

EXT. TREES - NIGHT

BRANCHES SNAP and slap Norman as he runs. He fumbles with his phone as he looks to see if Santa Arlin is behind him.

LIMBS RUSTLE

Norman watches. He waits for the resurrected Arlin to show himself and attack.

Nothing.

INT. SHIRLEY BRUCE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Darryl Bruce sits at the dining room table. Shirley stands, wrapping a gift.

The table is covered with rolls of expensive gift wrap, tissue paper, bows, boxes and all the necessary materials one would ever need to wrap a present. At the opposite end of the table from married couple is a mountain of wrapped gifts.

Finished, Shirley sets the newly-wrapped present in front of her husband.

SHIRLEY

There. Did you pay attention? Did you watch, did you see how I did that?

Darryl nods, obedient.

DARRYL

Yes, dear.

SHIRLEY

Good. Do you think you can wrap a gift, *properly*, now?

DARRYL

I think so, dear.

SHIRLEY

You think so? This isn't a "think so" business, Darryl. This a "know so" business. Gift wrapping is not a fucking kids game, Darryl.

Darryl nods.

DARRYL

I understand. I can do it, dear. I can wrap a gift. Properly.

SHIRLEY

Good.

She waves a dismissive hand to the gifts at the other end of the table.

SHIRLEY (cont'd)

Rewrap all these you fucked up.

DARRYL

All of them? Are they all-

SHIRLEY

You shit-eating idiot.

(slaps the present
she wrapped)

What do you think the point of this is?

DARRYL

I'll redo them.

SHIRLEY

Fuckin' A right you will. Your ass is on the line, *Darryl*.

Shirley's CELL PHONE RINGS. She looks at it.

SHIRLEY (cont'd)

What the hell now?

(answers the call)

What's the problem, Norman?

EXT. TREES - NIGHT

Norman is lurks among the evergreens.

NORMAN

(frantic whisper,
into his cell phone)

It's him! He's here!

INTERCUT SHIRLEY/NORMAN

SHIRLEY

Speak up, I can't hear you. What's wrong?

Norman rounds a line of trees. He can see his truck sitting at the curb.

NORMAN

(whispering)

Arlin! He's Santa Claus! He's trying to kill me.

SHIRLEY

What the fuck are you talking about? Are you drunk calling, again?

DARRYL

What's the matter, dear?

SHIRLEY

(to Darryl)

Shut up.

Darryl involves himself with his assigned task.

Norman creeps. Santa Arlin steps out from the trees in front of him.

NORMAN

It's Arlin!

Santa Arlin slices Norman across the stomach. Norman screams and his phone tumbles from his grip.

Shirley winces at the SOUND OF NORMAN'S CELL PHONE CRACKING on the ground.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT - NIGHT

Norman drops to his knees. He holds his stomach. Blood pours like a burst dam between his fingers.

NORMAN

Damn...you cut me deep...

Santa Arlin stares down at him. A darkness has infected Arlin's eyes, it has roughened his face. With his dirtied white beard and well-worn Santa Claus suit, he looks like a lunatic from multiple nightmares.

NORMAN (cont'd)

Don't...

Santa Arlin grabs Norman by the back of the head. He PLUNGES the knife into Norman's mouth, down his throat. He withdraws the blade in a swift, efficient manner.

Norman falls on the ground. Santa Arlin stands over him and raises the butcher knife.

INT. SHIRLEY BRUCE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Shirley, frozen, has the phone pressed to her ear. She hears movement. She covers her other ear so she can hear better.

Darryl begins cutting wrapping paper; the PAPER CRINKLES and CRUNCHES.

SHIRLEY
(to Darryl)
Stop, dammit!

He obeys. He awaits further instructions.

OVER THE PHONE: STABBING

QUIET

SANTA ARLIN
(from the phone)
Ho...ho...ho...

OVER THE PHONE: STABBING, SLICING

SHIRLEY
Fuck! Shit!

She ends the call and frantically dials another number.

DARRYL
What's the matter, dear?

SHIRLEY
Wrap your goddamn presents.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Officer Shockley and OFFICER STINSON (male, mid-20s) run out of the station to a parked cruiser.

The ENGINE REVS. With the lights flashing and the SIREN BLARING, the TIRES SQUEAL as the car bolts like lightning out of the parking lot.

The CAR SCREECHES on turns and races...across the street to the Christmas tree lot.

EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT - SAME

The POLICE CAR SCREAMS to a STOP at the entrance, mere feet from Norman's truck at the curb. The SIREN STRANGLES OUT.

The red and blue revolving lights dance across the trees like tweaked-out ravers.

The officers hop out of the car with their guns drawn. They do not advance any further than the chain with the "Closed" strung across the entryway.

Just beyond the entry point, Norman's disemboweled body hangs from a fir tree. The open cavity of his torso has been stuffed with garland, tinsel and other ornaments.

OFFICER SHOCKLEY
Sweet Mother of God-

OFFICER STINSON
Oh no-

Norman is decorated with Christmas tree lights; they race in multiple colors along his body. A Christmas star tree topper has been driven into the crown of his head. Glass balls are hooked through his cheeks. Snowflake ornaments pulsate a ghostly blue in Norman's eye sockets. Red and green lights blink in his mouth.

Officer Stinson doubles over and pukes.

OFFICER SHOCKLEY
You okay?

Stinson wipes his mouth with his gun hand.

OFFICER STINSON
Yeah-

Stinson takes another look at Norman's tortured corpse.

The policeman wretches and pukes all over himself a second time.

INT. POLICE STATION/INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Shirley taps her fingers on the table. She uses her phone's camera to check her hair. Satisfied she doesn't have a hair out of place, she strums her fingers some more.

The door opens and Detective Rivas enters with two cups of coffee.

DETECTIVE RIVAS
I thought you might could use this.

She gives a cup to Shirley then takes a seat on the opposite side of the table.

SHIRLEY

I'm not much of a coffee person.

Rivas sips from her own.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Yours is mostly whiskey.

Shirley tastes it.

SHIRLEY

This is just plain coffee.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

I must have mixed them up.

Rivas has a hearty drink of her beverage.

DETECTIVE RIVAS (cont'd)

Now, Shirley-

SHIRLEY

Please-- Mrs. Bruce.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Mrs. Bruce. We have one man ripped up and another we found unconscious in a dumpster. He was mugged for his phone, which we found tied to a tree at the murder scene. I want you to tell me everything about your conversation with Norman last night.

SHIRLEY

He called screaming his head off. I could barely understand a word he was saying. Something about someone trying to kill him. Honestly, I thought he was drunk. Again.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

He call drunk a lot?

SHIRLEY

Since he and his wife divorced? Yes.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

He didn't take the split well?

SHIRLEY

On the contrary. He was thrilled. He celebrated with every sip.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

What else did he say?

SHIRLEY

I don't know for sure, Detective-

DETECTIVE RIVAS

What did it sound like he was saying?
What did you hear?

Shirley sips her coffee, sneers at its bitter awfulness.

SHIRLEY

Norman said...a man in a Santa suit
was trying to kill him. More or less.
That's the summation.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

A Santa Claus suit?

SHIRLEY

Yes, Detective. Norman said, 'He's
Santa Claus. He's trying to kill me.'
Do you see why I thought he was
drunk?

DETECTIVE RIVAS

It's understandable. Did Norman
recognize him? Did he say a name?

SHIRLEY

A name? Well, I-- let me think...

Rivas doesn't like the woman's coyness.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

What did he say, Mrs. Bruce? Did
Norman know his killer? Did he say a
name? Did he identify him?

Shirley drums her fingers a moment then blurts:

SHIRLEY

He said it was Arlin Kingsley. He
said Arlin was Santa Claus.

Rivas has another drink of "coffee". She swipes her shirt
sleeve across her lips.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Arlin?

SHIRLEY

That's what he said. But Arlin looked like a half million other men in a Santa suit. Drunk Norman would-

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Toxicology will decide the drunk part.

Rivas leans back in her chair. She eyes Shirley for a beat.

DETECTIVE RIVAS (cont'd)

'Santa Claus Is Coming To Town'.

Shirley's hand, reflexively, wraps tight around her cell phone.

SHIRLEY

What?

DETECTIVE RIVAS

It was a message Norman received the night before his death, from an unknown number. We're tracing it. Did you happen to receive the same message?

SHIRLEY

You already know the answer to that.

Rivas nods.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Yeah. All of the Christmas Coalition received the same message, from the same unknown number.

SHIRLEY

Appears so, yes.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Mrs. Bruce, Arlin Kingsley lived in this town a whole lotta years. Pretty much his entire life. He had a lot of friends. A lot of other people who didn't know him personally, they liked him. I don't want to scare you-- too much-- but I think you and the others in the Christmas Coalition, y'all may need to keep a lookout over your shoulders.

SHIRLEY

I will make sure to pass along the advice, Detective Rivas.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

I've already spread the word.

She smiles; it is humble, but fake.

SHIRLEY

Good.

(beat)

Now, I do need to discuss something with you of the utmost importance-

DETECTIVE RIVAS

Word has been rolled down from the mayor to the chief to me: as little as possible will be reported in the media. The mayor's office already has PR people working double overtime.

Shirley sighs and beams with a genuine grin. She pantomimes wiping sweat from her forehead.

SHIRLEY

Thank God. I was so worried.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

I'm sure you were.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Shirley walks to her car to find Simon, Stewart and Pace waiting for her.

SHIRLEY

What's this? Another interrogation?

STEWART

How did it go?

SHIRLEY

It was fun, Stewart. I can't wait to come back, again.

PACE

This is horrible.

STEWART

My nerves are wracked!

Simon stares across the street to the Christmas tree lot. It is cordoned with crime scene tape. Police and technicians still work the scene.

SIMON
Merry Christmas to us.

The others join him to watch the police teams work the closed lot.

PACE
It's so sad.

SHIRLEY
I agree. But, on the bright side, we have two more tree lots open and going strong. So not all is lost.

Pace and Stewart regard Shirley with unspoken criticism.

SIMON
When we reopen this one, I'm thinking candlelit vigil and five percent discount on purchases fifty dollars or more.

Stewart is speechless at his husband's callousness.

SHIRLEY
We're not heartless, Simon. We can do a ten percent discount.

Pace and Stewart walk away. Shirley and Simon continue to watch the activity at the tree lot.

INT. POLICE STATION - SAME MOMENT

Detective Rivas stands at the glass doors. She watches the Christmas Coalition outside.

Officer Shockley hurries to her with stapled papers in his hands.

OFFICER SHOCKLEY
Detective Rivas, ma'am-

DETECTIVE RIVAS
Yeah-

The Coalition members have all gone to their vehicles and are leaving.

OFFICER SHOCKLEY

We got the report on Norman Kimball's
cell phone. The number-

Rivas watches Shirley Bruce's car speed from the parking
lot.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

And?

OFFICER SHOCKLEY

It's a burner phone.

Rivas takes the report.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

We expected that.

OFFICER SHOCKLEY

Yes, ma'am. But they did pick up a
ping from a cell tower, the night the
message went to the Christmas
Coalition.

Rivas scans the report for the information.

OFFICER SHOCKLEY (cont'd)

Its location, it's less than a mile
from Shirley Bruce's house. They
think whoever sent the message could
have been right on her street.

Rivas folds the papers.

DETECTIVE RIVAS

He's stalking them.

Detective Rivas looks back outside. Officer Shockley looks
out, too.

There are men in Santa Claus suits everywhere on the street
and all through the town.

INSERT NEWS REPORT

ANCHORMAN sits at the news desk. A picture of Norman Kimball
appears over his shoulder.

ANCHORMAN

Sad news tonight out of Butler Falls,
Christmas Town U.S.A.

(MORE)

ANCHORMAN (cont'd)

Norman Kimball, owner of Kimball Construction, and a respected leader in the community, has died in a freak tree trimming accident. He is survived by three ex-wives and four illegitimate children-- a paternity test is pending on a fifth. The families ask that the public respect their privacy during this most difficult time. Our thoughts and prayers are with them and their lawyers.

EXT. VFW PARKING LOT- NIGHT

The parking lot is packed. The party inside is well underway. People are still arriving.

A blue car, stylish and electric, cruises into the crowded lot. It glides into the nearest available space, far from the door.

Simon and Stewart get out of the car.

SIMON

I told you to charge the car today-

STEWART

We could have taken mine-

SIMON

The Range Rover? Really? A man just died, Stewart-- someone we could adequately tolerate-- and you want to arrive in a turd-colored Range Rover to one of the most anticipated parties of the week.

STEWART

(unsure)

Uh...yeah...why not?

They pause their conversation as a couple passes. The couple give a casual glance at Simon and Stewart.

Simon waits for the couple to move well along before continuing.

SIMON

I'm not going to stand here and argue with you in front of the whole goddamn town.

Simon huffs as he sees their distance from the building.

SIMON (cont'd)
And we're parked ten fucking miles
from the door like commoners.
(pointedly)
Penniless commoners.

STEWART
Calm down-

SIMON
You know I can't stand it
when you tell me to calm
down!

STEWART
I'm sorry.

SIMON
You know it doesn't work.

STEWART
I know.

SIMON
I know I need to calm down, but I
hate being late and I having to deal
with all this negative death stuff.

Stewart stops him and plants a kiss on his forehead.

STEWART
Deep breath.

Simon inhales. He holds it a moment then exhales.

SIMON
That's better. I'm better, thanks.

STEWART
Shake it off. Have a couple of
drinks. Everything will be good.

SIMON
We stay on script. Tree trimming
accident.

STEWART
Terribly tragic.

SIMON
Norman drank a lot.

STEWART
Like an Irish fish. God forgive me.

SIMON

Everybody's gonna have questions-

STEWART

They're gonna pump us for details and gossip-

SIMON

This is so fucking exciting-

STEWART

It's time to shine.

SIMON

Can you see my boner?

Stewart glances at Simon's crotch.

STEWART

Distinctly.

INT. VFW - NIGHT

The dance floor, bathed in holiday strobe lights, is as crowded as the parking lot. People dance to CHRISTMAS DANCE MUSIC. They bump, grind, gyrate, sweat and generally have a hedonistic good time.

Mixed in with all the people in their various stages of dress are a lot of men and women in Santa and Mrs. Claus suits, also sexy elves and snow people.

Disco balls glitter and shine. The MUSIC MAKES THE BUILDING VIBRATE.

Simon and Stewart have no sooner entered than they are descended upon by inquiring minds.

Everyone has to talk loud over the music

MAN #1

You poor things, you must be so devastated.

SIMON

We're coping.

WOMAN #1

How did Norman disembowel himself?

STEWART

Whiskey and cocaine.

SIMON

He was tripping balls...the chainsaw
got away from him.

STEWART

It's just one of those things.

WOMAN #2

I used to do coke with him. Norman's
nose was like a Shop-Vac.

STEWART

So true.

MAN #2

I smoked meth with him.

SIMON

(to Man #2)

Meth is the Alabama of drugs.
(disgusted at him)
Skank.

Simon and Stewart push through the crowd.

INT. VFW/BAR - NIGHT

Simon and Stewart emerge from the throng on the dance floor
to finally make their way to the bar.

Stewart grabs the nearest bartender.

STEWART

Two yuletide martinis, extra
peppermint.

The bartender begins mixing immediately.

Simon leans close to his husband for privacy.

SIMON

I love the yule-tini.

STEWART

They're both mine. We're slandering a
dead man. I need something to take
the edge off.

SIMON

It's a party, I think that's doable.

A GO-GO ELF throws his toned, tanned, muscular arms around
Stewart and Simon. He hugs them and smiles.

GO-GO ELF
Dudes, I'm so glad you're here!

SIMON
Do we know you?

GO-GO ELF
I don't know! But I'm glad you're here!

STEWART
(to Simon)
I need this level of no stress.

SIMON
I'll drink, you dance.

Stewart pulls the Go-Go Elf towards the dance floor and the sea of holiday-clad revelers.

STEWART
Let's shake our mistletoe.

GO-GO ELF
What about him-

STEWART
He has to get drunk before he can dance.

The bartender delivers the drinks. Simon quickly downs one.

SIMON
(to the bartender)
Two more. But, this time, make them both whiskey on the rocks.

He gulps the other martini.

INT. VFW/DANCE FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Stewart and the Go-Go Elf dance to the THROBBING MUSIC. They mix, seamlessly, with the other dancers. Bodies press together. Everyone is having a good time.

Stewart loses himself in the dancing. He pays no attention to the people around him as they filter in and out around him. A parade of characters pass by, Santas, snow people, elves, angels.

INT. VFW/BAR - NIGHT

Several empty shot glasses are gathered in front of Simon. He runs his finger around the inside of one then sucks what little moisture there is off his finger.

A BARTENDER, a different one than before, watches with a mixture of fascination and repulsion.

Simon wipes his finger on his shirt.

SIMON

It could have been any of us to die.
Poor Norman. Ripped open like that.
Makes you think.

BARTENDER

You need another.

SIMON

I probably shouldn't-

BARTENDER

I wasn't asking.

The Bartender clears the empty glasses to bring out a new one.

SIMON

The sad part is-

He accepts the new drink from the bartender.

SIMON (cont'd)

The real sad part...I don't think our
car has enough juice to get us back
home tonight.

Simon downs the shot. He slams the drained glass on the bar.

SIMON (cont'd)

(singing)
Tequila!

INT. VFW/DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

Stewart dances, carefree and liberated. People continue to filter onto and off the dance floor, some in costume, some not.

Soon, Stewart is struck by the realization that he is surrounded by Santa Clauses of all shapes, sizes, ages and ethnicities.

Stewart loves it. So do the other dancers.

In the flickering strobes and glittering mirror balls, the dance floor belongs to Stewart and the Santas to the delight of everyone.

As bodies move and groove, one Santa Claus moves closer.

Santa Arlin.

Stewart sees him, but doesn't recognize him.

In Santa Arlin's hand is a candy cane. The tip of it has been whittled to a fine, deadly point.

Stewart spins in the Santa dance orgy. He sweats, smiles, whoops.

Santa Arlin moves forward. Stewart whirls.

In the flashing green/red/white lights, Santa Arlin disappears into the throng of revelers.

Stewart spins and staggers. As he squeezes through the crowd, he brushes against another dancer. A a smear of blood is left on the person's shirt. The blood stain goes unnoticed.

INT. VFW/BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Simon downs his latest shot of liquor.

SIMON
(stares at the empty
glass)
That's a good Christmas.

The Bartender accepts the empty glass.

The people around Simon give him no attention.

Simon leans on the bar. After all he's drunk, he's just now feeling the effects. This euphoria makes him smile.

Stewart emerges from the dance crowd. He appears tired and pained.

SIMON (cont'd)
Hey, babe.

Stewart bumps, mindlessly, into the bar beside Simon.

STEWART
I don't feel so well.

He slumps over. The candy cane shiv sticks out of his back, surrounded by a wide spread of blood.

SIMON
What the fuck?

The Bartender recoils.

BARTENDER
The shit-

People notice Stewart's stab wound. The screaming starts.

The shrieks are contagious and quickly consume the VFW.

Simon catches Stewart as he begins to slide to the floor.

People scatter, terrified, shocked and yelling.

MUSIC THROBS

Simon eases Stewart to the floor. He rests his husband on his side to keep him off the candy cane shiv.

SIMON
What--what happened?

STEWART
I don't feel so well-

Simon beseeches others for help, but no one stops. The last of them run to the exit.

The club is empty. Simon and Stewart are alone.

Simon holds Stewart's hand. With his free hand he fumbles for his phone in his pocket-- it's a juggling act. He pulls his hand from Stewart's.

STEWART (cont'd)
Don't leave me-

SIMON
I'm not! I'm not! I've got to get help.

EXT. VFW - SAME MOMENT

People run out of the building. Nearly everyone is on their cell phones. Some are calling emergency services, some are live streaming.

YOUNG MAN
(into the spotlight
camera of his phone)
Holy hell, you guys! Y'all ain't
gonna believe this shit: a slasher
Santa!

INT. VFW - NIGHT

In the strobe lights, Simon swipes past the lock screen on his cell phone. He cannot navigate to the call button for social media notifications popping up on the screen.

SIMON
OMG, stop!

The MUSIC STOPS. The strobes still flash.

STEWART
Oh, boy...

Simon takes his hand, but Stewart shows few signs of life. His hand is limp in Simon's.

SIMON
Everything's gonna be okay.

Stewart's eyes stare off...across the dance floor. Simon follows his husband's gaze.

In the flicker of the strobe lights, on the other side of the room, stands Santa Arlin. He holds a butcher knife.

STEWART
(weak)
I...I think...it...was...him...

Stewart's hand slides out of Simon's.

SIMON
Stewart-

He shakes him. Stewart doesn't rouse or respond. He is dead.

SANTA ARLIN
Ho...ho...ho...

Rage builds in Simon. He throws his phone down then pulls the candy cane shiv from Stewart's back.

SIMON

You ain't seen naughty, you fat, ho-
hoing bastard.

Simon charges at Santa Arlin.

SIMON (cont'd)

(running)

Merry Christmas, motherfucker!

Simon lashes out with the candy cane shiv. Santa Arlin sidesteps.

Santa Arlin slashes the butcher knife through Simon's ribs. He shoves Simon into a festive display of Victorian carolers ankle deep in fake snow surrounded by deer, birds and squirrels.

Simon holds his side. Bleeding runs rivers into the fake snow.

Santa Arlin grabs Simon's shoulder and flips him over. Simon strikes out with the candy cane shive.

The maniac Santa catches him by the wrist and squeezes.
BONES SNAP.

Simon shrieks. He drops the candy cane shiv.

Santa Arlin puts the point of his butcher knife to Simon's chest, at his heart.

Simon looks into the madman's eyes.

SIMON (cont'd)

I hope you choke on reindeer shit.

Santa Arlin pushes the the butcher knife into Simon's chest. He is excruciatingly slow about doing it.

Simon yells in pain and anger.

SIMON (cont'd)

Fuck you! You fuck! You fuck!

Santa Arlin slides the butcher knife in all the way to the hilt.

Simon gags and coughs. Blood foams from his mouth. He shudders in agony then lies still. His lifeless eyes reflect the flashing, multicolored lights.