metal filings.

AUNT
 Great. So now we go to a hotel.

DETECTIVE

It also left behind remnants of all the victims from last year. He must have hidden the club before he was caught. This new family tonight was definitely murdered by the same club. We also think he was wearing the same outfit because we found more of those weird coat threads.

AUNT

Detective, I don't understand.

DETECTIVE

This guy's vengeful. The last place you want to be is at home. I'm sure he didn't like what your kid said on the stand. The mayor himself is coming by to see you're doing okay.

AUNT

No, what connection did this family tonight have with all the others?

DETECTIVE

Funny. I was about to ask you that.

Nick shakes. Waiting by a HOTEL is the LIMO WITH U.S. FLAGS. Its lights go to brights on Nick's face, as if watching him.

END FLASHBACK INT. SUBWAY TRAIN NIGHT

Nick AWAKES to the bright lights of another subway station.

MONTAGE EXT. CITY STREETS MANY ATM'S NIGHT

Nick draws \$500, from many ATM's, all flashing MAX LIMIT!

INT. THINGS REMEMBERED STORAGE ROOM NIGHT

Nick enters. He startles Lizzy, who gazes at the painting.

LIZZY

Not now! He's looking for you! I need you to come back later!

She goes back to the painting, fretting, biting her nails.

NICK

You sure about that?

LIZZY

Hey I believe in God. I heed spooky poetry that says if I'm afraid-

Suddenly Kafka comes from the hallway, yanking Nick with him.

KAFKA

-Afraid? Then you'll see perdition!

INT. THINGS REMEMBERED MAIN FLOOR NIGHT

Kafka drags Nick, money in hand, to the open front door.

NICK

I'll pay you. I need to destroy it.
(Kafka just laughs)
It's personal. It sounds crazy, but-

KAFKA

Not as crazy as you might think.
Save your time, Doctor Nick. Save
your money, and save your soul.

EXT. THINGS REMEMBERED NIGHT

Kafka slams the door. Nick slips on the ice, shouting.

NICK

Save my soul? Too late! I've been
living godless since my aunt died!

Then Nick sees Diana by a near CHRISTMAS TREE LOT, waving. He walks over. She waves to follow her, and goes into the trees.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT NIGHT

Nick wades through the trees, and finds Diana in a clearing.

DIANA

I knew you'd show up at Kafka's.

NICK

Ya, thanks for the help.

DIANA

He won't see me. We're no longer on
speaking terms. You and I, however-

NICK

You buy the Santa Suit Killer? Why?

She tugs at his belt. He shoves her hands off. So instead she smiles and slowly removes her shirt. And suddenly right then-

...Red and blue flashing LIGHTS! Squealing TIRES!

DIANA

You ever think maybe I'm a spook?

Nick looks dumbfounded as Diana backs away into the trees.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Or maybe I just wanted to fuck you.

Diana darts away. Nick chases her, confused. He passes more clothes and tries to grab them, but she's getting farther away. So he drops it all and sprints, until he trips over a stump, hits his head and lands on his back. He shakes it off.

NICK

Diana?! What the hell's going on?!

No naked girl. No police lights. But in the snow are hoof-like PRINTS. He squints and stands. Hanging on a near tree like ornaments, are human FEET. Then comes the wheezing.

WHEEZING

Hoooo. Hoooooooooooo.

The trees behind him start to move. First the far ones, then ones that are closer. The wheezing gets louder. Near branches snap. As Nick looks about to dart—all stops. A beat. Nothing.

Then a loud, close WHACK. Nick winces, peers down. Embedded in his ankle is a GOLD BRANCH on a chain. Instantly, he's on his back, dragging across the snow towards some dark Goliath.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT NIGHT

UNCONSCIOUS NICK is YANKED UP by a cop. He gets cuffed. Diana is by a cop who's grilling the lot owner. She guiltily waves.

INT. POLICE HOLDING TANK NIGHT

A JAIL DOOR closes on drunk Nick. He yells at a GUARD nearby.

NICK

I was trying to get her off! The-
the-lot I mean. Are you listening?

Nick gives up and walks off out of sight. A few seconds. Then-

SLOW MO: A GUARD walks up. The door opens. CHAD WATSON walks out. He's escorted down a hall to a door labeled COURTROOM.

NORMAL FRAME RATE FLASHBACK INT. COURTROOM DAY

WATSON sits with the defense. On the stand, LITTLE NICK takes his hand off a BIBLE. His LAWYER gives it to the JUDGE.

LAWYER

Nick do you see the man that killed
the Wellers? Do you see him?

The LAWYER slyly taps a pencil 3 TIMES. Nick guiltily nods.

LAWYER (CONT'D)
 Can you point to that man?
 (Nick points to Watson)
 Your Honor, let the record show the
 witness identified Chad Watson.

CHAD WATSON suddenly leaps towards a particular CROWD MEMBER.

CHAD WATSON
 You had to keep me down, didn't
 you, You had to hold me back so you
 could dump it all on me!

The pounding gavel makes Nick turn. At the judge's feet is a familiar MYRRH FLASK. By it the Bible has MONEY closed in it.

CHAD WATSON (CONT'D)
 Where's the painting! And the boy!
 He's only 4 and you're damning him!

Nick looks to Watson. He's grabbing at CARDINAL HAIN! He then sees his lawyer's tie tack and cuff links are all CROSSES.

END FLASHBACK INT. POLICE HOLDING TANK NIGHT

Nick starts AWAKE to his cell mates talking. In the shadows an OLD CON entertains some younger ones with prison stories.

OLD CON
 I learned the hard way to keep my
 mouth shut. Chad Watson's ghost
 never heard nothing from me.

NICK
 What? Did you just say Chad Watson?

OLD CON
 -What the hell? First time in 30
 years and they on me already? That
blonde-ass hooker got me thrown in
 here was under cover. A fuck'n cop!
 (Nick's eyes widen)
 And since you a cop, fuck you too.

NICK
 A cop? No, hey, I'm not-

OLD CON
 What are you asking me then, some
 dude don't know me from Shinola?

NICK
I heard you talk about Chad Watson.

OLD CON
And?

NICK
Keep talking.

OLD CON
Fuck'n cops-30 years back, home boy did time with me. Heard he was some famous killer. Shit, I seen killers before. He was weird but he wasn't no killer. Bulls kept him isolated, around the corner from the rest of us. Couldn't see him. You could just hear him rant about religion and shit. So, he's in for about a year. Christmas Eve come around and that night he starts screaming he's gonna die. Bulls just laughed and went on celebrating, but that night- Well everyone said he escaped, but didn't sound like no escape to me.

FLASHBACK INT. GRAYSON PENITENTIARY PRISON CELL NIGHT

The OLD CON sleeps by a calendar reading DEC 24th. A RUCKUS down the hall wakes him. He looks through the bars. Around a corner a HUGE SHADOW attacks a SMALLER SHADOW. Blood spews.

OLD CON (V.O.)
See, if you wanna escape, you won't be screeching at the top of your lungs. You ain't going to yell for help neither. It was some messed up shit. Best part? Bulls never came.

END FLASHBACK INT. POLICE HOLDING TANK NIGHT

Nick's mouth gapes as the old con finishes with:

OLD CON
And I got beat good to forget that.

EXT. POLICE STATION DAY

A grumpy Sal walks out the door with a prickly sobering Nick.

SAL
She's a cop? So that's why you're in jail and not the naked blonde.
(MORE)

SAL (CONT'D)

I thought it was because you trampled down a tree lot with \$5000 in your pocket! You finished with her? Or do you want her to find Watson now?

NICK

Chad Watson was innocent.

SAL

What?!

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT STUDY DAY

Nick yanks a filing drawer and dumps it. By him, Sal rants.

SAL (CONT'D)

Nick there was hard evidence Watson escaped. The 8th family? Remember? He cut himself and bled everywhere?

NICK

Everywhere! And the year before his DNA was at 1 crime scene? Out of 7?

Nick finds a clip headlined LOCAL JAIL HOUSES SERIAL KILLER. He nods. But below the title there's a photo of THE PAINTING!

Nick rubs his eyes. He looks again. It's a photo of GRAYSON PENITENTIARY. Nick growls and rushes out the door. Sal yells:

SAL

Why would the church frame him?!

INT. GRAYSON PENITENTIARY FRONT DESK DAY

Nick talks to a front desk GUARD through a grated screen.

GUARD

Sorry, warden's leaving. Come back-

Nick grabs a PRISON LOGO PEN, writes CHAD WATSON on a NOTE.

NICK

Ya? Hand him this. See what he says-

INT. GRAYSON PENITENTIARY MAIN FLOOR DAY

A big GATE opens. 3 GUARDS walk Nick to a door marked WARDEN.

INT. GRAYSON PENITENTIARY WARDEN OFFICE DAY

A door shuts behind Nick and one ARMED GUARD. Propped against a desk, holding Nick's NOTE is the WARDEN. He's on the phone.

WARDEN

I'll take care of it.

He hangs up, lights a smoke. He puts the note in an ash tray, sets it ALIGHT. Nick sees a PHOTO; the Warden and CARDINAL HAIN shaking hands. By the photo is a MYRRH FLASK. Nick nods.

NICK

Chad Watson. Charged with killing 7 families. He was kept here and supposedly escaped. You remember?

WARDEN

That was 30 years ago. I was a just a bull guarding A-Block. Since then that whole wing has been removed. Cells aren't much good unless they can keep someone from getting out.

NICK

Or getting in?

WARDEN

Why is it you're interested in this long forgotten circumstance?

NICK

I watched a psycho kill a family on Christmas Eve. I'm owed some gifts.

WARDEN

Escaped fugitives are recovered by the city police. So all our files on the prisoner are with the cops. The warden at the time has since died and-I was nothing more than a grunt in the situation. Once the cops showed, we weren't allowed near the convict's cell. So if you're looking for details-

NICK

You mean details like Cardinal Hain being here that night? Or details like scrubbing blood off jail walls at 3 in the morning? Did you find a severed foot sitting around Warden?

WARDEN

Prisons generate a lot of rumors. This is because cons are liars. So your accusations are no reason to keep me here after work.

(MORE)

WARDEN (CONT'D)

That's how the police would see it, coming from a man who was just arrested for destruction of private property.

Nick sighs, beaten. He looks up. BLOODY MISTLETOE drips down onto the warden's head. The warden grins, almost knowingly.

WARDEN (CONT'D)

Something wrong, Mr.-Summons? Why brood over a conspiracy that never happened, when any proof it existed was bulldozed for a prison library? As I said, I was just a guard. And guards here never question things, because they do what they're ordered to do. That right Sergeant?

The guard pulls the riffle's HAMMER back. Nick's eyes widen.

WARDEN (CONT'D)

Rest your demons. The mayor himself had his best officers work the case- And they all agreed Watson escaped. Do you have any other questions?

NICK

No warden...I don't.

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS OFFICE NIGHT

Sylvia Johnson watches Nick sign a CONTRACT. Sal looks upset.

NICK (CONT'D)

I can talk to the copilot tonight?

SYLVIA JOHNSON

Soon as we're done, he's all yours.

Nick nods. She exits. Sal shakes his head, goes for the door.

SAL

Biggest mistake of your life Nick.

NICK

Sal? I need Watson's police files. Hey what the hell's wrong with you?

SAL

With me? You just told me the 2ond person this week threatened to kill you, and you're gonna spill your guts about it on the 6:00 news? This time I'm getting drunk!

(MORE)

SAL (CONT'D)
 If you wanna follow Watson's
 footsteps, you'll have to do it by
 yourself.

Sal leaves, slamming the door. When Nick opens the door to
 follow, THE PAINTING is there. Nick slams the door, panting.

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS STUDIO AND CONTROL ROOM INTERCUT NIGHT
 ON STUDIO: Nick and Sylvia sit before the rolling cameras.

SYLVIA JOHNSON
 7 families, across 5 states, killed
 in only 3 hours. That same night
 your folks died on flight 801. Are
 you a religious man, Mr. Summons?

NICK
 What's the difference?

SYLVIA JOHNSON
 For awhile you were famous, but you
 vanished when you were a teenager,
 rumors say to a mental institution.

NICK
 Actually I became a psychiatrist.

SYLVIA JOHNSON
 Yet you changed your name. Why?

NICK
 The media exploits kids to a fault.
 They chased me when they should
 have chased facts. 5 states in 3
 hours? And only 1 suspect? Hard to
 swallow-until you get a sad orphan
 to corroborate it. No wonder they
 never let Watson get to the stand.

SYLVIA JOHNSON
 But Watson escaped? In fact exactly
 1 year later-also on Christmas Eve.
 He killed an 8th family that night.

Nick scans the cameras and crew. Amongst them now is HAIN.

NICK
 No. You were brainwashed, like me.

ON CONTROL ROOM: A PRODUCER watching a TV takes a phone call.

PRODUCER
 Ya, newsroom. Who? The Mayor?

ON STUDIO:

SYLVIA JOHNSON
Brainwashed? By what? A conspiracy?
(Controlled excitement)
Are you saying Watson's Santa Suit
Killer was real?

NICK
Yes. Well, yes and no. After all,
Watson was crazy. He said he saw-

SYLVIA JOHNSON
-The same thing you saw. A monster.

NICK
There's no such thing as monsters!

ON CONTROL ROOM: Nick's shout lingers. The producer hangs up.

PRODUCER
Al, have security standing by.

ON STUDIO:

SYLVIA JOHNSON
Indeed not. But there were matching
threads at every crime scene from
some coat that was never found.

NICK
No coat. No weapon. And no bodies?
These murders were well planned. By
many killers. At least one for each
crime scene. And they all wore
clothes cut from the same material.
It gave the illusion one man did it-

SYLVIA JOHNSON
So you feel Watson was framed? Why?

NICK
Watson was a Catholic historian, an
expert on religious artifacts. He
was sent to search for something in
Europe, a relic of some kind.
Apparently he found it, because it
got him excommunicated. The church
wanted what Watson found and ruined
him to get it. That meant murder.

SYLVIA JOHNSON
Over a relic? Murder Watson's whole
family? His peers? His friends?

NICK

Watson's peers and friends must have seen what he'd found. So the church needed them silenced. And why not kill 2 birds with 1 stone? Murder the families, then pin it on Watson, an excommunicated zealot.

SYLVIA JOHNSON

So your answer for all the mystery is that these murders were planned by a church hierarchy, that Watson was framed for the murders, and that instead of escaping from prison, Watson was-assassinated?

ON CONTROL ROOM:

PRODUCER

Damnit-How much longer until break?

ON STUDIO:

SYLVIA JOHNSON

But what was worth killing for?

NICK

Rare paintings? Sacred holy oils maybe? One thing is certain. Watson was lured to his sister's house so the church could get that artifact. What lured Watson, I don't know but-
(Eyes Cardinal Hain)
I think I know someone who does.

ON CONTROL ROOM:

PRODUCER

That's it! Commercial! Cut it!

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS STUDIO NIGHT

Suddenly Nick is cut off by Johnson, who turns to the camera.

SYLVIA JOHNSON

We'll be back with answers.

They cut. The PRODUCER stomps in ripping up Nick's CONTRACT.

PRODUCER

Answers? No! This interview's over!

SYLVIA JOHNSON

We've got a contract with this man!

Nick chases the Producer and Sylvia past the set to an office-

NICK

Hey? Hey! I'm talking to that jet pilot tonight, you understand me!

The door slams in Nick's face. He puts his ear to the door.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (O.C. THROUGH DOOR)

If he goes, I go! Got it?

PRODUCER (O.C. THROUGH DOOR)

What I got is the Mayor on the line ordering us to hold this guy.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (O.C. THROUGH DOOR)

Then we have a story. When you pick the phone up, mention cameras will roll as Nick Summons is arrested.

PRODUCER (O.C. THROUGH DOOR)

Ya? Tell Nick this from the Mayor-

A BLADE slams through the door, blood flowing out with it. Nick stumbles back, the blade wiggling, Johnson screaming. Nick turns, yelling for help...But the set is completely DARK-

Nick gawks. As the stabbing and yelling continues, Nick approaches something lit by a single SPOTLIGHT. It's a TV on wheels. He sees himself on it. It's live. He looks closer.

On the screen, behind him, is a huge wooden CROSS. Cardinal Hain is NAILED to it. Nick turns around to look. Nothing. He looks back to the TV. The cross is back, but Hain is down off of it-reaching for Nick's shoulder with a crazy SANTA MASK on-

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS OFFICE NIGHT

BJ prods Nick AWAKE! The UNSIGNED CONTRACT sits on the desk.

BJ

Mr. Summons? She needs a decision.

NICK

-Where's the damn copilot?

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS DRESSING ROOM NIGHT

A GIRL grooms the COPILOT. Nick enters, shoves the girl out the door and goes to the pilot. The pilot's confused until:

NICK (CONT'D)

My parents died on your aircraft. Please, tell me what happened.

COPILOT
I'm not supposed to until after-

NICK
I think I've waited long enough.

A long beat. The COPILOT proceeds with shame.

COPILOT
The airline feared a lawsuit. So they blamed it all on the Captain for having 1 beer before takeoff.

NICK
1 beer made him hit a radio tower?

COPILOT
No. That tower we allegedly hit? It was only 100 feet high. We were at well over 900 when...Bare with me-

FLASHBACK INT. AIRPLANE COCKPIT NIGHT

The COPILOT has his head down, reading gauges after takeoff. The CAPTAIN next to him suddenly looks left to an EXPLOSION!

COPILOT (V.O.)
I was distracted so I never saw it. But I'll tell you this. We didn't hit anything. Something hit us.

EXT. RUNWAY AND LANDED PLANE NIGHT

The Copilot stands next to a grounded plane with a huge HOLE in it. He sees 2 suited FEDS debriefing the shaking CAPTAIN.

COPILOT (V.O.)
The Feds drilled the Captain. But he made no sense. First he said it was an animal with wings, then some kind of vehicle. He kept asking if a rollercoaster had jumped a track.

END FLASHBACK INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS DRESSING ROOM NIGHT

The Copilot shakes his head. Nick just stares, speechless.

COPILOT
Damn lawyers drove him mad. Rumors are, the guy killed himself. Last time I spoke to him, all he'd say was, Santa was coming to get him.

Then a GUARD enters. Nick shoves past him. The Copilot yells:

COPILOT (CONT'D)
There's more! Hear my interview!

INT. CHANNEL 5 NEWS CONFERENCE AREA NIGHT

Nick's rushing through when he sees the cork board with the 747 DIAGRAM. He pulls the diagram down to take it. And finds- PHOTOS from the house murders underneath. In every photo, blood, severed feet and MYRRH FLASKS! He gawks, takes it all.

INT. NICK'S CAR NIGHT

Nick gets in and starts up, when he sees SAL'S WORK ID on the seat. Sal has GLASSES on in the ID. Nick looks in the mirror.

INT. POLICE FILE BUILDING FRONT DESK NIGHT

Nick, now wearing GLASSES and SAL'S ID, approaches a COP at a window baring a big STAR. Most lights are out behind the COP.

FILE ROOM COP
It's after 9 pal. I'm closing up.

NICK
I just need a file over the break.

FILE ROOM COP
What? No files can leave from here.
(Studies Nick, suspicious)
Do I know you? No. Hand me your ID.-
Merry Christmas. You got 5 minutes.

INT. POLICE FILE BUILDING BACK ROOM NIGHT

Amidst dark shelves, Nick finds a box marked WATSON MURDERS. In it are folders. One is marked WATSON JAIL LETTERS. He gets out a torn handwritten letter stained with blood. He reads it-

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
December 24. I'm out of time. It's past midnight and the guards won't help me. Whoever finds this in my pillow, please know it's the truth.

FLASHBACK INT. CASTENELLA CAVES DEEP CAVERNS NIGHT

CHAD WATSON walks amongst dark, misty, wet caverns with a flashlight. Hidden between stalagmites he finds THE PAINTING.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
I found what Hain was looking for. The painting was not in the Bari Tomb, but in the Castenella Caves near the city, hidden by pirates.

EXT. CASTENELLA CAVES CAVE ENTRANCE NIGHT

Watson emerges from the cave with THE PAINTING. Suddenly he drops to his knees, cowering from unseen hallucinations.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
Hain kept my research a secret. I discovered why. In minutes, a slew of nightmares littered my mind.

EXT. CASTENELLA CAVES CAVE HILLS NIGHT

HAIN shows at the cave mouth and notices Watson's footprints. Watson, mending in the near hills, flees with THE PAINTING.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
The Cardinal had lied to me. The legends were all true. Luckily I kept the painting from Hain's reach-

INT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD FAMILY ROOM DAY

Watson pleads with MONA and RAY WELLER. None of them notice SUZY peeking underneath the sheet of the veiled PAINTING.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
I hid it with my sister back in the U.S. begging her not to look at it.

INT. PUBLIC CATHEDRAL WORSHIP ROOM DAY

Tormented Watson watches naive people visit church. He preys.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
I was desperate to warn mankind-but then that is how the curse works.

INT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD DEN DAY

Terrified Suzy is held by Ray as worried Mona DIALS HER PHONE-

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
The monster is summoned by fear.

INT. NICK'S PARENT'S HOUSE DAY

THE RINGING PHONE in Little Nick's house gets CAROL'S attention. She picks it up while Little Nick plays with toys.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
And that fear is contagious.

INT. LIBRARY DAY

Watson views a SKETCH in a book. It's the one Nick saw in the museum of a PIRATE STEALING A PAINTING from St. Nick's tomb.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)

Hain and his ancient clan knew this all too well. Their purpose for centuries was to find the artwork stolen by pirates.

INT. CATHOLIC MEETING CHAMBER NIGHT

Watson pleads to a room full of disgruntled church hierarchy.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)

Since Hain couldn't be trusted, I went over his head. But I found out that others knew Santa was real.

The committee opens a door and welcomes in CARDINAL HAIN. Hain points a damning finger at Watson, who is dragged away.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)

That's when the Cardinal had me excommunicated.

PAUSE FLASHBACK INT. POLICE FILE BUILDING BACK ROOM NIGHT

The cop calls to Nick from the front. So Nick reads faster.

FILE ROOM COP (O.C.)

You about finished in there?

RESUME FLASHBACK EXT. PUBLIC CATHEDRAL FRONT STEPS DAY

Watson rants to the public. Everyone just ignores him. So he shakes his angry fists at the crosses atop the steeples.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)

Consumed by the curse and with nowhere to turn, I panicked. The church elite had betrayed me. The Almighty had betrayed me. In my fury, I abandoned God!

EXT. SPOOKY FORREST NIGHT

A dark and foggy forrest. Watson unveils THE PAINTING before 6 fellow priests. They cower.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)

And since God wouldn't help me, I'd have to turn somewhere else.

INT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD BACK ENTRY NIGHT

Watson is sneaking back into his sister's house with THE PAINTING when MONA SEES IT! She cowers!

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
Denying my Maker had a cost. My friends were infected. My loved ones were infected. They'd all die by Christmas without a miracle.

END FLASHBACK INT. POLICE FILE BUILDING BACK ROOM NIGHT

The COP'S coming. So Nick hides in a dark corner to read. But then the lights come on, and next to Nick is a giant, moving POINSETTIA. He gasps, tries to shake it off-It's still there.

FILE ROOM COP (O.C.)
Hey back there. Everything okay?

The blood stained letter in Nick's hand starts dripping. It's being absorbed by the flower's ROOTS. The more blood soaked, the bigger the flower GROWS. Nick grits his teeth, reads on.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
Just one thing could save us. The myrrh from the bones of St. Nick.

MEMORY FLASH: The museum tour guide holds up a MYRRH BOTTLE.

BACK ON: Nick frantically reading.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
This magic oil can kill the demon. But only one man holds myrrh pure enough to do so. Cardinal Hain.

Each PEDAL suddenly grows a CLAW. The flower pulses, now more like a grotesque MOUTH. And the cop is almost there.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
Desperate for my sister, the devil appeared to inspire me. She urged me to make a trade. We'd give Hain the painting...for some myrrh.

MEMORY FLASH: PHOTOS of myrrh flasks at the crime scenes.

BACK ON: Nick frantically reading.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
Hain agreed. Hain sent us 7 flasks. But he warned us the myrrh had secrets he would only exchange for the painting.

MEMORY FLASH: RAY and MONA argue in a hall with the PAINTING.

BACK ON: Nick frantically reading.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)

That was the deal, the secrets of the myrrh, for the painting!

Nick looks up and screams as the flower SWALLOWS his head!

FILE ROOM COP

What the hell's wrong with you man?

The cop GRABS Nick. He whirls. There's no flower. No blood. So Nick says nothing. He just stuffs papers back in the box.

EXT. POLICE FILE BUILDING NIGHT

Once outside, Nick pulls WATSON'S JAIL LETTER from his coat.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)

We met at Mona's on Christmas Eve.
I should have known it was a trap.

Nick squints. The writing gets clumsy. It reads NO TIME. IT'S HERE. WAS FRAMED. FAMILIES WERE KILLED BY A KRAMP-. It ends.

INT. NICK'S CAR NIGHT

Nick races down the highway. On the radio, SYLVIA JOHNSON is heard INTERVIEWING the COPILOT. Nick's barking into his cell.

NICK

-Yes that night. The painting was at the house. That's why Watson was there. His sister convinced him to make a trade.-His sister.-No, a trade with Hain. The hooded monk story was true.-No, Watson was gonna trade the painting for that myrrh shit. Or well, Hain already gave it to him, but there was some secret he needed to know about it.

Nick swerves to miss a REINDEER with tinsel in its antlers, no eyes, and its guts bowtied around its feet. A long TONGUE bashes the side window. When Nick looks back, it's all gone.

NICK (CONT'D)

No I don't think the myrrh's magic!
(Stares at self in mirror)
That voodoo shit is all in their heads. But these guys are crazy and this is ancient, priceless stuff.

Johnson is back from a break. So Nick just hangs up on Sal.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (O.S. OVER RADIO)
Back to the copilot of flight 801.
You said plane evidence was buried?

COPILOT (O.S. OVER RADIO)
Once the passengers were off, the
Feds made us clean the cabin. When
we first landed, there was a blood
trail proving the Summons couple
tumbled 9 rows before getting
sucked out. But when we finished,
the plane looked new. Save for the
hole in the rear.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (O.S. OVER RADIO)
About that. The 2 different holes?

COPILOT (O.S. OVER RADIO)
What do you mean?

NICK
-Two holes in the plane. Ya, ya.

Nick spreads the DIAGRAM of the 747 on the seat. The plane's
LEFT REAR has a big hole marked 10 FT X 9 FT. 9 rows up, a
pair of FAR RIGHT seats are circled and labeled SUMMONS
COUPLE. Just above that is another circle labeled 2 FEET.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (O.S. OVER RADIO)
This diagram shows 2 holes in the
craft. A huge one near the rear of
the plane about 10 feet wide. Then
a smaller one up front next to the
Summons couple about 2 feet wide. I
thought there was only one hole.

COPILOT (O.S. OVER RADIO)
No, you don't get it. The hole at
the tail of the plane labeled 10 ft
by 9 ft? Those are dimensions. But
up at the top where it says 2 feet-
all spelled out? Those are objects.
Crammed under the Summons couple's
seats were severed human feet!

Nick skids to a halt, gawks at "2 FEET" circled on the chart.

INT. PARLEE'S PUB NIGHT

Nick enters, dazed, and sees Sal at a booth watching a roof
TV. On it, SYLVIA JOHNSON is now interviewing CARDINAL HAIN.
Nick sits down, babbling, half gone.

SAL

Hey that pilot was just on! Spilled some crazy info! I think they're going to reopen your parent's case!

NICK

If my folks were murdered they were connected somehow, like on a list.

SAL

Murdered? No, they got sucked out of the plane, man. But experts say the airline is responsible. See, the low seats trapped their feet-

NICK

It was the same group of killers. They planted someone on the plane!

SAL

Nick!...I'm sorry, I can't keep up. Just tell me you didn't come here hoping she'd show. Obviously, Diana is more dangerous than we realized.

NICK

No shit Sal. Why do you think-

SAL

We can't handle this. We need help.

NICK

No cops. This thing goes so high up- Well, speak of the devil.

Nick sees Diana enter the bar behind Sal. She sits under a TV with the INTERVIEW, points to it and winks at Nick. He stands-

SAL

What, she's here? Nick, wait!

Nick makes a beeline for Diana. He storms into her space.

DIANA

You're just in time. They're about to show some crime scene evidence.

NICK

You think that's cute? Are all cops on the payroll or just you, bitch!

Then a BRIGHT FLASH! Nick turns. Sal stands there with a cell phone camera. Nick turns back. Diana's running out of the bar-

NICK (CONT'D)
I wasn't finished with her!

SAL
We needed proof Nick.

NICK
Proof? You just scared her off. Now
that picture isn't worth shit!

SAL
It is if it keeps you out of a
straightjacket!

Sal shows Nick the photo. Nick is in the photo. DIANA IS NOT.

NICK
Where is she? Where is she!

SAL
Tell me, Doctor, why your invisible
friends don't show up in photos.

SLOW MO: Nick goes blank. Every sound fades away but the TV.
Nick looks up at it. Johnson is still drilling Hain. A title
at the screen bottom reads SANTA KILLER: SUSPECT DRAWING.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (ON TV)
But your church kept the suspect
drawings from going public.

CARDINAL HAIN (ON TV)
And your sacrileges display of them
tonight is exactly why I'm here.

Johnson holds up the DRAWING; pencils of a beast like the one
in THE PAINTING. Nick gawks, plows out the door. Sal follows.

NORMAL FRAME RATE: EXT. PARLEE'S BAR NIGHT

Nick rambles, walking around in shock. Sal trails behind him.

NICK
It's not real. This can't be real.

SAL
Are you hitting those adrenaline
shots? Of course Diana isn't real!
I don't know what's real anymore!
The guns! The Warden! Why didn't
you take me to that jail, huh Nick?

Nick feels in his pocket. He pulls out the PRISON LOGO PEN.

NICK

Look! The warden is real! And we know Kafka is real. What about the police files?

SAL

Files? My ID! Damnit Nick! Did you-

NICK

The painting. Is the painting real?

SAL

Please! Will you stop talking about the painting? Because it scares me, okay? I'm scared. I'm so upset that-

NICK

-That what Sal?

SAL

Like you. Nightmares of the monster- That one in the painting. I'm so paranoid that I think someone's following me. It's-it's-it's-

NICK

What the artist wants. To scare us.

Nick nods. Then he sprints away. Sal calls after him. No good-

EXT. THINGS REMEMBERED NIGHT

Nick drives up. He trots to the shop door, sliding on ice and pounds on it. Nothing. He sees THE PAINTING inside. He pops his trunk, grabs a JACK and hurls it through the shop window.

EXT. NICK'S APARTMENT BACK YARD NIGHT

Nick slaps THE PAINTING against a tree, BAT in 1 hand, booze in the other. He chugs the bottle, breaks it on the painting.

NICK (CONT'D)

Hey, Artist. How's this for scared?

He swings overhead. A GOOD hit. A drunken stumble. No damage.

NICK (CONT'D)

At least you're a worthy opponent.

He swings again, hits HARD. He tumbles over. Still no dent.

NICK (CONT'D)

God Damnit!

He stands, FOCUSES. He hits so hard, the bat snaps. Nothing.

NICK (CONT'D)
What the hell?

CUT TO: He comes at the painting with a CHAIN SAW, starts it.

NICK (CONT'D)
Never send a boy to do a man's job.

Nick saws away. A broken clatter. The chain breaks. He gawks.

CUT TO: Nick soaks the painting with GAS. He lights a MATCH.

NICK (CONT'D)
Try breaking this. Ashes to ashes.

Nick turns the painting to flames.

INT. THINGS REMEMBERED MAIN FLOOR NIGHT

Kafka stands inside his broken shop window, talking to a COP.

KAFKA
I know a robbery on this particular evening complicates things. But have your superiors call me hourly.

The cop leaves. Kafka goes to check the cash in the register. Then he sees the REVOLVER is gone. A sound of crunching glass makes Kafka stand fast. Nick is behind him with the gun.

NICK
It won't burn. It won't tear. I'll be damned if it will even scratch.

KAFKA
Your tenacity would damn you anyway-

NICK
(Cocks revolver)
Don't let it damn you as well.

KAFKA
Do the scars on this face suggest a man that's scared of his own gun? You are lucky. What you don't know can't hurt you. For the last time, Treat Pandora's Box as if a myth.

NICK
I saw it! I was 4. On Christmas Eve I saw a family massacred. They said it was a man but you know otherwise-
(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

Now, you're telling me where that painting came from, or God help me.

KAFKA

God has nothing to do with it.

INT. THINGS REMEMBERED MAIN FLOOR NIGHT

Nick and Kafka sit before the broken window, drinking scotch. A Bible and a dusty book labeled LAGENDA AUREA: THE GOLDEN LEGEND are on a stool between them. Kafka's breath is misty.

KAFKA (CONT'D)

Are you a religious man Dr. Nick?

NICK

No.

KAFKA

That reasons. The answers you seek come at a price, a price that likely ends with your own death.

NICK

I don't understand.

KAFKA

That is what has kept you alive every Christmas for 30 years. Your ignorance is your savior. The truth will forever haunt you, Dr. Nick.

(Nick just drinks, waits)

Very well. The painting doesn't simply trouble you because of your childhood. It had the same effect on many before you. At one time it held spellbound millions, which was its purpose when it was created in the 3rd century. It is designed to generate fear. It is a cursed relic Dr. Nick. And it is indestructible.

NICK

I'll bite. Who? Created by Who?

KAFKA

In the 1st century, in Asia, there was a pagan cult that worshiped a goddess the Greeks named "Artemis".

He slides Nick 2 photos. One is the Greek TEMPLE OF ARTEMIS. The other is a BIG VERSION of Kafka's STATUE, a head dressed goddess with eggs for a chest. The MUSEUM FILM showed both.

KAFKA (CONT'D)

Her greatest temple, in Ephesus, is considered one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World."

NICK

Ephesus. That's where Apostle Paul condemned sex out of wedlock.

KAFKA

For you a sin of dire consequences. ...After the year 300, a Christian Bishop of Myra started a movement against Artemis and her followers. The Bishop's name, was Nicholas.

NICK

Saint Nicholas isn't in the Bible.

KAFKA

Mmm. According to history, the Christians won via larger numbers. (Strokes Legenda Aurea) According to legend, it took 1 man. See, Artemis defied her creator by coming to the earth in human form. She was beautiful, the goddess of fertility, spawning disciples that were near immortal themselves. Even the moon followed her eventually. (Kafka leans in) One night, she tried to overthrow Nicholas by appearing to local sea merchants. She seduced them into worshipping her by setting a fire so hot, it burned stone. But Nicholas won the merchants back, by turning their wheat into a never ending supply. So Artemis was shunned as a pagan witch, later identified as the human form...of Satan himself.

Dead silence. Wind coos.

KAFKA (CONT'D)

A fairy tale for some. But this Greek goddess is mentioned in 100's of cultures. Even Christian. Most Bibles call her Artemis of the Ephesians. But some Bibles identify her by her Roman name, Diana.

Despite the cold, Nick is in a blank sweat. Then he snickers, shakes his head. Until Kafka slides the books towards him.

NICK

You can't just print a fake Bible at Kinko's with her name in it? And this one—"Legenda Aurea: The Golden Legend". Dust is a nice touch.

KAFKA

Some say Artemis was burned alive, destroying her human form. Some say she was exiled by God from her own kingdom in Hell. And some say she roams the earth, neither deity nor human, with only damned mortals for company. The goddess of fertility - can only seduce a damned man.

MEMORY FLASH: Diana talks to Nick in the MICROFILM ROOM.

DIANA

I've been burned by plenty of bitter old merchants.

MEMORY FLASH: Diana talks to Nick while lying in his BEDROOM.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Thought I was some kind of goddess until Daddy threw me out.

MEMORY FLASH: Diana talks to Nick in the MICROFILM ROOM.

DIANA (CONT'D)

You're the kind of guy I can lay with.

BACK ON: Nick shaking his head clear. Kafka goes on.

KAFKA

Diana's also a Goddess of art. When her cult was wiped out, she blamed Nicholas. So before she was burned she made a painting that depicted the antithesis of Nick himself.

MEMORY FLASH: The painting. The claws, the teeth, the eyes!

KAFKA (V.O.)(CONT'D)

An evil alter-ego if you will.

MEMORY FLASH: The eerie GREEK SYMBOLS on the painting's back.

KAFKA (V.O.)(CONT'D)

On the back, she wrote some words.

MEMORY FLASH: MUSEUM PAINTING of monks burning a BLONDE LADY.

KAFKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

As the flames rose around her, she chanted, "Be damned and behold the Devil's Image, Be cursed and behold the Devil's Artwork, Be fearful and behold the Devil's Monster, Be Sin-

BACK ON: Nick finishes Kafka's sentence.

NICK

-Sinful and Behold The Devils Spawn

KAFKA

A curse, aimed to ruin the day Nick loved most. Christ's Birthday. Those who looked upon the painting soon felt a contagious paranoia.

(Leans in)

And every Christmas thereafter, It rose from the earth's coldest regions-to kill all who feared it.

NICK

Be fearful-and behold the monster.

KAFKA

One that damns its victims to Hell.

NICK

The monster damns its victims? How-

KAFKA

Diana told me. After I watched your parents die. 30 years ago tonight-

FLASHBACK INT. AIRPLANE CABIN NIGHT

Scarless YOUNG KAFKA sits lazy-eyed by TOM and CAROL SUMMONS.

KAFKA (V.O.)

My fear of flying had been killed by a bottle of prescription Benzo.

Then an IMPLOSION! The plane rocks into darkness. Most people stick their heads down. Calmer Kafka grabs for his air mask.

KAFKA (V.O.)

Leave it to a drugged man to follow protocol in a crashing plane. Since only I was calm, only I saw it.

Through the haze, a huge shadowed figure approaches Kafka.

KAFKA (V.O.)

It was so obese, yet dextrous like
a villain in a fairy tale. Paying
no mind to me, it had a mission.

The figure passes him by. Nick's folks are yanked up like rag dolls. Blood hits the windows. The lights flicker. Then Kafka is alone. Behind him is a huge hole. No figure. No parents.

PAUSE FLASHBACK INT. THINGS REMEMBERED MAIN FLOOR NIGHT

Nick stares at Kafka in disbelief.

KAFKA

Who would ever believe such a story
coming from a drug induced atheist?

NICK

Atheist? Be Damned and Behold the-

KAFKA

-Devil's Image. An image indeed.

RESUME FLASHBACK EXT. PUBLIC PARK DAY

YOUNG KAFKA builds a snowman with his wife and 2 girls. DIANA (young as always) sits on a bench. She gives him a once over.

KAFKA (V.O.)

A beautiful stranger that believed
me, when my own wife would not.

INT. YOUNG KAFKA'S FIRST SHOP DAY

YOUNG KAFKA sweeps his first shop. He sees DIANA working across the street, at a store labeled ART YA MISS. She waves.

KAFKA (V.O.)

What a surprise she started working
next door. As my paranoia grew, she
was the only one to console me.

INT. HOTEL ROOM NIGHT

YOUNG KAFKA stares in a mirror. Diana walks up to him, naked. She strokes him. He stops her, shaking his head. They argue.

KAFKA (V.O.)

But after a year of risky flirting,
my conscience won me over. It was
then Diana showed her true colors.

WIND blows! Her eyes go RED! She screams unlike any human!

INT. ART YA MISS PAINTINGS DAY

TENSE KAFKA sees his wife stare at something in Diana's shop.

KAFKA (V.O.)
 The Devil doesn't take denial well.
 Christmas week, my wife saw an odd
 painting across the street. Workers
 said they put it out-just for her.

INT. YOUNG KAFKA'S HOUSE KITCHEN NIGHT

YOUNG KAFKA looks paranoid as he eats dinner with his family.

KAFKA (V.O.)
 She also had dreams I was slain in
 our bed with a young blonde woman.

INT. ART YA MISS PAINTINGS DAY

YOUNG KAFKA stands in Diana's store staring at THE PAINTING.

KAFKA (V.O.)
 The killer she said, was a monster.

INT. YOUNG KAFKA'S HOUSE MASTER BEDROOM NIGHT

Young Kafka sits in bed, rocking his wife.

KAFKA (V.O.)
 By Christmas Eve, she was convinced
 I was having an affair.

INT. ART YA MISS PAINTINGS NIGHT

Kafka breaks in with an axe, chops at THE PAINTING. Nothing.

KAFKA (V.O.)
 My present to her was to make sure
 she knew otherwise. But "Be Cursed
 and Behold the Devil's Artwork."

EXT. YOUNG KAFKA'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY

Kafka arrives in his car with the pristine painting. He sees a ruckus through a bloody window of his house and runs in.

KAFKA (V.O.)
 I think the demon was proud to be
 the catalyst that connected the
 dots for me.

(MORE)

KAFKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The girl, the painting- the famous
Watson murders-it wanted to see my
face when the lights came on.
That's why it waited to kill my
family. It waited-until I was home.

END FLASHBACK INT. THINGS REMEMBERED MAIN FLOOR NIGHT

A terrible realization in Nick. He slowly points at Kafka.

KAFKA

Even the media couldn't connect
Watson to the 8th family, Dr. Nick.

NICK

Impossible! You aren't the father
of that 8th family. Every member of
every family died, even the 8th!

KAFKA

You think you're the only man who
ever changed his name!

Kafka yanks up a pant's leg revealing a PROSTHETIC FOOT! Nick
leaps up, gun shaking. Kafka stands. He walks Nick backwards.

NICK

Watson escaped. He killed your
family. His blood was at the house.

KAFKA

No, the beast was simply untidy at
the jail. When it came for us, it
still had Watson all over it. You
and I have but one truth. Both our
families sleep in Hell Dr. Summons.

NICK

Okay enough. You can just shut up.

KAFKA

But you don't have to join them.
You can survive. If you try to run,
your fear will only seal your doom.
Rather let me guide you-like I have
since you first mentioned Diana.

MEMORY FLASH: Kafka SMILES at Nick outside the shop window.

BACK ON: Nick and Kafka.

KAFKA (CONT'D)

I hid the painting from mankind for
decades.

(MORE)

KAFKA (CONT'D)

But now that plane crash story is out. It's only a matter of time before the beast is revived. Why lose my chance to another man? So you and I shall slay our demons.

NICK

Enough I said!

KAFKA

My wife died thinking I was untrue. And before it gutted her, before it sawed the limbs off my 2 girls, it crippled me so I could watch! That will be its undoing. You see, once they died, I no longer felt fear-
(Clinches his fist)
-But rage! And when the beast saw I was no longer afraid, it left! For fun! Chaining me to my anger! No it won't be back for me. But in your eyes I see it will be back for you.

Nick's terror seems to prevent his holding the gun straight.

KAFKA (CONT'D)

Time's short. It will come after 12-
And the gun will do you no good.

NICK

Oh the book says ya can't shoot it? You win. I'm scared okay. So quit playing or I really will shoot you.

KAFKA

You can't shoot me.

Nick wobbles. HIS SIGHT BLURS. He squints at his shot glass.

NICK

What the hell did I drink?

No reply. He fires a DRY CLICK. He falls. Kafka gets the gun.

KAFKA

See? I never wanted to hurt you. I only wanted you to be scared. I chose you because we are comrades. Two victims that have both seen the Krampus and lived.

(Kafka grabs Nick's face)

But only you made love to Diana. If the curse isn't lifted, she can exploit that sin.

(MORE)

KAFKA (CONT'D)

We must act tonight. Please pardon
I laced your glass, but I needed
you as bait.

Kafka pulls out a MYRRH FLASK. Nick sees it, groans in pain.

KAFKA (CONT'D)

I can end this, Doctor. This magic
oil protects the priests who know
the truth. It is the only thing
that can kill it. And kill it I
shall when it comes for you.

(Kafka grips Nick's hair)

But the church has warned me there
is a secret to this oil that I
first need to know. They'll give me
that secret as long as I make them
a trade. What they want is the
painting and I no longer have it.

(Slaps Nick awake)

If they find that painting, they
will bury it in St. Nick's tomb.
But they have tried this before and
still the curse survived. My way
the monster will be destroyed. My
way is our only chance for revenge!

(Forcefully shakes Nick)

I'm meeting Cardinal Hain at the
old Catholic church in a few
minutes. Where is the painting!

Suddenly LIZZY runs up behind Kafka in a panic. Kafka whirls.

LIZZY

Mr. Kafka! Please help! Someone is
after...me. What are you doing?

KAFKA

He's sick child. He needs our help.

Lizzy backs up. She turns and yells. Kafka lunges at her. But
Nick puts a foot out and trips him. She gets the STATUE and
hits Kafka across his scarred FACE. He stumbles. A mad smile.

KAFKA (CONT'D)

You would have done better to hit
the side that was living dear.

She runs out the window, but hits the ICE, lands on her HEAD-
Kafka gets an AXE from the bar. He chases. Nick drags behind.

EXT. THINGS REMEMBERED FRONT SIDEWALK NIGHT

Nick flops out the window, crawls toward the horror; Lizzy yells, slipping and sliding, as Kafka closes on her. Nick tries and tries, but can't reach her in time. He's nowhere close when the whacking starts. He groans, changes direction.

As the massacre continues, Nick drags himself to his CAR. Lizzy's screams die away as he crawls behind the car out of sight. Kafka drags a blood-trailing heap back to the shop.

Nick opens a rear door, gets the ADRENALINE off the seat. He extracts liquid from a vial with a syringe and gives himself a SHOT through his pants. He slowly livens. When he stands...

Kafka is CLOSE, approaching with the axe. Nick hobbles to the drivers' door and falls halfway in. He fumbles the keys into the ignition. He turns it as Kafka smashes a passenger window-

Nick skids off, one hand on the gas, one hand on the wheel, barely pulling himself in. Blood soaked Kafka is seething.

EXT. OLD CATHOLIC CHURCH NIGHT

Nick's car bounces onto the curb. He gets out, limps to the trunk, removes THE PAINTING, hobbles through the gates. He limps across the spooky courtyard, pounds on the huge doors.

NICK

Hain! I've got what you want! Give
me the myrrh or you'll never see
the painting again! Do you hear me!

He looks to the windows above. All dark. He limps around the church, passing through graveyard like shadows cast by trees.

Then, as if laying in wait, robbed silhouettes emerge from the shadows like hungry bugs. Nick never sees them until they converge. Then he is on the ground, being pounded and kicked.

Hooded faces chant in cult-like unison. The painting rises up and out of the crowd. Then the MONKS run off, dropping to the ground a MYRRH FLASK. Nick sees it. Delirious he has a sudden-

MEMORY FLASH: Watson grabs at Cardinal Hain in the COURTROOM.

CHAD WATSON

You had to keep me down, didn't
you, You had to hold me back so you
could dump it all on me!

BACK ON: Nick grabs the myrrh. He yells to the fleeing monks.

NICK

Is this how Watson felt! Wait! The
secret! I need the secret damn you!

No reply. He stands and looks up. A window is now lit. HAIN peers down at him like its judgement day. The light goes off.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE NIGHT

Nick hurries into the dark and spooky office. He pulls the BIBLE from the trash and opens it, thumbing the index.

NICK (CONT'D)

They literally kept you down, huh Watson? They physically held you back. Tell me you survived because they dumped it all on you. The myrrh that is.

He flips to EPHESIANS and reads aloud to himself.

NICK (CONT'D)

They cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the city was. No-No-Where's the myrrh!

A DEEP MALE LAUGH. Nick turns. Diana sits in the dark wearing a HEAD DRESS and CLOAK like the STATUE OF ARTEMIS. She stands and approaches with dead skin and black veins. Her eyes and teeth glow, accenting a void stare. She points to the BIBLE.

DIANA

Are you a religious man Nick? I say no. You were tested too many times. -Via my loyal priest Cardinal Hain.

She plays the answering machine. It's her NORMAL VOICE.

MACHINE (V.O. OVER SPEAKER)

Finally, I found you. My name is D. Artemis. I was told by my priest you were the doctor for me. And I was curious if you could see me?

DIANA

(Deep voice again)
My priest was right. You are the doctor for me. For you can see me. I knew you'd get my painting back.

Nick lugs a chair at her! Hits nothing! It breaks on a wall.

NICK

Hain and his monks-Working for you!

DIANA

The monks are pawns. Conspiracies are easier when soldiers are blind.

NICK

Watson knew Hain was rotten!

DIANA

Watson was used to find my illusive artwork. The monks were used. The entire church was used. The Vatican deserves it for masking the truth with centuries of candy and toys.

NICK

The church was protecting mankind!

DIANA

Let's weigh how the church protects mankind. Take Watson for instance.

FLASHBACK EXT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD BACK YARD NIGHT

Bloody LITTLE NICK stares out a window as MONKS hold WATSON down in the snow. They dump MYRRH out of FLASKS onto Watson.

DIANA (V.O.)

As my beast killed his family, they dumped myrrh on him so he'd live.

END FLASHBACK: Back on Hellish Diana.

DIANA

That way they'd have someone to pin the murders on. And speaking of murder, they let 7 families die to keep my curse under wraps.

NICK

Liar! The church gave them myrrh! I saw photos. The flasks were there!

MEMORY FLASH: PHOTOS of MYRRH FLASKS at each crime scene.

BACK ON: Nick shakes the FLASK in his hand. But Diana growls:

DIANA

Ah, but the myrrh has a secret. The church lots of secrets, which opens my next point. Your church staged every recent suicide in the city.

MEMORY FLASH: Sylvia Johnson on the TV.

SYLVIA JOHNSON

Now on to the recent epidemic of Christmas related suicides.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA

Only they weren't suicides. They were murders. They murdered every art lover who visited Kafka's shop.

MEMORY FLASH: Lizzy and Nick standing before the painting.

LIZZY

Everyone else will want back here.

NICK

What do you mean "Everyone"?

LIZZY

Everyone.

BACK ON: Nick gawks in response to Diana.

DIANA

They were all infected by the painting, so the church had to do something. Think how many more people they'll kill once Hain shows the painting on national TV.

NICK

Witch! You talk! You're a witch who tried to overthrow a patron saint!

DIANA

I am Lucifer! Thrown from Heaven and handed the name of a woman!

MEMORY FLASH: Kafka slides the BIBLE over the table to NICK.

KAFKA (V.O.)

-A pagan witch, later identified as the human form of Satan himself.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA

The Greeks worshiped me as a deity!

MEMORY FLASH: The MUSEUM FILM showing the STATUE OF ARTEMIS.

KAFKA (V.O.)

-A pagan cult that worshiped a goddess the Greeks named Artemis.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA

Why bow to a mortal like Nicholas!
A fly who stole my Ephesian empire!

MEMORY FLASH: The MUSEUM FILM showing the EPHESIAN TEMPLE.

KAFKA (V.O.)

According to legend, it took 1 man.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA

God helped a human take my powers
because I took human form. Maybe if
Nick had been more than a man, he
could have stopped my curse. Maybe
if Nick was now such a saint, he'd
save devoted priests like Watson.
Yet all true cowards follow God's
rules, so instead Watson's in Hell.

NICK

It's your curse! Your demon!

DIANA

No your demon! And allow me to tell
you why. You and Watson, like all
men, were easily manipulated. But
not before you made a choice.
That's why when Watson took the
painting and ran, Hain had him
excommunicated. Shunned by his God.

MEMORY FLASH: Hain throws Watson out of the CATHOLIC MEETING!

DIANA (V.O.)

I knew by experience how he'd react-

MEMORY FLASH: Watson shakes his hands at the CHURCH STEEPLES.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)

In my fury, I abandoned God!

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA

Technically it's by our own hand we
are damned. And what has your demon
taught you about being damned Nick?

NICK

-Jesus. Be damned...and behold the
Devils Image. Watson could see you!

MEMORY FLASH: Watson's bloody letter as we hear an echo.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
Desperate for my sister, the devil
appeared to inspire me. She urged
me to make a trade.

FLASHBACK: In the Weller house, WATSON preys before a family photo. A sudden WIND! He turns to see DIANA behind him!

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
Desperate for my sister, the devil
appeared to inspire me. She urged
me to make a trade.

END FLASHBACK: Back on shocked Nick. He points at Diana.

NICK
You convinced Watson to go to the
house. Not his sister. It was you!

DIANA
Of course it was me. The myrrh was
the perfect bait. And who else
could Watson bargain with? I'm
harmless! Yes I'm Satan-But he also
knew via research, I was powerless!

MEMORY FLASH: Kafka drinks scotch with Nick at the shop.

KAFKA
-Neither deity nor human.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA
On the contrary, however, Hain was
still a physical threat. So I acted
as mediator. First, Watson insisted
that Hain send the myrrh from afar.

MEMORY FLASH: Watson's bloody letter as we hear an echo.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
Hain sent us 7 flasks.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA
In return, Watson agreed to leave
the painting in his sister's back
yard on Christmas Eve.

MEMORY FLASH: MONA and RAY argue in a hall with the painting.

MONA (O.C. THROUGH DOOR)
They insisted that Chad leave it
out back. After midnight.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA
Once Hain picked the painting up,
he'd deliver the myrrh's secret.

MEMORY FLASH: Watson's bloody letter as we hear an echo.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
That was the deal, the secrets of
the myrrh, for the painting!

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA
Hain kept his word. That secret was
delivered. All 7 families had it.
(A huge laugh)
-They just never knew it!

MEMORY FLASH: THE PAINTING is yanked from Watson in the YARD.

CHAD WATSON (V.O.)
I should have known it was a trap.

BACK ON: Furious Nick.

NICK
Big shock! Hain played the families!

DIANA
Why would Hain want the families to
die? That kept my curse from
spreading.
(Snickers)
No, the church played the families.
Hain just did what the church told
him to. That way he was in charge
of the painting. And also, Hain's
fool monks would follow his every
command. For I had a master plan-

FLASHBACK EXT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD BACK YARD NIGHT

The monks poor MYRRH on Watson as HAIN snatches the PAINTING.
Then, a ruckus inside the house! Hain and his monks rush in.

DIANA (V.O.)
See the church was so desperate to
hide the truth from the world, so
(MORE)

DIANA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 desperate to frame Watson—they used
 most of the myrrh they had on him.

INT. WELLER HOUSEHOLD FAMILY ROOM NIGHT

A MASSIVE SHADOW fights 2 SMALL SHADOWS, dancing across the walls. The MONKS bust in with ready MYRRH FLASKS. But they notice LITTLE NICK UNDER THE TREE. The monks look to HAIN behind them! He points to Nick. The monks dump myrrh on NICK.

DIANA (V.O.)
 The fools could have killed the
 Krampus with what they had left.
 Until by surprise they found a tiny
 boy there. Alas there just wasn't
 enough myrrh left to both kill the
 monster, and save you!

END FLASHBACK: Hellish Diana feigns disappointment, saying:

DIANA
 At least Hain got the painting. So
 his decision was never questioned.

NICK
 Hain saved me?

DIANA
 You think you lived by coincidence?
 Hain saved you more than once.

MEMORY FLASH: HAIN saves LITTLE NICK from a LIMO WITH FLAGS.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA (CONT'D)
 Hain also made your aunt drink
 herself into religious hatred.

MEMORY FLASH: HAIN and his MONKS make NICK'S AUNT gulp BOOZE.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA (CONT'D)
 And he hounded you both, over and
 over— Just so you Nick, would lose
 your faith.

MEMORY FLASH: Nick in his car, scoffing at the nearby CHURCH.

NICK
 I wasn't like this before she died.

BACK ON: Nick, his jaw dropping.

NICK (CONT'D)

All of that? Planned? All of Hain's badgering? He drove my aunt to her death just so I'd deny God! Why me! I've done nothing!

DIANA

You've done everything! Sinning by wrote and Godless by heart. Thirty years I waited. But at long last, you made your decision!

MEMORY FLASH: Nick and Sal wade through the CHURCH PARADE.

NICK

I'm not agnostic. I'm an atheist.

BACK ON: Diana. She makes Nick back up. He FALLS over a CHAIR-

DIANA

From the night we first met years ago, you and I were meant to be.

MEMORY FLASH: Diana stands over Nick, suddenly BEAUTIFUL... wearing the ELF LADY outfit in the line for the MALL SANTA on that fateful night from his childhood! She turns from ADULT NICK and points over to LITTLE NICK in line with his FOLKS.

DIANA (CONT'D)

That very night, Santa was coming! So when I heard your folks say they were leaving you behind, I knew you were the one I'd been waiting for.

TOM

Nick is just too young for church-

ELF DIANA looks back to ADULT NICK on the ground.

DIANA

No church? That means no baptism!

BACK ON: NICK's back in his OFFICE. DIANA looks HORRID again.

DIANA (CONT'D)

First no baptism? Now no faith? Sounds to me like a damned man. One who has seen the Krampus and lived.

MEMORY FLASH: At the MUSEUM, the TOUR GUIDE says:

TOUR GUIDE

Those who see the Krampus and live become ripe with the seeds of sin.

BACK ON: Diana reveals a ROTTEN APPLE, bites it, gets a seed.

DIANA

Your seeds became sinful the night
you saw my beast. But I had to wait
until you came of age a damned man.
Only then, could you and I mate!

MEMORY FLASH: Diana teases Nick in the CHRISTMAS TREE LOT.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Maybe I just wanted to fuck you.

BACK ON: Shocked Nick. Hellish Diana speaks with fervor!

DIANA (CONT'D)

Not since the Krampus began has a
victim lived long enough for me to
seduce. Their fear always brought
the beast back to kill them.

(Slowly points at Nick)

But I saw to it that you survived.
Do you want to know how? Hain's
psychiatrists erased your memory!

MEMORY FLASH: The DOCTOR shines a PEN LIGHT down at Nick.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA (CONT'D)

You believed the monster was just
your imagination. So you lived to
be my fertile lover. I needed you
-To have sex out of wedlock.

MEMORY FLASH: Kafka at the SHOP tells Nick:

KAFKA

For you a sin of dire consequences.

BACK ON: Nick with Diana. Nick shakes his head.

NICK

No. No. Be sinful and behold-

DIANA

The Devil's Spawn. Even Kafka
didn't make that mistake.

MEMORY FLASH: YOUNG KAFKA in a HOTEL pushes naked Diana away.

BACK ON: Hellish Diana.

DIANA (CONT'D)
 Don't fret, Nick. You won't live long enough to see the world get taken over by our children!

NICK
 Noooooooooo! It's not true!

DIANA
 Yes, their human side helps them to interact with anyone. While their demon side makes them immortal.

MEMORY FLASH: Nick and Diana in bed:

DIANA (CONT'D)
 I need immortal kids so I can take over the planet.

BACK ON: Nick spins with rage. Then he laughs hysterically.

NICK
 This isn't real! I'm crazy and you're nothing! You're a shrink's nightmare! In a hospital bed!

Diana, obviously insulted, gives a pompous, brooding sneer.

DIANA
 Then I won't dare you to save the world. You want to end all this? The curse? Our children? All you have to do -is kill the Krampus.

Nick grips the MYRRH and BIBLE to his chest. Diana smiles.

DIANA (CONT'D)
 The Book won't help you. But maybe the myrrh flask will. Because guess what? You already have the secret.

Nick looks quizzical as Diana RUBS HER TUMMY.

DIANA (CONT'D)
 But I'll bet you fail. And my new Ephesian leaders will tell endless stories, of the night their father was killed by a monster....
 So sayeth the goddess of fertility!

She lifts her cloak. Like THE STATUE, she has a stomach of weeping EGGS. Wind blows! Her eyes go red!-Nick spies a CLOCK on a wall reading 11:00. As he runs off, Diana shouts to him:

DIANA (CONT'D)

Santa can't wait to see you again!

MONTAGE INT. NICK'S PARENT'S HOUSE NIGHT

Nick kicks the front door open, arms full of EQUIPMENT. He hammers WOOD PLANKS across all the doors and windows. Then he lights the FIREPLACE. The room is completely boarded up.

Nick spots a set of KITCHEN KNIVES. He stabs one into the MANTEL above the fireplace, one into a family room TABLE, and one into the kitchen COUNTER. Then he strings a PHONE CHORD around some chair legs and yanks it taught like a TRIP WIRE.

INT. NICK'S PARENT'S HOUSE KITCHEN AND FAMILY ROOM NIGHT

Nick drags a MATTRESS into the KITCHEN, turns it on it's side facing the FAMILY ROOM. He chunks a GAS CAN into the other room before the fireplace. He grabs a SHOTGUN and gets behind the mattress. He dumps a box of SLUGS, loads 2 into the gun.

Nick AIMS at the gas can. He nods, sits back. Silence.

He pulls the MYRRH FLASK from his coat. He stares at it a bit, then pockets it again. The wind outside howls. Silence. A SUDDEN BEEP scares him. He pulls out his CELL. The screen reads SAL. He turns the ringer OFF and lays the phone down.

The DISPLAY reads 12:32 A.M.

NICK

Hope I can still call you tomorrow.

DISSOLVE TO:

The phone DISPLAY now reads 3:08 A.M. It lists 2 VOICE MAILS. Nick has the gun lazily propped on mattress. The coals in the fire are dwindling. His eyes are HEAVY. Closing. Opening. Closing. Closed. Then a TINY NOISE. One eye creeps back open.

From NICK'S POV he sees the kitchen, his gun barrel, and the dark family room beyond. His view creeps left. Nothing. Right. Nothing. Up to the ceiling. Then back down. He waits.

Suddenly a SHADOW flies across the room! Nick yanks backwards into the wall, discharging the gun and taking a corner off the mattress. He levels the gun, waiting to shoot something. The shadow comes again! He grips the gun, readies the trigger-

And again the shadow. This time along with that TINY NOISE.

Nick looks about. Between nailed boards, he sees part of the outside roof. SNOW innocently glops off the side. He yells! A mad tantrum. He kicks at the mattress. Then he slinks into a

corner. He drops the gun, slides down into a ball. He sobs.

NICK (CONT'D)

Nooo. I'm not crazy. I'm nooot.

EXT. NICK'S PARENT'S HOUSE NIGHT

Nick creeps outside, gun ready. All he sees is a full moon.

NICK (CONT'D)

Bright enough to paint by.

Then he sees he left his CAR LIGHTS ON. He goes to the car, gets in, and angrily turns the engine. It's dead. He sighs.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD NIGHT

Nick walks, his folk's house in BG. He hits "SAL" on his CELL-

SAL'S VOICE GREETING (V.O. OVER PHONE)

Ya got Sal Kurban. Leave a message.

NICK

You win Sal. I think some very bad things happened tonight. We have to call the cops. I'm afraid to go in alone. So come pick me up. I'm at my folks. My car's dead. I'm hoping a gas station is open. I'm on that dirt road. Ya can't miss me-I'm the crazy guy that's scared of Santa.

Nick hangs up. He hits VOICEMAIL. A ROBOT chimes "12:32 A.M."

SAL'S MESSAGE (V.O. OVER PHONE)

Nick, where the hell are you? I called the cops, the hospitals. Man Kafka's shop got trashed. Someone burned down that old church. People have been murdered for God's sake. Cops are looking for you. Call me!

NICK

Oh no.

A ROBOT chimes 2:32 A.M. Then, Sal's voice? Panting. Gasping.

-And another voice, making odd grunts. Nick looks about. Corn stalks fill one side of the road. Woods fill the other. Much could be hiding. The road ahead is endless. His house behind him is far away. The gasping stops. A shuffle on the phone.

NICK (CONT'D)

Sal?

WHEEZING (V.O. OVER PHONE)

Hooooooooo.

It clicks dead. Nick freezes. Slowly he pulls the FLASK out. He uncaps it, holds a hand out for the pouring oil. Nothing.

NICK

The secret. All the flasks they gave the families were empty.

Then Nick is distracted by a MOTHER on a distant farm lawn. She is in a robe, smoking. Her toddler DAUGHTER wanders out.

MOTHER

No sweetie. It's still night time.

As her mom carries her back in, the child points to the moon.

LITTLE GIRL

Mommy! I see him! Santa's coming!

MOTHER

Of course he's coming dear.

The mom goes in. Nick slowly turns and looks up. Across the moon is a silhouette of a VEHICLE led by a REIGNED ANIMAL.

He runs! Racing towards his folk's house! The vehicle closes. It's a SLEIGH MADE OF THORNS towed by a wild creature! 2 huge wings! 8 galloping legs! As Nick leaps the front steps of his parent's house, a THUD on the roof rattles the entire frame.

INT. NICK'S PARENT'S HOUSE FAMILY ROOM AND KITCHEN NIGHT

Nick hits the floor as if thrown in. He gets up, slams the door, puts a SLAT under the knob. He runs behind the mattress and gets the GUN. He aims at the GAS CAN before the fireplace- Nick waits. He breathes. He waits. Then, from the chimney:

WHEEZING (O.C. FROM CHIMNEY)

Hooooooooo. Hooooooooo.

A HUGE FINGER curls out of the fireplace-with a CLAW as long as a writing pen. Then more claws creep into view, curling upward. They stroke the KNIFE Nick stabbed into the mantel.

WHEEZING (CONT'D)

(Almost a laugh)

Hnnnn-hnn-hnn-hnnnnn. Hooooooooo.

The knife is suddenly yanked into the fireplace out of sight. Nick jolts, tries to keep aim. But no targets. Then, a WOOSH and a CLANG! A second later comes a TRICKLING. A liquid? Nick looks down. The knife is stuck in the gas can causing a LEAK.

Something tumbles out of the fireplace! It's a blood soaked BURLAP SACK. Something in it moves. Something moaning. It's squirming out of the sack...And trying to call Nick's name.

SACK VOICE

Niiiccchh. Uhhhhh. Niiickchhh.

Nick's mouth drops. He lowers the gun. Trying to wriggle from the sack, despite no arms, no legs, and no tongue, is Sal.

NICK

Ssss-sss-Sal?

Then the gas puddle reaches a coal in the dying fire. A cloud of flames ignites, engulfing Sal within. Sal screams, as does Nick. Nick bolts from the mattress, rushes for his friend.

Just as Nick reaches him, A GIANT of a MONSTER emerges from the chimney, slamming a massive HOOF down on the burning Sal. Through a gaping set of CHESHIRE CAT TEETH, this soot-black demon spews a hiss of glee, shocking Nick off his feet.

The beast towers over Nick, details scarce, but the hellish flames demonstrate a massive silhouette. It bellows!

MONSTER

Hoooooooooooooooooooo!

Nick seems frozen by the image, but sees Sal struggling. So he leaps up, aims the gun at the beast and fires. The monster takes it in stride. Nick looks at his dying friend, gives a battle cry, and shoots barrel 2 into it's face.

As it's head flies back, Nick leaps onto the beast like a chimp. He beats. He punches. The creature just lifts him up for a better look.

The MONSTER'S EYES meet NICK'S EYES in twisted admiration.

With one hand, the monster throws Nick across the room over the MATTRESS. As he lands, the butt of the shotgun smashes his teeth apart. Dazed, he gets to his haunches. Meanwhile, the beast stomps on what remains of Sal over and over.

From nowhere the beast produces a rusty ICE HOOK, and digs it deep into Sal's leg stumps. Sal howls in pain as Nick rushes to RELOAD. Nick aims at the monster. But it just hooks Sal again, then again, waiting. When Nick doesn't fire....

The beast raises a WRY EYEBROW, daring Nick's next move.

Nick tears up, lowers the gun at Sal. The monster grins with excitement. Nick pulls the trigger, ending Sal's misery.

The monster tosses what's left of Sal's body aside like it's of no more consequence.

MONSTER (CONT'D)

Hnnnn Hnnnn Hnnnn Hooooooo.

Nick nods. He understands the challenge. He pulls the KNIFE from the kitchen COUNTER. Then he runs at the creature, gun in one hand, knife in the other, firing as he goes. When he reaches the target, he stabs and stabs, but to no avail.

He's slung across the family room into a CHAIR, onto his head-

Nick tries to get his wares. Standing over him is the family room TABLE and the KNIFE he earlier stabbed into it. He reaches up for the knife. But it's GONE. Just then the blade comes down into Nick's palm, TACKING his hand to the table.

Nick screeches, falls back to the floor, pulling the table with him. He tugs at the knife, tries to jar it loose. No good. Then he spots the shotgun on the kitchen floor. He crawls that way, dragging the attached table as he goes.

The monster pulls another sack from the chimney and casually unloads weapons from ages passed. It tests its tools like a surgeon. Meanwhile Nick reaches the gun, and with one hand tries to reload. The monster approaches with some SHEARS.

It playfully cuts the TRIP WIRE on the floor. Then it closes.

Nick swings the gun around. The monster rushes in, knocks it away, clipping at Nick with the shears. Nick tumbles over, wedging the table between them and kicks backward into a wall-

Nick is trapped, the creature pounding the shears into the table, through the table, around the table, occasionally stabbing Nick's arms and legs. The shield is whittling rapidly-

With each new hole, the monster's glee increases, with more grunts and snorts behind the jabs. When almost no table is left, Nick kicks at the beast's face, doing no good at all.

As a last resort, Nick grasps the shears as they sink into his side, holding them fast so the monster can't pull them out again. Instead the monster leans in, twists the shears around. As Nick screeches, the monster bellows in his face.

MONSTER (CONT'D)

Hooooooo!

The beast hoists Nick up by his feet, remaining table and all- It fits one of Nick's ankles between the shear blades.

Half coherent and upside down, Nick grabs for anything he can find as a deterrent. The table tacked to him has a LOOSE LEG. He yanks it off and thrusts it into the beast's massive thigh-

The monster reacts more out of surprise than pain. It pulls the table leg from its thigh and uprights Nick, holding him by his free hand. Nick dangles and kicks as the beast lifts the shears and clips off two of his fingers.

Nick howls as he's hurled towards the fireplace. He lands face-first amidst the FLAMES.

Nick flops from the furnace, rolling around, the facial burns sizzling. He tries to crawl with one arm to who knows where. The monster stomps up, turns him over, smashes a HOOF down on his chest. It looms over him, mostly shadowed, just waiting.

NICK

No, no, pleeease. No-

All at once the monster shoves its head into the LIGHT!

The GREEN EYES, lifeless in the painting, now dilate with blood shot anticipation. The TEETH pry its lips apart like a Venus fly trap, causing black, oozing saliva to pour onto Nick's face.

The BLOOD SOAKED HAIR, thick and slimy, is covered with WHITE MOLD at the crown and ends. Mist even rises and frost crackles as a BEARD OF ICE curls into a smile-

And like THE PAINTING, the monster's rear hand holds a BURLAP SACK, it's other hand REACHES towards Nick, and through the boards on the window can be seen a FULL MOON. It's Nick's worst nightmare come true. Nick screams. He screams!

The monster giggles, pulls a GOLDEN BRANCH from the sack. He lifts it, grabs Nick's ankle. All lost, Nick spits with fury.

NICK (CONT'D)

You think after 30 years that this
is the end?! Kafka will avenge me!
You can't run! Either Kafka-

The monster pauses, tilts his head, smiles even bigger.

NICK (CONT'D)

-Or God!

With a victorious growl, the monster swings the branch down.

IN BLACK: Silence. And then:

SYLVIA JOHNSON (V.O.)
 I'm addressing Nicholas Summons.
 It's been a year. You need to wake
 up. There's nowhere to run tonight.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM NIGHT

On a TV screen, SYLVIA JOHNSON is interviewing the MAYOR.

MAYOR (ON TV)
 We already addressed this last year
 Sylvia. Nick Summons was crazy.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (ON TV)
 Crazy enough to cut off his own
 foot Mr. Mayor?

MAYOR (ON TV)
 He was crazy enough to make a
 copycat murder of his best friend.

SYLVIA JOHNSON (ON TV)
 A Santa Suit Killer copycat would
 not have murdered Lizzy the shop
 clerk with an axe. It's not the MO.

MAYOR (ON TV)
 Who else but Nick Summons would
 chop that girl up, then set fire to
 an old catholic church?

A MATCH STRIKES to light before the TV. KAFKA is in a chair,
 about to smoke a PIPE. NICK lies next to him, unconscious,
 attached to slowly BEEPING MACHINES. Nick is missing a foot,
 and his face is as scarred as Kafka's. A young NURSE enters.

NURSE
 Smoking is bad for you, Mr. Kafka.

Kafka peers over at THE PAINTING. It is covered and faced
 against a wall. He rubs CHAR off it's perfectly intact frame.

KAFKA
 It has afforded me some things.

NURSE
 Well we found some abandoned babies
 outside tonight. Usually we locate
 the parents, but our security
 cameras aren't working right.

(Shakes her head confused)
 All you see on the recording is a
 weird blur dropping the babies off.

(MORE)

NURSE (CONT'D)

Anyway they're next door in 666, so you'll have to put out the pipe.

KAFKA

Ah yes. The little blonde rascals. What kind of devil would do that?

The creepy tone makes the nurse study his scars, then Nick's.

NURSE

I still can't believe you're paying his bills after everything he did. He murdered one of your employees.

Kafka muses at footage of the GOTHIC CHURCH burning. Titles below it read LAST CHRISTMAS EVE. Then he eyes the PAINTING.

KAFKA

We all have our burning incentives to get back what is stolen by life. I'm no exception. Neither is he.

Kafka then looks over at NICK.

KAFKA (CONT'D)

But living without fear is how we save ourselves. In my experience, vengeance is the devil's curse.

On the TV the Mayor says:

MAYOR (ON TV)

Nick Summons confessed in his voice mail. It led police right to him.

The TV reads SUMMONS VOICE MAIL. CAPTIONS type to the AUDIO:

NICK'S MESSAGE (V.O. OVER TV)

You win Sal. I think some very bad things happened tonight. We have to call the cops. I'm afraid to go in alone. So come pick me up.

The nurse double takes at a MYRRH FLASK next to the Mayor.

NURSE

Hey Weird! That thing reminds me, Mr. Kafka. You're in luck. Security is usually very strict about Mr. Summons. But believe it or not, the Mayor himself called.

She points to THE PAINTING.

NURSE (CONT'D)

He said since you're leaving Mr. Summons that gift, he'll let you stay the night. And he wanted to give you this ornament as thanks.

She digs in her pocket and pulls out another MYRRH FLASK. Kafka takes it. He smiles wryly as he weighs it in his palm.

KAFKA

It's heavier than one might expect.

An awkward silence. The nurse shivers. She looks at Nick.

NURSE

You do realize that if he wakes up, he has higher powers to answer to.

KAFKA

Indeed. And I will be here with him, in case he's afraid.

NURSE

Would you like some coffee then?

Kafka looks at the clock. It's DEC 24, 11:30 p.m. He stands.

KAFKA

I could afford a 30 minute break. Tell me, do people dream in a coma?

NURSE

Experts say they don't. But there's something strange about him.

Kafka and the Nurse exit. Nick is alone. But then the skirt of ANOTHER NURSE glides into view. A sultry finger runs along Nick's scars. As she leans down for a peck on his forehead, a glimpse of BLONDE HAIR tells us who it is.

DIANA

Merry Christmas Daddy-Sweet dreams.

With the kiss, comes REM movement under Nick's eyelids. The machine starts to BEEP, slowly at first, then faster, faster.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END