

INT. GRANDMA AND GRANDPA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

GRANDMA, GRANDPA and IVY, a girl about seven years old, are gathered at home on Christmas Eve.

Grandma is cheerfully hanging Christmas stockings while Grandpa reads a book in his easy chair. The tree is lit, the fireplace is ablaze and Christmas carols play on an easy listening station.

The three of them are wearing colorful homemade paper crowns.

Ivy sits with her head in her hands, eyeing a pile of opened Christmas crackers on a nearby table and looking dejected.

IVY

How much longer do we have to wear these stupid hats?

GRANDMA

What's wrong with you girl?
Father Christmas is coming tonight!

IVY

I don't care.

GRANDMA

What's gotten into you?

IVY

I'm just gonna get a bunch of junk in my stocking.

GRANDMA

Don't be silly, Father Christmas always puts plenty of oranges in your stocking.

IVY

Why do I only get oranges? All my friends get cool stuff like iPhones.

GRANDMA

That's how we did it when I was
a girl in Barbados.

IVY

Someone should tell Father
Christmas we don't live in a
third world country anymore.

GRANDMA

Hush, girl. That's how the
British do it.

IVY

We're not British.

GRANDMA

West Indian, British, same
thing. We loved the Queen in the
Islands.

GRANDPA

She's right, it's called
Stockholm syndrome. Wear the
crown girl, you're lucky that's
all she's making you do.

GRANDMA

Oh hush. I bet a nice Christmas
story would make you feel
better. Come sit over here with
your Grandma and listen.

Grandma sits down and puts her arm around Ivy, who looks at
her warily.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

"'Twas the night before
Christmas,

And all through the house

Not a creature was stirring,

Not even a mouse!

The stockings were hung by the -
- "

GRANDPA

Quiet woman, the child doesn't
want to hear that foolishness.

GRANDMA

Well, really!

GRANDPA

Come here girl, I'll tell you a
good story.

Ivy leaves the sofa and goes over to Grandpa, making
herself comfortable in his lap. He smiles at Grandma, who
narrows her eyes at him.

GRANDPA

Now listen to this:

"My dear, do you know,

How a long time ago,

Two poor little children - - "

GRANDMA

Oh lord no! Not that one! Not
"Babes in the Wood!"

GRANDPA

You never let me tell that
story. Every time I get to the
good part you lose your damn
mind.

GRANDMA

It's not appropriate for
children!

IVY

Ooh, this ought to be good!

GRANDMA

Children shouldn't hear such things, it's awful! When our children were that age --

GRANDPA

When our children were that age they watched soldiers drag dead Vietnamese through the streets on TV every night. Now let me tell this girl my story.

GRANDMA

If you're going to tell that awful story I'm going to bed!

GRANDPA

Turn the kitchen lights out before you go up.

Grandma gets up and goes upstairs, annoyed.

GRANDPA (CONT'D)

Now, where was I?

IVY

Something about some poor little children.

GRANDPA

Oh yes.

"Two poor little children whose names I don't know..."

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

A family is gathered in the large bedroom inside a huge estate. The furniture in the room is old fashioned and all are dressed in clothes suggesting the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

A MAN and WOMAN are in bed, sick and on the verge of dying. BOY, GIRL and UNCLE stand by their bedside. The tearful children go and hug their parents; Uncle then leads them out of the room.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Uncle and the children are in the hallway where two RUFFIANS are waiting. RUFFIAN ONE is young and timid while RUFFIAN TWO is older and very sinister looking.

Uncle hugs the children and hands them off to the two men. As the Ruffians leave with the children one of them looks back at Uncle, who makes a slashing gesture across his throat.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"Among the trees high
Beneath the blue sky
They plucked the bright flowers
And watched the birds fly;
Then on blackberries fed,
And strawberries red..."

The children and the Ruffians walk along a path in a forest. The children stop here and there, picking berries and eating them.

Ruffian One looks about nervously while Ruffian 2 pulls a knife out of his cloak and creeps toward the children.

Ruffian Two grabs the boy by the hair and raises the knife. Ruffian One, having second thoughts about the whole affair, pushes Ruffian Two aside. The two of them fight briefly; Ruffian One grabs a large stone and bludgeons Ruffian Two repeatedly until he dies.

The children look on in horror. Ruffian One backs up a few steps and runs away, back the way they came. The boy grabs the girl's hand and they run deeper into the forest.

EXT. WOODS - DUSK

The two children wander aimlessly through the woods at dusk, staying close to each other and sobbing. They sit down at the foot of a tree.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"And when it was night
So sad was their plight,
The sun it went down,
And the moon gave no light..."

EXT. WOODS -MORNING

The next day the children are lying dead, face up. Robins fly about dropping leaves and pecking at the children's open eyes.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"And when they were dead
The robins so red
Brought strawberry leaves
And over them spread.
Poor babes in the wood!
Sweet babes in the wood!
Oh the sad fate of
The babes in the wood!"

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Grandpa has finished the story and looks at Ivy expectantly.

GRANDPA

Well?

IVY

I don't get it. How did they die?

GRANDPA

Well...they starved to death, I suppose.

IVY

In one night?

GRANDPA

I guess they froze then.

IVY

But they were eating strawberries. It was summer.

GRANDPA

It gets very cold after the sun goes down! You've got no imagination.

IVY

I wanna hear another one.

GRANDPA

Alright. Let me see. Do you know the one about the "Milk White Doo?" That was your mother's favorite.

IVY

The milk white what?

GRANDPA

Doo. Let me see if I can remember all the words. Something about... a man wanting to eat rabbit stew for dinner, but his wife ate the whole thing before he got home.

IVY

That's weird. Go on.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Inside a small country cottage. A boy, JOHNIE, sits in his chair with his back to his MOTHER; the mother combs his hair gently, then steps away for a moment and returns with a knife. She drags the knife across the unsuspecting boy's throat and he falls dead and bloody on the floor.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

How did that go now? Oh yes.

Same cottage, Mother, FATHER and SISTER are sitting at the dinner table.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"The goodman cam hame to his dinner,

And his wife set down Johnie well boiled to him;"

Mother serves them bowls of stew. Father sticks a fork in his bowl and picks up a disembodied foot.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"And when he was eating, he takes up a foot,

'That's surely my Johnie's fit.'

'Sic nonsense! It's ane o' the hare's.'"

IVY (V.O.)

What language is this?

GRANDPA (V.O.)

English. Now listen.

The family is still eating; father spears a disembodied hand with his fork and raises it out of the bowl.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"Sync he took up a hand and says
-- "

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

IVY

Grandpa?

GRANDPA

Now see? This is why Father
Christmas doesn't bring you that
iPhone. You keep interrupting
your grandfather.

IVY

But I don't understand a word
you just said.

GRANDPA

I'm just trying to tell you
about a woman who cooked her son
and served him for dinner.

IVY

She did what?

GRANDPA

Then he came back to life as a
bird. Now hear what happens
next.

He looks at her intensely and waves his arms up and down,
like a bird. Ivy looks at him, horrified.

GRANDPA (CONT'D)

"Pew pew,

My minny me slew,

My daddy me chew,

My sister gathered me --"

IVY

Gross!

GRANDPA

What? You don't like this one
either?

IVY

No! It's disgusting!

GRANDPA

Since when are you so squeamish?
You disappoint me, child.

IVY

Sorry.

GRANDPA

OK, let me think of another. How
about "The Cruel Mother?"

IVY

Is this one a cannibal?

GRANDPA

Don't think so.

IVY

OK, I'm listening.

EXT. WOODS - DUSK

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"There was a lady near the town,
Low so low and so lonely,
She walked all night and all
around,
Down in the greenwoods of Ivy."

The CRUEL MOTHER leans against a thorn bush, sweating and obviously in agony; she's in labor. She lets out a blood curdling scream and looks down at a pair of twin infants.

She wraps the infants in a shawl and looks down at them for a moment, then pulls a pen knife out of her pocket and stabs them both in the heart. Blood spurts upwards and onto her face.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"She buried them under a marble stone,

Then she turned and went home."

The full moon is shining through the trees. The Cruel Mother digs in the ground, then drops a bundle in the hole and covers it with dirt. When she's finished she places a stone over the grave and runs away.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - DUSK

Later; the Cruel Mother walks alone through a clearing and comes upon a single house. Outside are two malevolent looking children, TWIN ONE and TWIN TWO, watching as she passes.

CRUEL MOTHER

"Oh babes, oh babes, if you were mine,

I'd dress you up in silks so fine."

TWIN ONE

"Oh mother, oh mother, when we were yours,

You dressed us in our own hearts' blood."

TWIN TWO

"You wiped your pen knife on your shoe,

The more you wiped the bloodier
it grew!"

TWIN ONE

"You buried us under the marble
stone.

You turned and went a maiden
home!"

A look passes over the Mother's face, a look of recognition
and horror. The children inch closer to her; she backs away
slowly.

CRUEL MOTHER

"Babes, oh babes, come tell me
true,

What death must I die for you?"

TWIN ONE

"For seven years you shall ring
the bell!"

TWIN TWO

"For seven years you shall wait
in hell!"

Twin One sprints towards the Mother and she takes off
running through the trees, looking back over her shoulder.

She runs until she's out of breath and stops to lean
against a tree. She turns to see if Twin One is nearby;
he's nowhere to be seen. She starts to run again when she
sees Twin Two standing in her path.

Before she has a chance to act Twin Two is upon her. He
wraps his hands around her neck and squeezes; the Mother
claws at his face but before long she stops struggling.

Twin Two gets up and joins Twin One, the two of them walk
back into the forest.

The Cruel Mother lies dead on the ground, her face blue,
staring at the sky.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

IVY

OK, that one wasn't so bad. I have a question though.

GRANDPA

Alright.

IVY

Why did she kill them in the first place?

GRANDPA

Well...she didn't want anyone to know that she...er...

IVY

She what?

GRANDPA

You see, back in those days an unmarried woman wasn't supposed to...uh...Shouldn't you be in bed?

IVY

Is this about sex?

GRANDPA

Well...

IVY

I'm just a kid, you know.

GRANDPA

Alright, up you go. You've got a big day tomorrow. Lots of oranges to eat.

IVY

Just one more, Grandpa? Please?

GRANDPA

Oh alright. One more. Any requests?

IVY

I don't know. How about something Christmas-y?

GRANDPA

You're in a festive mood, eh? Why didn't you say so? How about "The Little Match Girl?" I think I have that book around here somewhere.

He reaches for a small bookshelf next to his chair and pulls out a large, leather bound book.

GRANDPA (CONT'D)

Ah, here it is.

"It was so terribly cold. Snow was falling, and it was almost dark."

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

It's Christmastime in a fairy tale European village. People mill about among carolers and street merchants. A small blonde girl appears barefoot and clutching a bundle of matchsticks.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"Evening came on, the last evening of the year. In the cold and gloom a poor little girl, bareheaded and barefoot, was walking through the streets."

IVY (V.O.)

That's so sad! Didn't they have welfare back then?

GRANDPA (V.O.)

See what happens when you vote against your interests?

"And so the little girl walked on her naked feet, which were quite red and blue with cold."

The little MATCH GIRL finds a corner between two houses and sits down, shivering. She pulls her feet under her and rubs her hands together.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"She was getting colder, but did not dare to go home, for she had sold no matches, nor earned a single cent, and her father would surely beat her."

IVY (V.O.)

Is someone gonna call CPS?

GRANDPA (V.O.)

Shh!

The Match Girl pulls out a match from the bundle and strikes it on the wall next to her. The light from the match grows brighter and brighter, until she sees a big iron stove in front of her. She stretches her feet out as if to warm them by the stove. A minute later the match goes out and the stove disappears.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"She struck another match against the wall. It burned brightly, and when the light fell upon the wall it became transparent like a thin veil..."

A dining room lit with Christmas lights in a cozy house appears before the Match Girl. A huge feast is set on the table; in the center is a large roast goose. The goose jumps off the table and walks toward the Match Girl, then disappears.

The room fades away, but the Christmas lights remain. They grow brighter and brighter and rise up to the sky. One of the lights falls, like a shooting star, with a long tail of fire behind it.

GRANDPA (V.O.)

"'Now someone is dying,' thought the little girl, for her old grandmother, the only person that loved her, and who was now dead, had told her that when a star fell down a soul went up to God."

A bright light appears before the girl. The girl sees her grandmother step out from the light; the grandmother picks the girl up and the two of them float up to the heavens.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

The next day. A group of people stand in a circle looking down at something on the sidewalk. A tap-tap-tapping sound is heard.

On the sidewalk is the Match Girl, frozen solid and blue. One of the men is tap-tap-tapping her with the tip of his walking stick. Realizing that she's dead, they all shake their heads and slowly walk away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

GRANDPA

"'She wanted to warm herself,' the people said. No one imagined what beautiful things she had seen, and how happily she had gone with her old grandmother into the bright New Year."

The end. Good one, huh?

Ivy looks up at her grandfather, smiles sweetly and nods her head.

IVY

That was a good story, Grandpa.

GRANDPA

Alright then, off with you. Kiss your grandmother good night before you turn in.

She sits up, wraps her arms around Grandpa and squeezes with all her might.

IVY

Merry Christmas, Grandpa.

GRANDPA

Merry Christmas, Ivy.

Ivy hops off his lap and goes toward the stairs.

GRANDPA

Be careful on the stairs! Watch
out for the Little Man Who
Wasn't There!

She turns and looks at him quizzically, then starts to go up.

IVY

Hey Grandma? Poor babes in the
wood!

Grandpa chuckles and shakes his head. Humming, he goes around the room and switches out lights one by one.

GRANDPA

(singing)

Peace on Earth, and mercy
mild,

God damn sinners
reconciled!

He leaves the lights on the Christmas tree and switches off the last lamp.

FADE OUT