

THE NAUGHTY LIST

Written by

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EXT. VAST MOONLIT DESERT - NIGHT

Eerie harvest moon illumination.

A lone Mexican Wolf saunters upon a ridge, looks over a stretch of rock outcroppings, cactus, scans the distance.

THUD. A heavy, deep sinking sound reverberates through the earth.

The wolf jumps, eyes the ground, it's ears perk towards the noise source.

It howls, scans, and trots towards a house-sized boulder.

It searches, sniffs the ground, for Something.

DESERT CLEARING

It decides. Two short excited yips. It digs, the soft sand gives easily.

A PACK OF WOLVES join. The hole quickly a pit.

CRACK. Rock breaks deep below.

The pack freezes, skittishly backtracks and observes.

The pit center slightly rises, lifelike. Sand tumbles down the sloped sides.

The wolves exchange anxious glances, uneasily step back, eyes wary yet glued.

WHOOSH. Large wings flap. An UNDEAD RAVEN LANDS atop the largest boulder. Aged and scarred, missing feathers, dull and lifeless eyes, a thing from beyond the grave.

The pit's center pulses. Underground rocks crumble. The shadow of a hulking object forms.

The wolves circle, fretfully whimper.

Another UNDEAD RAVEN perches. The two share an expressive glance, share a Deep Unnatural Cackle.

A shadowy figure emerges. An uneasy silence.

An Alpha wolf emerges, larger and battle scarred. It growls, low and intense. Gravel crunches as it approaches the figure.

Two juvenile Alpha wolves study.

A dozen common ravens land, wings whip the air as they perch, soft cackles of curiosity. More ravens stream in.

The Alpha wolf growls louder, moves closer, postures and LEAPS.

BEAT

UMPH. YELP. Bones crunch. Air sizzles as the wolf's body sails, slams hard into a rock.

The pack in turmoil, yelps in panic and retreats.

The two juvenile Alpha wolves share a worried glance, then depart.

Hundreds of ravens line the rocks and cackle excitedly.

A gigantic dark black eye reflects moonlight as it looks towards the TWO LARGE RAVENS.

A single rumbling word dwarfs the cackles.

VOICE

VETE. (Spanish: Go!)

The Undead Ravens understand, take flight, Squawk.

Backlit by the moon, the ravens take flight, playfully converge, a Conspiracy. They fan like fingers across the sky.

Heavy footsteps- DRAG and THUD, repeat.

A lumbering shadow marches, hums a few chords which poorly resemble a Christmas carol, mixed with indiscernible word fragments, entirely out of tune.

A dusty cough, a throat-clear, then--

PEDRO NEGRO

--Oh. You better watch out, you
cry, because Pedro,
venido a su pueblo.
(Spanish: Is coming to town)

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND RECESS - DAY

Kids play basketball.

A boy lumbers, enabled and alone, he is--OTTO, 10, a chunky jackal.

He traverses the court and kids play around him. A boy dribbles close and draws his glare.

BOY
Sorry Otto.

OTTO
Better be.

He scans, spots something of interest.

JUNGLE GYM
A pile of wood chips, are Boy 2 and Boy 3, huddle in terse trade discussions, gum for baseball cards.

BOY 2
No, you don't get Machado for five pieces and a Spangenberg.

BOY 3
They're both Padres.

BOY 2
Yeah, for now. How about 10?

A shadow as Otto's blocks the sunlight. Some ravens cackle in the distance.

OTTO
I'll take that.

He fat-hands, the cards bend and some gum falls. Both boys sit in sad silence.

A nearby raven hops and excitedly cackles.

INT. POLICE CHIEFS OFFICE - DAY

A uniformed man behind the desk, he is -CHIEF BOWEN, 50's, stern, always angry.

Chief ends a call, shuffles folders, slams a drawer in rapid succession.

Two soft knocks. Chief doesn't look up.

CHIEF
Enter.

In walks a distracted man in a cheap wrinkled suit, a bad haircut made worse, phone in hand.

He thumbs a text and tries to hide a goofy grin as he clumsily negotiates the doorway, he is- DETECTIVE JOHN KELLY - Hispanic, 40, ugly but trying, lax.

JOHN
Sorry Chief. I'm-

CHIEF
--late. As usual. Admin leave,
you're off, three weeks.

John confused, pretends to contemplate.

JOHN
Wait. What?

CHIEF
We're done. You can go.

John swoons as the message sinks in.

JOHN
I gotta stay home, Unpaid?

CHIEF
I can't make you stay home.

John scoffs, relieved. A short smile, glances at his phone. Chief sees John doesn't get it and sucks his teeth.

CHIEF (CONT'D)
You can come to work. But you won't
get paid.

John bewildered, worry and jitters set in.

JOHN
Chief, I was hoping for overtime. I
could use the money.

CHIEF
You. Me. The taxpayers. Guess who
wins? Your money problems are
Exactly That. Divorced twice.
Twice! That reminds me.

Chief rifles through a stack of folders.

JOHN
I. I.

John's phone chirps, he instinctively looks and sees a text from Sara, her sleazy photo, "Hi, yourself."

John smiles, opens Notes, Title: Chicks on Deck, a list of names, sees Sara and puts a Y. Others have a Y, N, or X.

Chief finds the right folder, sees John absorbed.

CHIEF

Hey!

John snaps back from his salacious world.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Get your head out of your ass!

Chief, a deep calming breath. John attentively watches.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Look. I've cut you a lot of slack. Since, the shooting. The Steele Warehouse. Van--

JOHN

--Burth. It was a good shoot.

CHIEF

Perhaps. The man is dead. Then shacking up with his widow. Bad idea, right? God Dam. A cop with a restraining order.

John cowers, agrees and concedes.

JOHN

That was a Bad Idea. Chief.

CHIEF

The mayor would fire your ass if we lost the suit. Now, you're a detective, you need to solve cases. You Detect crime. Get it? The word De-tect-ive. One who detects. How many cases have you solved this year?

John looks skyward, taps his fingers and counts. He stalls. The chief impatient.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Two! Two. Every other detective is over 10. Are you telling me Crime doesn't exist on your shift?

JOHN

No. Of course no. It's just, a lot of these folks, maybe didn't mean to do it. Some. Deserve a Second Chance. To. Be.

John sheepishly struggles for a word as the Chief stews.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Nice.

CHIEF

Nice! You don't decide who gets a Second Chance!

Chief fumes.

John's phone chirps, he retrieves it, glances, A FLASH - KIM HAS REPLIED.

John smiles, drifts, but quickly reconnects with the moment, smartly puts the phone away.

The Chief glued to his every movement.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

What now?

John debates sharing Kim's news. Better judgement prevails.

JOHN

Nothing.

CHIEF

Fine. Until God or the Angel of Death, appear on the courthouse steps and delivers justice, you take your findings to the District Attorney. Understood?

JOHN

Ahem. Chief. Religion doesn't belong in the workplace--

John's eyes track a wall. The Chief gives the ARE YOU SERIOUS look and John misses it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

--and neither does folklore.

Chief erupts.

CHIEF

--What!

John's hand rises in surrender as he retreats.

JOHN

I just think they—Uh. Yeah. The DA.
Got it, Chief.

INT. 5th GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

Otto noisily enters as the teacher is mid-sentence. He's late.

A "No Cell Phone zone" sign next to a holiday basket filled with phones. As Otto walks past, he eyes the prey.

He purposely bumps a student's desk and sends a pencil careening.

He sits at his woefully empty desk.

TEACHER

Class, there's a week until Winter
Break. It's a great time to focus.
Especially for those of you who
want to be on Santa's List.

Classroom giggles.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Final on Friday.

Kids textbook sigh in unison.

Otto slyly eyes the basket of phones. The teacher notices, pulls them close, and gives Otto a curt glance.

Two ravens on a tree branch scrutinize Otto.

INT. OTTOS SMALL LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Pitch black except for the TV light cast on Otto's face as he plays Fortnite, Save the World Mode.

TV

Otto's avatar and Player 1's avatar
in an open field.

WINDOW

A raven flies past the window and
squawks.

LIVING ROOM

OTTO

Are you a scammer? I'm not. I know someone who got scammed once.

PLAYER 1 (V.O.)

No, I'm not. What do you have to trade?

OTTO

I'll show you. I have mats too.

TV

Otto expertly constructs a trading hut.

OTTO (O.S.)

Just go behind, I'll look through the window and see what you have.

PLAYER 1 (V.O.)

You won't scam me, right?

Player 1 moves his avatar behind the wall, drops a dozen shiny weapons.

PLAYER 1 (V.O.)

I have a SMG, a couple Kingslayer, a legendary potato gun.

Otto toggles the screen options and hovers the mouse above the "Kick Player" option.

LIVING ROOM

OTTO

Bye, bye.

PLAYER 1 (V.O.)

What?

Otto clicks and kicks the player. Player 1 avatar disappears, the cache of weapons remains. Otto's avatar gathers the loot.

INT. PLAYER 1 LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Family members peacefully read books, watch tablets, PLAYER 1, 8, wears a headset, stares hopelessly at the TV, a warning flashes "Kicked."

PLAYER 1

Nooooooooooooo!

In unison, family members freeze and look up in wonder, then return to their distraction.

Player 1 in tears, angry, throws his headset and gaming control, yells at the TV.

LIVING ROOM

Otto smiles, satisfied, stands, and glibly drops the headset and controller to the floor.

As he slogs by the window, outside on a tree branch, TWO RAVENS attentively watch and exchange low squawks.

SMALL MESSY BEDROOM

Otto crawls into bed and turns off the lamp.

INT. BUSY SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Children at lunch. Fabulously bright like a hospital surgical room. Beyond five feet, everything appears blurred and fuzzy.

OTTOS POV through a tunnel- He sits next to the prettiest girls. His head bobs and lips move; no words are heard. His hands jut in sync with his amazing story.

The girls smile, intrigued, and laugh distortedly.

BEAT

A shadow falls over the girls, their smiles fade, they stare at Something behind Otto, recline and shriek, their faces twist in terror.

The shadow falls upon him.

A booming Spanish accented drowns out everything.

PEDRO NEGRO

BE NICE

He senses Something behind him. In Slow Motion, he turns his head, uncontrollable fear grips him, wide-eyed, and--

SMALL MESSY BEDROOM

--he jumps awake, covered in sweat, gasps, sits up, scans and sees nothing.

First daylight passes through the window.

He calms and stares out at the window, past a figurine on the window sill, a --

BURRO - A small crudely carved bone figurine that poorly resembles a donkey, yellowish red from a fresh kill, fringes of flesh attached, the carves are made from gnawing.

--BURRO. Otto relieved, collapses back in bed.

BEAT

Otto, decidedly rises with unusual vigor, makes his bed and cleans his room.

A fly lands on the Burro.

Otto briskly walks past, the breeze disturbs the fly, it lifts off a red meaty speck.

CRAMPED KITCHEN

A frantic woman sets the breakfast table, she is -Alicestair, 40, stressball in motion.

Otto enters with unusual pep and vigor. She's busy and doesn't notice.

He sits, scans eagerly, sees the cereal, bowl and spoon, and patiently waits.

He fumbles with a kindergarten Christmas decoration, Something he made. He glances up at distracted Alicestair, a moment of resent.

ALICESTAIR

Sorry no milk. Momma's gonna get more after work. Be home by 10. You should be in bed.

He sighs, the smile fades, he forces it to return. He pushes the decoration, it slides on edge, and falls.

OTTO

That's alright.

Alicestair drops a SACKED LUNCH on the table, uprights the decoration, as she arranges her purse, grabs coffee, eats toast, and fix her hair, in rapid fire.

OTTO (CONT'D)

What's--

ALICESTAIR

--Sorry, its cheese. I know you hate it. We can't afford school lunch yet - I promise I'll get those forms in. Soon. Love you.

Alicestair kisses her hand and taps his head, gathers her things and exits.

Otto scans, disappointed, his stomach grumbles. He stands, forgets the sacked lunch, loses his smile and shuffles off.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Otto walks to school alone. He awkwardly waves at a group of kids who don't wave back. A RAVEN WATCHES from a nearby tree in silence.

INT. 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

The teacher stands at the doorway, stern expression, arm extended, points down the hallway towards.

TEACHER

No homework. Van Berth, principal's office.

CAFETERIA

It's lunch time, boisterous kids eat and chatter. Holiday songs play on the cafeteria speakers.

Otto sits alone, looks down at his stomach as it grumbles. His scowl returns.

Otto scans for prey, sees a kid alone, eating pizza and drinking Coke Zero. Otto stands.

LATER

Otto sits, stuffs half the slice in his mouth and sips Coke Zero. Otto sighs.

EXT. OTTO RESIDENCE - NIGHT

A residential yard, trees, crickets chirp. The wind gusts. A distant wolf howls.

The bathroom light casts a creepy yellow light upon two Ravens on a tree branch as they watch Otto's bedroom.

The crickets go quiet. A pause.

BEAT

Both RAVENS frantically squawk and flap, gleam at Something below. The ravens fly away in a panic. Silence.

INT. OTTOS SMALL MESSY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Otto deep in a slumber. THUD. He awakes, immediately wide-eyed as the heavy thud reverberates. Otto freezes in fear.

PEDRO NEGRO, 3-feet tall, 250lbs, powerful, staunch creature, with Rhino thickness embodied on a dwarf, a broad forehead, dark black skin mixed with matte and shiny oily splotches, short course scrub pad hair, stubby horns that run flat along his skull, black eyes with red outlines, teeth are black and jagged, wide three fingered hand, short fingers with pencil thick talon-like fingernails, wears a shredded burlap sack loincloth.

A stone-faced Pedro Negro, nose-to-nose, studies a petrified Otto.

BEAT

Through the bedsheets, Pedro Negro grips Otto's ankle like a VICE. Pedro Negro turns and effortlessly pulls a bedsheet ensnarled Otto from the bed onto the floor with a THUD.

Otto panics in terror, his face bedsheet covered. He twists and writhes, blindly struggles and grabs for Anything. He grasps the leg of a night stand, a lamp on top.

Pedro Negro marches forward, unimpeded. Otto's grip holds, the night stand slides, a leg catches a floorboard, then falls. The lamp crashes to the floor and flickers on.

Pedro Negro drags a whimpering Otto toward the center of the room and stops, and releases his ankle. Otto flops, face to floor, flails and tugs the bedsheets from his face.

Pedro Negro pulls a BURLAP SACK from his waist, and shakes it airborne to fully open.

Otto cowers and rights-himself, musters a breath, pulls the bedsheet from his face, clears his view, and for the first time Seeing Pedro Negro.

Otto gripped by paralysis and fear.

Otto begins a piercing scream, as Pedro envelopes him with the sack. The scream decisively muffled, then fades.

From inside the burlap sack, Otto sees speckles of light, hears Pedro's breath.

Otto, cinched inside, struggles to free himself.

Pedro tugs the sack. Otto spills backwards and strikes his head to the floor. LIGHTS OUT.

Pedro Negro hauls a stuffed burlap sack.

INT. QUAIN T LIVING ROOM - DAY

A credenza with a laptop, wall photos of birds, a window overlooks the street.

A woman stares out the window and dreams, she is - HOLLY, 30, African American, shy but responsive.

She nibbles on a pencil, deliberates, returns to the laptop. A folder rests nearby, the title page labeled "Vegas presentation."

A printer spits out pages.

The laptop open to Gmail. Holly scans Sender and Subjects: Kim-NY "Double doctorate? - why not a double-date?, Mom - "plan for Christmas," X4rd "Russian brides love you."

Holly clicks Delete for the Russian Bride email. She hastily deletes ALL THE MESSAGES, sighs in relief.

Holly picks up the printed pages, the cover "Doctorate Thesis: Impact of Socio Ethos on Adolescent Development"

Holly sadly sighs, stares out the window.

She flips to the last page, "In conclusion I believe with properly allocated resources, a comprehensive detection, identification and mitigation plan, can be effective, as every child's life is a treasure."

Holly traces with her finger.

HOLLY
 (Softly, aloud)
 and the resources to save every
 single one of these children would
 be well spent, as this matter
 impacts us all.

She believes it.

Beneath is SCRIBBLED RED WRITING and Holly's finger taps the page.

"Marginal work, deep clinical research, no real-world examples. Aged case studies is NOT relevant to today's youth whom are not all precious snowflakes. Success starts in the field! Y/T, Dr. Walsh."

Holly perplexed, sighs, drops the documents.

A wrap at her window, she looks. A small bird sits on the ledge, it's long tail pivots. Holly, a little smile, forgets her discourse, stares and leans in.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
 Why, hello Mr. Great-tailed
 Grackle. It's so nice to see you. I
 miss you guys. So much easier than
 children.

The bird seemingly stares as if it heard her.

Holly welcomes the attention. The bird pecks at something outside the window.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
 Found a Termitaphididae, perhaps? I
 miss You Guys.

Holly leans, her forehead to the glass, scans curiously. A peaceful moment.

SQUAWK! The small bird panics, flaps rapidly, slams against the window. A raven swoops, tangles in branches, chases the small bird.

Holly aghast, reels back. She spastically waves her hands, convincingly directs the small bird to safety.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
 Go! Go!

The raven clears the branches, moves in, the small bird pivots, and flies to safety.

Holly stares, gasps, out of breath.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Wow. Aggressive. A male. Too early in the season for That Behavior. No shortage of food. Must be something else.

Holly ponders. A police siren outside, louder, then fades, A car door slams.

Holly presses her face to the window, looks down the street. She sees a small crowd, a few cop cars.

A police officer strings yellow tape in front of a neighbor's home.

Holly intrigued, glances at the folder, sighs and pauses, grabs her jacket, and exits.

INT. OTTOS LIVING ROOM - DAY

Footsteps and chatter as cops meander and mill about in poor attempt to appear busy.

A bored man in a suit palms a notepad, he is DETECTIVE ARNY - 50, lethargic and ungainly, as he badgers a distraught Alicestair.

These Men are in her home, she needs Help and these men are not it. She searches for Someone.

ARNY

Just because he's missing doesn't necessarily mean--

ALICESTAIR

(Explodes)

--nothing's wrong! He was Taken. Kidnapped. He didn't Run Away. Listen to what I'm saying.

Holly enters, scans, takes it all in with newfound wonder. She recognizes Arny's persistent and a woman in duress. Her head shakes in disgust as she approaches.

HOLLY

Hi, officer. Officer. I think she's had enough. Alright?

Arny pauses. He has a job to do, and has been interrupted a few times in the past.

ARNY
It's Detective. Are you family?

HOLLY
No.

ARNY
Well then you shouldn't be here.

Arny shakes his head, motions towards the door and a to nearby officer- GET HER OUT. Holly worriedly glances around For Someone.

ARNY (CONT'D)
It's a CRIME scene miss. You'll have to leave.

Holly and Arny see John's grand entrance.

HOLLY
I'm with him.

Arny casts a doubtful eye, shakes his head in amusement. John grins.

ARNY
That figures.

John locks eyes with Alicestair her face registers muted anger, he dampens his smile.

JOHN
(To Alicestair)
Hi, Alice. I'm so. Sorry.

ALICESTAIR
You. You CAN'T be here.

JOHN
I'm here to help.

John leans in and whispers in Arny's ear.

JOHN (CONT'D)
No, no. She's okay. She's with me.
She's a clinical psychiatrist, or
psychologist.

Arny contemplates and is not convinced. John senses a hurdle.

JOHN (CONT'D)
By the way. Your fly is down.

ARNY
Uhh. What?

Arny distracted, looks and sees his fly is Not Down.

John triumphantly smiles, nods to Holly to continue, and drags Arny under his arm to a sidebar.

Alicestair, a doubtful eye on John.

HOLLY
Hello, maam. I'm Holly. I'm a psychologist. I know what you're going through.

Alicestair receptive with Holly's calming voice.

ALICESTAIR
You do?

Holly pauses, sucks her teeth, looks sideways, gulps.

HOLLY
I mean. You must be going through a lot. Studies suggest--

John and Arny step away.

ARNY
John. Always a douche. But anything helps. It seems pretty straightforward. The kid ran away.

JOHN
And Alice?

ARNY
You mean the mom?

ARNY (CONT'D)
The usual. Thinks the kid is a Student-of-the-year material. Must have been abducted. God knows what she thinks. Will probably blame Aliens.

JOHN
Illegal or space?

ARNY

Pick one. No drugs. No custody issues, no crazy ex-boyfriends.

John squeamishly looks sideways.

BEAT

ARNY

What brings you out here? Chief said you were Off.

JOHN

Forced vacation. Started today. I. I know these people. Knew, the kid, sort of. You remember the OIS I had six or seven years ago?

ARNY

Uhhh.

JOHN

Steele's warehouse. The robbery.

ARNY

Yeah, yeah. You got a 60-day suspension, paid. You kill the property owner, bad guy gets away. Somehow, ruled a good shoot. Lucky bastard. You Almost solved that case too.

JOHN

It Was a good shoot. I guess.
(A beat.) It was THIS kid's dad.

ARNY

Shit. Right. Didn't you date the mom, her, afterwards? That was a shit-storm too. You Stalker.

Arny looks past John, eyes Alicestair top to bottom.

JOHN

Alleged. A misunderstanding.

ARNY

Sure, you scoundrel. Like a hyena.

JOHN

Yeah. Victimless crime. Right? Bullshit. Her, the kid. I lost track.

John looks disgusted; Arny doesn't like the news either.

ARNY

Yeah, you did your thing. So busy. You got to wonder. If you didn't shoot the guy, would the kid still run away? Would you still nail the mom?

JOHN

Alright. Alright. Damn.

ARNY

What you doing with your time off?

JOHN

I got nothing. Better to sit at home than the office, right?

ARNY

I dunno. Sticking around?

JOHN

Just gonna hear what she's got to say. Make sure she's ok.

John nods towards Holly and looks her up and down.

ARNY

Yeah, yeah, sure you're gonna! The endless pursuit. She's out of your league. Unless she has a glass eye, peg leg, Crohns. Well, good luck.

JOHN

Thanks!

John doesn't catch Arny's sarcasm.

ARNY

It's a good time of year to enjoy your days off. Merry Christmas, if I don't see you, don't be shocked if you get Coal in your Stocking.

Alicestair gives Holly a warm parting embrace, casts a hate-filled glare at John.

BEDROOM

Holly turns towards the bed, stares.

John sees Holly, rehearses a smile, still compelled to hit on her.

BEAT

Holly stares blankly somewhere in space and her eyes water. She fishes in her purse.

JOHN
You okay? Tissue?

HOLLY
Yeah.

John checks his jacket pocket as Holly anticipates. John removes a handful, a crumpled slip with a woman's name and IG handle, a few coins, and condom.

Both look away embarrassed. John returns the items.

JOHN
(To Officer)
Hey, got a tissue?

A moment. For the first time John sees the night stand, the neat closet, bed sheets on the floor. He squints in wonder.

Officer 1 hands Holly a tissue.

HOLLY
I'm alright. I just need a minute.

Holly walks John's eyes study her. Arny notices.

John glances between the bed sheets and the night stand, considers, he's bothered, he studies and holds, on the sheets, muses.

Arny's footsteps break his concentration.

ARNY
You here for her or the crime scene?

It takes a second for the real question to sink in.

JOHN
Ahh. No. We just met. I'm walking up. Get to the police tape. She's there, and starts asking questions. Real stupid questions. But she's hot, so I thought, maybe, she was looking to date a cop.

A raven flies past the window.

ARNY

Don't you already have a harem?
What are you? A professional
juggler? No wait. I've seen what
happens after you drop the balls.

JOHN

I guess she used me for my crime
scene.

ARNY

They USE you for something. At
least you know NOW, before it costs
you half. By the way, what is half,
of a half, of a half?

JOHN

Yeah. Yeah. Take care. Dick.

Houseflies circle the BURRO as John walks past and exits.

INT. LOCAL COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Holly sits at small corner table, laptop out, studies
Something.

John enters, sees her. He recognizes a familiar blue hue
reflection in her eyes, and perks up.

JOHN

Hey. What's your profile?

Holly, a glance, still deep in thought.

John smartly takes out his iPhone, happily clicks on the
Facebook icon- his homepage opens, fills with plentiful
updates, photos of single women, chats, likes.

HOLLY

Huh?

JOHN

Facebook. What's your profile?

John nods, peers at her laptop, she's still confused.

HOLLY

Facebook? Oh. I'm not on--

JOHN

--Oh.

John firmly nods towards the laptop.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I thought you were ON.

HOLLY
No, this is the National Institutes
Health professional portal.

Holly swivels the laptop and he sees it's not Facebook.

JOHN
So, you're the ONE person not on?

HOLLY
Well- I have. Had.

Holly finally flustered.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
--an account, but I don't use it. I
mean, the occasional photo, I share
with my mom.

John lays the guilt on her and sings.

JOHN
Oh, ok. No worries. It's not like
being a Facebook friend is a real
commitment to anything.

John stands silently, lost in his phone, Facebook messenger,
scrolls. She makes an admission.

HOLLY
I don't get out much. Socially.

John misses it and she quickly returns to her sanctuary.

John scrolls through messages "What, no call? Asshole!"
followed by a different sender message "You have some
nerve!!" followed by a different sender message "Ok, ok, I'll
go out with you." He smiles, his luck has changed.

Satisfied, he takes a seat and hungrily eyes Holly. Next!

He leans forward, smiles but she's glued to her laptop.

JOHN
Ahem. Doctor. Thanks again for
speaking with her. Our detectives
aren't known for their people
skills.

Holly pauses, half folds the laptop, engaged. John - Bingo!

HOLLY

I'm glad I can help. Usually I spend all my time researching, hoping to find ways to prevent, exactly this sort of thing. Studies say the parents often have no idea, the pressures of childhood, the reality is--

Holly, mid-ramble, stares in worried contemplation how little she knows; John wants to lighten the tone.

JOHN

--So, what do you think? He'll be back by dusk, sooner?

John hopes that Holly doesn't consider abduction an option.

HOLLY

Most runaways are found. Missing Children. Well, assuming it wasn't an abduction, like Your People insist, it wasn't. If we can find a better way to predict youth behavior, we can do a better job of helping those in need. It's never safe for kids to be on the street alone. Without help.

JOHN

Maybe a website, or toll-free hotline?

HOLLY

There are. Both. But, it isn't that simple. A large number of children exhibit no warnings.

JOHN

Unusual sadness or misbehavior?

HOLLY

Trouble at home. Unstable family life are contributors. Absence of a strong parental unit, such as divorce or the death of a parent.

John gulps, avoids eye contact, and looks down.

JOHN

Did she, Alice, the mom, say anything? About--

HOLLY

Alice. She's in shock. How dare that detective harass her, with what she's going through.

JOHN

He has a job to do.

HOLLY

She wasn't fond of you either.

Two ravens jump feverishly from tree to tree.

The doorbell clangs and the holiday wreath rocks at its flung open, and a man, Bill, 40, grumpy sleaze, enters.

Bill's head and shoulders splattered with fresh bird droppings, he's disgusted, rants and curses.

As the door closes--

-- A radio station plays holiday music.

BILL (O.S.)

Damn crows. Every year.

HOLLY

Peer pressure, poor self-image. Running away from home is often a segue to suicide, the 2nd leading cause of death for youths.

JOHN

That's not the case here.

HOLLY

In nearly every case I've read about. There were more than 400 youth suicides last year, nearly 60 kids were under 11 and many ran away Before. We just don't have the time and resources to commit to prevention.

JOHN

That's a problem right there, not enough resources for Prevention. Not that El Paso is a garden spot. We kept TRAINING DOWN THE TUNNEL. Teaching new officers, the same old techniques we knew didn't work. Prevention takes far less resources than investigating and cleaning up a crime scene.

Radio station break between songs, the radio host voice for a second, a voice recognizable at Pedro's.

RADIO HOST (V.O.)
(gruffly)
Your next.

Holly and John freeze as they think they heard something. The radio host clears his throat, speaks normal.

RADIO HOST (V.O.)
Up next is another holiday
favorite-

Holly resumes the conversation in stride.

HOLLY
So, what did you do?

JOHN
An MIT kid turned us on to
predictive modeling and geo-
mapping.

Now Holly is impressed.

HOLLY
Fancy words. But THAT'S nothing
new.

JOHN
We started there and pivoted to a
process, analysis, built on the
concept of a Primary Event.

HOLLY
What's that?

JOHN
A significant event, like a
holiday, such as Christmas or Arbor
Day. We've used a variety of
possible Primary Events, to find
potential hot spots and
strategically deploy resources.

HOLLY
How so?

JOHN
For example, the 4th of July, each
year, same date, but different day
of the week, didn't jive with work
schedules.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

We'd rather interdict illegal
firework sales than respond to
injuries. So, we staff more on the
days before. Reduce the sales,
prevents injuries and fires.
History tends to repeat itself.

Holly marvels and John happily expounds.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Now we staff around Primary Events.
It's worked wonders, saved
resources.

Bill walks past, uses a napkin to wipe the bird droppings but
spreads them. John notices and grins.

HOLLY

I follow. But it seems convoluted.

At "convoluted" John looks puzzled and Holly notices.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Complex.

JOHN

Uh. I got it.

John smiles.

HOLLY

Not use to women using long words?

JOHN

Uh. No. Not par-tic-ula-rly.

John's well-received humor.

HOLLY

Funny you should mention the
holidays, because it was the first
thing I thought of after, you know,
this morning.

JOHN

Yeah, Christmas is almost here.

HOLLY

That's a common misconception, that
depression rises around the
holidays.

JOHN

Guys call the these next few weeks the HOLIDAY-SHITSHOW. It's the busiest time of year, and I'm forced to take time off.

John's phone chirps. He reaches for it.

HOLLY

At least you'll get to spend time with your family, right?

JOHN

I've got nothing. No one. Maybe a deck of cards. Of course, my chief said I can come to work for free. Fat chance. Free. That's like volunteer work. Who'd do that?

John rises the phone to eye level and misses Holly's disparaged glance.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Yeah, I know. It's tough to talk lunar cycles with cops. But the full moon does bring out the-

John's eyes go wide as he reads a text from Sara-Boobs. "I'm blocking you. You're fucking crazy!"

John sighs, opens Notes, finds her name, types M. John returns the phone to his pocket as if it were hot.

JOHN (CONT'D)

--crazies.

HOLLY

Unique. But I don't think there's a Primary Event for these kids.

JOHN

When what we were doing, stopped working, we tried something that didn't make sense. It worked. Just look at Missing Children, reported around Christmas.

HOLLY

I have the data on my laptop. I don't think there is anything. Let's see. Let me just search the past five years of data, enter El Paso. We Are 11 days before Christmas.

The laptop screen progress wheel spins for a few seconds.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

--and Voila!

(Surprise)

Whoa. I wasn't expecting that.

JOHN

What?

HOLLY

Well, according to this, for Each of the Past five years, there was a missing child reported.

Holly realizes, John considers.

JOHN

That can't be right. In El Paso, exactly 11 days before. Christmas.

Holly nods affirmatively as John takes it in.

The doorbell jingles as Bill exits. Immediately the two ravens cackle overhead, dive towards Bill, he shrieks.

John and Holly pause and stare at the debacle. Bill runs, hands guard his face as a raven's talon scratch his cheek and draw blood.

HOLLY

Oh my God. Shouldn't you, like do something?

JOHN

Uh. No. That's not detective work.

Holly dubious.

Passersby freeze in alarm, take shelter.

Bill flees down the street.

HOLLY

Unusually aggressive Ravens. Lately. So, what Exactly Is detective work?

JOHN

Well. I detect things. I have an expert eye. I. I notice things the casual observer wouldn't.

HOLLY

Like?

JOHN

This morning for example. Didn't it seem strange? Nothing was missing from Otto's closet. No suitcase. Sheets on the floor. Like He Vanished.

HOLLY

Abducted? But there were no signs of a forced entry.

JOHN

Yeah, that too. I'm struggling lately to make sense of this stuff. According to the Chief.

Holly muses. John rethinks, decides callous talk won't help his chances with Holly. An awkward pause.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Exactly 11 days? Shocking. Right? Not that-

John nods toward the spectacle of which returned to view of Bill fleeing two squawking and dive-bombing ravens.

JOHN (CONT'D)

--the data?

HOLLY

Wait a minute. Let me just check 10 and 12 days before Christmas. And...

(Pause)

There's nothing.

(Pause)

And... nothing again.

Holly considers. John smiles triumphantly. Holly, a sideways glance gives him pause. He suppresses the smile.

JOHN

(Baited breath)

Told you it works. Primary Event.

HOLLY

You're saying Otto ran away, today, is correlated to these other five children?

JOHN

No, not at all. I'm saying the numbers don't lie.

HOLLY

(To herself)

THIS IS really something. I've got to look more closely.

Holly stares at the computer model, tunes the numbers.

JOHN

Glad I could help. Any interest in grabbing dinner later? Maybe like... a date? Who knows. Otto will return, or be found by then.

Holly smiles, and looks John in the eyes. Holly's first held eye-contact. John's phone chirps again, he fights to hold the gaze, she Holly hears it, looks dismayed.

HOLLY

I don't think I'm your type.

JOHN

What type is that?

HOLLY

A woman with more brain than bust.

JOHN

Funny. I thought the same thing. Still. Dinner?

HOLLY

Perhaps. I haven't had dinner Out in a while. Just don't call it a date. I'd like to know if he's found. I imagine you'll be the first to know.

JOHN

Definitely. And I won't call it a Date. Why? Any reason?

HOLLY

Ah. No. I'm just too busy with research on my thesis to be involved.

John's phone is out, Notes, next to the already entered name "Holly," types a "?"

EXT. GRASSY FIELD - NIGHT

Pedro Negro's silhouette walks while he hums and sings. Raven conspiracies fly high overhead, few ravens playfully circle close to him.

PEDRO NEGRO

He sees you cuando duerme.
 (Spanish: when you're sleeping)
 He knows when you're awake.
 El sabi si, usted mal or buen, y
 deci Pedro a arreglarlo,
 (Spanish: He knows if you've been
 bad or good, and Pedro will fix
 you)
 so be good or Pedro break.

Pedro grumbles and emits an ominous laugh. He walks atop a small grassy mound and sees a small town.

A raven lands at Pedro's feet, hops feverishly and squawks for attention. Pedro listens to the raven's squawks.

Pedro, understands, turns towards the town, stares.

PEDRO NEGRO (CONT'D)

Mustreme! (Spanish: Show me)

The raven takes flight toward the town.

NEARBY HILL

Two juvenile Alpha wolves silently creep into view, and spy on Pedro Negro from a safe distance.

GRASSY FIELD

Pedro Negro follows the raven's path, resumes his methodical march, hums and sings his broken carol, which synch with his heavy footsteps.

INT. TGIF RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A booth, tacky menus, family restaurant noise.

John and Holly sit across from each other. He's smartly dressed and cleaned up. She has not. She's brought her laptop, it's out.

John stink-eyes her laptop, gulps the last of his drink, holds the tumbler high for every drop, ice avalanches and some falls across his face.

Holly's wine glass untouched. The waiter pauses at the table.

WAITER
Another Jack and Coke?

John nods, musters a smile.

JOHN
(To waiter)
You're a gentlemen and a -

John indifferently forgets. Holly, without a glance.

HOLLY
--scholar.

John waves him off, returns a flat gaze to Holly, then scans for a distraction.

She's absorbed.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
This is staggering. There's a
pattern moving West. A 100%
positive trend, shifting every
couple days.

An attractive waitress passes, John blatantly stares too long. Holly doesn't notice.

JOHN
A moving a pattern?

HOLLY
You said it. If there are
stationary trends, why can't there
be moving trends? It's here.

Holly turns the laptop around to face John.

A map of the South-Western U.S., with a daily timeline across the header, showing the CHRISTMAS MINUS X-DAYS, and a RED FUZZY CIRCLE over cities.

As Holly scrolls, it heads west from El Paso.

JOHN
Moving to where?

HOLLY

West. For the pattern to remain intact, there'd have to be a Missing Child reported in Tucson, AZ, exactly 8 days before Christmas.

JOHN

So, you are going to Tucson and going to tell all the kids at school What?

HOLLY

No, but I'm scheduled to give a presentation at a Las Vegas elementary school next week. Tucson is on the way. I'll check in with the district. Goodwill visit.

JOHN

Goodwill... Why Vegas? I love Vegas!

John instantly too excited and grins wide.

HOLLY

We'll it's actually a school that was impacted by the mass shooting at Mandalay Bay.

John's giddiness fades. Again.

JOHN

I bet there's a spike afterwards..

HOLLY

I called the district expecting. But there wasn't. Nevertheless, they asked me to give a series of speeches. You know, preventative measures.

JOHN

So, no spike?

MONTAGE

EXT. HOME - WINDOW - RAVENS PERCHED WATCH A LITTLE GIRL.

EXT. MOBILE HOME - PATIO - Ravens fly above a little boy.

EXT. APARTMENT - BALCONY - Ravens stare into a room, a boy seated reading.

HOLLY (V.O.S.)

Well, a spike after a major event like the Mandalay would be appear equally across all ages and be evident for years. This was different, as there was No spike. But now, with this methodology.

TGIF RESTAURANT

Holly point to the laptop screen.

HOLLY

... The pattern moves from East to West and... beyond Tucson, towards Vegas.

Holly looks in her purse, checks her phone, and partially closes her laptop. John looks around sadly for a distraction.

JOHN

(Sighs)

The fastest way to see what's out there is to Get Out There and See.

The comment grabs her and she makes real eye contact. A moment.

HOLLY

Right. See First Hand. This is exciting. What do you Look for, as a detective, in the Streets?

JOHN

Look for? Anything out of place. Like the guy at the table next to us is carrying a gun-

The booth across from them, a drab man has a hip-bulge slightly observable under his flannel shirt.

JOHN (CONT'D)

--the kids at that table are about to dine-and-ditch.

Two nervous teens, a stack of empty plates and beer glasses. The kids take turns plotting an egress.

John woefully nods. Holly studies, sees nothing.

HOLLY

I don't. How?

The teens dash. A waiter calls out.

WAITER
Hey, wait! Get-

Holly amazed.

HOLLY
How do you See that?

JOHN
I'd call it a gift but my Chief
would disagree. I think the Real
question is How everyone else
Doesn't.

HOLLY
I don't. I just don't get out much.

JOHN
The more you get out and see, well,
the more you know.
(Whispers - sings to
himself)
And knowing is half the battle.
G.I. Joe.

Holly pauses and silently deliberates.

HOLLY
You seem like a good guy. You're
not too creepy.

JOHN
(Scoffs)
Thanks.

HOLLY
That meant a lot today. If you
don't have plans, would you want to
come along? With me. To Vegas.

JOHN
Really? Who wouldn't want a hot
date and a paid trip to Vegas! As-

HOLLY
--professional associates.

JOHN
Okay. I'm still in!

EXT. GRASSY FIELD - DAY

Children encircle a fight. Indiscriminate shouts.

A cowering PREPPY BOY, 9, with a bloody nose, torn and stained clothes, his hair a mess.

Another boy towers over him, triumphant, he is- KYLE KENYON, 10, dons facial hair and untied work boots.

Kenyon, chest puffed, clenched fists, raises his fists high. He triumphantly exits the circle.

Two ravens quietly watch the ordeal, exchange glances, a bob.

As Kenyon leaves, the ravens take flight and follow.

INT. CLUTTERED APARTMENT - NIGHT

Silent.

HALLWAY

A bedroom door slightly ajar.

BEAT

PIERCING SCREAMS erupt from beyond the door. THUD, THUD, THUD. A break in the screams. The door flies open.

TINY BEDROOM

A hulking shadow towers over the bed. Kenyon, defiantly struggles, entangled in blankets, head to toe. Pedro Negro's vice-like grip has Kenyon's knee.

HALLWAY

Pedro Negro marches down the hallway, drags Kenyon's mass.

ECONOMIC LIVING ROOM

A small homely Christmas tree, ragged decorations, an open screened window.

Kenyon twists and writhes, entwined in a blanket, swings fists at the unseen assailant.

Kenyon's half freed from the blanket, kicks Pedro Negro's head with no success.

Kenyon grabs for ANYTHING, finally grasps a branch from the Christmas Tree. The tree spins, tilts and falls with a crash, decorative bulbs roll across the floor.

The window screen gets knocked out.

Kenyon flails chest down. Pedro Negro raises a foot high, stomps it on Kenyon's squirmy back. Kenyon wiggles to no avail and screams in agony.

Pedro pulls the BURLAP SACK from his belt.

Kenyon grabs the window sill. Pedro Negro shakes the sack open.

Pedro's talon effortlessly pulls Kenyon's hand from the sill. Kenyon doesn't release his grip, and the skin on his fingers shreds.

Kenyon's will and strength fade.

Pedro raises the open sack above Kenyon's head. DARKNESS. SILENCE.

Jingling bells outside in the background.

INT. THRIFTY DETECTIVE OFFICE - DAY

An office door closes an emblem "Tucson Police Department," Holly and John takes seats across the desk from a welcoming yet bothered man, he is DETECTIVE JACK BOX, 50, tired yet witty.

Box, leans back, studies them, a bothered sigh.

BOX

You're an El Paso detective. Here because?

JOHN

I'm with her. Business, unofficial.

Box shortly hears "business" and smiles slightly, but then realizes the prefix "un" with "official" and is unamused.

BOX

And you're a child psychiatrist?

HOLLY

No, a psychologist.

BOX

Whatever. What can I do for the two of you today?

HOLLY

We heard a report about the missing boy. Abducted or ran away. I just wanted to hear--

BOX

--First, it's Presumed. He's not Missing for 48-hours.

JOHN

So, not an abduction?

BOX

There no signs of forced entry. No one saw anything.

(Condescending)

How long have you been a detective?

John gets asked that a lot and calms himself with a deep inhale, prepares for a lengthy reply.

Holly cuts him off.

HOLLY

We've found Evidence, a disturbing trend linked to your Victim. They may be connected.

BOX

Whoa. Victim? There's no victim here. There's just a 10-year old kid who needs some time alone. Probably holed up a friend's house, or an arcade. What evidence?

Box has plenty to do. He gleams, leans in, waits.

JOHN

Well, not Evidence, per se.

BOX

What then?

JOHN

She's the one with the PHD, I'll let her explain.

HOLLY

In short, we think our data shows,
a moving pattern which predicts
were children seem to go missing.
Disappear.

Box looks sideways at Holly, dismisses uncaringly.

BOX

Whatever. If you can help find this
kid. Then help. I wish you luck.
Detective. She's with YOU. I'll
share what I got with YOU. We can
call it, some kind of cross-town
collaboration.

Box slides John the folder. John knows what it is.

HOLLY

What's this?

John casts a glance at Holly's dumb question.

BOX

THIS. This stays in the office. No
press. Don't talk to the family. No
one. Got it?

JOHN

Understood, and appreciated.

HOLLY

I knew it would be good to take you
along.

JOHN

We make a good team.

John opens the folder and Holly eagerly grabs Everything.
John acquiesces, scoffs, and discards the empty folder.
John's phone chirps and he retrieves it.

Holly flips through the documents. There's handwriting notes,
a draft report, and a stack of 8x10 black and white
photographs.

The photographs include an open window next to a toppled
Christmas tree, the bedroom window sill with a BURRO. Holly
doesn't notice the BURRO.

John's text wasn't what he wanted, looks up, sees the photo
of the toppled Christmas tree, holds and muses.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (To himself)
 It. Looks like there was a
 struggle.

Holly hijacks.

HOLLY
 There's nothing in here about the
 boys preexisting conditions,
 details on school counseling, or
 why he chose THIS day to run away?

JOHN
 (Just a breath)
 Or be abducted.

BOX
 From my understanding, there was
 trouble at school, a suspension for
 a fight, bullying.

John's phone chirps. He deliberates, pauses, the phone wins, he checks out of the discussion.

John in Messenger sees a reply from Susan "Hot time, exciting, I'm in. What time?" John sly smiles.

He glances at Holly as she peppers Box with amateur questions. He's intrigued, pauses, considers and decides, he deletes the message.

He opens Notes, finds Susan's name, changes the "M" to a "N."

He looks back at entrenched Holly, who scrutinizes the photos and skims notes.

HOLLY
 I'm sorry. Are you suggesting he
 Was the bully?

Box nods. Holly dismayed, leans back in her chair, contemplates. She fishes through her purse for a Post-It and a pen, jots a few words "Boy -10 -bully??"

EXT. OPEN PLAINS - NIGHT

Traces of daybreak. Rock out-croppings surround a small area of dirt. A distant silhouette of a parked truck hitched to an RV. A brown sign WHITE TANK MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK.

HOLE

A large hole and a mound of dirt.
Digging and grunt sounds.

An 80lb pit bull menacingly approaches and growls.

The digging stops, quiet. The pit bull growls. Shuffle sounds within the hole grow louder.

A Shadow just inside the hole. The pit bull growls and bares its teeth.

PEDRO NEGRO

Perro, Perro. (Spanish)
Good doggy.

The pit bull sprawls and barks feverishly.

Pedro Negro lunges, the two tumble, dust stirs up.

Pedro Negro quickly overpowers, a hand on the dog's neck and the other grips the dog's thigh tight, blood pours from broke skin.

Pedro Negro bites the dog's jugular, a brief struggle, it whimpers and dies.

Pedro Negro drags the dog into the hole.

OLD TRUCK HITCHED TO RV

A desert shrub decorated holiday bulbs. A light turns on, the RV door opens and a OLD MAN, 60, lone wanderer, leans out.

He calls out into the vastness.

OLD MAN

Here Boy, Come here. Treat. I gotta treat.

HOLE

A filled hole. The fill slowly moves and reflects movement underneath.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

Here, boy.

The sounds tearing flesh and gnaws on bone, the hums a creepy holiday tune.

A cacti field adorned with ravens that stir. First light, the ravens take flight toward the dark horizon.

INT. PACKED SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

A raised stage and podium, an emblem Walter E Jacobson Elementary, Las Vegas, NV, large screen and holiday decorations.

Packed with kids, some wear Santa hats. John stands among staff and watches from the sideline.

Holly, on stage. The topic "Cyber Bullying, Depression, and Awareness."

HOLLY

Popular television shows like "13 Reason Why" tend to sensationalize depression.

Holly pauses, the silence gets John's attention. She composes herself, a gasp, watery eyes, she commits and continues.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

I wasn't always an adult. When I was your age, I was depressed, alone. I had dark thoughts. Someone helped me realize there's a wonderful world out there, and that I should be part of it. Running away is dangerous, and not the answer.

John captivated at her bare soul.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Your life is not a TV show. You ARE NOT ALONE. Your parents love YOU, your teachers care, and your friends are there for you too. We are here to help. (A beat.) I'm here if there are questions.

KAY, 40, Hispanic, keen, boisterous, wears a dress suit and a Santa hat, leads the applause.

The children erupt in haphazard claps and jovial banter.

STAGE

Kay and John warmly smile as Holly nears.

KAY

Wow, that was great. I like the inclusion of the Cyber Bullying, it's increasingly been an issue.

HOLLY
Yes, especially with the girls.

KAY
They're get cattier, younger.

HOLLY
Cattier? Well, thanks again.

Kay walks away.

JOHN
You were great up there! The kids
really connect with you.

Holly proudly blushes. John notices the compliment was well received and feels good too.

HOLLY
Thanks. I really believe the
message needs to be shared in
person. The rest of the mediums
just fall flat with today's kids.

SAMANTHA, 10, entitled brat, approaches Holly and postures, a certain air about her.

SAMANTHA
Hello.

HOLLY
Hi. You're a pretty girl.

Samantha well-trained to ignore despondent adults, flashes a patronizing scowl.

Holly frowns at the cold reception. Samantha continues with her cold-open.

SAMANTHA
I sometimes text my friends things
about the weird kids. You know, the
kids with no phones. Is it my
fault? You can't blame me if THEY
show the phoneless kids what I
posted, right?

HOLLY
Well, you must be a little
concerned, as you asked. Is it
something you'd tell them to their
face?

SAMANTHA

(Scoffs)

No! But I shared it privately.

HOLLY

So, it wasn't nice.

SAMANTHA

No, but it was our private conversation. I'm not the one who shared it.

HOLLY

But it was shared, and you said things. Try to think how it made the other person feel.

SAMANTHA

You don't get it. I didn't tell that vintage thrift shop dressed loser anything. It's not my fault she cries.

HOLLY

Maybe finds something else to discuss with your friends? Boy bands, make-up--

Samantha wildly rolls her eyes.

SAMANTHA

--stupid. (A beat.) There's no such thing as monsters, right?

Holly, still on defense, pauses, considers, shares a quizzical glance with John.

HOLLY

Uhh. No. Not the last time I checked.

Samantha, a sighs relief.

SAMANTHA

Uhh. Ok. You can have this. I don't know where it came from. It reeks.

Samantha fishes in her purse, removes a folded sandwich bag with Something inside, and drops it on stage.

She wipes her fingers with a Sani-Wipe, takes out her phone, eyes keenly glued to it.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

Oh. You bitch. I'm gonna--

She turns, smartly walks, plows into a child, and berates.

John watches her exit.

JOHN

She's the only monster around here.

HOLLY

What a wretched little--

JOHN

Whoa, now. Doc. Where the compassion?

HOLLY

Sorry. She was just despicable. Utterly horrid. How--

JOHN

--Reminds me of the kid this girl I was ban--

(stops self)

-seeing. No one to teach them, no one to learn from.

HOLLY

No role models. Or rather, the wrong role models. Then what?

JOHN

I dunno. What do you think she meant by Monster?

HOLLY

I think she was referring to the Mandalay Bay shooter.

As Holly watches, John picks up the plastic bag, opens and removes the BURRO.

They study it. John brings it close for a smell. He jumps at the rancid odor, flick-drops it and it bounces several feet away.

JOHN

What the fuck! Whoa. That horrid!

John smells his fingers and his face wildly contorts but then he smells again, looks sideways, remembers Something salacious.

BEAT

A woman steps toward the dropped BURRO, she is—ABUELA - 65, Hispanic, sluggish with purpose, neatly dressed in her Sunday's best.

Abuela picks up BURRO.

JOHN

Miss. Don't touch that...it smells like sh--

Abuela holds it up to eye level, examines.

ABUELA

--a donkey.

JOHN

Like that too.

ABUELA

No, it's a Burro. Spanish for donkey.

JOHN

You mean, it smells like a donkey?

ABUELA

No. It's a juguete, a carving for children, like a toy.

JOHN

Who'd want that toy?

ABUELA

No one. At least not this kind.

HOLLY

Why?

JOHN

Yeah, why, besides the obvious, it smells like-- feces.

ABUELA

No, the smell is decaying flesh. This was made from vaca.

Abuela point at a sliver of blackish red flesh on it.

ABUELA (CONT'D)

The bone of a cow. See, there's still flesh. This was made recently.

JOHN

Why the heck would someone carve a kid's toy from a cow bone?

ABUELA

It's not exactly a kid's toy. It's more like a WARNING to children.

HOLLY

A warning? How so?

ABUELA

Have you heard of Pedro Negro?

JOHN

No. Peter of the Black?

John proudly smiles with his Gringo Spanish translation.

ABUELA

Black Peter.

JOHN

No.
(To Holly)
You?

HOLLY

No. Presumable Mexican folklore?

ABUELA

Every folk tale contains truth.

HOLLY

I guess.

ABUELA

Everyone knows Santa Claus, the Elves, and Rudolph the Reindeer ...

John look around impatiently with Abuela's rambling.

HOLLY

Of course.

ABUELA

Everyone knows the happy side of Christmas. Santa makes his list, he checks it twice, he's gonna--

JOHN

(Speedily)
--find out who's naughty or nice...
And?

ABUELA

No one speaks of the OTHER LIST.
The list of naughty kids.

JOHN

They get coal, right? And in some
cities, where coal is pricey, they
get a stinky flesh covered donkey?

John laughs alone.

ABUELA

Long ago the Moors waged war, took
control of the entire world, even
the North Pole.

JOHN

You know there's no such thing as
Santa? North pole. Fantasy. Right?

John looks to Holly for comic relief, but she is engaged and
steps closer to Abuela.

INT. DARK HOLE - NIGHT

Darkness and the shadow of a huddled Pedro inside his lair.
Pedro hums a creepy holiday song, giant hands and shark like
teeth carefully gnaw a Burro shape from a cow's femur bone.

ABUELA (V.O.S.)

The Moore's impact was felt long
after Santa and the elves rebuilt.
Little Peter was born, and as he
was half Moore, his skin was dark,
he was called Pedro Negro. The
other elves didn't treat Little
Peter well. He wasn't included in
their games, or play with the
reindeer. When Santa learned of
this, he became very, very upset.
Santa told the Elves "Be Nice" and
warned them. But when Santa was
away, the elves continued to taunt
and tease Pedro. Pedro was sad. He
spent more time, alone, in a hole,
where he slept, singing by himself
and carving... juguetes, from
reindeer bones. Pedro loved Santa,
and Santa loved Pedro.

STAGE

John now moves closer and looks engaged in Abuela's tale.

ABUELA

Santa realized he couldn't make the Elves LIKE Pedro. Santa was sooo very busy with the NICE LIST. Santa put Pedro in charge of the NAUGHTLY LIST. He was to encourage children to, be, nice. Santa gave Pedro the strength to handle the task. When the other elves learned Pedro was in charge, they were furious. But Pedro didn't care. The other elves no longer concerned him.

JOHN

This is a creepy story. So Santa gave Pedro a list. What next?

EXT. SNOWY FIELD - NIGHT

Pedro Negro sits in the snow, back toward us, alone, hums and sings. There's a party nearby, elves laugh and joke, indoors, a fire casts light which outlines them as they dance.

Santa's shadow moves behind Pedro Negro accompanied by snow crunching boot-steps.

ABUELA (V.O.)

Once Santa gave Pedro the list Pedro would watch them. He asked birds to help. If a little boy was naughty, Pedro would visit and ask them to be nice. He'd leave a warning, a burro, like this.

STAGE

Abuela holds up BURRO.

ABUELA

...as a reminder, Santa Claus AND Pedro Negro were watching.

JOHN

What happened to the kids who, you know, didn't act nice? Counseling? Group therapy?

ABUELA

Pedro Negro would stuff them into a burlap sack and beats them.

JOHN

Ohh. GEEZ! Happy ending.

HOLLY

Wow. That's some story. I guess it's typical of folklore. Like the lumberjack poem..

JOHN

The one where the lumberjack cuts the children's head off?

HOLLY

Yeah, that one. Always cheery.

ABUELA

The lumberjack was real. Folklore has its roots in truth.

(Pause)

Where did you get the burro?

HOLLY

A girl.

Holly looks around the auditorium but doesn't see her.

ABUELA

(Disbelief)

Here?

HOLLY

One of the students. She was just here.

ABUELA

Oh.

Abuella's face registers deep concern and sadness.

ABUELA (CONT'D)

Ohhhh... My grandson goes here. I hope it's not one of his friends.

EXT. WALKWAY OUTSIDE AUDITORIUM - DAY

Samantha exits the auditorium. Two girls huddle, whisper in serious tones. Samantha, flashes a sinister smile, approaches.

SAMANTHA

(Braggs)

Hey! You should Kimmie cry when I told her off!! She's such a loser.

Both girls frown and look away.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

What's gotten into you? You are no fun. I'll find new friends if you're gonna be sticks in the mud!

Samantha sulks away.

In a nearby tree, six Ravens watch the scene unfold. As Samantha walks O/S, two Ravens leave their perch, and follow her.

The remaining ravens linger in the tree, study the two girls, disinterested, scan the area.

NEARBY

A MENACING BOY, 10, kicks a ball over the fence, to the dismay of children, effectively ends their game.

The Menacing Boy leaves and two ravens take flight and follow him.

INT. ENTITLED GIRLS BEDROOM - NIGHT

A night-light, soft music.

Samantha, a princess, asleep deep under the blankets.

The music and the lamp turn off. THUMP. It echoes.

Samantha awakes, startled. She sits up, grabs her phone and peers into the darkness. The phone's glow exposes a hulking dark mass.

PEDRO NEGRO

Hola quirida. (Spanish: Hello my dear)

Drag, Thump. The dark mass steps into the phone's glow. She sees Pedro Negro.

PEDRO NEGRO (CONT'D)

Hello my dear.

SAMANTHA

Ahhhhhhhh.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

John exuberantly watches Family Guy on TV. He knows every line, one laugh after the next.

A sharp knock on the door. Holly's voice.

HOLLY (O.S.)

John, John! Hey. Open up!

John hurriedly rises, opens the door and sees a red-faced, panic stricken Holly.

JOHN

What? What is it?

HOLLY

The principal called.

JOHN

What for?

HOLLY

A student went missing. A girl.

She stares long at John, her eyes watery. He knows.

JOHN

The girl?

Her eyes drop, he knows and shakes his head.

INT. IMPECCABLE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Teary-eyed distraught parents consoled by friends.

A few cops meander.

John and Holly enter and take it in.

A cop eyes John, he flashes his badge. They continued.

ENTITLED GIRLS BEDROOM

Two cops haphazardly rummage. John pauses in doorway, Holly at his shoulder.

OFFICER 1

Man. There's dried blood everywhere. How? She must cut herself and ran around like a chicken.

OFFICER 2

Well, when we find her, we'll ask.

OFFICER 1

Or her body.

OFFICER 2

Ain't no body. No forced entry. She walked out the front door.

OFFICER 1

After losing all this blood? Kids probably a mental mess. Jumped a bus to New York or Los Angeles.

John steps into the room.

OFFICER 2

Last year, around this time. Remember that kid, went missing?

OFFICER 1

Was he found?

OFFICER 2

Yeah, I think. Or not.

OFFICER 1

Man. You don't know squat. You take online courses for crime scene investigation?

OFFICER 2

I know this much. Sideways for attention, and vertical for results.

Officer 2 makes a slicing motion with his hands, sees John, and squirms in embarrassment.

OFFICER 1

That don't make you no expert. Heck, apples and orangutans. No body, no--

Officer 1 notices John and Holly, looks freezes.

OFFICER 1 (CONT'D)
--Sorry folks. You are?

JOHN
Detective Kelly. You guys mind
acting like this is a crime scene?

HOLLY
(Whispers)
Suddenly, you're the mature one.

OFFICER 2
Sir, yes. It's pretty clear cut.
Err. Bad word choice. We got the
Missing Person report ready.
Checking the hospitals. Parents
called friends and family. Nothing.
She'll turn up.

JOHN
There's blood. Signs of a struggle.
This looks like foul play.
Shouldn't you take a little more
time, bring forensic out?

OFFICER 2
Well, the house alarm was set. Only
folks here were the parents. They
seem shook up. I don't think they
had no part. Mom, called 911 in
hysterics at 7 when she found the
deceased, came in to wake her up.
Besides, we don't have a Forensic
team.

John motions to the blood splatters.

JOHN
Her blood, right?

OFFICER 1
Yep. Well. I mean we're not
positive. We found a razor, had
some blood on it. But for this much
blood, she'd have to use a sword, a
dull sword, or something.

JOHN
A sword?
(Under his breath)
Idiot.

John sees a fingernail embedded between floor boards, trailed by scratch marks and takes interest. He stoops, motions to both officers and Holly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You need to consider foul play.

OFFICER 2

Like he said. Alarm was ON. No sign of forced entry. Loving parents story checked out.

John stands and sadly look at Holly.

Holly has tears in her eyes, a hand up at her mouth, stares at the blood stains and droplets.

John hugs Holly as she cries.

JOHN

There's something wrong here. Something going on. Something terrible.

HOLLY

I know. I. I'm really scared.

INT. DOLEFUL COFFEE SHOP - DAY

John and Holly sit across from each other, stare blankly into the distance. A suited man approaches, he is - DETECTIVE KURT, 50, helpful try-hard.

KURT

Hi, John. Holly?

John stands up, a serious handshake.

JOHN

John. Thanks for taking the time. This is Dr. Underwerth.

HOLLY

Hello.

KURT

Maam. Sorry it took while to sneak away. The circus doesn't stop.

Holly slides over and makes room, he sits.

JOHN

Everything okay?

KURT

Yeah. More of the same. Just crazy desert people.

Kurt shakes his head, a slight laugh.

KURT (CONT'D)

Lady swerves off the road last night, to avoid, guess. A midget in black. Her cars in the ditch, waiting for a tow, and a pack of wolves chased her up a tree. You can't make this shit up.

John and Holly share a look

JOHN

Bizarre.

HOLLY

Yeah. Very Strange.

KURT

Anyways. Thanks for meeting me along the way. Busy day. So I understand you had some questions about yesterday's, a, incident? I'm not how much I can tell you that you don't already know. You met my officers at the scene, right?

JOHN

(Scoffs)

Officers. Yeah.

KURT

Horrible, horrible... Kids sometimes, just don't realize there's light ahead and just Up and Run Away. I put out a Missing Person's report. It's early. I may catch hell for not waiting the--

HOLLY

--48 hours. I know. It's--

JOHN

-- we wanted to know you are sure she wasn't abducted?

Kurt looks slightly puzzled but answers candidly.

KURT
The ink's not yet dry so nothing's
official. Why? You think the
parents--

JOHN
--No, no.

KURT
Aliens?

JOHN
God no. We have no reason to
suspect the parents, aliens, of
anything. Ahhh. We thought It was
strange.

KURT
Well, those two... officers, usually
work traffic, and for good reason
too. I wouldn't lend what they
assert much gravity.

HOLLY
So. The blood?

KURT
Yes, we confirmed it's hers.

HOLLY
So, she was injured? And what cut
her?

KURT
A razor, a Mach 3, I believe.

HOLLY
You think she'd cut herself like
that and disappear?

KURT
To be honest, kids do crazy things.
But I recon, if I were a little
kid, and I really wanted to
abscond, I probably want all my
blood to come with.

JOHN
So. This is closed?

KURT
Our work is done. They'll be some
leads and we'll follow up. She
either comes back or not.

(MORE)

KURT (CONT'D)

Lots of these kids go out West.
California. Try and track down the
Jonas Brothers, that Timberlake
fella. We good?

John's phone chirps. Holly hears it, looks and anticipates.
John's eyes blink, he heard it, and ignores.

JOHN

Hey. I heard that last year there
was a boy who ran away.

KURT

Ahh. Yeah, the Jessup boy.

JOHN

No, not that one.

KURT

That was it.

JOHN

Wasn't there another? Nearby?

KURT

There was, around a few days later,
I remember cause we floated the
idea the two of them kids ran away
together. A girl, a little ways
down the road, in Pahrump. Her name
was Stump... Kimmie, or Kemi? You can
call Sheriff Brown. He and I went
to elementary school together -
stay in touch around the holidays.
He'll talk to you. We good? Folks,
I need to get going.

HOLLY

Thanks detective.

JOHN

Thank you.

Kurt stands, tips his hat, and walks away. Holly and John sit
quietly for a moment.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What are you thinking?

HOLLY

I've never really gone on an
Adventure before, I'm not what's
known as the Adventurous-type.
Truthfully, I rarely get out.

(MORE)

HOLLY (CONT'D)

If it's okay with you, I think we need to go West.

JOHN

For the first time in a while, I really want to solve a case. Pahrump it is!

HOLLY

Let's do it!

Holly initiates an awkward High-5. John, slow to recognize, misses the grove. It's ugly, but they pull it off with a smile of muted accomplishment.

INT./EXT HOLLYS CAR ON HIGHWAY 160 - DAY - MOVING

An endless stretch of desert highway. It's hot and the pavement on the horizon appears to boil.

Holly drives exactly 65 mph.

John stares at the endless line of Joshua Trees which dot the road.

He sees his phone has One Bar for signal strength, the Facebook icon has updates. He considers, decides not to click. The last signal bar disappears - No Signal.

John sees his iPhone which shows 70 miles, and 1 hour 15 minutes until Pahrump.

JOHN

Thank goodness for GPS.

HOLLY

Why? No signal.

JOHN

No cell coverage. But the iPhone maps still function on GPS. If you have the maps cached.

HOLLY

Impressive. A man of many talents. I guess with No Signal, you'll be unable to get updates from all your little girlfriends.

John, a deer in the headlights.

JOHN

Pardon?

Holly curtly nods to the phone, quickly gets her eyes back to the road.

HOLLY

You're like a teenager with that thing. Is it really that important? All those. Women?

JOHN

Well. I. Don't know.

HOLLY

Does it make you happy?

JOHN

I guess. Well. Not really.

John contemplates quickly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

No. It's kind of like watching the same bad movie, over and over. I can't say I enjoy it. Maybe I need to watch a new movie.

HOLLY

Maybe on a different channel?

John smiles sadly, reflects, stares off into the distance. He sees a strange large dark lumpy shadow, atop a sand dune.

BEAT

John sits up to get a better look.

JOHN

Hey, slow down. SLOW!

HOLLY

What?

Holly slows and scans. John peers over his shoulder.

JOHN

Pull over! Just pull over HERE!

He points to a wide nearby shoulder. She pulls over in a narrower section, the car blocks the lane.

John's hand hangs, still points to the wide section of road, as he playfully turns towards Holly. John shakes his head.

He jumps out.

Holly, leaves the car in Drive, opens her door, the car leaps. Holly puts the car in Park, exits, leaves her door open.

SAND AND BRUSH

John briskly walks, then jogs on the paved road, alert and cautious.

He slows and enters the brush.

He stops, stares, realizes the SHADOW, is a-- dead Cow.

He sees it's hind quarter noticeably absent, body riddled with Raven pecks, it's eye an early snack.

A dozen ravens linger on the cow, show no fear, loiter, peck, and largely ignore the visitors.

He blankly stares as Holly footsteps approach.

HOLLY

Holy--cow.

JOHN

What's left of it.

HOLLY

Was it, hit by a car, or truck or--

JOHN

--I don't think so. Look there.

John points to the missing leg.

HOLLY

What?

JOHN

There's supposed to be a leg..

John raises his arm and slowly points a waving finger.

JOHN (CONT'D)

There.

HOLLY

Ahhh.

JOHN

It's ripped off.

HOLLY

Maybe it was knocked off by the impact?

JOHN

Yeah, that's a no-go. A car didn't do this. Knock a 1000lb cow 30 feet, cause its leg to disappear. Heck, the rest of the cow is intact, except for what the crows ate. I don't think the crows got together, flew off with the leg..

HOLLY

Ravens.

JOHN

What?

HOLLY

Ravens. Not crows.

JOHN

Same thing.

HOLLY

Well, no. They are completely different. I know. Before going into psychology, I wanted to be an ornithologist.

JOHN

A what?

HOLLY

Ornithologist. Study birds. I was a member of the John James Audubon society.

JOHN

Whoa. There's a shocker. That reeks of excitement. So?

Holly systematically lists.

HOLLY

Ravens are larger, almost twice a crow's size, with thicker bills, and shaggy throat feathers.

Holly shines in her factual recount. John stares, considers for a moment, finger raises on point, mouth opens and--

JOHN
I got nothing.

JOHN (CONT'D)
They still sound about the same.
Black, feathered, fly, and shit on
people. But that still doesn't
explain where the cow's leg went.
Maybe coyotes?

HOLLY
Coyotes don't attack cows either.
Even if. They wouldn't just attack
a single leg and leave a feast
behind. I don't know.

They study the cow. Ravens squawk nearby and end the moment.

JOHN
What were the birds we saw back in
Vegas? Crows or ravens?

HOLLY
I didn't see. But in Vegas, they
should be ravens. Back in El Paso-

Holly lists.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
-- the American Crow, the
Chihuahuan Raven and the Common
Raven. For whatever reason, crows
DON'T GO west of El Paso, NOR to
Vegas. They don't come out this way
either... even in migration. I always
thought that was strange.

JOHN
But they go everywhere else?

HOLLY
Yes, they do. Like something keeps
them out.

JOHN
Pretty freakin bizarre.

INT./EXT. HOLLYS CAR - DAY - MOVING

A stretch of innocuous highway.

John drives and Holly has her laptop open and punches in a
bunch of keys.

They absently pass a sign DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK.

Holly sees a map of the South West U.S. opens up which shows the series of circles surrounding the historic hot-spots, with the most west circle being Las Vegas, NV.

Holly motions to the screen.

HOLLY

So, we started here in El Paso.
Then here. Then Vegas. Now almost
to here. Pahrump. Let me see.

Holly types in the geo-location of Pahrump with the five-year data set.

John smiles and rhymes.

JOHN

Kimmie Stump from Pa-h-rump.

John laughs at his elementary school rhyme.

Holly furrows her brow.

HOLLY

Oh my god. This tiny town, of
36,000 people, had reported a
missing child, on December 23rd,
for each of the past five years.

JOHN

Hopefully today was different. Just
days before Christmas. Man, I hate
to even imagine.

Holly casts a serious glance.

HOLLY

I really hope.

JOHN

We should stop by the sheriff's
office. Just to check in.

HOLLY

Right.

EXT. STRIP MALL SHERIFF STATION - DAY

John and Holly exit the station. Laptop under her arm.

A raven on the rooftop, another in a nearby tree, there are a few distant squawks.

HOLLY
How, just how?

JOHN
Small station, small problems. It's funny what some zeros and ones can do. You show someone data, they can see the connection. Otherwise, life is a timeline of innocuous events.

This doesn't sit well with Holly.

HOLLY
They didn't even realize. Five years in a row!

JOHN
Well, now six.

Holly's expression of anger subsides to sadness.

HOLLY
Do you think if we got here yesterday, we could have done something?

JOHN
To stop it? Stop What? He doesn't know what we are talking about. And. We still don't even know What This Is.

HOLLY
I don't know. Something.

JOHN
Listen. There's something here. Something going on. And it isn't just coincidence, or seasonal depression, too much Internet, or too few YouTube subscribers... whatever

John motions to the Sheriff's substation.

JOHN (CONT'D)
That guy agrees. There's a Real Problem. But if we can't put a face on it. How can we do something about it.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Now, get back on that laptop, and tell me where the pattern moves next.

HOLLY

I don't know. Christmas is in two days.

JOHN

I don't have anyone in El Paso to run back to just for Christmas. At least anyone that's not worth saving some kid's life over. Do you?

HOLLY

Ahh. No.

Holly flips open the laptop atop the car hood. The sun's glare obscures the screen image.

The map shows a green circle over Pahrump.

She moves the cursor and draws a large rectangle over an area west of Pahrump, hits search, and waits. The message prompt reads "Insufficient data."

Holly looks at John with a puzzled look.

Several ravens line the roof top of the plaza, and squawk intermittently.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

The trail ends.

JOHN

What's this mean? The pattern STOPS.

HOLLY

It just ends. Here.

John looks around at the distant dessert to the west. Holly follows his glance.

JOHN

Or maybe, whatever is happening, ends here. But whatever is responsible, keeps moving. There's just not anything here but--

HOLLY

-- snakes and cactus.

A conspiracy squawks as it passes overhead, headed west.

John scans the town. There is a raven perched on every surface.

He stares skyward and sees flocks of ravens converge in the distance.

JOHN
And RAVENS.

John nods to the convergence.

JOHN (CONT'D)
What's out that way? Before Fresno.

HOLLY
Out there? Nothing. Just the desert. An Death Valley.

JOHN
Just Death Valley. How--

HOLLY
--predictable.

JOHN
I've never been there.

HOLLY
In the summer, it's the hottest places in the world, like--

JOHN
--hell.

BEAT.

HOLLY
Well, thanks goodness it's winter. So, we ARE going?

JOHN
I think we NEED to. TO understand this.

HOLLY
Whatever THIS is. Where do we go when we get there?

JOHN
Just follow the crows.

HOLLY

Ravens.

John smiles at his folly.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Do you know what a bunch of raven's
flying together is called?

JOHN

Since you asked like that, I
imagine it's not a flock, right?

HOLLY

An Unkindness. Or a Conspiracy.

JOHN

Unkindness? Well, that's fitting.
Rather, real UN-fitting.

JOHN looks at the map. Suddenly, its--

EXT. GRASSY PATCH OF DESERT - NIGHT

-- night. The only light is from a nearly full moon and
stars. There's BARBED WIRE fenced in area.

A small herd of ANGUS COWS stand clustered together. The
sound of an intermittent MOO carries for miles.

A heavy footstep approaches, DRAG and THUD, repeat. An eerie
holiday carol hummed out of tune.

A few of the cows stir, look around, largely indifferent.

PEDRO NEGRO

Aqui Vaca. (Spanish: Here cow)

(Pause)

Aqui. Oye Vaca.

As the footstep grow louder, most cows slowly shy away, but
two remain, calm and passive.

PEDRO NEGRO (CONT'D)

Buen. (Spanish: Good)

Buen. Vaca.

Two large hands grasp the sides of a 300lb rock. A slight
grunt. A footstep. And another.

PEDRO NEGRO (CONT'D)

BUEN.

WHOOSH. CRACK. THUD.

From overhead, Pedro Negro drives the large rock, SMASHES through the cow's head, drills it into the ground.

PEDRO NEGRO
(Sings)
Hecho un lista. (Spanish: made a
list

Pedro Negro is hunched over the carcass. RIPPING sounds as he tears the cows hind leg off.

PEDRO NEGRO (CONT'D)
He lo checking dos veces. (Spanish:
checking it twice)

Pedro Negro snaps the cow's femur to expose meat under skin.

PEDRO NEGRO (CONT'D)
He's going to ask Pedro who's
naughty or nice.

Pedro Negro gnaws at the leg. A mouthful of meat.

PEDRO NEGRO (CONT'D)
(Almost unintelligible)
Santa Claus is coming to town.

Two juvenile Alpha wolves watch Pedro. An Alpha wolf licks his chops. The other Alpha wolf looks behind. The PACK is amassed, and silently looms.

Pedro stops mid-bite, scans the horizon. A piece of bloody meat free falls from his mouth on to his burlap outfit.

PEDRO NEGRO (CONT'D)
(Laughs)
Loca lupe! (Spanish: crazy wolf

Pedro returns to his meal, resumes humming creepy chorus while eating.

INT./EXT. CAR HIGHWAY 190, DEATH VALLEY - DAY - MOVING

Desert highway, a bend in the road.

John drives, glances, follows the vast Unkindness.

The road curves and the Unkindness fly straight.

John pulls over.

ROCKY TRAIL

JOHN

Well?

HOLLY

We'll go until we get a flat. I have a spare.

JOHN

That's some spirit of an adventure for a book worm. What's up that way?

Holly enjoys the compliment. John nods up ahead.

HOLLY

According to the map, it's called Racetrack Playa.

ROCKY TRAIL

John and Holly stumble over small rocks as the car disappears behind them. The sun behind the mountains, leaves them in shadows.

They approach the base of the mountain as ravens squawk overhead.

The Unkindness convergence in the sky above.

JOHN

So, what's at Racetrack Playa? A racetrack?

HOLLY

No. You ever heard of Sailing stones?

JOHN

No.

HOLLY

Also known as sliding rocks?

JOHN

Still no.

HOLLY

Well, it's a geographical phenomenon. Large 200lbs rocks move and leave tracks behind.

JOHN
Sorry? Self-moving rocks?

HOLLY
Well, underground ice sheets form in the winter, and in the summer, the ice breaks up, and moves these giant rocks.

John listens intently and Holly notices. Two ravens watch them from upon a cactus.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Really. The rocks move up to 5 meters a minute.

JOHN
(Shrugs and laughs)
Yeah, that's not bizarre.

HOLLY
You want to hear something stranger. People actually steal them.

JOHN
Steal them? Who catches them? The rock police?

HOLLY
Well, no. No one catches them.

JOHN
How do you know the rocks were stolen?

HOLLY
Geologist fellows track certain rocks, visit every few weeks, and well, some went missing.

JOHN
Okay. 250lb rocks, in the desert, goes missing, and students think they are being stolen? That's far-fetched. Almost as far-fetched as ice moving them.

HOLLY
When you say it like that... but the ice does really move them.

JOHN

Yeah, maybe the Unkindness is moving and taking them. Like the cow's leg?

DESERT PLAIN AND ROCKY HILLS

Near dusk. Holly and John walk in pace.

HOLLY

We should turn back soon.

JOHN

I'm with you there. Wouldn't want to be out here when it gets dark.

HOLLY

With the coyotes and--

JOHN

--with The Whatever is out here.

THUD. The echo carries. The ravens silent. John and Holly stop, scan the horizon, stare at the ground at their feet as they feel the rumble. The ravens resume their chorus.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Must have been one of your Sliding Stones. Sliding.

Holly and John walk, pass by a dilapidated wooden shed.

JOHN (CONT'D)

An outhouse?

HOLLY

Likely. There's lot of abandoned mines out here. Gold rush days.

JOHN

Like the 1850's gold rush?

HOLLY

Yes, that one.

Holly enjoys the quip, grins, John responds in kind.

They pass a large boulder and see a blood trail intersects their path, leads to a crevasse. John stops.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

What. Is that blood?

JOHN
It's a blood trail.

HOLLY
Coyote?

JOHN
Too much blood. Is that one of your
rocks?

John points to a SLIDING STONE with blood and fur tufts stuck
to an edge.

HOLLY
Stone. Sliding Stone. Yes, that
looks like one. Maybe someone
tripped over it?

JOHN
Tripped?

HOLLY
Maybe they're hurt?

JOHN
If they are hurt out here. They'll
need help. But the sand, see--

John motions to a broad drag mark which precedes the blood
trail.

JOHN (CONT'D)
--almost like something, was
dragged. But there's no footprints.

John scrutinizes and sees several sets of paw prints traverse
the blood trail.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Only those, paw prints going in
That direction.

HOLLY
Do we, follow the trail? That way?

John pointing toward the crevasse in the distance.

JOHN
That way. But if someone was hurt,
they'd want to find cover before
nightfall. Get shelter. Else those
coyotes might get an easy meal.

Holly cups her hands around her mouth and yells.

HOLLY

HELL--

John swats her. He clumsily holds her hands and urges.

JOHN

--Shhhhhh..

HOLLY

What? Coyotes are scared of people.

JOHN

QUIETLY! It's not the coyotes I give two shits about. We move quietly. Could be a drug mule, a smuggler, who knows? I'd rather have surprise on my side. Okay?

HOLLY

Alright.

John reluctantly lets go of her hand.

He fishes around his waistband, takes out his GUN, a S&W silver pistol, he proudly brandishes.

JOHN

Do you know how to use one of these?

HOLLY

Well, yes.

John poorly masks his disappointment.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

I've read all about them--

JOHN

(Scoffs)

--Ok. I don't think that counts, but good to know.

John holds the gun out, near Holly, as he eyes the trail.

Holly excitedly reaches for it. He pulls it away.

Holly, muses, realizes, he's not giving it to her.

John takes lead and Holly a few steps behind.

They cautiously follow the BLOOD TRAIL, footsteps on gravel. Quiet. Ravens squawk. GROWL.

They freeze, scan, and see nothing.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Did you hear? A dog?

HOLLY
Something. Maybe?

They vigilantly continue forward.

CREVASSE ENTRANCE

Dusk. The last of the daylight casts shadows everywhere.
Giant boulders tower above a small sand trail.

They enter the crevasse, eye the BLOOD TRAIL.

Ravens continuous squawks just ahead.

They rounds a corner, see a DEAD COW, the head CRUSHED.

JOHN
This ain't making a lick of sense.

HOLLY
Oh my god!

A faint echo of a voice, a song, ahead. John cocks his head,
and takes a step forward.

Holly eyes the DEAD COW.

JOHN
Do you hear that?

HOLLY
What? The birds.

JOHN
Ravens. But no. Something ahead.
Like singing. Shhh.

HOLLY
I don't hear anything.

They listen. The ravens squawk quiet.

The singing, faint, becomes somewhat audible.

The air goes eerily quiet except for the faint and distant
echoes of singing.

PEDRO NEGRO (O.S.)
 you better watch out, you better
 not cry...
 usted tenga cuidado ya que digo por
 que... (Spanish: I'm telling you why)
 Santa Claus is coming to town...
 Y Pedro Tambien! (Spanish: and
 Pedro too.)

The carol fades into indiscernible echoes.

HOLLY
 Did you hear that?

JOHN
 Yeah, Christmas Carols.

HOLLY
 Do you think?

JOHN
 I don't know what to think.
 Wait here.

HOLLY
 I'm not waiting here alone, while
 you leave with the gun!

JOHN
 Okay, okay.

John digs into his pants pocket and pulls out a TINY POCKET
 KNIFE. John unfolds and hands it to her.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Take this.

HOLLY
 What is this?

JOHN
 Stay here. I'm going to go check
 this out. I don't want anything to
 happen to you. Ok.

Holly stares in disbelief, considers, and relents.

HOLLY
 Ok.

John nervously wipes his brow with gun-wielding sleeves,
 takes a few steps forward, scans.

The ravens squawk pitch.

PEDRO NEGRO (O.S.)
 (crazy laugh)
 Naughty!

John freezes, casts a final scared glance at Holly.

HOLLY
 Let's just get out of here.

John considers, stares long at the crevasse.

JOHN
 I'd like to, but I can't. Besides,
 I haven't solved a case in six
 months.

WINDING CREVASSE

The song becomes audible and fades among the raven squawks.

John creeps.

The path leads to an open chamber.

CHAMBER

Spacious with tunnels and alcoves, towering walls, ravens
 line every inch like spectators in a stadium, absurdly quiet.

John sees shadows move on all sides.

He gasps, steps forward, waves his gun at every movement.

His mouth slack, pants, he continues, studies the darkness.

John sees a HOLE in the corner, two DEAD COWS, and a large
 pile of Hole Fill.

PEDRO NEGRO (O.S.)
 No Santa! Who dare? Hunginn, Muninn
 a ver. (Spanish: We'll see)

John sweat covered and hyperventilates, hears echoes, wildly
 waves his gun and spins.

JOHN
 Who's there? Come out! I'm a police
 officer.

PEDRO NEGRO (O.S.)
 Yes. Esta. (Spanish: You are)
 John.

John's world shrinks.

JOHN
COME OUT! I don't want to shoot
you.

PEDRO NEGRO (O.S.)
Claro. (Spanish: Of course)
You believe.
Cree a Pedro. (Spanish: You believe
in Pedro)

John spins. The words circle him.

Pedro Negro zips from the hole as John faces away.

The ravens squawk, hop, and flap in fervor.

John spins his gun as Pedro Negro tackles him, a thud.

The gun sails through the air.

Face to face, Pedro Negro bridges his legs, his weight off
John.

The raven cries fade.

PEDRO NEGRO (CONT'D)
Too old to believe. No such thing
as Santa. Stupid mortals.
No creo' a Santa, you don't believe
in Pedro, BUT YOU DO. YOU listened.
NICE JOHN.

John's eyes widen further, mouth open wide, beyond shock as
John recounts a childhood suppressed memory.

EXT. LITTLE JOHN BASKETBALL GAME - DAY - FLASHBACK

School gymnasium basketball court red versus blue.

A boy selfishly dribbles the ball, he is - John 9, clearly
the best player.

He takes the easy shot.

Defense, he steals the ball, takes another shot.

PLAYER 1
John, here, pass.

John glances, dismisses, takes another shot. The coach shakes
his head.

COACH

Time!

The team huddles around the coach.

The team calls "Break" and claps.

The coach puts a hand on John's shoulder.

COACH (CONT'D)

John, you've got a team out there.
You don't treat them well. You're.
Like. A bully.

JOHN

They suck. They all suck. Do you
want to win this? I do.

COACH

Just. Be Nice out there.

Little John remembers, recalls, Something clicks.

He decides, looks down, smiles, jogs onto the court.

JOHN

(To team)
Let's go guys!

John passes the ball, and claps and smiles. He passes to
Player 1, who misses an easy lay-up. Player 1 and John slap
high-fives.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Nice try! Better luck next time!

John smiles and runs back on defense.

INT. JOHNS BEDROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK CONTINUE

John awakes from a nightmare SCREAMING, covered in sweat, in
tears. He continues to sob, grabs his sheets and crawls under
his bed.

In the moonlit window, there's a silhouette of a BURRO.

CHAMBER - RETURN TO PRESENT

John hazy, returns.

Pedro Negro eyes John.

The ravens banter.

PEDRO NEGRO
Ohhh. You better watch out.

In a single smooth movement Pedro Negro rises.

Pedro Negro grabs a cow with a single vice-like grip, tosses it into the hole.

The cow lands with a THUD, and slides down the hole.

Pedro Negro sings, grabs the second cow, repeats.

BEAT

John motionless, eyes open stares skyward.

Ravens fill the sky, exchange perches along the cavern walls, and squawk in chorus.

John studies the birds, tranquil, forgets.

BEAT
Pedro Negro throws the second cow into the hole, without a grunt. The cow O/S slides into the hole with an audible dirt sliding sound, which continues for several seconds as the raven squawking changes from random chatter to excitement.

Pedro Negro scans, listens, then postures towards the crevasse entrance.

The two juvenile Alpha wolves approach, stealthy, paw carefully creep forward. The wolfpack in tow, surprise on their side.

The UNDEAD RAVENS squawk fiercely. An Alpha wolf glances, growls, and continues.

John hears, scans, recognizes the danger. He rises to his feet, shuffles to the cavern wall, scans for his Gun.

Pedro holds his ground and scans.

The wolf pack march towards Pedro Negro.

The ravens, eerily quiet, take turns with intermittent squawks.

A chorus of wolf growls grows louder as they fan out.

The two juvenile Alphas, front and center, move towards the hole, posture, block Pedro's possible escape.

Another wolf glances at John, then Pedro, back to John. The wolf shares a growl with another, they both eye John. John gulps, understands he won't be forgotten.

A juvenile Alpha wolf moves menacingly towards Pedro. Pedro doesn't flinch.

The ravens are quiet.

The Alpha wolf tactic is a distraction.

A raven shrieks. Pedro turns his head as two wolves attack him from the rear, bite his leg and shoulder.

Pedro reaches over his shoulder, vice grip talon crushes the wolf's shoulder, WE HEAR THE BONES BREAK.

Ravens are excited.

The wolf's fangs are deep in Pedro's leg. Pedro pivots and drives his foot down on the wolf's head. Pedro's flesh tears from the clamped teeth. The wolf's head crunches into the earth.

The juvenile Alpha wolf sees a bloodied Pedro, shares a satisfied glance at his peer.

The wolf sneers and nods. The next wave attacks, four more wolves lunge, teeth exposed, dive at Pedro's extremities.

Pedro stumbles under the onslaught, down on a knee.

The juvenile Alpha wolves stand straight as victory is near.

Pedro explodes, stands, launches two wolves skyward.

A wolf writhes at Pedro's feet and he grabs its neck, slams it down, drives his talons into its chest, and PULLS out its beating heart.

Pedro smashes the beating heart into his mouth, blood splatters across his face.

The juvenile Alpha wolves, a worried glance of concern, step backwards.

A wolf comes close to Pedro and he grabs it by the neck. BONES CRUNCH. Pedro uses the dead wolf as a CLUB, to smash another nearby wolf.

The juvenile Alpha wolves share an indecisive look. One steps toward Pedro, glances at the other. It pauses, across the chaos, it spots John.

John, stick still, body pressed against the wall, takes it all in. He sees the junior Alpha wolf approach, eyes locked upon him.

John eyes an exit, blocked, sees his gun is beyond reach.

The juvenile Alpha wolf launches at Pedro. Pedro stumbles backwards, off balance, and falls. The wolf upon him, bites feverishly. Pedro writhes. The wolf snaps.

The juvenile Alpha wolf closes in on John. He edges along the wall towards the exit.

The wolf lunges as John ducks and dives for his gun. The wolf slams into the wall, shakes its head, reacquires John.

John picks up his gun, stands, readies.

John aims, shoots, and misses!

The wolf careens into John, the gun sails towards the entrance.

The wolf snaps at John. He flails in defense. The wolf bites his forearm, shakes wildly.

John screams and pulls his arm free.

The wolf rears up, mouth wide open, John defenseless, and—whoosh. The other juvenile Alpha wolf's body crashes into it, knocks it into the wall.

Pedro Negro stands victorious, had just thrown the juvenile Alpha wolf. Pedro bleeds from several wounds, alive.

John stares.

JOHN

Gracias.

PEDRO NEGRO

Feliz navidad. John.

Holly's distant voice heard over the calmer ravens.

HOLLY (O.S.)

John! John?

John slowly scans.

Pedro Negro moves the mountain of fill, to tower above the hole. He crawls into the hole and pulls an armful of fill onto himself and covers his burrow.

A couple ravens squawk. Holly's voice is closer.

HOLLY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
John, where are you?

John slowly sits up. The sounds of gravel sliding.

JOHN
I'm here. Over here.

HOLLY (O.S.)
John, where?

Holly enters and sees John and rushes over to him.

John's skin is clammy and pale, face covered in scrapes, his forearm bloody. He is silent, still gasps.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Are you ok? Did you fall?

Holly scans the cavern walls for a place John could have fallen.

Hundreds of quiet ravens line the cavern walls; an eerie unnatural silence.

Subtle sounds of gravel shifting.

Holly searches for the noise, sees the FILLED IN HOLE, notices a dozen dead wolves, blood everywhere.

JOHN
I'm okay.

HOLLY
Oh my God! What's happened?

Holly sees the FILLED IN HOLE slightly bulge.

She stands and takes a step toward it. The raven protectively squawk.

She freezes.

John slowly rises and pulls Holly back, towards the exit.

JOHN
We need to leave. Now.

HOLLY

What. What is it? What happened?

What did you see?

JOHN

We need to leave this place and
never come back.

John tug a reluctant Holly as stares at the FILLED IN HOLE.
The FILLED IN HOLE surface moves a little. A scratching
noise.

HOLLY

Did you see him?

JOHN

What?

HOLLY

Did you see Pedro Negro?

John's eyes, filled with sadness and horror. She understands
he is a different person. John pauses, considers, opens his
mouth to speak.

BEAT

The juvenile Alpha wolf jumps John,
knocks him to the ground,
immediately snaps at his jugular.
John flails for his life.

BAM! Holly shoots the wolf in the head, it collapses dead.
John pushes the wolf corpse to the side as Holly helps him.

JOHN

Jesus. Nice shot!

Holly errantly waves the gun across John's face. He brushes
it away and takes it from her.

HOLLY

I guess you can learn some things
from books!

INT./EXT. HOLLYS CAR - NIGHT - MOVING

Holly and John are in the car, John drives, a white-knuckled
grip. His forearm wrapped in bandages, blood seeps through.

John relaxes his grip on the steering wheel, tries to shake
out his fingers. She notices.

The sky is purple, almost complete darkness, the silhouette of thousands of ravens fill the sky. The squawking heard though the closed car windows.

JOHN

I've never seen so many Crows, I mean RAVENS in one place.

HOLLY

They'll return to Mexico for the winter and make their way north again next year, follow the food, mate. Repeat the whole thing.

JOHN

Repeat. Every. Year.

(A beat.)

I saw him.

HOLLY

What?

JOHN

I saw Pedro Negro.

HOLLY

In the hole?

JOHN

Yes. He tackled me, threw two dead beef carcasses into his lair..

HOLLY

I can't believe it. Are you sure?

JOHN

I don't just Believe. I'm sure. I know. I've seen him before. I just didn't realize.

HOLLY

What do you mean?

JOHN

When I was a kid, around 9, I wasn't a particularly good kid. I was, more of, a douchebag. I mean, I didn't treat anyone nice, not really a bully. But I picked a lot of fights, wasn't generally pleasant, seemed to get in a lot of trouble.

HOLLY

So, a bully?

JOHN

Okay. Maybe. But something changed. I really couldn't remember what. But I became one of the good kids. It, was, I don't know. Well, I didn't, or couldn't remember. It was Him. Pedro. The whole time.

HOLLY

He came to you?

JOHN

Well. Yes. In a dream or nightmare that I long forgot. Until now. Seeing him. Hearing that voice. I know now why I became what I turned out to be. A cop who believes bad people deserve second chances. Instead of god-knows-what.

HOLLY

So, Pedro Negro is out there. Warning little children--

JOHN

--that they are on the NAUGHTY LIST.

HOLLY

That's one way to put it. Those kids were not suicidal.

JOHN

So much for the naughty kids who don't listen.

HOLLY

What do we do?

JOHN

What do we do?

HOLLY

About your imaginary friend, living underground, until next holiday season...

JOHN

I know you'll hate to hear this. But, you have to wonder how much the boogeyman, the Slenderman, and the rest of the folklore, really impacts children... I mean when the parents aren't raising them right... Helps them.

HOLLY

Helps them? So?

JOHN

Think of the good?

HOLLY

Good?

JOHN

Nothing. We do nothing.

HOLLY

Nothing?

JOHN

Just nothing.

HOLLY

In all my life, that must be the craziest thing I've heard. Leave a child killing monster on the loose. Tell no one. Do nothing.

JOHN

So?

HOLLY

I'll. I'll have to get back to you on that. I'm-

JOHN

--You Agree with me?

HOLLY

I. I. At the moment, I don't necessarily Disagree with you. Your methodology, may be.

(A beat.)

Sound.

John smiles wildly and Holly blushes. John pulls his phone from his pocket, sees a Facebook messenger text from Jessica "I'd love to!!" John pauses.

Holly opens her laptop.

JOHN

Maybe, we can take this up. Over dinner? A Date.

HOLLY

Maybe. It's about time you date an educated woman.

JOHN

Yeah. And maybe leave you laptop at home. I can promise it won't be boring.

HOLLY

After this, I could use Boring.

John swipes to delete the Facebook messenger text, and smiles again. He looks at Holly, back to his phone, and to Notes, and Deletes the page, smiles with satisfaction.

Holly looks at the laptop, thesis, final page. "In conclusion I believe with properly allocated resources, a comprehensive detection, identification and mitigation plan, can be effective, as every child's life is a treasure." Holly clicks Something, pauses, then WE SEE she deleted "as every child's life is a treasure."

HOLLY- SATISFIED. Closes the laptop.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Much better.

EXT. HOLLYS CAR - NIGHT - MOVING

The car drives past sign "LEAVING DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, Population 0001" with TWO LARGE RAVENS sitting atop, watching the car drive past. The TWO LARGE RAVENS share a glance, as if to say GOODBYE to the passing car.

The car drives away, only headlights and brake lights can be seen, as it follows the pavement into the distance.

JOHN (V.O.)

By the way.

HOLLY (V.O.)

Yeah.

JOHN (V.O.)

Merry Christmas.

EXT. CREVASSE CHAMBER - DAY

Nearly pitch black, even the shapes cast within the shadows are dark. On Pedro Negro's filled in hole.

The FILLED IN HOLE is still. A faint sound can be heard of caroling. From the sand, WE HEAR--

PEDRO NEGRO (V.O.)

(Sings)

I see you when you're sleeping, I
know when you're awake, I know if
you've been bad, so be good for
your own sake. Ohh..

CHORUS - ALL