

THE COMPANY TOWN

script sample

Written by

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INT./EXT. TRUCK/COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The WHOOSH of wind and HEAVY DOWNPOUR of rain slams against the windshield of a delivery truck.

DALE CROWDER, male, 35, scruff, trucker hat, overworked, but wired, clenches the steering wheel and stares out at the darkening skies ahead.

There's a logo on the side of the truck - A running stick figure. Next to the logo, the words: "VENTUS online."

Dale lets one hand off the wheel to grab a drink of Red Bull. STATIC, and then a voice comes over his CB radio.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
Warehouse B-G thirteen to Truck
forty-two. Gettin bad out there
Crowder? Over.

Dale puts his Red Bull back in the cup holder and picks up the radio mic.

DALE
(clears throat)
Yeah, man. I got that tornado alert
on my phone like thirty minutes
ago. You never told me what to do.

A pause. Only the wind and the rain.

DISPATCH
Okay yeah, uh, how far out are you
again? Just go to a designated area
or, uh, head home. Over.

Dale rolls his eyes.

DALE
Well I'm right up the road from the
warehouse now dammit. I'll just run
in there.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Dale walks into CHAOS at a sprawling warehouse full of every product you could possibly find on a site like Amazon. A MANAGER is frantically speed-walking around, gabbing at employees that are scattered throughout.

MANAGER
(over the noise)
Everyone shelter at the severe
weather assembly area.

Dale finds STEPH and BILL.

DALE
Bill. Steph.

They nod, but keep walking.

STEPH
This way.

They reach an area underneath a banner hanging from the
rafters. Its got a tornado image on it.

Dale notices stacks of refrigerators and treadmills on the
pallets around them.

DALE
Screw this. We're surrounded by
heavy bulk shit.

BILL
Could go into the bathroom.

The three of them ditch the others.

A TORNADO SIREN BLARES from the outside.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - EVENING

The wind and rain have died down a little. There's an eerie
calm under the siren, as the sky gets darker and clouds move
in.

A TOWERING GRAY TORNADO appears in the warehouse parking lot.
Loose corn husks and other debris are sucked toward it.

INT. BATHROOM - EVENING

Dale, Steph, and Bill are huddled in the corner. The lights
flicker. The VIOLENT SOUND of the tornado gets closer. They
look up. WHOOSH.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. BARRINGER - DAWN

A brisk Autumn morning. Elderly Oak and Maple trees with beautiful leaves of orange and red. OPENING TITLES BEGIN.

Shimmering dew on overgrown grass. The stillness of small dilapidated shacks. Their yards cluttered by the likes of beer cans, gardening tools, and discarded scrap wood. A sad unlit jack-o-lantern on every other porch.

Now on to well-preserved civic buildings. A spooky old Neo Classical, red brick and limestone. A sign that reads: "Patrick R. Boyle Library." Lights out.

The majestic and ominous red brick Barringer City Hall. Steeple, giant clock tower, and all. Not a soul in sight.

A beautiful, red brick, American Queen Anne style mansion. Straight out of the Gilded Age. Rough around the edges. And eerie. The Mystery Gang's wet dream. On its porch...

A wooden swing hanging from chains, creaks back and forth, to and fro. **All by itself.**

On the other end of town: Boring, newer, pristine, modern homes with freshly mowed yards. A different world just next door. Decked out in the trendiest Halloween decorations. Obnoxiously giant lawn skeletons. And inside one of these sterile homes...

Hanging on a child's bedroom wall: Amateurish but entrancing pastel drawings done with muted, dusty tones. Within them, we recognize the library, city hall, and the haunting red brick mansion.

Past the newer neighborhood...

Two signs on the side of a country road.

One is busted, lying on the ground from the storm. It is old, wooden, and painted, and reads: "Welcome to Barringer, IL. Home of the famous luxury rail car. Population 3,100." Covered in fading FFA and Lion's Club logos.

The other sign stands strong, sleek, and digital, flashing HD images of "Ventus Company Town" and happy employees in polo shirts.

Across the road, a towering seven-story office building and...

A bird's eye view of a sprawling warehouse next to a harvested corn field. A section of the warehouse roof is CAVED IN. Debris litters its parking lot. OPENING TITLES END.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

MIKE PUTZ, Caucasian Male, late 50s, a brunette toupee-wearing sharp-dressed sleaze, speaks into four microphones at a podium.

PUTZ

And thank you Pastor Bea, our own company Chaplain, for leading that prayer.

He motions to PASTOR BEA, Caucasian Female, late 40s, boyish, short hair, glasses, a cardigan over her clergy dress-blacks and collar, standing behind him. She's absurdly happy to be there.

PUTZ

(melodramatic)

Again, it's a regrettable situation. A very somber time for the company. And to our shareholders... I assure you that together, we will get through this.

Before he can leave, a REPORTER calls out--

REPORTER

Mr. Putz, what do you say to those questioning the existence of severe weather protocols at your shipping centers?

PUTZ

We have, uh *had*, a designated severe weather assembly area in this warehouse. I have been told that some employees chose not to--

REPORTER

One of the victims was crushed by items that were stacked in that designated area.

PUTZ

Our warehouses have always had guidelines in place and I am sure that after an investigation, we will know if a mistake was made.

He walks away from the podium as reporters yell at him. Pastor Bea does a double take and follows.

REPORTER

With six deaths reported, do you--

INT. ELECTRIC ESCALADE - DAY

The rear door SLAMS shut and the car starts moving. Pastor Bea sits next to Putz in the back seat. She stares him down while he loses himself in his smartphone.

He throws the phone on the floor and leans his head against the window.

BEA

Guess they think you cause tornados
now eh?

He ignores her.

BEA

Some of em think *I* can stop
tornados with prayer.
(forced chuckle)
How about we fire up the spa
tonight. What do you think? Kick
back a couple of margs.

PUTZ

After my call with the Interior
Secretary. This is not what I
needed right now. You know
Barringer used to lose two men a
month? Just gives a little
perspective.

BEA

I like to think the quality of life
has improved a bit since the
eighteen hundreds Mike.

Putz grins.

EXT. BARRINGER HOUSE - NIGHT

The old red brick Queen Anne style mansion we saw before.

A string of orange lights glows in the front window.

There's a moving truck parked in the driveway.

INT. BARRINGER HOUSE - NIGHT

ALEX JENNINGS LOPEZ, Latino Male, 12, scrawny, black baggy t-shirt, jeans, and a black sweat band on his wrist, carefully removes a sloppily painted porcelain ghost figurine from a cardboard box. It smiles up at him.

LAURA (O.S.)
 Dammit. Come over here and help me
 honey.

Alex looks over at his mom LAURA LOPEZ GARCIA, Latina Female, 40s, still wearing her work pant suit. She's struggling to drape a string of bright orange lights across their window facing the front yard. Alex sets his porcelain ghost down on a coffee table and rushes over to her.

He grabs the opposite end of lights that fell onto the floor and stands on his tip toes to reach them to the top of the window.

Laura tacks her end of the lights up and then tacks Alex's.

LAURA
 Gracias papito.

DAVID "DAVEY" JENNINGS LOPEZ, Latino Male, 8, runs through the living room wearing a Monster Mask and knocks Alex's painted porcelain ghost onto the floor. It SHATTERS in half.

ALEX
 Son of a bitch!

Alex rushes over, shoves Davey out of the way, and picks up his ghost.

LAURA (O.S.)
 Language.

TIM JENNINGS, Caucasian Male 40s, loose flannel, sleeves rolled up, joins them. He takes a look at the ghost.

TIM
 Oh bud. When we're done unpacking
 I'll find some glue.

ALEX
 (to Davey)
 I painted that with Aunt Julie you
 moron.

He smacks Davey on the back of the head.

DAVEY
 Ow.

TIM
 (to Alex)
 Stop that. Your brother's restless.
 He *should* be in bed right now.

Davey runs off. Laura rummages through some boxes in the kitchen nearby.

LAURA

Did you see that hand anywhere? The one that grabs people when they reach for candy.

TIM

We should have waited until we were unpacked to put up decorations.

She walks over to him.

LAURA

(stressed whispers)

We've got to make this fun for them.

TIM

Tell me again why you were given this decaying pile of bricks when the other execs all have new houses?

Laura ignores this and reaches into a box. She pulls out a vase with a white skull and a bunch of colorful flowers painted on it.

She sets the vase on the table and then gets closer to him. She puts her hands on his shoulders and looks into his eyes.

LAURA

They're building more next year.

BACK ON Alex running his hand along the fireplace mantle. Dust comes off into his face. He coughs.

CRUNCH. He looks down and lifts up his foot. He just stepped on a cockroach.

ALEX

(to himself)

Yuck.

(to parents)

This place is gross!

Tim gestures toward him from the kitchen. Laura sighs.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Five executives and Pastor Bea sit at a long table in the penthouse of the Ventus office building, overlooking the town. Among them are STEVE ALMAS, caucasian male, 40s, an aging frat guy, and VIV TIMMONS, Caucasian Female, 50s, short and frail.

Pastor Bea has her legs crossed and is reading a "Book on Crypto."

Putz paces in front of them.

PUTZ

You know, we were finally getting past that bullshit Frontline documentary.

(mocking voice)

The bathrooms are too far. The quotas are too high.

He SLAMS his hand against the giant glass window.

BEA

(without looking up)

Good heavens.

PUTZ

When you're the biggest employer in the country and have the reach that we do, there will always be some issues.

STEVE

Here, here.

Putz adjusts his toupee.

PUTZ

(clears throat)

I want the internal research department turned inside out. Make sure there are no records of that emergency response audit we blew off. And find whatever rat bastard leaked our turnover rate to the press.

Steve types on his laptop.

STEVE

Will do.

VIV

People don't want to work anymore.
And the ones who do, expect too
much. What if Ventus didn't exist?
What then? These jobs would be
gone.

PUTZ

Exactly. Take a week on the yacht
next month Viv.

Viv smiles.

STEVE

Very true. The family restaurant
isn't even open on weekdays anymore
because no one wants to work.

Putz leans on the back of a chair.

PUTZ

Alright, so as usual, the feds will
send their hound to sniff around.
Ventus security will put together
our own internal report. We'll say
what we're gonna do better, and
nail that coffin shut.

STEVE

Amen.

Putz's attention shifts to a broken sprinkler on the ceiling.

PUTZ

And leave the sprinkler system out
of it. Still not up to code. I
can't be bothered.

Laura and Alex walk through the door. Alex has his backpack
on. Laura notices his black pentagram wristband and takes it
off him.

LAURA

(to Putz)

Ope, sorry we interrupted. Steve
mentioned I should show Alex my new
office before school.

STEVE

I did.

PUTZ

All good, all good. Welcome!

LAURA
 (nudges Alex)
 Say hello. This is my boss, Mister Putz.

ALEX
 Hola Mister Putz.

LAURA
 (to Putz)
 I told him I'm so special, that you came to town for my first day.

PUTZ
 I *wish* that were the reason. Alas, we've got a crisis of angry employees on our hands. Hope you brought your A-game.

LAURA
 Angry employees are my specialty.
 (to Alex)
 Alright honey, have fun at school.

She kisses him on the head.

ALEX
 Goodbye Mamá.

He leaves through the door. Putz calls after him.

PUTZ
 Adiós!

Laura shoots Putz a painful smile.

INT. SEVENTH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

We catch the tail end of a video that Alex and his classmates are watching on a projector screen with the lights off. Most aren't paying attention.

The video ends with a drone shot of the beautiful Barringer City Hall building topped by its clock tower and steeple.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 And in two-thousand and one, eighteen years before ground broke on the Ventus Headquarters, old Barringer town was made a National Monument, ensuring that James Barringer and his legacy would live on.

The video ends and MISS TAYLOR, early 30s, Alex's teacher, turns the lights on.

RYDER CROWDER, Caucasian Male, 12, greasy brown hair, and worn blue Vans sneakers, appears from hibernation within his hoodie on his desk with a groan.

RYDER
Miss Taylor, is that the last time?

MISS TAYLOR
Ryder, we'll continue to watch it every time we get a new student, just as the school requires.

RYDER
Let *me* tell the damn story next time. I'll shorten it up.

MISS TAYLOR
Excuse me?

RYDER
Darn story.

Alex laughs with the rest of the class.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

As Alex leaves school, he sees ZANDER ALMAS, Caucasian bleach-blonde Male, 12, handing party fliers to some friends. They ignore Alex as he passes by.

He jogs to catch up with Ryder.

ALEX
You going to the party?

RYDER
Zander's? Nah, his parents do a bunch of Halloween stuff. They all get scared together and act like sissies.

ALEX
Sounds cool.

They walk off the school grounds and continue down the street, passing the modern pristine executive homes.

RYDER
Yeah, handing out paper fliers his mommy made is so cool.

ALEX

I heard he sent invites on Discord too.

RYDER

K.

He thinks.

RYDER

So you like being scared huh? Come hang with me this weekend.

ALEX

Okay. And do what?

RYDER

You remember the stupid video? How families used to live here to make train cars? I live by the old factory building. They say kids died in it.

ALEX

Oh over by the shacks. Yeah okay let's do it.

RYDER

Do what?

ALEX

Camp out in there?

RYDER

In the building? Nah, you wouldn't last.

(hiding his own fears)

I'll show you the outside.

EXT. BARRINGER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Alex stops walking. Ryder follows suit.

RYDER

Damn. You're in the Barringer house?

ALEX

(not enthused)

Yeah, its a dump compared to the new ones like Zander's.

RYDER
Those are boring. You know
Barringer himself lived in that
right?

ALEX
Yeah. Barringer House? Kinda
figured.

Alex walks toward the front door and realizes Ryder isn't
leaving.

ALEX
Well, I gotta finish unpacking and
stuff.

RYDER
Cool.

He doesn't leave.

ALEX
I could ask my parents if you can
come over tomorrow?

RYDER
For sure! I mean yeah, that'd be
cool.

ALEX
Bye?

RYDER
See ya.

Alex disappears inside.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex is sitting on his bed. He opens a pocket-sized leather-bound book and scoots closer to his lamp to read it.

There's a handwritten note inside the cover: "To my favorite nephew... They can hear us! Love, Aunt Julie"

The first page reads "Seances: Contacting the Dead. The lights will give you signs."

His lamp dims in and out startling him.

And again.

His little brother Davey throws the door open, amused with himself. He's swiping up and down on a smart phone.

DAVEY

Hehehe.

Alex stomps over to him.

ALEX

Give me that.

He takes the phone and swipes up and down on the screen controlling the lamp bulb. It's a smart home app.

ALEX

Mom, Davey has your phone!

DAVEY

I do not!

Davey grabs the phone back and runs off.

INT. RYDER'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ryder lies on a tattered couch. He stares at an old Zenith tube television with nothing but screeching gray noise on the screen. An obnoxious bouquet of flowers sits in the middle of the room, next to a photo of truck driver Dale Crowder.

A knock at the door. It opens. SHIRLEY HORNER, African-American Female, 70s, walks in relieved.

SHIRLEY

I was waiting an hour for you.

He ignores her. She turns the TV off.

RYDER

Sorry.

SHIRLEY

If you're not going to come stay at mine, then I'm staying here.

RYDER

Fine.

She walks over to him.

SHIRLEY

You doing okay being back at school?

A tear runs down Ryder's cheek. She joins him on the couch and gives him a side hug. He buries his face in her shoulder and sniffles.

SHIRLEY

I'm not going anywhere.

EXT. BARRINGER HOUSE - EVENING

Alex and Ryder rock back and forth on a porch swing. It CREAKS loud. Alex winces.

ALEX

It kinda hurts my ears.

RYDER

(louder over the noise)

I like it.

Alex stops the swing by putting his feet down.

ALEX

I'm good.

RYDER

I forgot Zander's party is tonight.
We should go spy on them and go to
the old factory after.

ALEX

I don't think--

The swing SWAYS back and forth with its unbearable creaks.

RYDER

Thought you wanted to stop.

Alex stares at him as the swing keeps rocking.

ALEX

It's not me.

RYDER

Very funny. C'mon.

He gets up, walks off the porch, and makes his way to the sidewalk.

The swing keeps swinging all by itself. Alex jumps off of it and runs after Ryder.

ALEX

Dude, I'm serious. Something's up.

RYDER
 Maybe it's the Rascals.

ALEX
 The Rascals?

RYDER
 Yeah. The kids who died in the
 train factory. Miss Taylor says
 they like to haunt Barringer's old
 house cause they think he's still
 there.

As they walk, Alex looks back at his new home and doesn't say
 another word.

EXT. ZANDER'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

Alex and Ryder stalk Zander and the other boys and girls from
 the forest. Zander's house is one of the new ones. A palace
 compared to the shacks.

RYDER
 Ha. They're making s'mores.

ALEX
 (squinting)
 I like s'mores.

The TORNADO SIREN BLARES throughout town.

Alex looks up at the sky.

ALEX
 Is that... Another tornado?

The siren ends.

RYDER
 Nah, it's the nine o'clock whistle.
 Curfew.

Alex steps on a branch with a loud CRACK. The kids at the
 party all look toward them from the fire pit. Zander walks
 over.

RYDER
 (whispers to Alex)
 Don't move.

A phone light shines in their faces. Alex covers his eyes.

RYDER

Shit.

ZANDER

(authoritarian)

What are you guys doing back here?

ALEX

We got lost. S-sorry.

ZANDER

Hey, you're new.

ALEX

Yeah.

ZANDER

Want a s'more?

Alex turns to Ryder. *How bout it?*

RYDER

You guys have fun with your kiddie
shit. I'm out.

He disappears into the woods.

ZANDER

(to Alex)

Coming?

Alex follows Zander to the house.

EXT. ZANDER'S BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Alex sits around the fire pit in silence with the others,
eating a s'more. COLLEEN, African-American Female, 12,
wearing jeans and a sweatshirt, comes out of the house and
joins them.

The only seat open is next to Alex on a little bench. She
takes it.

COLLEEN

You're Alex right?

ALEX

Yeah. You?

COLLEEN

Colleen.

ZANDER

His mom works for my dad. Ryder was here too, but he ran away.

COLLEEN

Figures.

ALEX

Why?

ZANDER

His dad was one of the ones who died in the tornado.

ALEX

(holy shit)

Oh.

COLLEEN

So do you like it so far?

ALEX

Besides the deadly tornado? Yeah.

(pause)

Do you guys know about the Rascals?

ZANDER

The ones that haunt your house?

(he smiles)

Maybe.

The others snicker.

ALEX

What happened to them?

The kids all exchange nervous glances.

COLLEEN

(pre-lap)

Well, when they used to build Barringer train cars here, there were some workers as young as us...

EXT. OLD FACTORY - NIGHT

Ryder exits the forest and comes upon the old burned out factory. It looks more like a charred barn. A chunk of wall is missing. Piles of rubble and old tools litter the yard around it. He hesitates and looks through two big open doors... Then walks in.

INTERCUT CAMPFIRE/OLD FACTORY

COLLEEN

Some were even younger. One time,
the kids were made to take night
shifts and paint while the grownups
slept.

Back on Ryder in the old factory. Faint cheerful voices of
children start to chant around him.

CHILDREN (V.O.)

(sing-song)

*Round and round the house we go,
will it burn? No one knows. Up,
down, round again, not enough to
save our friend.*

Ryder shines his phone flashlight around the room, attempting
to find the source of the voices.

COLLEEN

A girl named Holly Giddens was
tired of working, so she started
dancing in the rafters.

An orange translucent light swirls like a swarm of fireflies
from the ground of the factory up into the air, illuminating
the room around Ryder. The building is no longer in shambles.
The chunk of wall isn't missing.

The faded ghostly figures of child laborers appear out of
thin air and dance around him as he gasps, staggers, and
falls onto his butt.

CHILDREN (V.O.)

(louder now)

*Round and round the house we go,
will it burn? No one knows. Up,
down, round again, not enough to
save our friend!*

Ryder looks up to the rafters and sees the ghostly figure of
HOLLY GIDDENS, Caucasian red-head female, 12, dancing
playfully on the beams.

Back at the fire pit, Zander gets up.

ZANDER

I'm going inside.

COLLEEN

Scared?

COLLEEN

And they all burned alive.

Silence. The doors are gone. The flames are gone. The factory is dark again. Ryder points his phone flashlight up at the rafters. Holly Giddens' ghostly body is gone too. He runs for his life.