

LAST SANTA

Written by
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INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A merry Christmas-y dinner din *but* for a middle-aged couple: JOHN (stocky, grizzled, curmudgeonly Santa Claus with a trim, grey beard) and ESME VELEZ (Mexican-American, stately, poised by choice). He leans in; she's pregnant. Both nervous.

JOHN
How's the soup?

ESME
Salty. How's the chicken?

JOHN
Chicken.

WAITER
How's everything?

ESME
Wonderful.

JOHN
It's great, thank you.

She takes a SLURP.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Why do you keep eating it?

ESME
Over-hydrated.

JOHN
I like your, uh, brooch.

ESME
Thank you.

They sip their waters. Hers has ice, his absolutely *does not*.

JOHN
Speaking of...have you thought
about my, uh, proposal?

ESME
John, we were married 35 years; you
had your proposal.--No.

JOHN
No to the proposal or no you
haven't thought...

ESME
You know I'm busy. The farm, the
start up. "Settling down." I'm
already somewhere warm.

(MORE)

ESME (CONT'D)

And I'm perfectly capable of taking care of this little one myself.--
Oh, you wanna move back in with me?

JOHN

Remember Spring Break?

ESME

That was a one-time thing.

JOHN

Let's give it a...nother real shot.

ESME

Let's talk after Christmas. It's an emotionally-loaded time, you must be overwhelmed. Stress makes the worst ideas seem romantic.

JOHN

Certain people, certain things, go, y'know? Like peanut butter and-

EMSE

Jelly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Chocolate.

ESME

See? We want different things.

JOHN

I like jelly. I could. Ok, but I've changed in other ways. For you. Watch. I'll prove it. One sec.

He turns the electronic candle off. Clumsily picks up a large, wooden, candy-cane-shaped STAFF from under the table, bonking it and the chair. Lifts it, touches it to the candle.

ESME

What are you-You'll make a scene.

JOHN

(focuses, nothing happens)
Watch.--Ta da!

ESME

Stop fooling around, put that away.

JOHN

See?! I'm trying really hard and nothing's happening!

ESME

You're telling me.

She looks at him, then the candle. The life leaves her face.

JOHN
Surprise! I gave up my powers.

He turns the e-candle back on manually.

ESME
You...you gave up...?

JOHN
My powers! Couldn't light this if I wanted to, magically anyway.

ESME
I thought that wasn't for another three days.

JOHN
That's the surprise! Last night. Said the magic words. Poof. Officially retired. Well, unofficially. I'm technically still Santa for three days. Just as a *symbolic* figure. But I'm hangin' up my hat, givin' up the *rei(g)ns*!

WAITER
(sets down a small dessert)
Compliments of the chef. Thank you for your service.

JOHN
Wow, thank you for your service!

Waiter bows, starts to exit as Esme is lost in thought:

ESME
I didn't ask for this.

JOHN
We can send it back. Uh, garcon? We're full actually.

WAITER
(doubles back)
Would you prefer milk and cookies?

JOHN
No. Thank you. Just the check...
Jerk.--Honey, you ok?

ESME
...Stop me if I'm wrong.

ESME (CONT'D)

You: the current, one and only Santa Claus, long ago decided not to appoint a new Santa Claus, as per tradition, but to hand things over to a multinational corporation to automate Christmas; and *then* decided, in your wisdom, three days before said Christmas, to give up all of your powers. For me?

JOHN

...Didn't stop you because that sums it up perfectly.

ESME

Right. And what were you thinking?

JOHN

I was thinking I could be with you. I thought you'd be happy, I'll be home for Christmas for once.

ESME

You've made yourself vulnerable.

JOHN

You like it when I'm vulnerable.

ESME

Emotionally! Oh what have you done?...

A SORORITY GIRL, 20, breaks off a friend to approach:

SORORITY GIRL

Like, hi, can I get a selfie?

JOHN

No, sorry, I'm not S-

ESME

(kicks him under table)
You're still Santa. Be Santa.

JOHN

Ok! Gonna say I'm not s-anitary but-

He scooches back to stand. She sits in his lap before he can.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Oh! Ho-ho-kay.

SORORITY GIRL

I want pswswsws...

She whispers in his ear; he hoverhands and eyes Esme nervously.

JOHN

Wow well, that's...unsustainable.

SORORITY GIRL

Merry Christmaaaaas.

(snaps pic, gets up, to Esme:)
Ms. Velez. Such a big fan of your
work in clean energy. Inspiration.
Can I shake your hand? I wouldn't
insult you with a selfie.

ESME

Thank you dear, that's very sweet.

Sorority Girl bows and shakes Esme's hand.

SORORITY GIRL

Merry Christmas! Byee!

JOHN

Ok, well, Merry Christmas.

ESME

Merry Christmas.

ESME (CONT'D)

Who else knows about this?

JOHN

No one.

ESME

Peter? He'll kill you for this.

JOHN

Peter's fine. Everything is fine,
ok, it's three whole days.

ESME

What if something happens in those
three days? It's a big three days.

JOHN

It's the same thing every year, we
get a list, check it twice, naughty
or nice, whole system's basically
automated anyway. Heck, I've been
on autopilot the last few years.

ESME

You say that with such pride.

JOHN

Peter's seen everything I've seen.
Nothing he can't handle. What?

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

You want me to renew my contract?
Or drag some other poor soul into
100 years of thankless labor?

ESME

No! Did I say that?

JOHN

I just think you're overreacting.

ESME

Ohh-k then I'm leaving.

JOHN

You invited me! Welcome surprise,
yes, we haven't had dinner like
this, let alone talked in...I
wanted to return the gesture.

ESME

This is my fault...I needed to tell
you something. Give you something.

JOHN

It's Christmas! Perfect timing.

ESME

There's no convincing you, is there?

JOHN

Convincing me of what?

ESME

That you've done it all wrong.

JOHN

Well, what's done is done. As of
midnight yesterday.

ESME

...You may have given up your
powers last night, John, but the
magic was gone a long time ago.

WAITER

The bill, whenever you're ready.

John, dejected, ignores AURA (15) sharp, shy, who emerges:

AURA

Excuse me, sir?

ESME

Sorry dear, this isn't a good time.

Waiter stands in her way. She tries to talk around him.

WAITER
Child, please leave.

AURA
Sir! It's a-hey! Emergency.
Need to speak privately.

JOHN
I'm having dinner with my wife, ex-
wife. Say it from there. Is it
Merry Christmas? Merry Christmas.

AURA
You have to listen to me.

JOHN
Where are your parents?

AURA
I'm 15.

JOHN
The question remains.

AURA
Sir. It's a Code Red!

Esme turns, motions Waiter to subside; he leaves in a huff.

JOHN
Wait come here. Say that again?

AURA
Code. Red.

JOHN
Very funny. Who sent you? Peter?

AURA
Yes!

JOHN
Exactly. And you're who?

AURA
I'm Aura, like Laura but no-

JOHN
No, who are you?

AURA
I'm the new elf recruit.

JOHN
Yea, that program was suspended.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Esme, are you in on this?

Esme looks offended.

AURA
Got the alert, alarm, tracked you-

JOHN
You're telling me...that the list-

ESME
Shh!

AURA
I guess.

JOHN
Even so, it's not a big deal unless-

JOHN (CONT'D)
-it's also a-

AURA
-it's also a Code Green.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Code Red and Green. Hilarious. Do you even know what that means?

AURA
No, it's my first day.

JOHN
Peter? Come out now, party's over.

Aura shows PETER (30) African-American, tech nerd via TABLET.

PETER
Sir.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Peter?

AURA
He's been trying to reach you.

John eyes Esme for permission, takes out his phone: 47 missed calls, 53 missed texts. Phone dies. He grabs the tablet.

PETER (ON TABLET)
We have an emergency.

JOHN
Let me call you on a secure line.

PETER (ON TABLET)
This is.

John takes Peter off speaker, holds him awkwardly to his ear.

JOHN
I understand, I'll be right there.

PETER (V.O.)
-better if you go *directly* to-

JOHN
(hangs up, returns tablet)
Thank you, now go away.

<i>John.</i>	ESME	AURA
		I'm to accompany you to the North Pole and begin my orientation.

JOHN
No accompaniment needed. I'm famously acapella. There's no orientation either; *the program was suspended.*

AURA
Your phone's dead. Unless you can charge it with your Santa powers, I have a working tablet.

A look overcomes Esme, like she senses something in Aura.

ESME
John. Take her with you. And don't talk to me until this is resolved.

JOHN
...Ok. Fine. I'll get the check and-

ESME
I got it. Go. Now.

John nods, leaves, Aura follows. Esme lingers on both. To herself:

ESME (CONT'D)
What have you done?...

She stares in her purse...pulls out her wallet to pay the bill.

EXT. QUEEN CREEK, ARIZONA - NIGHT

John paces down the street. Aura struggles to follow.

JOHN
Where's our ride?

AURA
Don't you have a Sleigh?

JOHN
In the shop. How did you get here?

AURA
Hitchhiked.

JOHN
(stops, turns around) I'm 15!
You're 15! AURA (CONT'D)

JOHN (CONT'D)
I thought you said Peter sent you.

AURA
Through the app. I applied to the
Elf program months ago, didn't hear
back. Hitchhiked across the US. Hit
Arizona. I was accepted. Before I
could figure out how to get to the
North Pole for orientation, I got a
Code Red telling me to find you!

JOHN
So you're just a wild coincidence huh?

AURA
Christmas miracle?

JOHN
Definitely not that.

AURA
(on tablet)
Well I've booked us 2 seats on
American leaving Phoenix Sky Harbor
in 1.5 hours. We should hurry.

The Tablet JINGLES, FLASHES RED and GREEN. John grabs it.

JOHN
Hey Peter. We're flying in an hour,
should be there in 10.

PETER (ON TABLET)
I saw. I suggest you go straight to
New York to start investigating-

JOHN
Peter, I trust you implicitly. But
I need to verify this for myself.

PETER (ON TABLET)
Fine. Hurry.

PASSING LATINO TEEN
Santa-a-a! Que paso?

JOHN
Namaste. Feliz Navidad.

AURA
Oh boy.--So how big a deal is this?

JOHN
If it's real? Pretty big deal.

AURA
Where are you going?

JOHN
Me? To my car. You're going home.

AURA
I thought you said-ugh, wait! I don't live here, remember?

JOHN
Hitchhike.

AURA
I'm 15!

JOHN
Where do you live?

AURA
New York.

PASSING ADULT
Hey man, I got a PS3 when I clearly asked for a PS4, what gives, bro?

JOHN
Who are you?

Aura snaps his pic with the Elf Help App, reads the results:

AURA
Howard Johnson. Arrested last year for battery. No, you stole AAA batteries and then threw them at AAA vans yelling "irony" so, battery. Lucky you got anything.

PASSING ADULT (O.S.)
PSH. Not my Santa!

JOHN
Ok we're going to the airport in my regular-speed car, and switching your ticket to New York.

PASSING DAD

(approaches with Kid)

Santa! Liam, he would go house to house, down a chimney, when we had those, hand-deliver presents world-wide every Christmas, it was crazy!

PASSING KID (LIAM)

Sure Dad, let's go home.--Sir, sorry to bother you.

PASSING DAD (O.S.)

You gotta believe me!

AURA

'What happens when you outsource to Mall Santa's for ten years.--Look, I'm coming with you to the North Pole or I'm not coming at all.

JOHN

...K.
(continues to car)

AURA

Stop!

PASSING LADY

Miss is this man bothering you?

AURA

Yes. But it's fine.--Wait up!

Lady glares. He groans. He, Aura get in his car, drive off.

INT. FORD FESTIVA - NIGHT

JOHN

Ground rules: 1. Don't talk to me.
2. I hate children.

AURA

How is that a rule?

JOHN

Not personal. I despise everyone equally. Especially children.

AURA

That doesn't make sense.

JOHN

Why do you think I delivered presents at night?

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Can you imagine millions of pounds
 of small talk? Having to explain
 that I don't eat milk and cookies
 because I'm vegan.

AURA
 You're going to need my help.

JOHN
 3. I don't need anyone's help.

Traffic bends into the left-turn lane. Cascade of flickering
 lights. They're behind one car at the red. An OLD LADY with a
 cane and shopping bags struggles to cross the street to a
 bus, out of view of a worker loading up others. Red lights
 turn green to go straight and left. OLD LADY blocks the left.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Jiminy Christmas...

MALE DRIVER OF CAR IN FRONT
 (HONKS!)
 Move it, lady!

AURA
 Ugh! Can't believe you guys.
 (gets out of car)

JOHN
 Where are you going?

AURA
 Can I help you, miss?

She takes the Lady's bags, hand, helps her cross in no hurry.

DRIVER
 Hurry it up, shorty!

Aura hands her off to the grateful worker, heads back to car.

AURA
 Shame on you, dude!

DRIVER
 Hey my M-score is through the roof.
 I could steal her purse and still
 get what I want for Christmas.

They drive off hollering. Cars HONK at John now. She gets in.
 John drives off quietly. His cane pokes out of the back seat.

JOHN
 Don't need anyone's help.

AURA

What?

He shakes his head. She starts to work on her tablet.

JOHN

What are you doing?

AURA

Taking notes. How did you and Mrs.
"Claus" meet? *Ex-Mrs. X-MASes*. Ha.

JOHN

Rule #1...We met at a ball. And
lived happily ever after.

A bus passes outside with a Missing Child poster: LITTLE BOY.

AURA

Where do all the missing kids go?

JOHN

Jeez Louise. The heck if I know.

AURA

You are NOT how I imagined you.

JOHN

Ha. How did you imagine me?

AURA

What's the opposite of a stick in
the mud?...I figured you'd be more
jolly and less...jalopy.

The car backfires.

JOHN

Don't meet your heroes.

AURA

You're not my hero.

INT. PHOENIX SKY HARBOR AIRPORT - NIGHT

SECURITY AGENT

North Pole. Business or pleasure?

JOHN

Business.

SECURITY AGENT

Are you a parent or guardian?

JOHN
Neither. Guardian? I need to switch
her ticket. Uh, girl, Logan or JFK?

AURA
Ignore him.--I'm coming with you.

JOHN
(pulls Aura aside)
Excuse us.--Look, kid. There is no
elf program. No orientation. Don't
know why it accepted you, though,
you'd fit right in. Thanks for your
help. But I got this. Go home, it's
Christmas, be with your family.

AURA
I don't have a family.

JOHN
What do you mean you don't have a
family? Who do you live with?

AURA
Nobody. Mom died, Dad left...Can't
be home for Christmas with no home.

JOHN
Oh. I'm sorry. Look. Let's get it
sorted at the North Pole, ok, you
can stay there for now. Come on.

AURA
Yesss!

JOHN
Just remember my rules.

AURA
Nope.

SECURITY AGENT
Sir, you have to check that Staff.

JOHN
Oh, sorry, I have a permit.

SECURITY AGENT
I see. Thank you, Santa.

INT. AIRPORT SECURITY CHECKPOINT - NIGHT

John's big black belt triggers a TSA pat down.

INT. AIRPLANE CABIN - NIGHT

Flight attendant nods. John puts his cane in an overhead bin. It takes up two. John and Aura click into adjacent seats.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (ON SPEAKER)
Ladies and gentlemen, we are proud
to have the one and only Santa
Claus on the plane this evening.
Merry Christmas. Hashtag blessed.

Scattered APPLAUSE. John unclicks, awkwardly waves, mildly annoyed. Sits, clicks in and pulls a Santa hat over his eyes.

JOHN
Long flight. Get some REM, kid.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Plane departs, Lands at Barneo Ice Station, Aura taps John awake with Staff, They hop in a helicopter.

EXT. NORTH POLE STATION - DAY

Christmas-lit helipad next to a log cabin. She looks, full of awe. He looks, something awful. Helicopter lands.

EXT. NORTH POLE HOME - DAY

He jingles bells thrice: wreath face scan unlocks front door.

INT. NORTH POLE HOME - SAME

A small, quaint cabin. They walk to a metal pole.

AURA
Is this the home office?

JOHN
This is a home. *This* is the office:

He reaches out with his cane and tugs on a mantle stocking. Floor lowers into a brick elevator shaft, stops, doors open:

INT. NORTH POLE UNDERGROUND STATION - NIGHT

Long hall of doors leads to a vault. Various people in green uniforms bustle among rooms carrying papers, hiding panic.

PETER
Walk and talk.

Aura steps out of the elevator.

ALARM:
Unauthorized access!

PETER
Can we turn that off?

JIMMY, Peter's assistant, hands Peter a clicker. He CLICKS.

PETER (CONT'D)
Thank you. Who's she?

JOHN
Peter. New elf? New elf. My No. 2.

PETER
Thought that program was suspended.
Oh. Handing over operations to
Omnicon, it must've accidentally
been reactivated. Well, we're
always looking for the best and
brightest bulbs on the tree. Jimmy?

JIMMY
Confirmed. Aura Schlesinger, sole
applicant. Awarded every badge in
Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts even
after refusing to sell cookies, top
of her class, wrote an essay
entitled "Denzel: National
Treasure."--Sign for clearance.

Jimmy hands Peter a clipboard. Header: Executive Labor Force.
Peter reads it, dots an i, crosses a t, signs, hands it back.

PETER
O-k. Jimmy, attention to detail hm?

Jimmy nods, exits. As they talk, they walk past the Mail
Room, a flurry of activity. Aura sticks her nose in.

ALARM:
Unauthorized access!

PETER
Jimmy! Oh, right.
(clicks button)

JOHN
She alerted me to this.

PETER
Thank you miss. Sorry there's no
position but...We'll try to get you
temporary security clearance.

They walk. Email Room, Cash Counting Room. An elf shuts glass
door before Aura can enter, shakes his head. He draws blinds.

Which are *also* transparent, doing nothing to create privacy. They continue. Christmas Break Room: elves eat cookies, milk.

PETER (CONT'D)

Total transparency. 'Why this is so perplexing.--In here.

They pass Santa's little Helpers room, tech elves typing, to

INT. MORAL COMPASS SURVEILLANCE ROOM

A row of monitors under giant glass reveals the Moral Compass Chamber beyond it: a midnight blue room with flickering gold lights and circuitry with a ceiling-wide, upside-down pyramid descending from above forming an empty, clasped reading tray.

PETER (CONT'D)

Jimmy was on surveillance. I trust him. Caught it, called me promptly.
(rewinds, plays feed)
10 hours ago. Timestamp 2400 Hours.

He flips between two frames, revealing a golden object:

PETER (CONT'D)

One second it's there, next it's gone. No trail or trace. No perimeter breach or alarm bells. No lapse in the log or blip in the feed. No one in or out. Not even a mouse. As you know, we've been in lockdown all week for Christmas.

JOHN

Oh, is that this week?

PETER

Simply no explanation for this.

JOHN

So it just disappeared by magic?

PETER

Yea. Probably.

JOHN

That narrows it down. 12 AM. So they have the device, not the list.

PETER

Well, we have to assume that they d-

AURA

What is it?

PETER

The Moral Compass. Every year it surveys the world population. 3 days before Christmas it spins for 24 hours. Generates a list. What you call the Naughty or Nice list. 2 days before Christmas, that list is used to determine who gets what, Christmas eve, we start delivery. Christmas day: everyone's happy.

AURA

Cutting it close.

PETER

It works how it works. We don't futz with it, it spins, it spits, we place the orders.

AURA

Thought you guys built everything.

PETER

We did. Too much for a small shop. Omnicon stepped in. We keep control of the Compass and the List. Vital no one else does or they could use it for truly nefarious purposes.

JOHN

Like marketing.

AURA

Can't you get a new one?

PETER

Only one. Either you have one or you don't. Built a machine to read it, which I since miniaturized.

AURA

Why steal it if they can't read it?

PETER

Good question. I don't know. If someone built a similar machine or could tap into its other powers...

AURA

What other powers?

PETER

We don't know. It reads energy. If it were reversed: Murder She Wrote?

AURA
Who'd have the power to do either?

JOHN
Omnicon.

PETER
Why jeopardize the biggest deal of his life, 2 days before Christmas?

JOHN
Total control, assuming he knew how to use it. But yes, the timing... I'll need to talk to him.

Aura studies the Moral Compass image, sees a handprint on it.

AURA
What's that?

PETER
It is said to have burned the hand of the man who procured it centuries ago. It's cool now, unfortunately.

JOHN
Peter, can we go inside?

PETER
Normally, no.

Peter pushes one of many unmarked buttons, muting the feed.

PETER (CONT'D)
Wait here, please.

John and Peter walk to a wall of exposed bricks and push a series of them simultaneously to enter the

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - MORAL COMPASS CHAMBER - DAY

Wall closes behind them. Red light turns green for access. Soundproof. They walk and wave their arms around, through the space where the Compass would be. Look at all four corner cameras. Aura sees them on the security feed in real time.

PETER (CONT'D)
You understand what you might have to do right? Only one place in the world that could possibly produce another one of these?

JOHN
We're not there yet. I'll find it.

PETER

If you don't? We're on a timer.--I don't think I need to point out this would've been a lot easier if-

JOHN

-if I had my powers, yea.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - SURVEILLANCE ROOM - SAME

Aura can't hear them. She sees John shaking his head.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - MORAL COMPASS CHAMBER - SAME

JOHN (CONT'D)

Too dangerous. Out of the question.

PETER

Does Esme know?

JOHN

Yes. Didn't tell her that you knew.

PETER

Don't lie to her on my behalf.

JOHN

Didn't want her to blame you.

PETER

What about the girl?

JOHN

She's harmless.

PETER

She should go home.

JOHN

She's homeless. I think. Let her stay here until we figure this out.

PETER

She can't stay here.

Aura, apparently shifting the right bricks, walks in.

ALARM:

Unauthorized access!

PETER

(cocks head)

You go, I'll hold down the fort.
But wait. Gear up.

INT. SANTA'S SHOP - DAY

Workbenches. Power tools. Elves repairing the Sleigh.

ALARM:
Unauthorized access!

PETER
(clicks remote)
It's fine, she's with...us.
(on bench)
New belt. Pomegrenades. Self-
explanatory. Christmas Cheer. Makes
anyone happy for 30 seconds.

AURA
Why only 30 seconds?

PETER
Any more would be torture.

JOHN
Like a commercial.

PETER
New comms so you can't ignore me.
And the usual bells and whistles.

JOHN
(points to white box)
What's that?

PETER
Low priority. These came for you.

John opens it: 2 suits: one traditional Red Santa, one Fancy.

JOHN
Bespoke...hang the fluffy one. Who
sent these?

PETER
Jimmy?

JIMMY
Choo.

PETER
Huh. Send a thank-you card.--Moving
on, the staff may not work but you
can pretend that it does.

AURA
What's that?

She unwraps a BALL from a small, WEBBED FABRIC. It glows RED.

PETER

Oh, uh, remember the quake of '95?

JOHN

It still shakes me.

PETER

Part of the reader broke off and scraped the Moral Compass, which I filed into this...stress Ball.

AURA

A synthetic Moral Compass?

PETER

A reader of intention, I've found.

Takes it. It glows GREEN. Throws it to John. It glows RED...

PETER (CONT'D)

Or maybe it's not working properly.

AURA

Is the Moral Compass working properly?

PETER

Was it ever working "properly?"
Another conversation.--Anything else, we'll send it through this.
Long as it doesn't have a soul.

He holds up Santa's Sac: a GOLDEN-WEBBED FABRIC/PORTAL.

INT. WISH FULLFILLMENT CENTER - DAY

PETER (CONT'D)

Testing forth!

Elves stop typing on rows of computers facing an identical WEB PORTAL splashed on the wall. Santa holds the sac in front of him. Peter throws the Ball through the Web Portal on the wall. It pops up from the sac. Santa catches it midair.

PETER (CONT'D)

Good. Testing back!

He throws it down the sac. It comes flying back via the wall Web Portal; Peter catches it without looking.

PETER (CONT'D)

Perfect.

Aura studies the wall Web Portal. John, staff in hand:

JOHN
This thing have any juice left?

PETER
Do you have any juice left?

JOHN
Maybe if I concentrate?

They share a laugh before it gets real.

PETER
Gonna miss you man.

JOHN
Gonna miss you too. You're my
number one number two guy.

PETER
Right.--Been through a lot of, uh,
scenarios together. This is just
another one. Powers or no powers.
(over John's uncertainty)
Find the Moral Compass. Bring it
back, where it belongs. Retire. Let
me be Number One, for once. Don't
come back. I'm playin', you know
you're welcome back anytime.

ALARM:
Unauthorized access!

Aura touches the edge of the wall Web Portal. Peter clicks.

PETER
Can you, please?--Oh John, Perry
doesn't know that you're, you know,
powerless. Make sure he doesn't get
too close.--Jimmy?

JIMMY
Security override failed, sir.

Peter shakes his head at John. John groans.

JOHN
Fine. How we getting out of here?

PETER
Sleigh's down. But I got a guy.

PILOT KEN, a jolly 40-year old man, wide smile, on screen.

PILOT KEN (ON SCREEN)
 Howdy Santa! Name's Ken! Honored to
 be of help!

INT. PLANE - DAY

John adjusts his now-Fancy suit, GRUMBLES as he boards. Aura
 grins. They get seated, fall asleep. Hours pass. They land in

PILOT KEN
 New York City! The Big Red
 Delicious! Guess I'll leave you
 here to be picked up by a stranger.
 Not, I'm your chauffer!

JOHN
 Thank you but that's not necessary.

PILOT KEN
 That's why I do it!

INT. KEN'S CAR - DAY

Pulls up to a space, confused by parking restriction signs.

PILOT KEN (CONT'D)
 Here we are! Boy, all the red and
 green is making my head hurt.

JOHN
 (exits with Aura)
 You and me both.

PILOT KEN
 I'll figure it out, see you soon!

EXT. OMNICON HEADQUARTERS TOWER - DAY

DRONE PERRY (V.O.)
 Enjoy your stay at Omnicon. Have a
 Perry Christmas.

A drone greets, thanks people. John GROANS. They walk into

INT. OMNICON HEADQUARTERS TOWER - GROUND FLOOR - DAY

a gift showroom: Chris-mist, Cotton Candy Cane, Judy Garland.
 John groans past a fat, jolly Santa standee. No resemblance.
 Aura sees an ad: "Naughty or Nice. Download the app today!"

Infomercial: "Omnicon. The world is our business." Pics of
 factories and *smokestacks with no smoke* shrink, pop up "over
 90% of the world." Jingle: "Everyone relies on Omnicon."

They walk by racks of Père Fouettard-branded merchandise.

CONCERNED EMPLOYEE
Uh, sir, can I help you?

JOHN
No.

He zips to the back elevators. Aura jumps in as doors close.

INT. OMNICON ELEVATOR - DAY

Aura goes for the PF button. Santa blocks her hand with his cane. He pushes buttons PF with his thumb (thumb scanner), 12 and 25 with the other hand simultaneously. Elevator starts.

Elevator music: "'Tis the season to be jolly. Falalalala lala la la, Don we now our Père apparel, Falalalala lala la la..."
Santa, miffed. Aura rolls her eyes. DING! Double doors open.

INT. OMNICON TOP FLOOR - DAY

They walk past cubicles of Wolf-of-Wall-Street-call-center-like activity. Père Fouettard's voice comes from each, not from people; but from magically-imbued SUITS. Aura listens:

SALES SUIT 1
-your M-score. Yes, Moral score.
Records show you're just shy of...no,
one more day. List isn't finalized,
if you donate...sure or bake cookies
for...yes, that should put you over.
Main thing is to get your score up
to get your Wishlist...yes, but later
there's no Christmas discount. I'm
trying to save you money, ma'am.

SALES SUIT 2
-very good this year, great M-
score, but nothing on your list...I
see, can I interest you in our
Immaterial Possessions Collection.
I'll walk you through it. Is your
computer on? Click on Omnicon. Can
I activate screen sharing? Great.

SALES SUIT 3 signals SALES SUIT 4 to get off the phone.

SALES SUIT 4
Sorry, there's nothing I can...score
is negative...deep in the red, you
won't be getting anyth-...try next
year, be nicer...ok sir this is now
tantamount to spam, I'm hanging up.

Scissors glide. Folds, neat. Not one errant crease. Nine gifts done, under the tree. Three boxes left on the far end of the table, near Santa, plus the one Perry's wrapping. Drones hand him: wrapping paper, scissors, tape. After each gift, he turns a page of a BOOK on the table. SUITS slide boxes down one at a time. One SUIT keeps fumbling the pass.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Well-WELL well-WELL WELL-well to
what do I owe the pleasure?

JOHN

You and I both know that's too many
wells. And you know why I'm here.

Perry finishes the last box. John notices they're unmarked.

JOHN (CONT'D)

How will they know who's is whose?

PERRY

They'll know.

A drone flies it to the tree. Perry picks up the BOOK. The conference table and chairs sink into the ground. The Suits stand up. Perry walks among them, to Santa, examines them.

PERRY (CONT'D)

People rue routine but I find the
rudimentary pristine. I like the
predictable precision of it. If
something is out of place, it must
be put back. Or find a new place.

He snaps his fingers. A drone lifts the errant SUIT by the loop and throws it in the fireplace, flailing.

PERRY (CONT'D)

I call that the "fire" place. Loose
thread or fireable offense? I was
gonna press him for answers but
some details you can't iron out-
Anyway, in all the time I've known
you, you've never once set foot
here. But if there's a place for
everything, and everything in its
place, you're here for a reason.
What's the good news?

JOHN

Drop the charade.

PERRY

Charade? Movie? 4 words? It's.

PERRY (CONT'D)

A. Wonderful. Life. I'm as happy as a clam before the coral reefs died.

JOHN

Where is it?

PERRY

WHERE IS WHAT?

(scares drones back)

JOHN

The Moral Compass.

PERRY

Never had one.

JOHN

It's missing.

PERRY

Missing as in you lost it or someone "found" it?--Stolen? 'Tis the season for Christmas treason! And you think I...boy are you barking up the wrong spruce, Bruce, that's richer than cake! Need I remind you, we had a deal.

Aura peers through the double doors, walks in.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Look what the Christmas cat drug in.

AURA

That's definitely not a thing.

PERRY

Oh but it is...shame we hide the truth about Santa from children. Uh, who are you?

AURA

Aura, like Laura with-

PERRY

I'm Père Fouettard. Americans call me Perry.--Why do you have a child?

AURA

I'm the new elf.

PERRY

Thought that program was suspended.

JOHN

She's nobody. Er, she's a civilian.

PERRY

Whatever, where was I? Ah yes. Dear Santa, you and I had a deal. People worldwide send you little lists and money which you compare with the big list made by the Moral Compass to buy the right gifts for the nice people and coal, or, what is it now, *solar panels*, for the naughty kids? You send the extra money back. And everyone gets a fat Christmas discount.--Your likeness for our business, right?

I do all this at a monumental inconvenience to myself. How are you not the merry little middle man? This question has been eating at me from the inside like a pizza. You aren't even a good Santa. Out of touch. You've never known what they wanted. They had to tell you.

I know what they want before they do. Every click, pic, typo and Wish List brings me closer to them. I don't care if they're naughty. Naughty people buy more sh-tuff. I don't have the list because I don't need the list. You label. I enable. I'm a better Santa than you ever were. Why not buy direct from me?

The *contract*. But it's December 23 and, forget the list...where's m'money? I know what to send whom. Millions of things waiting to be delivered. But you've got my money. People want their things, Santa.

JOHN

You won't get a red cent until the Moral Compass is back safe at the North Pole.

PERRY

'Til now my hands have been tied but now it's time for my three favorite words: You're in breach. So, in regards to your assets. I'm gonna go ahead and SEIZE THEM!

The 11 suits and 4 drones encircle John. John guards Aura.

JOHN
Aura, stay back.

PERRY
I don't care about her. I want your staff.

JOHN
My employees?

PERRY
Them too. I can only control so many lifeless suits.

John wields his staff slowly but powerfully, whacking each suit, downing each drone, flinging one into the other, knocking them out, each suit taking a few blows to down. One suit remains, which grabs the staff and hands it to Perry as two grab his feet and the rest reanimate to hold John down.

PERRY (CONT'D)
Well well well well how the turntables have moved 180 degrees.

AURA
Give it back! Let him go!

PERRY
(wields staff, monologues)
Story time, sweetheart. Once, there was a naughty kid. So naughty, no punishment worked. One year, Santa decided he was beyond improvement but not beyond recruitment. He trained this kid to punish other naughty kids. Back when it was acceptable. A proper beating, every Christmas. Whole team of punishers: the kid, Gryla the witch, 13 Yule Lads, Krampus, even the Christmas cat terrorizing the "naughty." Times changed. Santa vanquished all of them to save face. But the kid got out, started his own company and vowed never to punish again.

JOHN
HA! HA! HA! Fairy tales to scare children. None of that is real.

AURA
They don't sound that scary anyway.

PERRY

Listen here, Junior Mint. They were very scary! And very real! That's not to say Gryla wasn't a hoot, I wish they'd bring her back, this season needs more of that, deck the halls with boughs of horror, I say-

AURA

"Yule Lads?" A witch and a cat? Not even Christmas, that's Halloween.

PERRY

Things change! Times change! I got out! But somehow, I'm still-I'm always the bad guy. Your father had me beat children. For decades. Based on whims of a Moral Compass.

Aura looks at John with increased skepticism.

JOHN

There's no evidence of what he's saying, nothing in recorded history-

PERRY

Are you kidding me?! You know you can't record magic. Oh wow. All this time, I thought you were gaslighting me but you truly don't believe, do you? I'll show you what happens when the skeletons in your closet come back to life. "Gryla the Witch and the Thirteen Yule Lads." You know, they banned this book? Burned them. Last copy. Original. 1st editions are so magical, I've found.

JOHN

Enough! Père: you were a bad apple my father took in to keep from rotting. Gave you work, discipline. You never changed. He gave you the power to give with your left and take with your right but all you did was take. 'Til you consolidated so much power you became the biggest and baddest CEO in the world and turned morality into a sick game, congratulations.

PERRY

Thank you and Rawr! More like Mr. Claws am I right?

PERRY (CONT'D)

You know, we're not so different.
You're Santa, I'm Satan? You made a
deal with the Devil, neglecting the
details. That's your bad as much as
mine. Anyway, it's a good thing
magic can't be recorded. There'll
be no evidence that I did this.

He points the staff at John and concentrates. Does nothing.

PERRY (CONT'D)

That I did this!--Hm?
(aims, fires, dud)

He taps it. Nothing. He readjusts his grip, then smashes it
to the ground; it breaks at the curve like candy canes do.

JOHN

No!

PERRY

Such poor design. Weak in the neck.

He tosses his end in the fire and nods to have a drone throw
in the other piece. He wipes off his hands.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Like you said: the left hand
giveth, the right hand taketh away.
Why not take from the source?

Perry removes his right glove, extends hand. John struggles,
has his right hand extended by a SUIT. Perry shakes it but,
again, nothing. Confusion becomes epiphany. Drops his hand.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Interesting. You do seem different.
Thought maybe you lost weight? Off
your conscience?--Huh, so you're
going to have to go to the...to get
your...means you're gonna have to
go through the...but you don't have
the sac or the staff.

He pulls out the sac from Santa's pocket and holds it out.

PERRY (CONT'D)

The very fabric of time and space.--
Oh you're screwed. This is perfect.
You'll destroy yourself! You have
nothing; I know where the money is,
I have a whole war-drobe and I know
a staff that will work for me. Bah!

(MORE)

PERRY (CONT'D)
 Look at me droning on and on when
 actions speak louder than words.

He whistles, holds the sac out. The double doors open to
 suits and drones which hop into the sac into

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - DAY

PETER
 Uh, Santa, that you?--Shut it down.

JIMMY
 It's not working!

Drones fly in, hold up elves. Suits wrestle them. Peter
 replaces Jimmy at the keyboard, types furiously to no avail.

PETER
 Move!--Gaaah!

INT. PERE'S PENTHOUSE OFFICE - DAY

JOHN
 STOP! PERRY! PETER, SHUT IT DOWN!

PERRY (VIA WEB PORTAL)
 Let's keep this forfeiture civil.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - DAY

Elves cower. Peter pulls a bo staff from nowhere, fights the
 suits, flings them back through the Web. 4 drones surround
 him. He hits his Ball up with his bo right in their center as
 they fire: lasers bounce, destroy themselves. Elves in awe.

PETER
 Nothing like a bo to make your
 presence stand out.

More suits, drones approach the Web Portal. Dismayed, Peter
 walks up, strikes his bo like a match, sets fire to the wall
 Web Portal, and blows out the bo. Both Webs burn up, leaving

INT. PERE'S PENTHOUSE OFFICE - DAY

Perry empty handed. Perry shrugs.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - DAY

PETER
 He'll be back. Everyone grab a
 stick. Don't have one? Make one.

INT. PERE'S PENTHOUSE OFFICE - DAY

JOHN

What are you going to do with us?

PERRY

Nothing. Leave. You're literally powerless to stop me. I have plans to unravel, go!

INT. OMNICON ELEVATOR - DAY

AURA

Wasn't bad, all things considered.

JOHN

He'll be after the Moral Compass.

AURA

He wants to sell to everybody. From a pure profit motive, it makes no sense for him to steal the list.

JOHN

I think I know him a little better than you do. Perry craves power. And punishing people is in his DNA. ...Maybe he wants to reward the bad kids, punish the good kids in a perverse reversal. A perversal. Gah now he knows it's missing. Just as likely he doesn't want me to have it. Petty Perry.

AURA

What did he mean by skeletons in your closet coming back to life?

JOHN

Just trying to scare you.

AURA

I like skeletons.

JOHN

Well, we're all skeletons.

DING! Ground level.

INT. PERE'S PENTHOUSE OFFICE - DAY

PERRY

(to SOMEONE via Drone)

That was expected. We'll try again.

EXT. OMNICON HEADQUARTERS TOWER - DAY

PETER (ON COMMS, WORKING AGAIN)
Suits just tried to take over the
North Pole. It's under control.

JOHN
Perry...Call Scrooge and Grinch.
Where's Ken? Have him bring the car
around. We're going to Tinseltown.

PETER
Ken is parked 9 blocks east. If
we're going up against Perry again,
you'll need powers. Or powerful
allies, like your brother. Not
private investigators. Time is-

JOHN
Ha! Did you say powerful? Also did
you say ally? Out of the question.
Tell Ken we'll meet him halfway.

PETER
The Black Forest is your only hope.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

John and Aura walk silently. John is troubled, ready to blow.

AURA
So...gonna tell me why you don't
want to go to the Black Forest?

JOHN
I didn't give up my powers, I lost
them! OK? I don't deserve this job.
I told you, I don't like people.
The world keeps tearing itself
apart. I want out. I love Esme.
That's it. I want to be with her,
for once, forever. If I go to the
Black Forest, I might not make it
back, or I'll make it back a lie.

AURA
You're afraid of being found out.

JOHN
I'm afraid of being a fraud. And
I'm probably telling you all this
because you don't have anyone you
can talk to. See? I'm no good.

AURA

I have a job to do. I'm supposed to be your "little helper?" It's what I signed up for and I'm going to see it through. So, instead of running around the world wasting time, someone's out there with some powerful thing that they shouldn't have, doing who knows what with it. And again, no offense, you're powerless to do anything about it. So buck up. And go to the Black Forest because right now you're on track to let the world down...no offense.--Brr. Do you feel that?

Snow falls. Winds hasten. Commotion: People run, yell, drive terribly. Aura's tablet shows a temperature gradient map.

JOHN

Oh, brother. Time to go.

AURA

Polar vortex.

JOHN

Let me see that.

AURA

You didn't charge your phone?

JOHN

I forgot...There!

He points to the center where it's the coldest.

AURA

You want to go...towards the cold?

They fight icy-cold winds to the center. John yells up:

JOHN

Now! Do it!

Snowy winds engulf them. Santa hides Aura under a flap of his coat. Icicles form on his eyelashes. They close their eyes.

EXT. ANTARCTICA - DAY

Winds clear. Open their eyes. Only snow in every direction.

JOHN

This way.

AURA
Where are we? Where are you going?

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

Perry walks to where they vanished. Nods. Walks away.

EXT. ANTARCTICA - DAY

John walks; Aura follows. She's hit with snowball out of nowhere. Hears a child giggling. She stops, confused.

JOHN
Keep up!

Another snowball whizzes past her face to a small humanoid Snowchild running, laughing. She looks back; a Snowman and Snowchild are playfully throwing snowballs at each other.

AURA
I don't think...they...know we're here.

Ignoring her, John's punches a snowman. The ground rumbles.

AURA (CONT'D)
Well, now they know.

They're pelted with snowballs/snowmen of increasing speed, number, size and hostility, flinging hands as snowballs. One throws its head at Aura's face. She yells-POW!-blows it off. Santa whacks them. They fall apart but reassemble or function autonomously. A snowball rolls down a hill, absorbs snowmen to form a giant snow-boulder. John pushes Aura out of its way and gets enveloped. Aura looks around for him. He surfaces.

JOHN
...I think he's done.

They walk. It's HOT; they take off their coats. He stops.

JOHN (CONT'D)
It should be right here.

AURA
What?

JOHN
A-a fortress of ice, 70 foot walls,
8 feet thick...I don't understand.

AURA
Is it covered by a magical shield?

JOHN
Don't be silly.

AURA
(rolls eyes, steps away)
Found it.

JOHN
(walks over)
No...

EXT. SNOW FORTRESS - DAY

a sideways snowflake Pentagon but...a hexagon, half-melted, the whole thing has sunk below the horizon ~70 feet down. They put their coats back on, slide down the ledge to the entrance: a translucent sheet of ice. Santa pushes his hand through. The whole sheet falls. They walk through the hole.

INT. SNOW FORTRESS - HALLWAY - DAY

Stalactites of ice drip from the ceiling onto stalagmites of ice rising from the ground. A blue PULSE radiates from the end of the hall. Ice statues with melted faces reform with each pulse, melt again. Behind them, the hole fills with ice.

A loop: melt, Pulse, refreeze. The hall cracks, echoes. It'll buckle any second. They tread lightly, avoiding cracks: ice melts with each step, water underneath. Imagine the other five halls the same, meeting in the middle of the fortress.

INT. SNOW FORTRESS - CENTER CHAMBER - DAY

JACK FROST, crusty, is glued to an icy throne, eyes barely open, Ice Sickle in his left hand. He emits the PULSE through the chair and fortress. Cracks fill, reform. In front, 2 snowmen fight for his amusement, carrots as weapons. Light beams pierce the roof to the floor, creating small watering holes.

AURA
P-p-please h-help.

His eyelid twitches. Thin ice sheets form over holes in the ceiling, refracting light beams onto John and her, warming them. Clothes steam. John looks around in disbelief.

AURA (CONT'D)
Thank you.

JOHN
What...happened here?

JACK
(booming, echoing voice)
Neglect. Malice. Choose.

JOHN
Why are we here?

JACK
I knew you'd come. I hate
waiting...Why are you here?

JOHN
...I need your help.

JACK
How much ice am I losing every day?
If you're even in the right order
of magnitude, I'll help you.--Don't
look at her. Off the top of your
head. What do you think?

JOHN
A million pounds...a day.

JACK
Seven hundred. Million. A day.
250 billion pounds of ice a year.
For the last 50 years.

JOHN
(shocked)
How is that even possible?

JACK
Death by a thousand cuts. Each
degree a dagger. You were carrying
your coat. 70 and sunny. It takes
all of my power to keep this place
afloat. For the last 50 YEARS! I've
sat here. In a low-power state. So
the world doesn't melt. While a
megalomaniac controls half of it.
I'm going down with the ship. Happy
retirement, by the way.

AURA
We can still do something.

JACK
Ok, snowflake. I used to do things.
I had so much power, I would craft
each snowflake, no two the same. In
my sleep. Awake, I fought wars.
Know what they used to call me?

AURA

Yea. I read about you. Your winters held back Napoleon and Hitler. Nearly got to Nagasaki in time. They called you General Frost.

JACK

That's right. I was gonna say "they called me General Frost, now I'm generally forgotten" but the point is, John, I got my hands dirty, but you never did. Sitting on top of the world, judging people from afar. Naughty. Nice. But you're the good guy. And I'm the ice man.

AURA

Eh, I mean, you're blaming him for warming the bench but what are you doing? You say you're powerless, but you have enough to play games, make a Polar Vortex in New York, throw snowmen at us for no reason! I think you have more power than you say. You're just not using it.

JACK

Is that so?

He gets off the throne; ice breaks like Velcro unsticking. He steps down as they talk. Aura sees her tablet isn't working.

AURA

When's the last time you got news down here? You said half; Omnicon owns 90% of factories worldwide.

JACK

Congrats. Worse than I thought.

AURA

But also, people are trying. They're passing new laws everyday but he's not following them.

JOHN

How would you possibly know that?

AURA

All his factories have giant smokestacks. Where's the smoke? He hates clean energy. No way they're giving off sunshine. He's using old methods and covering it up.

(MORE)

AURA (CONT'D)

Magic can't be recorded right? He's taking everything toxic, making it invisible, odorless, colorless, and nobody tests it because "everyone relies on Omnicon." He's been the #1 world polluter for the last 50 years.

JOHN

Can you prove this?

AURA

Test each factory or, Mr. Frost, magic takes concentration right? If we can't remove his magic, we can remove his focus. Expose him and his factories all at once.

JOHN

And cripple the world economy?

AURA

No. Force him to change or go away.
--Please this our only chance; we need to stop the man responsible.

Jack holds his Ice Sickle to John's chest. It hurts.

AURA (CONT'D)

Hey! What are you doing?!

JACK

Stopping the man responsible.--
Father gave Perry his power. But you signed the contract. Handed the world to a company on a platter. Crippling me by consequence.

Pushes the Sickle to his heart. John WAILS; his body freezes.

AURA

Please stop! You can help us!

JACK

Too late to invest in me. Smart money's on solar. Only getting hotter out there.

PULSE stops: the fortress increasingly cracks and crumbles.

JACK (CONT'D)

Can't freeze what's already frozen. Polar opposites. Ha! If Father knew, when he gave us these powers.

AURA
Stop! He doesn't have his powers.

JACK
I know. I felt it. Like you felt me, getting weak. And did nothing.

AURA
He's going to the Black Forest!

John unfreezes, GASPS as Jack lets go. The PULSE resumes.

JACK
You're unworthy. Let IT tell you. Happy to help you meet your fate.

JOHN
Take me home. To say goodbye. Then I'll go.

JACK
If not, I'll finish you myself. And then Perry.

JOHN
Just tell me...is it true? What they say about our father?

JACK
Every word.

JOHN
I don't believe y-

Jack summons a POLAR VORTEX which lands John and Aura in

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY DESERT - NIGHT

John, on his knees. Aura stumbles, almost onto a cactus.

AURA
Whoa.--Hey, you ok? It's not entirely your fault. Perry is-

JOHN
I should have known better.
(looks around, gets up)
Let's go. One last person to disappoint.

INT. SNOW FORTRESS - ANTARCTICA - DAY

Perry walks in. Frost raises his Ice Sickle.

PERRY

Wait! I know you're mad at me...but
neither of us wants to see what
happens when you lose your cool.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - NIGHT

John and Aura sneak past a Well, Pond, Shed, Gate with Horse,
and Solar Farm outside the Main House. John opens the Gate.

AURA

Why are we sneaking?

John pets MARI LWYD, a giant, majestic white horse.

JOHN

Hey Mari. It's ok, girl. Ready for
an adventure?

ESME

(cocks Shotgun)
5 seconds before I shoot.

JOHN

It's me!

ESME

What did I tell you?

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

ESME (ON KITCHEN LANDLINE PHONE) (CONT'D)
-on stand-by, thanks Peter.

Esme pulls a tofurky out of the oven, sets it on the table.

JOHN

What, how did you?...

ESME

Stress-cooking.--Hot chocolate?

Aura nods. Esme brings out a mug full, carves slices, sits.

ESME (CONT'D)

So, how was your day?

JOHN

We can't stay long. Need to get
some things for the trip.

ESME

I'll get them. Eat. You'll need
your strength, and hers.

John debriefs the day...

JOHN
-Perry, but Peter handled it..

ESME
My goodness, how are they? If
anyone needs a place to stay..

Voices drown out as Aura falls under a trance. Simple dinner.
Parents debriefing their day. She envies her calm, tears up.

ESME (CONT'D)
Aura. Aura. Everything ok?

AURA
Yea I was just chopping onions in
my mind's eye.

JOHN
(gets up, head rush)
I should be going.--Whoa.

ESME
Why don't you lie down?

JOHN
Ok. 5 minutes.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Aura sits, shy, staring at her hot chocolate. Esme looks at
her with tenderness. John snores in his La-Z-Boy.

ESME
Tell me about her.

AURA
Who?

ESME
Your mother.--Come here.

Aura walks into Esme's embrace and cries freely.

AURA
She loved me. I miss her. She was
good. I'm...not. My dad wasn't the
same after. I ran away, never far
enough. I'm sorry, I can't...

ESME
It's ok.--Did he tell you how we
met?

AURA

(laughs under a snuffle)
He said you met at a ball.

ESME

(chuckles)

It's true. Plus a few details...
My mom died young. I was taken in
by a woman who had two daughters.
Couldn't care less about me but
every Christmas, she read only me
the story of "Gryla the Witch and
the Thirteen Yule Lads" punishing
kids who didn't listen to their
parents, to scare me in line, I
guess. She wanted to marry us off
and secure dowries, money for
marriage. But I was turning 18. She
knew I'd emancipate myself and
where's the money in that? Still,
she put it off, never took me out,
never let anyone meet me, let alone
court me, until the eve of my
birthday, Christmas eve, she took
all of us to a ball. Dressed me up
fancy. Seeing me catch the Prince's
eye, she hid me. Then I met John.
He was hiding too.

INT. CASTLE BALLROOM - DECADES AGO - NIGHT

Young Adult John, shy, and Young Adult Jack, spry, enter the
ballroom, all dressed up like a medieval Dumb and Dumber.

ESME (V.O.)

Sweet man. Neither of us were meant
to be there. I was ripped away. He
overheard Mother talking about her
dowry scheme and agreed to pay them
off so she didn't have to sell us
into marriage. He left. Dropped a
single white glove. We went home. I
was angry. She was rich. Couldn't
be happier. Next day, she pretended
nothing happened, read me "Gryla
the and the Yule Lads" like every
year, but that night, she kissed me
on the forehead, like she knew...
That night, I ran away. Tracked him
down. I took his hand.

QUICK FLASHES: Mother rips Esme away, John overhears them,
drops white glove on steps, Esme picks it up, Mother reads
Gryla, Esme runs away, Puts glove on him in his Toy Shop.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

ESME

Emancipated myself. Got married.
And we lived happily for a while...
until his love went away. That's a
different story.

AURA

Tell me the story.

ESME

A story is a lie to tell the truth.
One day I'll know how to tell it.--
Come. I need to show you something.

EXT. SHED - NIGHT

With the House behind them, they enter

INT. SHED - NIGHT

A dark brown sac covers something. Aura is wary. Esme lifts
the sac, tosses it to the floor, revealing the Moral Compass.

AURA

Holy-it has to go back. Now! All
this will be over, I don't have to-

ESME

Little more complicated than that.

AURA

...how did you find it. No. John!
(starts to leave)

ESME

Aura. It has to be returned, yes.
To where it really came from. Heart
of the Black Forest. Head of the
White Cave. Then this will be over.
When no one has their hands on it.

AURA

Why not tell him? He'll understand.

ESME

He doesn't. He'll take it right
back to the North Pole, and this
continues forever.

AURA

You don't believe in him? To do the
right thing?

ESME

I believe in him. To be him.

AURA

Why me?

ESME

Right place, right time? Karma, coincidence. But I trust you.

AURA

Why can't someone else go? Peter?

ESME

He gave it to me...The North Pole is vulnerable right now. Aura, the world cannot rely on a magical machine we barely understand to tell us who's good and who's bad. We should be left to our own devices, for better or worse. It's the right thing to do.

AURA

Won't this be dangerous?

ESME

You'll be fine.

AURA

How do you know?

ESME

(shrugs, smiles...)
Just kidding. As long as you have this, no harm will come to you.

AURA

Oh ok, that kind of makes more sense, I guess. What about him?

ESME

His fate is in your hands. Let them guide you.--Cold, let's go inside.

INT. SAN TAN RANCH - NIGHT

ESME

Wake up, John. Sleep on the plane.

JOHN

Plane? What plane? Oh yea, it's here? What plane?

Esme loads the last of the dark brown sac from the shed, hands Aura a backpack. Aura packs it with Pomegrenades, Christmas Cheer and other items from Santa's belt, sliding them into place neatly. She picks it up, ready. John picks up his; sounds like a loose bag of wrenches. She looks at him. He shrugs which makes the noise again. She shakes her head.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I know where everything is. Anyway enjoy unpacking, you're not coming.

AURA

Of course I'm coming.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Too dangerous. I need to do this alone. No discussion.

Aura looks at Esme for help.

ESME

John. The test is for you, not for her. She should be fine. I think.

JOHN

Great.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - DAY

John loads up Mari with the sac. Mari NEIGHS. Aura gets on.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What did you put in this thing?

ESME

Just the essentials.--Do this. Come back. We'll have that talk.

Aura's attention lingers on them whispering. John gets on.

AURA

(turns around MOS to Esme)
When do I tell him?

ESME

You'll know.

JOHN

I'll know what?

ESME

You'll know.

They ride off into the distance. Then into the back of

INT. FED-EX CARGO PLANE

PILOT KEN

An honor to help you again sir!
When little Billy and Joel heard I
was helping the real-life Santa
Claus, they were like "Dad, where's
the beef? You're the beef!"

JOHN

You have kids?

PILOT KEN

Boy 'n a girl. They're so proud.
Academy found out I was a Naughty
kid but your recommendation letter
put me over, got my license! Just
returning the favor!

JOHN

(confused, then lightbulb)
Peter...

John can't asleep, ashamed. Aura, worried. Plane takes off.
12 hour flight. 8 hours ahead. The plane lands in Germany:

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Almost untouched by time. 1800's village with neon signs.

PILOT KEN

I'll be right here when you return.

JOHN

Ken...go be with your kids.

PILOT KEN

Yessir!

He flies off. They ride into Feldberg. Folks shutter doors.

VILLAGERS

Turn back!/Misery!/Traitor!

A giddy Village Kid runs out; a Village Mom holds him back.
John smiles. Kid smiles. Mom shakes head. John loses smile.
They reach a PRISONER in stocks. John gets off, frees him.

JOHN

What's going on here?

PRISONER

Thank you. Well, people hear the
man formerly known as Santa Claus
is coming to town, they get angry.

AURA

They know he gave up his powers?

PRISONER

Word gets around, even here. Anyway
I believe in you, where ya headed?

JOHN

Black Forest. White Cave.

PRISONER

Ehh. Good luck!

He puts himself back in the stocks. They have A FEW WORDS,
continue. They pass a BARBER SHOP with a spinning pole. They
approach the edge of town and the beginning of

EXT. BLACK FOREST - NIGHT

Spooky. Foggy. Snow-capped spruce. They enter the fog.

JOHN (V.O.) - A FEW WORDS (START)

How do you get to the White Cave?

PRISONER (V.O.)

You need an invitation.

JOHN (V.O.)

I don't have one.

PRISONER (V.O.)

Then you should make other plans.

JOHN (V.O.)

Is there not a guide?

PRISONER (V.O.)

None that will take you. There is
another way. To get, you must give.

JOHN (V.O.)

I'm afraid...I have nothing left to
give.

PRISONER (V.O.) - A FEW WORDS (END)

You should be.

AURA

Any idea where we're going?

JOHN

What was my rule about "not
talking?"

AURA

That was...that phrasing makes it really hard to respond to.

JOHN

Exactly. Wait, shh! We're being watched.--Come out now.

He waves as one of Perry's drones comes from behind a tree.

INT. OMNICON HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Perry eats only the caramel third of a popcorn tin. Waves.

PERRY

Light 'em up!

EXT. BLACK FOREST - NIGHT

JOHN

Hold on. Ready, Mari? HYAH!

They ride. More drones emerge and speed up, firing lasers.

PETER (O.S.)

Pomegrenades!

Aura turns around on Mari. Pulls a Pomegrenade from her bag. And two branches off passing trees, holds them in one hand like an X, scrunchie in the top gap. She launches one. Hits, explodes: berries cause secondary blasts. A drone fires. She launches. Hits! A drone above fires. She launches up. Misses.

AURA

Uh oh. Speed up!

It lands behind them and explodes, singeing Mari's tail.

AURA (CONT'D)

Sorry!...Wait, slow down.

JOHN

Why?

AURA

Trust me.

Drones gather, she aims at the middle, launches, hits middle drone: explosions cascade out to the rest. Dozen more emerge.

AURA (CONT'D)

I'm out!

John rides faster, harder. The drones get closer. Suddenly they all short circuit and fall to the ground. They stop. Static ZAPS in John's earpiece. He throws it to the ground.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - DAY

PETER

Sir? Sir?

EXT. BLACK FOREST - NIGHT

AURA

Tablet's down too. No electronics.

JOHN

We're in it now. Let's keep moving.

AURA

Wait. Assuming this magical force field is spherical, the center is where we want to go, right?

She walks behind the curved line of dead drones. Tablet works again. She pulls up a measurement app. John observes. She finds the line perpendicular to the curve of dead drones.

AURA (CONT'D)

There.

John nods, impressed. They walk for a bit. SOON, their steps reveal frozen suits under snow.

JOHN

Sent suits to do a human's job.

AURA

This is why there's no "proof." No photos, film, records. Only stories and drawings.

JOHN

Doesn't make 'em any more true.

AURA

I heard of elves in trees that make cookies, like, that's all they do.

JOHN

Those are actors.

AURA

I heard fairy dust makes you fly.

JOHN
That's a euphemism.

AURA
For what?

JOHN
I'll tell you when you're older.
Er, someone will.

AURA
K. What about Gryla? The Yule Lads?

JOHN
No.

AURA
There are gingerbread people,
elves, Jack Frost...you don't think
it's remotely possible that Gryla
and the Yule Lads existed. At some
point? You can't believe that?

JOHN
I can't believe...that my Father
would hide that from me. That he
would have them hurt people. And
then just get rid of them. Without
me knowing. Ok? Happy?

AURA
...So what can we expect?

JOHN
If the stories are to be believed,
it adapts to the person entering.

AURA
Adapts how?

JOHN
Different for everybody. Many paths
you can take, or that take you,
depending on what you want. Each
one takes you closer or farther
away, depending on what it wants.

EXT. GIANT LOG - DAY

Both sit, eating granola bars. Mari is tied to the log.

AURA
So Santa, what do you want?

JOHN

For Christmas?! No one's ever asked me that before...Family.

AURA

Family's overrated.--Don't you have one anyway?

JOHN

Not yet. You? What do you want?

AURA

Freedom. Go wherever I want, whenever...Family holds you back.

JOHN

Don't say that.--And you already go wherever you want, don't you?

AURA

There's a difference between running towards and running away.

JOHN

If this is what you're running towards, can't imagine what you're running away from.

She shrugs, reties her shoes, revealing gold bracelets.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Never noticed those.

AURA

My dad gave them to me.

Twig snaps. Santa gets up. A snowball hits the back of his head. He zips around in a fighting stance. Aura laughs.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

John winds up for a pitch, snowball in hand. He throws. She swings a large branch, misses.

JOHN

Eye on the ball. Don't look at me. I'm only gonna lie.

He winds up, misdirects, and throws it. She HITS it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hey, there it is!

He throws two quickly. She twirls the stick, hits both.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Oh!

AURA

I was a baton-twirler in my youth.

JOHN

Ah so next year? Wow!

They chuckle. He winds up for another. A twig SNAPS in the distance. They stop. The branches seem to move. SNAP, closer.

AURA

Show yourself!

This takes John by surprise. A four-legged figure comes into focus: a Reindeer whose central antlers roughly form a heart.

JOHN

Cupid?...I left you in the...how did you end up here?

Cupid bucks. Mari neighs. John stands between, hands out.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hey now, it's ok.

AURA

I don't think she recognizes you.

JOHN

I cast a spell to make them forget.-
-Please remember. Remember.
(extends a hand to Cupid)

AURA

Where are the others?

RAWR! from far behind. Ground moves. Stampede sounds. Snow shakes off trees. Seven Reindeer run full speed towards them. Behind them, chasing, is KRAMPUS: a gargantuan demon bull. Cupid takes off. Aura and John jump back on Mari.

JOHN

Go! HYAH!

Reindeer overtake. Mari catches up. John looks helpless. The Reindeer run nimbly around trees. Krampus knocks trees over, trips Vixen who slides on her side. Krampus walks up direly.

AURA

Stop!

Mari stops. John looks back; Aura's already gone.

JOHN

We have to get to the--Aura!

Aura walks up to Krampus, sprays Christmas Cheer for ten seconds, empties the can. Krampus sits, calm. Vixen bolts, kicks snow in its face. Krampus sneezes. Aura hops on Mari.

AURA

30 seconds!

They ride, reach a frozen river. Reindeer are afraid to step.

JOHN

It's ok. Spread out!

He holds his hands out. They listen, begin to cross, slowly. Krampus ROARS! They're halfway across. John gets off, unhooks the sac. Krampus is heard running. Deer make it across, flee.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Go. He's coming.

AURA

(gets off)

What? No!

JOHN

Too heavy. Mari, anything happens to me? You don't leave her.--Here. Stay close but keep your distance.

He hands her the reins. He pulls out 2 scimitars from the sac, stands ready for Krampus. Aura looks in the sac for the Moral Compass. Can't. Ties it to Mari so it drags behind.

AURA

Sorry, girl, this is the only way.

Aura holds reins far from Mari, begin to cross the river.

Krampus barrels towards John. He throws one scimitar at a tree to the left; one to the right. Their handles together emit a red, laser-linked chain that entangles Krampus.

Aura and Mari, halfway across. John begins crossing. Ice cracks. Krampus breaks free. Ice breaks under Aura. She falls in. Mari instantly whips her out onto land with the reins as she herself falls through the ice. Sac snags on jagged ice.

JOHN

NO!

John reaches the sac, pulls, ice cracking under. He gets it. Mari vanishes in the water. John crawls to shore. Collapses.

Sac in hand. Rest of the ice breaks. Krampus is stranded. John sobs on his back, in pain. Aura looks for Mari. No sign.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I'm useless. I should throw myself
in after her. Why. WHY?! Why me...

No response from Aura. He picks his head up. She's crying quietly into her knees, shivering. He gets up.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Aura? No no no. It's ok. It's gonna
be fine. I'm sorry. Ok, let's go.

An hour passes, walking, heads down, silently. John holds the sac over his shoulder. Leaves start to crunch. It's Autumn here. Strange. Walking. Soon, Spring: various red flowers against the green. Their spirits lift one degree. They see trees sheltering very peculiar mushrooms. Aura investigates.

AURA
Don't think I've read about these.

JOHN
Careful.

He examines. Mushrooms with various yuletide hieroglyphics.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Oh. This won't be pleasant.

Takes one, eats it. It regrows. Aura raises an eyebrow.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Give it a second. Here we go.

He sees a dozen highfalutin-types prance through the woods.

JOHN (CONT'D)
12 lords a leaping. Follow them!

AURA
You know I don't see them.

They follow. Lords disappear. John looks for the next batch.

JOHN
11 ladies dancing. Find one of
which there are only 11. In here.

AURA
-9, 10, 11...no more, this one.
(watches him eat it)
Anything?

Lords return but 11 dancing ladies go in another direction.

JOHN

No. Oh, here they are.--That way!

MONTAGE of them running, laughing, chasing visions: lords, dancers, 8 maids a milking, 7 swans a swimming, 6 geese a laying, 5 golden rings, 4 calling birds, 3 French hens. John's vision worsens as they all appear at the same time.

AURA

You ok? Why don't you sit down.

He stumbles. She sits him down, facing the WHITE MOUNTAIN. John sees various birds fly into various panels mountainside.

AURA (CONT'D)

Why don't I take the last one?

JOHN

NO! No.--What does a pear tree even look like, or a partridge? Is it alone, or a partridge family? "Our house in the middle of the forest."

AURA

Focus. Look towards the mountain.

He looks, focuses. Then he sees it. He points at a panel. She walks up to it, touches it, but it looks like nothing to her.

AURA (CONT'D)

Ok. Uh. What, how do we open it?
A knock or a phrase? Secret panel?

JOHN

You do it. I need to sit down. I'm already sitting? Whoa.

AURA

(pacing)

Open sesame. Had to try. Merry Christmas. Four score and seven years ago. Cotton eye joe...
("Joe Joe" echoes back.)
Oh! (Echo: "Oh. Oh.") There's an echo right here. ("Echo right here. Echo right here.")
(leans back)
Oh! (no echo)
(leans forward)
Oh. ("Oh. Oh.")
(leans back)
That's probably a clue...somehow.

Disgruntled, John gets up, takes her position, yells, loud:

JOHN
HO! (Echoes: "HO! HO!")

The cave entrance opens like a garage door.

AURA
You know there are numerous teenage
boys trapped in there right?

A BOOM! from the sky. Perry(!) lands behind them with a
Golden Parachute, carrying a satchel.

AURA (CONT'D)
Ugh what are you DOING here?!
How did you even...? Ugh!

Perry points up. A drone glints in the sun. Above the magic.

PERRY
Anything's possible if you're high
enough...What's wrong with him?

AURA
Why were you shooting lasers at us
if you wanted us to find the cave?

PERRY
Entertainment, my child, keep up.

JOHN
No way you're going in there.

PERRY
Deal: if I get what I want, I'll
shut down all of my manufacturing
facilities. No factories, no
smokestacks, zero emissions.

AURA
What? I don't believe you.

PERRY
Believe me.

AURA
What's in there?

PERRY
Big shoes. Tiny carbon footprint.

JOHN
Fine.

AURA
No! He's just gonna...trick you.

PERRY
(shakes John's hand)
Let's go!

Aura is deflated. They enter the cave. It closes behind them.

INT. WHITE CAVE - BASE - UNKNOWN

John pulls a red flare from the sac, lights it. As the cave closes, it glows whiter. So he drops it. They start walking.

AURA
Where's the light coming from?--
And the oxygen?

PERRY
Magic.--When you're done with him,
why don't you come work for me?

JOHN
(sobers for a moment)
Hey! You don't talk to her. You
don't even look her way, got it?

PERRY
Fine. Just saying, we're in the
same boat. Better to row than to
row. (pronounces it rau)

At the first fork, the ceiling, walls are lined with holly. She reaches to touch. They start flying around like bats. Père screams, John falls back. She laughs. They swirl around them, fly down left path. Perry reads his book, heads right.

PERRY (CONT'D)
Well this is me. See ya!

JOHN
Uh, guess we go left?

AURA
We can't guess our way to the top.

JOHN
My head. Gotta sit down. 5 minutes.

AURA
Ok I'll just-

She looks; he's sleeping. She sits, stares at the sac.

Quietly, she digs through it, eventually pulling out the Moral Compass, with an unmarked card. She puts it aside. Stares at the gold machine and handprint.

FLASHBACK: PETER: -said to have burned the hand of the man who procured it. It's cool now, unfortunately.

FLASHBACK: ESME: Fate is in your hands. Let them guide you.

AURA (CONT'D)
It's not a handprint, it's a map.

Tilts the handprint 45 degrees. Ridges rise, meet, diverge: a maze in an outline of a mountain on the palm. She squints:

AURA (CONT'D)
Backwards. How do I bring you back?

Compass glows. She GASPS. John snores. Glow projects the map onto her. She rotates it: map shines on cave wall. She sets it down, uses a rock to solve the maze, base to peak. Checks tablet is dead; no way to write, she memorizes out loud:

AURA (CONT'D)
Left, Right, Left, Left, Right, Up,
Down (trails off, closes eyes and
repeats) Left, Right, Left, Left...
(whispers to Compass as
she puts it away)
Thank you.

JOHN
What for?

AURA
For...gathering your bearings. C'mon.

MONTAGE of trek up the inside of the mountain. Paths close behind them. They get EXHAUSTED. She leads him, whispering.

JOHN
Left again?

AURA
One right turn to screw it all up.

JOHN
How do you know where you're going?

AURA
Uhh, Peter gave me a map.

JOHN
Let me see.

AURA

To memorize. No...physical copy...

JOHN

Little has been written of this place. Few have made it in. Fewer have made it out.--Aura, this could take hours, days. Air's thinning.

AURA

What do you want me to do about it? We've no choice. Keep going until-

Aura is startled by a row of skeletons in the labyrinth.

JOHN

This time of year used to be a celebration of both life and death, so here, you might see both.

At a fork, a bunny with colorful eggs runs from a chicken.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Wait.

AURA

Come on, this is it. Last fork. You ok? Has the...worn off?

JOHN

Yea. Maybe not.

Giant, fuzzy, cute tinsel caterpillar goes into a crawlspace.

AURA

I see it too. You're fine. It's right there, what's the problem?

JOHN

Doesn't feel right.

AURA

(fed up)

You know I'm starting to understand why no one likes you. Why your own brother hates you. You're a terrible Santa. You don't listen. Only thing you've given me is a hard time. If there was a test in here, you failed. By shaking hands with that madman. Again.

JOHN

I wasn't in my right mind.

AURA

Were you ever? You can follow my lead? Or get lost.

JOHN

I'm not ready...I'm not ready. To be a dad. I'm not ready to be... dead. I'm not ready.

AURA

...What do you think is going to happen to you in there?

JOHN

I don't know...

AURA

If you trust me, you'll be ok. Ok? You can be a good dad. Work on some dad jokes, you're halfway there.

She gives her hand, lifts him up. He looks in the crawlspace.

JOHN

That's where the missing kids go.

AURA

Too dark.

JOHN

I'll go first.--Stay close behind me, unless you're Claus-trophobic.

AURA

(echoes through caverns)
Nooooo!--Aw-ful! It's perfect.

He crawls, sac drags behind. She pushes, follows, crawls into

INT. WHITE CAVE - PEAK - DAY

with a 50-foot evergreen tree in white-particle glow, decked in caterpillar garland, round gourd ornaments, insects with light-bulb butts, butterfly bows, and little birds of green and red. Conspicuously missing a tree topper.

AURA

That is the mother of all Christmas trees.

JOHN

I think you're right.--This doesn't look so bad.

Approaching Tree. John, cautious. Aura, curious, GASPS: two *golden* GOLDEN ORB SPIDERS weave two layers of fabric opposite each other, hanging off, flowing as a tree skirt.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Two halves of the same cloth, no matter how far, forever bound by time and space. Golden Orb Spiders only work together. As a pair.

AURA

Something to aspire to.

She reaches out. Spiders shake their front two legs at her. Then hop onto the tree and curl up in perfect spheres.

AURA (CONT'D)

Ok, sorry.--Now what do we do?

JOHN

Your guess is at least as good as mine.

INT. WHITE CAVE - DARK LABYRINTH - SAME

Perry sweats, drained. Checks his book with the same handprint map. He enters his final crawlspace into

INT. WHITE CAVE - GRYLA'S CHAMBER - SAME

with a large cauldron in the middle, 13 blank tombstones around it. He removes the cauldron lid. A BLACK CAT (the Yule Cat) jumps out. Perry gasps. Cat, needles for whiskers, hides behind a tombstone. Perry dumps 13 pouches marked "wool, pot, door handle, etc" from his bag and into the cauldron. Opens GRYLA THE WITCH AND THE THIRTEEN YULE LADS book, reads, triggering a soft green glow from the cauldron.

PERRY

"Once upon a time..."

INT. WHITE CAVE - PEAK - NIGHT

JOHN

"We wish you a Merry Christmas,"
"Jingle Bell, Jingle Bell, Jingle
Bell Rock," "Have a Holly, Jolly
Christmas" Come on, I'm ready for
my test, please.

The tree lights up with the music but doesn't do anything.

AURA

Why don't you see if there's anything useful in the sac?

JOHN

Huh, no, nothing that would help here. These lights. If I get 'em to the top: new Moral Compass!...?

AURA

Wouldn't hurt to check.

JOHN

Sure, go for it.

AURA

I don't feel comfortable going through your things.

JOHN

I give you permission. Have at it.

AURA

Ok but...my hands are all sticky.

JOHN

(looks back finally)
Huh, why?

AURA

I'm a child, remember?

JOHN

You're acting strange. If it'll make you act less weird, I'll do it, ok? Cover all our bases.

(sits, rummages)

One can of beans. Spoiler alert, there are more of these in here.

(pulls out)

Another can of beans.

AURA

How'you planning to open those?

JOHN

Can opener.

AURA

How were you p-

JOHN

Portable stove. Gas for the stove. Matches and lighter as backup.

AURA
Cool, you got the whole beans
situation worked out. What else?

JOHN
(pulls out Moral Compass)
Another...can of beans...

He deflates, stares at it, then looks at Aura, who nods. He turns it around. Unmarked card stuck to it. He opens it.

JOHN (READING) (CONT'D)
"Dear Santa,
All I want for Christmas.
Love. Esmerelda."
(to Aura)
She didn't trust me to do the right
thing.

AURA
She trusted you to be stubborn. To
make it here. Or she trusted me.

JOHN
"To get, you have to give." I don't
deserve to. Here.

He hands it to her. His beard grows, turns white.

AURA
Thank you. Santa.
(looks to Tree)
Just don't wanna climb it, do you?

JOHN
(pats her on back)
I believe in you.

Aura starts to climb it, Moral Compass slung from her waist in the empty sac. Tree and creatures help, extending limbs.

JOHN (CONT'D)
If you fall, I gotcha.

AURA
I think the tree's got me.

JOHN
Well, I've got the tree.

He puts one hand on trunk. It gently reacts to his touch. Aura reaches the top, gets a footing, and uses both hands to retrieve the Moral Compass. She tosses the sac and places the Compass on top of the tree at the same time as:

INT. WHITE CAVE - GRYLA'S CHAMBER - SAME TIME

PERRY

"-they lived happily. ever. after."

INT. WHITE CAVE - PEAK - DAY

As the Moral Compass settles in place, a beam of light blasts from it through the top of the mountain, knocking her back. She grabs hold of the tree and re-finds her footing.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - SOLAR FARM - NIGHT

Esme is tinkering with a solar panel. Then she stops...

INT. WHITE CAVE - GRYLA'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

13 YULE LADS rise from in front of the tombstones: each a mix of garden gnome and Gollum. Perry is giddy. Mountain RUMBLES.

SPLIT SCREEN: (3-WAY: Left, Middle, Right)

JOHN (LEFT)

Did you do that?

AURA (MIDDLE)

Did I do that?

PERRY (RIGHT)

Did I do that?

The branch Aura grasps starts to glow and splinter. A thin column of trunk John touches begins to glow, too.

JOHN

Hold on!

AURA

I'm holding on!

John's hand is stuck. Aura's branch breaks. She falls.

JOHN

No!

Santa rips his hand away from the tree, falls, *with* the thin column. Aura's eyes open. She holds the STICK, suspended parallel, 4 feet off the ground. She dangles off it. Its branches flare out, curl like twisted broom hairs. The Stick rigid, she climbs atop, leans left; it moves. Right; it goes.

AURA

No way.

She zips and zooms around on it, in complete control of it.

AURA (CONT'D)
How in the world?! You got one too!

John, grounded, holds a new STAFF.

JOHN
It...gave it to me. To us.

AURA
What does yours do?

JOHN
I dunno.

He wields it but it does nothing. Aura keeps flying around.

AURA
Woooooooo! This is awesome.

JOHN
Careful! You could poke an eye out!

AURA
Am I-Do I get to be a witch? That's
so cool. I'm gonna get a hat.

Spiders unfurl, hop on fabric, use their front feet to summon them. Aura GASPS. John, Aura each take half. They look at each other through their half. She rubs the spiders' heads.

AURA (CONT'D)
Thanks little guys!

Aura folds hers and stuffs it in a pocket. John tries to stick it in a pocket but they're all stitched/sealed.

JOHN
Dang new suit.
(ties it under pant leg)
How do we get outta here?

They look up at the hole blasted by the Moral Compass.

AURA
There. Hang on.

John grabs the end of Aura's stick. She tries flying. Too heavy. It goes up a bit, stalls. He lets go. She shoots up.

AURA (CONT'D)
Whoa!

Flying the stick with John holding the back, Aura steers him like he's jet-skiing and she's the jet, weaving in and out of the way of the trees as the avalanche catches up.

AURA (CONT'D)
Tuck your knees!

He gets better at riding the bumps, but they gain speed until-

JOHN
AHHHHHHHHH! Hold on! AURA (CONT'D)

-they crash land at the foot of the mountain. Snow settles around them. They get up, shrug it off. Mountain RUMBLES. She looks to it, then to her bracelets, then to Santa.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Thank you.--We need to get back to the North Pole. Let's go.

AURA
Yea, you should go, meet you there.

JOHN
Aren't you coming with me?

The cave entrance begins to open. She turns back.

AURA
One more thing I have to do.

She hides his staff and her stick in the snow. Pere's cauldron rolls out of the cave, then the Yule Lads. Cave closes, stops rumbling. The Lads laugh, orient around the cauldron, from which Père emerges, dizzy, waddling.

PERRY
Well well wel-come The Yule Lads!
I'm no Gryla the Witch but they're mine now. Ghouls of Christmas past. The skeletons in your closet. And a Christmas cat! See? Told you it's a thing!

JOHN
That's what you were after? These monsters.

Cat meows. Yule Lads hiss. Cat notices them hiss and begins to hiss. Père motions them to stand down.

PERRY
Don't have to worry about them. Yet. But first. Hand 'em over.

He holds his hand out. John and Aura look at each other.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 More like the not-so-Giving Tree
 eh? C'mon, Secret Santa, I know you
 come bearing gifts. Let's go.

Holds hands out again. Aura steps forward.

JOHN
 Aura. What are you doing?

She walks solemnly to Père. John tries reach for her arm but his boots are strangely stuck to the ground.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Aura!

She takes out the two Spiders in ball form. John is shocked.

PERRY
 Ah, there we are, w-

JOHN
 Aura you don't have to do this.
 What did he tell you?

PERRY
 Excuse me Santa, can't a man talk
 to his own daughter?

AURA
 Dad left. A husk remained. I'm
 sorry. He promised he'd let me go.

PERRY
 Well...a deal is a deal.

He snaps his fingers. Her bracelets unclasp, fall to the ground. Cat nuzzles her. She stares at her hands in shame.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 Santa's little helper is actually
 my little helper. And with my
 daughter by my side-

She turns around and takes off running.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 Ugh. Get her.

She runs. Yule lads chase. John is stuck, on his knees now. She picks up both sticks, takes off on hers, flying so fast it creates a magical black shield. Yule Lads surround John.

PERRY (CONT'D)

They leave us so soon, don't they?--
Stand up.

(magically stands him up)

Nice suit. Who designed it? She
never liked the clothes I made for
her...This is good actually, I
didn't want her to see this.

JOHN

You used her. She's a good kid.

PERRY

Ugh, I hope not.

Monologuing, Perry pulls out a disc. It uncoils into a 4 ft.
screen (~collapsible hamper). Its mesh pattern has flies. He
inserts the Spiders; they eat the flies and CREATE A NEW WEB.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Sad that for the sins of the
father, the son should repent. Once
I unleash these Yule Lads onto the
world, they'll blame you. As the
dismantling of the Santa brand is
complete, I'll swoop in with this:

(holds up half-done WEB)

Instant delivery. Imagine one of
these in every household.

INT. IDYLIC FAMILY HOME - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS DAY

The Web is an area rug; objects pop up from "under" it and
don't fall back in: bouncy ball, bag of Funyuns, lawnmower. A
family gathers in joy at their bounty, cheer and applaud.

EXT. WHITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

PERRY

No wrapping, no boxes, no shipping,
no handling, no delivery time, just
instant gratification, Christmas
every day...And I'll get a magical
window into everyone's lives, I'll
know their fears, habits, convos,
"I'll see them when they're
sleeping, I'll know when they're
awake," it'll be brilliant!
Gotta make these spiders work OT,
but I'll have enough for a small-
scale, magic carpet rollout today.
Full launch by New Years.

(MORE)

PERRY (CONT'D)

Then we'll all be connected through a world wide web, an interconnected net. Internet! Take that, Al Gore! Thank you from the bottom of where my heart should be for the ultimate Christmas gift. But I'm putting a freeze on any more gift-giving HA.

JOHN

You'll never get away with this.

PERRY

Get away? Santa, I'm here to stay. I'm the new you! But a real hero. To the nice and naughty. Oh, you thought my plan was to punish people, make the world suffer? That hurts my feelings. Means you haven't been listening. My bad. Made you think I wanted the Moral Compass so you'd make a deal letting me get what I really wanted. I'm done punishing. Except you. And these Lads can have at it.

The spiders finish the web. He puts one in each pocket.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Amazing!...Well, I'm running late. Toodle-loo Santa Claus! Merry Christmas. Let's go lads.
(carried off, hits trees)
Gah, watch it!

John struggles to free himself from the suit. It barely budes....He gives up....He's freezing. But, so is the suit.

EXT. BLACK FOREST - DAY

Perry and the Yule Lads come across Krampus, resting.

PERRY

Oh, Big K, we'll get 'em next time.

EXT. WHITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

John yells in agony as he uses every ounce of power to strip the coat off. He falls over, freeing him from the frozen boots. The pants now horizontal, he crawls out of them, shivering, freezing in his underwear. Until he stops moving. The wind sweeps snow onto him, motionless.

JOHN
Please...Esme...

EXT. BLACK FOREST RIVER - DAY

The river refreezes. Bubbles from below. Ice cracks. A BURST from underneath: it's MARI LWYD, zombified, with a glowing exoskeleton. She neighs strongly and runs through the forest. Mari comes across Cupid. They stand off. Mari bows. Cupid bows. Cupid calls out. The other Reindeer emerge and follow.

They get to John, motionless. Mari nudges him. Reindeer surround, bow and lift him using their antlers, placing him on Mari. John, draped over, steams as Mari warms. Reindeer huddle, walking through the forest. Midway through the Spring section, his eyes open to Yule Lads' footprints, then seeing:

JOHN
Mari? You're alive? Or am I...

Sits up. Sees the Reindeer and tears up. He pets Cupid.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Thank you.

Yule Lad footprints branch out where the drones fell earlier, with Pere's footsteps conspicuously missing. John looks up, then around. He finds his broken comms piece and picks it up.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Peter...Peter...

PETER (V.O.)
Sir...

JOHN
It's done.

PETER
I knew you could do it.

JOHN
Perry's on his way.

PETER
We're ready.

JOHN
Yule Lads are heading to Feldberg.
Don't have time for told-you-so's.

PETER
Nor do I, sir.

JOHN

Peter. Can you configure a web to connect with *another* piece of web, one it's not already paired with?

PETER

Send them back to the White Cave.--
In theory, any web should be able to be connected with any other.
(palms Ball, web wrapping)
One-way? Let me see what I can do.

JOHN

(Comms breaking up)
Ok. Watch out for Perry's suits.

PETER

What? You're breaking up. His suit!

JOHN (CONT'D)

PETER (CONT'D)

Need a new suit? K? How's the girl?

JOHN

What?

PETER

Where's the girl?!

JOHN

(Comms go dead)
She's not with me.

His leg is freezing. He takes web off and yells into it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

AURA! AURA!

EXT. GREENLAND - NIGHT

AURA, Web as a scarf, rides fast through green streaks of Aurora Borealis. Wind, snow picks up. She's hit with a snowball. More. She's knocked off, into a snowy hill. Tries to take off. Too windy. An IGLOO forms around her. Frost enters.

AURA

I have to get to the North Pole!

JACK

Can't let you do that.
(sits at entrance)

AURA

Why not? Why are you doing this?

JACK
I made a deal.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - MORAL COMPASS CHAMBER - NIGHT

Peter puts his Web piece in the reader: displays on screen in

INT. MORAL COMPASS SURVEILLANCE ROOM - NIGHT

He types. Radar screen scans a world map: LOCATING WEBS...
Two blips* pop up in Feldberg, Germany. *One in Greenland.*
THREE BLIPS move towards the North Pole, two of which peel
off in other directions. Peter glares at the last three.

PETER
*White Cave and John. *Aura?* PERRY...

EXT./INT. PERRY'S DRONESHIP - NIGHT

Two drones exit each side of the ship with a Web Portal.
Perry sets the Spiders onto his mesh fly dressform, grins.

INT. NORTH POLE - MORAL COMPASS SURVEILLANCE ROOM - NIGHT

Peter types, selecting only John's blip + White Cave's blip.

PETER
Come on, come on...

COMPUTER
Configuring. Processing. Loading.
Completing. Connection Established.

PETER
Yes! Phew...Ok, "Suit."

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - MAIN CORRIDOR - SAME

PETER (CONT'D)
New suit. New suit.

INT. SANTA'S OFFICE - CLOSET

PETER
Low priority but...it is Christmas,
gotta look the part, right?

Opens closet: Santa suits, two of each rainbow color: Violet,
Indigo, Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange. But there are 3 Red...

The new Traditional Red suit jumps on Peter. They get in an epic struggle, knocking over furniture, closing the door.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - MAIN CORRIDOR

ELF 1

What's going on in there?

JIMMY

I think he's changing.

Suit knocks out Peter, exits the room, controlling Peter a la Weekend at Bernie's, hat covering head. An elf gives a finger gun. Suit waves Peter's hand, goes to the computer, types.

EXT. BLACK FOREST - NIGHT

Yule Lads run, smelling Feldberg...John rides, far behind.

INT. IGLOO - GREENLAND - NIGHT

Aura sits elevated inside, warm. Frost sits at the entrance, lower elevation, cold, meditating, her stick on his lap.

AURA

What a plan. A Web in every home?

JACK

Clean. No more pollution. Convinced him that if we only had one season, people would buy less stuff. In his best interest to keep Winter alive.

AURA

He gets away with decades of evil?

JACK

Planet will cool. I'll be powerful.

AURA

He's using you! He'll take your power. First chance he gets.

JACK

I won't let him.

AURA

I need to get back to help John before it's too late.

JACK
It's already too late. He's dead. I
felt it myself.

AURA
What?...No.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - NIGHT

Peter wakes up quietly, opens eyes. His body types without consent. The FLOOF atop his hat moves to the front; he closes his eyes! Floof moves away. Eyes open; careful not to move. Floof juts to the front, he closes his eyes in time! Floof moves away. He sees Ctrl Alt Del buttons. Takes deep breath.

He types Ctrl Alt Del: system resets! Password protected. The whole Station shuts down, reboots with emergency lighting. He is held in place, his cries muffled by the soundproof room:

PETER
Help! Help!

INT. PERRY'S DRONESHIP - NIGHT

DRONESHIP (V.O.)
"Approaching North Pole Station"

PERRY
Ready electro-magic pulse.

A red EMP button emerges from the console. Out the window, Père notices the reduced, emergency lighting.

PERRY (CONT'D)
Never mind.

DRONESHIP (V.O.)
(retracts button)
"Never minded."

EXT. NORTH POLE STATION - NIGHT

Drones escort Perry into the station. He speaks into a drone, broadcasting to drones around the station.

PERRY
Attention everyone. Santa Claus is
no longer with us. I am taking over
early. You'll see drones poking
about. They're nice as long as you
obey them. We have much work to do.
(MORE)

PERRY (CONT'D)
 Making sure everyone gets their presents. Forget the List, and the Moral Compass...Let's get to work!

INT. MORAL COMPASS SURVEILLANCE ROOM - NIGHT

Perry enters.

PETER
 You!

PERRY
 Nice to meet...me, I'm assuming.

He see's Password Protected screen, then smiles at Peter.

PETER
 You can't make me talk.

PERRY
 I can make you type. "Esmerelda."

The suit makes Peter type it out. It works.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 And it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas.

PETER
 What are you gonna do?

PERRY
 YOU are going to give me access.

He fits the Spider-balls in the Magic Reader which delivers a temporary surge of energy. The computers start to read them.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - NIGHT

PERRY
 Show me the Yule Lads.

Drones *project* on the wall where the Web Portal used to be:

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Yule Lads exit the tree line to Feldberg under a full moon. Thirteen drones in Santa hats dangle a Golden Box Present and land. Yule Lads curiously but cautiously approach. They shake the boxes until they find one to their liking. Jump around, excited to open them. The drones yoink them away. Lads *chase*.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - NIGHT

Perry relaxes in Santa's chair. But notices Santa emerging from the Black Forest. Anger turns to resignation to resolve.

PERRY

Fine. Better ways to destroy you.

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE/BLACK FOREST EDGE - NIGHT

JOHN

We're too conspicuous. Wait here.

EXT./INT. BARBER SHOP - FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

John sneaks to Barber Shop. Handle reads his handprint. Goes to a back room, opens door to: a normal Santa suit.

JOHN (SANTA)

They want Santa? Santa they'll get.

Changed into the normal Santa suit, he ties his Web Portal into a *practical* sac and slings it over his shoulder, ready.

INT. IGLOO - GREENLAND - NIGHT

Frost's eyes closed, Aura sneaks to her stick. Reaches out, ready to grasp it. Amazingly, it LEAPS from his lap to her hand. She GASPS. His eyes open. He seals the exit with ice.

JACK (O.S.)

See how long you last without oxygen. Like every generation, making things worse for the next until the air you breath vanishes.

AURA

Ok, stick. How fast do I have to go to get that shield? We've got...9 meters to accelerate, think I can do that? If not, I'm gonna knock myself unconscious. Or worse.

From the exit end, she bursts forward, stops shy of the wall.

AURA (CONT'D)

No, no, no.
(backs up, deep breath)
I believe in you.

She bursts forward! Stops short again, scraping the other end. She backs up a third time. Deep breath.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Any Elf makes a peep, gets lasered.
Live in 3...2...No apologies for the
interruption, this is Fouettard
News: Père and Balanced. Santa has
unleashed a baker's dozen of ghouls
on the fair citizens of Feldberg,
Germany, bringing to life the
twisted story of "Gryla the Witch
and the Thirteen Yule Lads." Ahem.

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

PERRY (V.O.)

"The first of them is Stekkjarstaur
the Sheep-Cote Clod./ He came stiff
as wood,/to prey upon the farmer's
-sheep/as far as he could./He
wished to suck the ewes,/but it was
no accident/he couldn't; he had
stiff knees/-not too convenient."

A drone dangling wool leads Clod to a sheep pen. Clod chases,
pinches the sheep. Santa captures the sheep and Clod but only
Clod *passes through the sac*. Santa lets the sheep out: BAAA!

PERRY (V.O.)

Honestly, that's the weirdest one.
Why would they lead with that one?

INT. MORAL COMPASS SURVEILLANCE ROOM

Peter struggles to move in the suit. He wiggles his toes.

PETER

Forgot about my shoes.

He starts inching to the door...more like centimetering.

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

PERRY (V.O.)

The second was Giljagaur or Gully
Gawk,/gray his head and mien./He
snuck into the cow barn/from his
craggy ravine./Hiding in the
stalls,/he would steal the milk,
while/the milkmaid gave the cowherd
/a meaningful smile.

A drone drips milk, leads Gully to a cow. Santa nabs it.

INT. WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - NIGHT

PERRY

Shocking and disturbing. Most of these things appear to be hungry. For your children?! Like Stubby.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Door locked, Santa hops onto the roof, Santa descends chimney, Santa nabs Stubby in kitchen.

INT. MORAL COMPASS SURVEILLANCE ROOM - NIGHT

Peter uses his head to open the door to the Main Corridor. He peeks: drones surveil in a fixed pattern.

PERRY (V.O.)

Spoon Licker...Pot Scraper...Bowl Licker...Door Slammer: how bizarre!

SERIES OF SHOTS (Santa nabs Yule Lads in the act): Spoon Licker, Pot Scraper, Bowl Licker, Door Slammer opening and closing doors which wakes up the family.

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Lights on, commotion grows as Santa nabs Door Slammer. Santa comes outside to address his presence in the square.

JOHN

It's ok everyone, don't call 911, please, we're just running a circus...practice, it'll be over shortly if you could just point me in the direction of-

SCREAM from the next house.

PERRY (V.O.)

Taking credit, strange tactic. And talk about breaking and entering! I will. Course he doesn't want the police involved, not with Skyr Gobbler on the prowl.

INT. HOUSE - FELDBERG - NIGHT

Skyr Gobbler drinks yogurt from the fridge, ignoring a Mom's SCREAMS. Santa sneaks up, nabs him with the sac.

JOHN

Yoplait somewhere else.

INT. MORAL COMPASS SURVEILLANCE ROOM - NIGHT

Peter shuffles down the Main Hallway towards the Wish Fulfillment Center, carefully avoiding drone notice.

INT. HOUSES - FELDBERG

PERRY (V.O.)
 ...Door Sniffer, so PG yet so
 perverse, amazing...Meat Hook,
 mhm...Sausage Swiper (stares into
 camera) That's a real thing.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Santa nabs Door Sniffer (scratching pantry door), Meat Hook (in a butcher shop), Sausage Swiper (trailing linked sausages by drone)

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

PERRY (V.O.)
 Window Peeper aka Tom aka I can't
 believe this was a children's book.

Window Peeper stares at a kid through bedroom window, breath fogging it. Kid opens eyes, sees the moon cast in Peeper's eyes. SCREAMS! Peeper creepily opens window. Santa nabs him.

PERRY (V.O.)
 -last but perhaps least: Candle Beggar.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Slumber party kids surround a pentagram in an attic singing Silent Night, Candle Beggar crashes through a skylight, Kids freak out, Santa drops in and nabs it.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - NIGHT

PERRY
 Folks, I promise I didn't make any
 of those up. Someone did. Not me.
 Forget your kids, parents are gonna
 have nightmares about this.
 Grandparental discretion was
 probably advised.

The Elves are slack-jawed.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 Oh, the Christmas cat! How could I
 forget? Evil incarnate. (HISS)
 She'll teach you to cross her; she
 puts the cat in educate.

INT. FELDBERG HOUSE - NIGHT

Christmas tree rustles. Santa creeps. Who's trapping whom?

JOHN
Here kitty, kitty, kitty.

The cat lurches at him! He holds up the sac! It wrestles in the bag, jumps out, HISSES, runs away.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Didn't know you had a soul, sorry.

Santa falls into a La-Z-Boy, eyes the milk and cookies. A kid emerges, sits on couch. John nods at the presents. Kid looks excited, then sheepishly shakes his head. John smiles, nods.

INT. WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - NIGHT

Père looks at Santa through drone footage, smiling.

PERRY
Rest, Santa, you'll need your strength...Oh are we still on?
(CLICKS to end feed)

INT. FELDBERG HOUSE - NIGHT

Santa sees Perry's drone outside. Exits house. People CHEER. They lift him up, sing his praises, let him down. He looks in sac but sees blackness. The drone displays Père to Santa.

PERRY
Hello Santa. Congrats on putting the Yule Lads away for me. I'm-

PETER
(bursts through door)
San Tan Valley. Esme is in danger!-
(feed cut off by Perry)

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

JOHN
What? Peter!...What have I done?

EXT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT CENTER - NIGHT

PERRY
Ttt. You're definitely fired.

JOHN
...I understand.

PETER
Guys, we gotta go.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - MORAL COMPASS CHAMBER - NIGHT

The spiders are being electrocuted. Peter powers it off. Aura GASPS, goes in, grabs them, steaming but cool to touch.

AURA
Oh no. Poor guys. I'm sorry.

PETER
(holds staff)
That's not designed for this. Come.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Esme serves soup from a giant bowl. Her phone rings silently.

STEW
Please ma'am, may I have some more?

ESME
After everyone has had some, yes.

STEW
Aww-k.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - SANTA'S SHOP - NIGHT

AURA
She's still not answering.

Peter hooks up the staff to leads on a workbench, runs tests.

PETER
So what's the plan?

AURA
We have to get to John. I shouldn't have just left him there.

PETER
He's not the one in danger right now.

JOHN (WEB PORTAL)
Uh guys...I'm in danger. Right now.

He turns the Web Portal: Krampus comes from the Black Forest.

AURA

Is the Sleigh working?

PETER

It warps but the guidance is all wonky. 1 degree off and you warp hundreds of miles off course.

AURA

Good time for steady hands. I'll go to Esme, try to intercept the Lads. Any other way we can warn her, electronically or magically?

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ESME

No electronics! 'Tis a magical time where you turn to each other and open up...your presence, as in being present. You are the gift!

Kids don't react. Stew shrugs.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - SANTA'S SHOP - NIGHT

PETER

No responses on any device.

Elves escort Perry, wrapped in red tape, to a locked room.

PERRY

Ugh, I hate red tape.

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Krampus ROARS. Villagers panic, attracting Krampus further.

JOHN

Oh wonderful. Staff!

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - SANTA'S SHOP - NIGHT

Peter runs diagnostics on the Staff, stressing out.

PETER

I don't understand what's wrong with this thing.--Where's my Ball?

Peter anxiously pats his pockets. A hand softly lands on his shoulder.

AURA

Peter. Breathe. You don't need that thing to tell you you're doing the right thing...You got this.

The staff lights up, glowing a brilliant GREEN.

JOHN (O.S.)

Peter, now! He's coming!

PETER

There's nothing wrong with it.--
Sir. You never gave up your powers, did you? You lost them. It's ok.
Just tell me...do you trust me?

JOHN

...Of course, Peter...You were always my number one. Sir.

PETER

Thank you. And I...believe in you.

Aura holds the Web Portal up; Krampus charges. Peter throws it like a javelin, through the Web Portal, slow motion into

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Santa lunges to grab it, but misses and falls. It HITS Krampus, who goes flying back. Santa GASPS.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - SANTA'S SHOP - NIGHT

Aura and the elves look at Peter. Peter shrugs.

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Santa extends his hand to telekinese the staff. Doesn't work.

JOHN

No? Ok.

Santa gets up. Krampus recovers, charges again. Santa grabs the staff. It pulses with RED energy now. He whacks Krampus, knocking him back with 75% of the force. They wage battle.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - SANTA'S SHOP - NIGHT

PETER

Hold him off, John, I'm coming.

(on Speakerphone)

Listen up, Tech Elves! We need this web reconfigured so any and all Web Portals lead back to the White Cave, one-way...Let's do this.

(fist bumps Aura)

See you in Arizona.

EXT. NORTH POLE STATION - NIGHT

Aura is about to take off. Jack Frost materializes in front.

AURA

I don't have time for this. Perry set the Yule Lads loose on Esme and a bunch of children! MOVE!

Jack's face turns to horror.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - SANTA'S SHOP - NIGHT

Peter starts up the Sleigh. Waits for the instruments to line up and FIRES...dissolving into a white light...

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Esme gets in bed. A THUD from outside. She walks with a candle to check on the children, sleeping in

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

tightly in sleeping bags. THUD outside. None are astir. She walks to the window. The THUD is coming from the shed. She puts on shoes, coat, walks outside to open the door to the

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - SHED - NIGHT

Web Portal is out of view. All 13 Yule Lads, horsing around, turn their heads to Esme. She GASPS, locks the door, runs to the house as they start POUNDING on the walls and door.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Esme gets in, locks the door, shakes kids awake.

ESME

Ok everybody up. Up up! Let's go.

She whistles softly. They all start to wake, yawn, stretch.

KID 1

Is it Christmas?

KID 2

What's going on?

ESME

We're going to play a game.

KID 3

It's early.

KID 4

It's late. I'm tired.

ESME

I know, but we need to play hide and seek right now. Everyone pick their favorite hiding spot and stay there and be as quiet as you can, ok? And no matter what you hear, don't peep and don't make a peep.

BANGING on the door.

KID 1

Santa?

EMSE

No, not Santa. Hide, now, please.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Kids disperse: under a couch, in a cupboard, under tables and chairs, Stew under a rug...She notices Window Peeper...peeping through a window. She goes to Stew.

ESME

Not there, Stew. Find a really good spot, where even I won't find you.

All hidden, she grabs the shotgun off the mantle. Yule Lads BURST in but then file in patiently. She COCKS the shotgun.

ESME (CONT'D)

Get back! I'm warning you.

They all line up side-by-side around her. She shoots one: BANG! It's knocked back but does no damage...She tries again. BANG! It goes down and gets back up, unfazed.

ESME (CONT'D)

Who, what are you? What do you want?--No, it can't be...

YULE LADS (REPEATING)

Hrgh Hrgh Hrgh. Hrgh Hrgh Hrgh.

ESME

What?

Whether they're getting more intelligible or she's simply starting to understand them, it becomes clear:

YULE LADS

Re-mem-ber. Re-mem-ber. Re-mem-ber.

She drops to her knees. They approach, chant. The fire grows.

ESME

Remember what? Remember WHAT?!

MONTAGE - FLOOD OF ESME'S CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

POV Little Esme hums, skips with a Halloween pail. Bathroom door cracked open, peers in: Her mom applies beige makeup to a patch of green skin on her face. Esme kicks the door open.

LITTLE ESME

Ta daa!

ESME'S MOM

What are you doing?! Take that off.
(removes witch's hat and
nose from Esme's head)
You should be ashamed of yourself.

ESME (V.O.)

She was...I'm...

POV Mom reads: "Gryla the Witch and the 13 Yule Lads." Young Esme shuts eyes, sleeps. Adult Esme walks into memory, sees mom kiss forehead, leaving a magical green mark that fades.

ESME

It wasn't a story, it was a spell.
To prevent, to forget. Every year.

POV Meet-cute with John at the Ball. Ripped away by her mom.

ESME'S MOM

He'll never accept you. He can't.

POV Funeral, all wearing black, parasols. STEPSISTERS glare.

ESME (V.O.)

She took something. To her grave.

STEPSISTER 1

Leave him before he finds out what
you really are.

END MONTAGE**INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

On the ground, Esme transforms. Her skin turns green. Her nose, chin, and ears elongate. She's supine, like An American Werewolf in London. But nothing more happens.

ESME/GRYLA

Oh, that's it?

(breathes deep, stands up)

Wow, ok. Hello, brothers. How would you like to play hide and seek?

They giddily agree.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY DESERT - NIGHT

Polar Vortex forms. Aura spins out of it. Jack falls on one knee. Aura flies across the desert and through the door to

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

AURA

You're...you're...Esme?

Esme shuts the door telekinetically to Aura's muffled shock.

ESME

Yes, yes, it...is me.--Look at you.

AURA

Are you...a witch?

ESME

Not every woman with powers is a witch. But yes, I am.

AURA

Ok...What are *they* doing?

Yule lads open cupboards, look under covers. Esme turns Aura around, arm on shoulder. Esme is Mary Poppins as a witch.

ESME/GRYLA

I'm wonderful. Don't mind them. Listen, I'm...coming to a fuller understanding of things. See, I thought my mother was doing what parents do: protecting her children from the evils of the world.

(MORE)

ESME/GRYLA (CONT'D)

I didn't realize that I was the
evil she was protecting the world
from. Isn't that delightful? I'm
Gryla's daughter. New Gryla. And
improved. Mother hid me from the
world. I won't do the same to you.

(holds hands, notes
missing bracelets)

...what your father did to you. Join
me. Punish those who've held you
back, starting with him.

Aura sees a kid hiding under a table, blocks him from view.

AURA

I can't say I'm opposed to that.
But, um, where do the, uh, Yule
Lads fit into all this?

ESME/GRYLA

Oh, looking for children to terrify
or terrorize or what have you.
Specifically, they're helping me
make a stew. If we're going to
conquer the world, we have to eat
the children, of course.

AURA

Oh-k, got it, hey, know what? Why
don't I help them? Looks like
they're having a lot of trouble. Go
ahead and start in the kitchen.

ESME/GRYLA

I knew I could count on you!

Gryla exits; Aura's smile fades. Texts: "GET HERE ASAP!"

EXT. BAHAMA BEACH - DAY

Peter WARPS over a sunny beach.

PETER

Ok. I still believe in myself.

Waits for wobbly instruments to align. WARPS again. Now to

EXT. PARIS, FRANCE - EIFFEL TOWER - NIGHT

PETER

One more time. WARP!

EXT. FELDBERG VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

PETER

Phew!

SCATTERING VILLAGER

Black Peter!

PETER

Just Peter.

SCATTERING VILLAGER

You've come to save us!

PETER

Well...Santa! Let's go!

Santa focuses his effort, KNOCKS Krampus back quite a ways. He turns around, runs to the Sleigh. He WHISTLES loudly. Reindeer and Mari come out of hiding, run to the Sleigh.

JOHN

Poor things got scared.

Peter hooks them up to the Sleigh. Cat runs onto Santa's lap, then hides behind their feet. John shrugs. Peter hops in.

PETER

I'd be, too.

Krampus gathers himself and barrels towards them. The Sleigh's instruments are stabilized to the right coordinates.

PETER (CONT'D)

Ok, here we go.

(presses WARP, it CLICKS)

Uh. It's not working.

JOHN

Then ride. HYAH!

Mari and the Reindeer take off running, pulling the Sleigh.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Why aren't we taking off?

PETER

I don't know! Maybe we were better off without them!

JOHN

How dare you!

Mari NEIGHS. Krampus gains speed behind them.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HALLWAY/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Via tablet, Aura Googles the Yule Lads, finds pics of their coveted objects in order to lure them. She empties out her backpack, fills it in the kitchen with the right objects.

AURA
(holds up a PAN)
Can I borrow this? *Motivation.*

ESME/GRYLA
Of course!

A Yule Lad opens a closet door to find a scared KID.

AURA
Psst, hey!

Holds up PAN, throws it up *the Attic*. Yule Lad chases it, joins the other Lads playing with *their* objects. She closes attic, pulls KID into the basement with the others. She mimes "stay" and "shh," closes the door. Gryla HUMS in the kitchen.

AURA (CONT'D)
(to self, too loud)
How many of you are there?

ESME/GRYLA (O.S.)
What's that, dear?

AURA
Uh, how many kids are there?

ESME/GRYLA (O.S.)
Thirteen.

AURA
Thank you!

EMSE/GRYLA (O.S.)
Welcome! Bring them to the kitchen
once you've rounded them all up.

Aura opens basement door and compares the kids present to ESME'S FACEBOOK INVITE PAGE to figure out who's missing.

AURA
11, 12. 1 more. Who's left? Stew.
(shuts door, walks around)
Stew. Stew. Where are you?

She sneaks about the house, hasn't checked the bathroom yet. Shower curtain rustles. She tiptoes, and, armed with a ladle, draws it open quickly! Stew, standing in the tub, shrugs.

AURA (CONT'D)

Oh, Stew.

Gryla's in the Kitchen, throwing parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme into the cauldron, singing along.

ESME/GRYLA

Oh no we're all out of thyme.

She heads for the basement, finds Aura holding Stew, basement door open. Aura pulls Stew away from the doorway, slams door.

AURA

Found one! He was hiding in the basement. Cheater. Everyone knows hide and seek is one level only.

ESME/GRYLA

Stew! How appropriate.
(drags Stew into kitchen,
holds him over Cauldron)
You wanted some more. Here you go.

STEW

I've had enough! Nooo!

Aura is frozen in fear...She notices snowfall out the window.

AURA

Wait! What is that?

ESME/GRYLA

(drops Stew, opens window)
Jack, is that you?

PERRY

(emerging from snowy mist)
Am I the first one to the party?

Aura hides, baffled. Esme turns to her. Aura shakes her head.

ESME/GRYLA

Yes you are.

Aura lets Stew escape. Esme looks. Aura mimes she'll get him.

ESME/GRYLA (CONT'D)

Why don't you come inside?

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - NIGHT

Perry covertly pushes buttons on his remote: A drone quietly enters the shed, then exits holding the Web Portal.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Perry enters. Esme slams the door as a bit of snow flies in.

ESME/GRYLA

Welcome.

PERRY

No, you're welcome.

ESME/GRYLA

I'm sorry?

PERRY

Don't be! I brought them to you as a gift. And I brought you...to you.

ESME/GRYLA

Give me one good reason I shouldn't punish you right where you stand?

PERRY

I-I just gave you like two.

ESME/GRYLA

Apologies, my mind is currently competing with itself. Thank you.

Perry nods. Esme "force chokes" him.

ESME/GRYLA (CONT'D)

Still...after what you did to Aura.

PERRY

Wait...I can help you. If I may.

She loosens her grasp.

PERRY (CONT'D)

You're in a punishing mood, *Gryla*. Children, specifically? There's a much more efficient way of doing that, as much as I like a hearty stew. *The Moral Compass*.

ESME/GRYLA

That's right.

PERRY

That's-yes, that's right. I can take you to it.

ESME/GRYLA

I can get there myself.

PERRY

Not without a lot of trials and errors COUGH Yule Lads. In return, I want immunity. Impunity. Both.

ESME/GRYLA

From me? Sure. But who knows what Santa might do to you.

PERRY

I'm not worried about him, I assume you'll get rid of him.

ESME/GRYLA

Why would I do that?

PERRY

He knew. About you.

AURA

(whispers)

Liar!

Esme considers this info. Perry degloves his right hand.

PERRY

Anyway let's shake on it, yea?

Aura texts: "WHERE ARE YOU?" as Esme and Perry almost shake.

AURA

(jumps out of hiding)

No!

EXT. FELDBERG CLIFF - NIGHT

The Sleigh is headed to a cliff. Krampus nips at its heels.

JOHN

Now or never!

PETER

Come on guys! Ahhhhhh!

They LEAP off the cliff. They start to rise, then fall... Then rise! Running on air. Peter hits the button as Krampus jumps, swipes, nudges the Sleigh, causing it to WARP to

EXT. ARIZONA TOWN - NIGHT

JOHN

Agh! How far away are we?

PETER
Not far. There!

Points to SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH, caught in a wintery pocket.

JOHN
Jack?...

PETER
Hold on!

On the street, pedestrians watch in awe as they ride across the sky with a glittery trail before WARPING. One couple:

KARL
It's a bird!

JOANNE
It's not a bird, Karl.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

In slow motion, Esme and Perry shake hands as Aura lunges towards them. Perry draws power, barely affecting her.

A white BLAST of light and force from the front door knocks Perry into the Tree, and Aura away by collateral. Esme, unfazed, flaps her hand. The BLAST fades, revealing Santa in the doorway. He sees Esme as Gryla and gets what's happened.

ESME/GRYLA
Oh hello dear. Loving all these merry little pop-ins.--Oh my:

Through the door, we sees outside, Peter helps a downed Jack.

PETER
He's alive!

JOHN
Esme, we need to talk.

ESME/GRYLA
Start talking.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - NIGHT

Aura sneaks outside to Peter, who's loading Jack onto the Sleigh. The cat jumps out of it and hides under the porch.

PETER
What the heck is going on?

AURA

I don't know but I don't like where this is going. Esme is *not* herself.

PETER

Santa's...Santa.

AURA

Right. We need to get Jack and the kids out of here, prevent Père from doing whatever he thinks he's doing including but not limited to getting these Spiders and stealing anyone else's powers...and the Yule Lads are in the attic, for now.

PETER

Elves are working on getting the Webs reprogrammed.

AURA

Send 'em back to the White Cave.

PETER

And...30 minutes before we start missing deadlines to delivery.

AURA

Well...bring the sled around back, I'll get the kids.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

JOHN

Firstly, I'm happy you aren't hurt.
(goes to hug; she recoils)
Perry was trying to steal your powers; he already got Jack's.

ESME

I thought I felt an annoying prick.

Père gets up, dusts himself off, and holds out his hands.

PERRY

Ok that's enough. Everybody FREEZE!

Santa's and Esme's feet FREEZE to the floor. Aura's and the kids' FREEZE in the hall. Peter's feet FREEZE outside.

PERRY (CONT'D)

(surprised it worked)
Hmmk.--We'll do this the hard way.

Pushes button on remote. Drones SURROUND and ENTER the house.

EXT. ARIZONA TOWN - SAME

Drones cross the sky, alarm people, then form: Perry X-Mas.

KARL

Oh, no! Is it birds?

JOANNE (O.S.)

That might be birds, Karl.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

PERRY

Now, hold out your hands where I
can shake them.

ESME

Sorry. House rules. No electronics.

She snaps her fingers, emitting a BOOM, short-circuiting/
crashing the drones, turning off all lights (sparing candles)
killing Aura's tablet, Peter's comms, knocking Perry OUT the
door and back 50 feet into a snow bank AND FREEing everyone's
feet. The BOOM forms a giant, 100-ft diameter MAGIC BUBBLE
around the house. Aura, Peter look at each other, resume.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - CELLAR DOOR - NIGHT

Aura opens the door, unloading kids from the basement onto
the Sleigh brought by Peter. About to part, they see Perry.

AURA

Wait, I have an idea.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

JOHN

-Krampus, the *Reindeer* didn't
recognize me, magic mushrooms made
me hallucinate, and that was just
to GET to the White Cave-

ESME

Your father killed my mother. And
you killed my horse.

JOHN

Mari is undead, technically, so...

ESME
 Luckily, I'm in need of a guide.
 What do you say? Partners in crime?

JOHN
 I can't.

ESME
 Show me the way or stand in it, one
 will be a lot more painful for you.

JOHN
 Esme, what has gotten into you?

ESME
 Clarity.

EXT. EDGE OF THE MAGIC BUBBLE - NIGHT

Perry tries his remote. Doesn't work. He sees drones *working fine* outside the Bubble. He holds the remote outside of it, begins working again. He calls drones to SURROUND the Bubble.

PERRY
 Time to make a withdrawal. Let's
 see what you've got, Jack.

He summons a dozen SNOWMEN to form from the snowbank, albeit sloppily cobbled together. Then, Perry walks confidently back towards the main action at the center of the Bubble.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 I didn't want to have to do this.
 Just kidding I really wanted to do
 this. THUS BESPOKE ZARATHUSTRA!

He RIPS off his overcoat to show a GOLDEN SPIDER-WEBBED SUIT.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - NIGHT

AURA
 Ok, here he comes.
 (loudly)
 He wants the Golden Spiders! We
 need to split up!

PETER
 You need to leave!

Meanwhile, the Yule Lads ESCAPE from the attic skylight and run around the house, towards Aura and Peter...

AURA

Oh, I do need to leave.

Perry sees Peter HANDOFF to Aura. He sees Peter hop in the Sleigh loaded with kids plus Jack to the RIGHT, and Aura take off to the LEFT, drawing and fending off the Yule Lads.

PERRY

Keep your eye on the ball.

Perry extends his hands. Six snowmen each chase Aura and Peter. From the LEFT half of his Web Jacket emerge magically-imbued scarves, mittens, stockings, hair-ties to attack Aura.

INT. OMNICON WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Drones load the wintery items into a Web Portal on the wall.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - NIGHT

From the RIGHT of his jacket emerge wrapping paper, ribbons, scissors and tape to attack Peter and the kids.

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Santa touches the staff to the ground; its glow brightens.

ESME/GRYLA

Planning to use that thing on me?

JOHN

No, course not.

ESME/GRYLA

Then put it down.

He doesn't. Without moving, she sends tree ornaments flying at Santa. He swats them away with the staff. She sends the dead Christmas lights to wrap around him and his staff, which makes them glow before bursting, wires snapping.

She sends mantle picture frames flying at him. He reluctantly smashes them. The last one is a WEDDING PICTURE. He suspends it in between them with his staff. It turns slowly to her: they're young, happy, gorgeous, in love.

ESME/GRYLA (CONT'D)

I don't look like that anymore.

JOHN

Neither do I.

EXT. RANCH LEFT - NIGHT

Aura flies away. Scarf wraps around her eyes, neck. Hair-ties attack like Face Huggers, hold her hair back. She struggles to remove them. Conjoined mittens spin like a bolas, trap her hands. She falls off the stick into the snow. She gets up, tries to run but boots grab her feet. Perry walks up, removes the scarf from her eyes, tightens it around her neck.

PERRY

You're grounded. Give them to me.

The mittens force her hands up. Perry removes them manually.

AURA

You get what you deserve.

Her hands are empty except Peter's Ball.

PERRY

What's this?

He palms it; it glows bright RED, explodes, singes his hand.

AURA

Evil. You don't control me anymore.

He GROWLS.

EXT. ICE HOUSE COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

Peter breaks in and unloads the kids. Jack is awake, weak.

PETER

Update.

JIMMY (V.O.)

The webs aren't cooperating. We open one, another closes or opens elsewhere. Anything you can do?

Peter sees Stew's knee, fills his bag with SODA MACHINE ice.

PETER

Stay here, look after each other.

In the Sleigh, riding back to the Bubble, Peter hears the Spider-Balls clacking in his coat. He pulls them out.

PETER (CONT'D)

Hey guys. I don't know if you can hear me or even understand me. You've been through a lot today.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I just wanna send you home. I wanna send them - the Yule Lads - everything we shouldn't have taken, back. But we need all the Web Portals here to lead to the White Cave. Can you do that, please?

No response...Peter sighs and starts to put them away.

JIMMY

Sir? I don't know what happened but the portals are open and stable.

PETER

Yes! Thank y-

A BLAST of snow upends the Sleigh, throwing off Peter, disconnecting, tangling up Mari and Reindeer. Père emerges.

PERRY

Give me the spiders, man!

PETER

Ok, goblin.

Thirty drones line up with Perry, line red lasers onto Peter. A snow-covered tumbleweed crosses their path. Perry puts his remote in his waistband. Peter does the same with his remote. Showdown...They both draw at the same time. Peter clicks his button first. Red lasers turn green, reposition on Perry.

PERRY

Ha!...What?

PETER

Freeze.

Peter clicks again. Drones start firing into his suit, sure to miss his exposed body (hands, head, neck) as Père makes sure not to move an inch. One laser destroys his remote.

INT. OMNICON WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Warehouse and drones are bombarded and destroyed with green lasers through the Web Portal. As they are being destroyed, a few drones in the warehouse fire red lasers back through to

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - OUTSIDE MAGIC BUBBLE - NIGHT

which Peter narrowly dodges. The drones stop firing.

PETER

You're just another man in a suit.

Peter breaks off part of the dying Sleigh engine to use as a booster cannon. Perry sees the Magic Bubble expand, goes for his inside suit pocket. Drones whir. Pulls out a new remote.

PETER (CONT'D)

Drop it.

PERRY

Plan C.

Peter fires the cannon: it putters. Perry hits a button: Drones fly overhead and drop tons of COAL and bundled-up SUITS in the Bubble as the Bubble expands, envelops and kills the drones. Perry drops the now-dead remote.

PERRY (CONT'D)

And Plan K.

PETER

Stop, I'm warning you!

Peter fires again. Nothing. Perry unbuttons his suit. Bottom flaps unfold like drapes, creating a suit like a trench coat or cape. Turns around, fans it out, shakes it like a matador.

PERRY

(into the suit)

Release the Krampus.

Krampus barrels through the fanned-out jacket. Peter stands frozen. Krampus lunges. Mari intercepts. Krampus stops. They stand off. Reindeer back Mari up. Krampus turns around, runs back to Père, who cowers, tries to make his cape as wide as possible. Krampus runs *through the Web* but knocks him back. Out of options, Père twirls in place. Nothing. Twirls again.

PETER

What, what are you doing?

PERRY

Trying to get this darned thing to-

He twirls and vanishes in a Polar Vortex as Peter fires the cannon, misses. He sighs, hops on Mari, Reindeer follow.

Père reappears in the frozen pond, slips. Angry. He assembles the fallen coal into humanoid shapes. Coal Creatures merge with Snowmen to create fuller, stable humanoids. Some Coal Creatures dive to make snow angels to cover up. The bundled-up suits unravel, wrap around Coal Snowmen for max stability. An army of fifty COMPANY SNOWMEN form in front of Père.

Aura removes the boots as Yule Lads play keep-away with her stick. She tries telekinetically but it gets yoinked. The Yule Lads grab her and throw her down the well behind her.

AURA

Ugh! Peter!

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The commotion outside grows.

JOHN

Can we talk privately?

She forms a mini bubble around them. Sound outside is dulled.

JOHN (CONT'D)

...This isn't you. Not because I'm saying it. You already know. *The ghost of tradition* is messing with your head. Our parents lied to us. We can be different. I can be a different Santa. You can be a different Gryla. "Gryla the Witch hates kids." You don't hate kids. You love kids. We're about to *have* one, if you'll take me. Will you judge him or her as harshly?

ESME

It's a her.

JOHN

IT IS?!

Esme nods, holds belly. John extends hand. She slaps it away.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - NIGHT

Peter rides full speed to the Yule Lads. Company Snowmen charge, try to tackle him. Reindeer plow through them. Some break through. Peter blasts his booster cannon, exposing coal under snow. Peter grabs Aura's stick as Yule Lads cluelessly play with it. He rides to the well. A Snowman charges right at him. With the Reindeer battling the Snowmen, he's exposed.

The Snowman tackles Peter as he throws the stick down the well. Aura immediately shoots out of it. Snowmen turn their attention to Peter, pile on, burying him. Aura gets close to the ground, rides full speed towards the pile. Fast enough that the SHIELD forms just as she crashes into the pile and knocks every Snowman away, narrowly missing a huddled Peter.

The Reindeer encircle Père, as Aura and Peter throw in the remaining eight Yule Lads in QUICK FLASHES.

END MONTAGE

INT. WHITE CAVE - GRYLA'S CHAMBER - UNKNOWN

Lads find their Tombstones, happily jump in. Ground reforms.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - NIGHT

Aura and Peter high-five-turn-shake. Père trembles in fear, turns into anger. Ground shakes. Aura and Peter are cautious.

PERRY

You know. I always admired Santa's ability to bring people together.

Snow starts falling UP. Snowmen merge into a big Snowmonster. It absorbs Perry. Grows 20 ft. 30 ft. Cat's hairs stand up.

PERRY (CONT'D)

Mergers, acquisitions, conglomerates, oh my.--Merry Christmas, Santa, your day has come!

AURA

Santaaa!?

PETER

Santaaa!?

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Snowmonster grows in the background and swipes at Peter and Aura, narrowly missing them.

JOHN

When I saw you the first time, it was like we were in our own bubble. Nothing else mattered. I love you.

The green in her eyes fully fades. Her true self resumes.

ESME

Yes. That's the problem. I remember now. That wasn't the magic I was talking about. I never questioned your love for me. You lost your love for them. The world. Your work. You wanted us to live in a bubble.

(dissolves mini bubble,
revealing chaos outside)

Nothing else mattered to you. Even when people needed you.

PETER

Hey Santa!

AURA

Do your job!

ESME

You see? The culmination of everything you've ignored.

JOHN

I understand. You're right. You're all right.

Esme and Santa come out. The Snowmonster is 50 feet high now. Santa begins blasting it with pulses from his staff. Esme CRUNCHES her hands: the monster compacts. Yet, it still grows bigger, flings a mound of snow and coal, destroying the shed.

Esme goes to the wire connecting the solar panels to her house, jacks herself in: she BLASTS A GREEN BEAM at it which bores a hole through the head. Santa blasts with his staff, trying to knock off the arms. Aura punches holes through him with her magic shield. Peter charges at the legs with Mari. Reindeer prevent it from enlarging by fighting the Snowmen.

INT. ICE HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack and the kids look at the expanding Magic Bubble, mostly occluded, with glimpses of the Snowmonster, flashes of light.

JACK

A lot of energy, if it gets any bigger, it could be disastrous.

KID 2

You have to help them.

JACK

Need to cool it down, contain it.
Get me as much ice as you can find.
Let's see if I have anything left.

Stew offers his ice pack. Jack is moved to a single tear. He gently pushes it back to Stew's knee. Kids return with ice.

JACK (CONT'D)

No, thank you, you keep that one.

KID 3

That's all we could find.

He focuses, forms one snowflake on his fingertip. It melts.

KID 4
One snowflake?

JACK
An avalanche is nothing but a torrent of snowflakes. There is power in each one. Combined can be an unstoppable force. A force for good. If you choose. Don't believe anyone who tells you that you aren't good enough. Especially "adults." Believe in yourselves.

KID 1
You can do it, Mr. Ice Man. I believe in you.

JACK
(gets up)
Never done this before. Let's see-- John, I hope you're ready.

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - NIGHT

JOHN
What? No, Jack...

Perry's monster gets bigger. Aura notices plumes of smoke becoming bigger from the drones.

JOHN (CONT'D)
All fire at once. Ready?!

AURA
Wait!

JOHN
He's getting bigger.

AURA
Let him. He's concentrating all of his power. The drones are *smoking*.

PETER
So? They're damaged.

AURA
No, the ones *outside the Bubble* are fine. But they're burning coal! The same magic that's covering the smokestacks is masking their fumes. If we let him get bigger? We expose him.

PETER

We'll miss delivery, John, but-

JOHN

This is more important. Aura, he doesn't have any factories around here; how will we know it worked?

AURA

Have faith in people.

They egg him on by firing intermittently, letting him grow.

AURA (CONT'D)

Not yet...not yet...not yet...

MONTAGE - INTERNATIONAL EXPOSING OF PERRY AND THE SMOKESTACKS

--Scrooge, Grinch alerted by Gingerbread People to look at the smoky sky. Scrooge: "Forget it Grinch, it's Tinseltown."

--Frost sees a building emit black smoke out the window.

--Omnicon Tower blasts a plume of black smoke across the sky.

AURA (CONT'D)

NOW!

JOHN

Jack, brother. I'm sorry.

Esme uses the solar farm to blast GREEN. Santa blasts RED. Jack blasts BLUE and dissolves into the blast. Snowmonster stops growing, trapped. Perry SCREAMS. Santa sees his staff dissolve into the blast. He looks around at his loved ones.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Esme! Aura! Peter! I love you all.

The staff fully disintegrates. He claps his hands together, delivering a final blast that knocks him back.

AURA

No!

The three beams combine to create an epic IMPLOSION that pressurizes the coal and explodes as fine diamond snowflakes, within the confines of the Magic Bubble, like a snow globe. As snowflakes fall, the Magic Bubble dissipates. A snowflake falls on Aura's nose. Runs it between her fingers. Not sharp.

The snow settles and they rush to Santa, on the ground...

AURA (CONT'D)
 (crying)
 Get up! Get up. No. Please...

He's barely conscious. It is painfully clear he won't get up.

ESME
 You never got to see her grow up.

Esme holds her belly. In John's last breath, looking at Aura.

JOHN
 I did...No L. I get it...

He smiles, fades. Esme kisses him. They're all crying. Peter, on his knees. Aura cries into his chest. Esme consoles both.

Moments later...they go through the wreckage and throw the Spiders and sacs through Perry's lifeless golden suit.

PETER
 Everything goes.

ESME
 Where's Perry?

PETER
 He became that monster.

AURA
 He was always that monster.

PETER
 There are others.

AURA
 We'll get them.

Aura is about to put her stick through.

PETER
 If the tree gave it to you, it's yours.

They curl the Web Portal suit into itself. It disappears.

CUT TO:

NEWS (ON TV)
 No device was able to record what happened but eyewitnesses claim Santa was involved in an epic dispute with businessman and former colleague Omnicon CEO Père Fouettard, both missing.
 (MORE)

NEWS (ON TV) (CONT'D)

What was recorded around the world, was evidence of massive pollution by Omnicon automated factories. No one was available for comment.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Cell-Phone footage with a grey void where Magic Bubble was; Omnicon factories smoking in India, France, China; Police raid a factory with no one but collapsed suits.

EXT. ICE HOUSE - CHRISTMAS DAY

Peter, kids exit. Mom, parents arrive. Stew debriefs police.

STEW

Big Snowmonster. Santa was blasting it and there was a witch and these trolls and it was crazy. Peter saved us. Then Jack Frost blasted-

Peter nods to the officers. Officers nod back. Pam enters.

PAM

Stew, are you ok?

Stew shrugs shoulders.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Santa with Staff on chest in Arizona; same shot but at a Viking funeral with Esme, Aura, Peter and elves gathered; power restored to the North Pole Station.

INT. NORTH POLE STATION - WISH FULFILLMENT - CHRISTMAS DAY

AURA

What are you gonna do?

PETER

My job.

AURA

You'll make a good Santa.

PETER

Yea. Think I'm gonna be my own thing. What about you, Ms. CEO?

AURA

Need to make things right.

Peter sees Santa suit, picks it up cautiously. Sees something sewn into it. Hidden tag. Something written on it: SOS. Peter has a horrific epiphany.

EXT. OMNICON HEADQUARTERS - DAY**INT. OMNICON ELEVATOR - DAY**

Peter pushes two buttons: 50 and 5. They move down past the (B)asement. Doors open: Rows of kids happily on sewing machines, making Suits. Aura recognizes LITTLE BOY from the Missing Child poster. Peter sniffs, covers face. Aura, too.

PETER
I'll handle this.

AURA
I'll get them out of here.

He opens the door to the back office: Jimmy is there. Aura funnels the kids into the elevator. They happily follow.

PETER
You. You were with Perry.

JIMMY
Pays better.

PETER
Ran the elf program behind my back.
Undermined me at every step. Used
Christmas Cheer on *children*?

JIMMY
Attention to detail hm?--Wanna wake
them up? Be my guest.

He lunges at Peter. Peter sprays him. Jimmy laughs, sings.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
I really can't stay (Baby it's cold
outside) I gotta go away (Baby it's
cold outside).

Peter picks up the desk rotary phone and dials 911.

INT. OMNICON PENTHOUSE OFFICE - DAY

Phones ring continuously outside. Suits draped over seats.

AURA
(red from crying)
Can't believe he was my father.

PETER
You're not him. You can fix this.

AURA
Will you join me?

PETER
I dunno. Big company...What are you gonna do first?

AURA
Hire people. Real people. Pay them. Answer those phones at some point.

PETER
Sounds like a good place to start.

AURA
Gave everyone refunds but people are mad, understandably.

MONTAGE: CHRISTMAS MORNING

--Kids cry under an empty tree. Parents: "It's gonna be ok."

--Parents cry under an empty tree. Kids: "It's gonna be ok."

--Angry Karen on the phone: "Manager! MAN-A-GER!"

INT. OMNICON PENTHOUSE OFFICE - DAY

AURA
Would've given everyone their presents but can't have drones out there polluting. Factories need to be fitted with filters but, long term, I'm thinking solar.

PETER
I'll have the elves design a filter for you. I'm just a small shop. But I'll be there if you need me.

AURA
Me too.

They shake hands.

AURA (CONT'D)
But right now I'm gonna go home. It's technically Christmas.

PETER
Oh is that today? I totally forgot.

Aura flies out the window to

EXT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - DAY

Lands outside, hugs Mari. Reindeer play. She runs in

INT. SAN TAN VALLEY RANCH - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

and hugs Esme. Cat approaches for pets then runs off.

ESME

Welcome home.

AURA

You know I like the new look.

ESME

It's growing on me.

AURA

I'd help you clean up, but looks like you got it covered.

ESME

Powers are wonderful for tidying.

Aura walks past the mantle picture frames, sees Santa.

AURA

How do you think he'll be remembered?

ESME

I'll remember him well. That's all that matters to me. And hopefully to Noel.

(touching belly)

QUICK FLASHBACKS: Santa shelters Aura in the Polar Vortex, plays (snow)baseball, hands her the Moral Compass.

AURA

Me too.

INT. PILOT KEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS DAY

Ken turns off the previous News Broadcast. His kids (BILLY, girl, and JOEL, boy, both 5) saw it, too.

BILLY

What happened to Santa?

JOEL

Is Santa even real?

KEN

Well, it's an interesting story.