

THE PRIEST WHO RUINED CHRISTMAS

Written by

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EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The Christmas song "WE THREE KINGS" is playing somewhere, faintly.

An illuminated VIRGIN MARY statue, about three feet high, sits on the darkened church lawn. We can only see the face.

TERESA (O.S.)

Jesus.

The statue moves a little. There's a slight, whimsical illusion that the statue is talking.

The statue of JOSEPH seems to answer in a man's voice.

CHRIS (O.S.)

Amos?

TERESA (O.S.)

No, Jesus.

CHRIS (O.S.)

How about Joseph, after his father?

TERESA (O.S.)

You're not his father.

CHRIS (O.S.)

Ah, crap, that's right. Jonathan?

TERESA (O.S.)

Jesus.

CHRIS (O.S.)

It's just that "Jesus" is the number one most popular name in Israel these days. I looked it up in the, uh, in the census book.

TERESA (O.S.)

In the census book?

CHRIS (O.S.)

That's a thing. When we were being counted I asked the Roman soldier guy, "hey, what's the most popular boy's name?" And he said "Marcus," so I said "no, I mean a Jewish boy's name," and he was like, "oh, definitely Jesus. Totally popular. Totally unoriginal."

TERESA (O.S.)

Well, Joe honey, I doubt any of those other Jesus' had their names assigned by a literal angel. End of discussion.

CHRIS (O.S.)

You know, I'm taking your word about the whole angel thing. But it doesn't seem quite fair that I don't even get a say in giving him a name, and I just had to stand back and watch you get pregnant without even getting to...you know...

Out from behind the little statue jumps SISTER TERESA - 30, spritely and sharp and dressed in a nun's habit. She's laughing joyfully, though there's just a hint that she feels a little scandalized.

TERESA

Too far! Jesus Mary and Joseph forgive us, that's too, too far!

FATHER CHRIS appears behind the Joseph statue. He's 35 or 40, solidly built but not overweight, well put-together but not terribly attractive, and dressed in black with the white collar of a Catholic priest. He wears a mischievous grin.

CHRIS

(laughing)

If Joseph was just a normal human male - and he was - you can't tell me he wasn't upset about never getting to... I mean, all due respect but the Virgin Mary was probably...hot, being created specifically to be completely perfect in every possible way.

TERESA

Oh Lord. How do I let myself be led into these things?

CHRIS

Because I'm way more fun than the last priest?

TERESA

Father Griswald had Alzheimers and couldn't walk to the altar without help. I would hope you're more fun.

Chris reaches down for a SWITCH, and clicks it. The rest of the NATIVITY scene lights up.

All the animals and shepherds are present. Only the baby Jesus statue is missing.

Chris goes over and straightens the two main statues, where they'd been rotated when the two were miming.

CHRIS

Look good to you?

TERESA

Looks like...Christmas.

CHRIS

Thanks for the help with this.
Really. I know you've got classes
in the morning.

TERESA

Don't mention it. Three years in a
row I've put them up and taken them
down - Nativity scenes, Easter
sets, Palm Sunday palms...SO many
palms.

CHRIS

Wait - if you're so good at it, why
am I helping you? Sheesh, I could
have gone to bed hours ago.

TERESA

Don't start that with me, Father.
Keep up that attitude, and next
time you can spend a week or two
digging through storage to find all
this stuff.

CHRIS

No thank you. I'll behave. This
time of year is stressful enough as
it is. All the people with their
holiday blues. Christmas is a week
away but it won't be over soon
enough.

TERESA

Shall I call you Ebenezer Scrooge,
or do you prefer Krampus?

But Chris is distracted. There's something in the night sky
that has gotten his attention.

CHRIS

Would you look at that though?

Teresa walks up behind him and looks up into the sky. There's a bright DOT, followed by a faint streak of light, slowly moving through the sky.

This is accompanied by the music hitting the "Star of Wonder" chorus line.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Probably a new satellite I just haven't seen before. But it seems fitting for the season, at least.

TERESA

Aww, like our very own Star of Bethlehem. I didn't take you for the type to look for signs in the sky.

CHRIS

Oh, I'm not. Like I said, probably a satellite.

TERESA

Whatever it is, it's pretty. I hope it sticks around up there till Christmas.

They both look up and appreciate the light for a moment longer.

TERESA (CONT'D)

Well hey, if you think we're wrapped up here, I'm going to call it a night.

CHRIS

Yep. I'll get the lights. Thanks Sister.

TERESA

Goodnight.

She picks up a RADIO that's sitting nearby, playing the Christmas music. She turns it off, and walks away into the darkness.

Chris walks over to the Nativity scene and stoops down beside it. From his point of view, the light in the sky lines up with the top of the scene as if it were actually the Star.

Chris holds up his hands in a square, as if "framing" a shot in which the Star is above Joseph and Mary.

CHRIS

Nah. Too far to the left.

(then, to the statues)

Sorry folks. Nothing special. It's just a normal Christmas.

EXT. SUBURBAN CITY STREET - MORNING

Chris goes for a run. He's still wearing his collar, but the rest of his black clothes are underarmor and shorts. He makes a slightly comical sight.

He passes by several people who are out on morning walks. Their breath shows in the morning air, and most are bundled up warm in jackets.

CHRIS

Good morning Amy. Morning Mrs. Hill.

Chris continues running without stopping.

He reaches a narrow section of road, without a shoulder.

He glances behind his shoulder and sees a car coming from behind him. It's an upscale car, i.e. a PORSCHE.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Whoop. No shoulder.

He stops, running in place while the car passes by. He waves with a smile.

The car slows to a stop, and the window opens. This is HERBERT (65), a friendly old man with a nervous disorder that makes his head shake.

HERBERT

Don't tell me you're not cold out here.

CHRIS

I wasn't until you just made me think about it.

HERBERT

Well, good. We're Catholics. Pain and suffering is good for us! Haha!

Thinking he's very funny, Herbert drives on forward. Chris guffaws, then continues jogging after the car has gone on.

INT. DINER - MORNING

Chris sits at the counter, sipping on coffee and finishing up a platter of eggs. There are a few other customers around, including old Herbert.

His waitress is ROSE. She's 25 and thin - too thin - with tattoos that have been covered up and scars on her wrists. She has an open, sincere look about her.

A TELEVISION is playing the news in a corner of the diner.

Rose refills Chris' coffee.

CHRIS
Thank you Rose.

ROSE
Of course.

CHRIS
And the omelets are excellent.
Really, excellent.

ROSE
Good.

Rose steps back from the counter, but keeps her eyes on Chris.

In the background, the PHONE rings. ANNE (55), the other waitress, goes to answer it.

Chris looks up from his food to see Rose looking at him.

ROSE (CONT'D)
What about the toast?

CHRIS
Pardon?

ROSE
The toast. You said the omelet was good, but I made the toast.

CHRIS
(*smiling warmly*)
Toast is amazing. Perfect crisp.
Warm enough to melt butter but not too hot to hold. Not too sour, not too sweet.

Rose glows with happiness.

Behind her, Anne turns around with the phone.

ANNE
It's for you Rose.

ROSE
Oh. For me? Oh no.

Rose walks over toward the back of the kitchen, to the phone.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Hello?

The rest of her conversation continues softly in the background.

Chris' attention turns back to the TV screen.

The News is showing an astronomical map of the Solar System. Talking heads of REPORTERS and SCIENTISTS talk onscreen.

SCIENTIST (ON TV)
It's been a known fact for some decades that Beelzebub had a 3 to 7 percent chance of crossing paths with Earth.

That statement confuses Chris, until he focuses and hears the context.

REPORTER (ON TV)
And now as of yesterday, the asteroid has entered the earth's exosphere, and we've been told the chance of collision has increased to 12 percent.

SCIENTIST (ON TV)
It's a significant new presence in the night sky, and it's only going to get brighter over the next week. It's on track to become the closest asteroid flyby in recorded history.

CHRIS
Oh, that's what it was. Haha, Beelzebub. That's kinda ridiculous.

He chuckles sardonically then wolfs down the last of his omelet.

He's distracted to hear Rose yelling on the phone, and he turns his head to look.

ROSE

No, I told you never to call me.
Ever again. I'm trying to do
better, okay, and you're not making
it any easier!

She slams the phone down. She walks over toward Chris and the other customers, trying to compose herself before she grabs their plates.

She comes to Chris and takes his plate without a word. He looks up at her sharply.

CHRIS

Are you okay?

Rose nods her head slightly.

Then the PHONE rings again. Rose looks helpless.

Anne picks it up.

ANNE

Rose. Again.

Exasperated, Rose sulks back toward the phone. She answers. Chris stands up defensively.

ROSE

Yeah. No. Yes I hung up on you.
Because you were being...

Chris walks around the counter toward Rose. He mouths the words: "is that him?"

Rose nods to him. Chris snatches the phone out of her hand.

CHRIS

Hello. You must be Chuck, the
little fuck. Your ex-fiance does
not want to speak with you, and you
are making her feel unsafe. Don't
call again or you'll have to deal
with me.

He hangs it up. Rose looks at him with some shock.

Chris waits a moment, looking at the phone.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Aaaand he hasn't called back yet!

Meanwhile, Anne rests her eyes on the TV. The report about the asteroid is continuing.

MUTED CONVERSATIONS take place onscreen, discussing the asteroid's approach. Anne watches with more and more concern, as she gets closer to the screen.

ANNE

Hey, come look at the news.

She gets the attention of other customers, who slowly converge around her and the TV set. Herbert joins them in watching.

Meanwhile on the other end of the counter, Chris is still waiting for the phone, with Rose.

ROSE

I really didn't need you to talk to him. But thank you. But I can make him go away on my own. Getting back with him would be going backwards, and there's no part of me that's okay with that.

CHRIS

Of course. I...just wanted to help.

Suddenly the phone RINGS again.

Rose glances over at Anne, who is still immersed in the newscast. Rose picks up the phone, summoning a lot of bravery to do so.

ROSE

I'm done, Chuck. I've moved on and I don't want to go back to who I was...

She pauses, listening. It's not Chuck on the other end.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Oh. Sister who? I...here, he's right here.

She hands the phone to Chris, looking extremely embarrassed.

She moves away, clearing some dishes off the counter before being distracted by what's on the TV. She joins the others.

REPORTER (ON TV)

...And again, that 12 percent chance of collision with earth is not a statistic to be taken lightly.

(MORE)

REPORTER (CONT'D)

It's a measure of the likelihood that life on our planet, as we know it, could be changed forever.

SCIENTIST (ON TV)

Or even annihilated, quite frankly. It's relatively small odds, but with incredibly high stakes. The chance of us being a week away from an extinction level event is 12 percent.

Herbert chuckles as he watches the TV. The others look at him humorlessly.

HERBERT

I bet you that percentage goes even higher. Imagine if it was a 50/50.

Anne looks at him with disgust, but Herbert smiles.

Chris is meanwhile getting upset on the phone call.

CHRIS

Sister? I'm so sorry. Usually this is the time I'm back at home, but I ran a little farther this morning and started breakfast late...

INT. TERESA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Teresa sits at her tiny, simple dining room table, on her phone.

TERESA

Father, they were trying to get in touch with you. Tell me where you are and I'll come pick you up.

CHRIS (OVER THE PHONE)

Who were trying to get in touch?

TERESA

The Oakwoods. It's about Tina.

INT. DINER - MORNING

Chris becomes a little sad, while he's on the phone.

CHRIS

Oh no. Okay. Tell them I'm coming right over.

He hangs up the phone.

He paces quickly over to the others hovering around the TV.

He pulls out a \$20 bill and hands it to the distracted Rose.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Here. Keep any change.

ROSE
Thanks, Father.

Then Chris taps Herbert on the shoulder.

CHRIS
Herbert. I just got a call to see
your granddaughter. She's...

HERBERT
Yeah, poor kid.

Herbert never peels his eyes away from the TV.

CHRIS
She might not make it past
tomorrow.

HERBERT
How terrible. But that thirteen
percent chance says none of us are
making it past next week.

Chris is a little upset at the cynicism. But he tries to sound cheery as he leaves the diner.

CHRIS
That's an 87 percent chance that
we're all just fine.

He opens the door and leaves. Everyone else in the diner is still hooked on the news.

INT. OAKWOODS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

The TV report continues.

SCIENTIST (ON TV)
There is a lot of human error
involved, and to make a long story
short, we didn't anticipate just
how much the moon's gravity was
going to affect Beelzebub 24971.
(MORE)

SCIENTIST (CONT'D)

Because of the surprise turn it took in our direction, many of my peers in the science community, I believe, overcorrected that percentage to account for error, so realistically I believe we're really looking at a percentage far lower than 13. Probably 4 to 6 percent.

This TV is in a large, clean, white living room. The decor is plush enough to indicate this belongs to a wealthy family.

Chris is sitting in the couch, listlessly watching the TV.

Beside him sits ROB (40, dressed in khaki pants and a button-up shirt - a picture of wealthy suburban domesticity). He's staring at the floor, lost somewhere in thought.

Chris turns to Rob, and throws him a small smile.

CHRIS

Huh. I never thought I'd miss commercial breaks. Jeez, we could all use a rest from all the doom and gloom.

Rob, very distant, turns his head to Chris and nods.

Chris frowns to himself. He doesn't really know how to comfort Rob.

A bedroom door opens in the hallway, and a NURSE (40) comes out, joined by DANIELLE (40, Rob's wife: fit, abrupt, and a "Karen" if ever there was one).

DANIELLE

Thank you for coming, Father Chris. I'm glad someone was finally able to get in touch with you.

She says this with a hint of accusation. Rob looks even sadder. Chris frowns to himself and nods.

CHRIS

How is she?

DANIELLE

It's not going to be much longer. She's ready.

Chris nods sadly to Danielle and Chris, picks up his little black BOOK, and walks through the door into the bedroom.

INT. TINA'S BEDROOM - DAY

The room is full of flowers and medical equipment.

On a BED in the middle of the room lies TINA. She's 15 years old, but she's shaved bald, incredibly thin, and pale as a sheet. IV tubes run into her arm, and she's wearing an oxygen tube.

CHRIS

May I come in?

Tina waves at him.

Chris smiles and shuts the door behind him.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Thank you. Like I've always said, priests are like vampires. They can't come in unless you invite...

He thinks very hard about what he's just said. He sincerely regrets the poor joke, and tries to shrug it off.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Oh nevermind. How are you feeling?

TINA

Mom called you over to give me Last Rites, didn't she?

CHRIS

(smiling bitterly)

Extreme Unction. Yes. That's why I'm here.

TINA

Nice. They could have mentioned it to me first.

CHRIS

That I was coming?

TINA

That I was almost dead.

CHRIS

Ah. I'm sure you're not almost dead. A lot of times people will want Last Rites for loved ones even when they're not very sick at all.

TINA

Don't tell me what I want to hear,
like everybody else does.

Chris frowns, then gives her another bitter smile.

CHRIS

Okay. Um. Would you like me to hear
your confession now?

TINA

Bless me Father, for I have sinned.
My last confession was two weeks
ago. But I haven't moved from this
spot in two weeks. I don't know
what sins my mom thinks I've
committed since then.

Chris hurriedly makes the Sign of the Cross over her as she
begins. Then he chuckles at her pronouncement.

CHRIS

Well that's a good problem to have.

TINA

Maybe this is a sin, but I almost
wish I could commit a bad, bad sin.

CHRIS

What kind of bad sin?

TINA

I don't know. Any.

CHRIS

Can you tell me why you wish that?

Tina sighs and lays her head back.

TINA

Because I'm not very happy with
God.

This is both unexpected and intriguing. Chris moves his
chair closer.

CHRIS

Okay. I know how that can be. I
think everyone else feels that way
sometimes.

TINA

Everyone else? Is everyone else gonna die when they're only fifteen, and miss out on growing up and having a job and getting married and everything?

CHRIS

(*frowning*)

No.

TINA

But I am, so I think I have a right to be extra mad at God.

Chris ponders this for a minute.

CHRIS

You're right. You really are right. God does things that don't seem fair.

TINA

Please, stop telling me what I want to hear.

CHRIS

Okay, I won't. I'll tell you a story about me. It was when I was a little older than you. My big sister had just gotten engaged. She was young but he seemed like a pretty good catch, so we were all so happy for her. She took me on a camping trip a few nights before the wedding. Sort of a last brother-sister outing before she grew up. She snuck out some tequila - for both of us, not just for her - and we sat around the campfire, and she talked to me for hours. She was so excited about the future, she was glowing. There was the husband-to-be of course, but she had so many big plans for getting her degree, finding the career she loved...for painting the walls of the baby's room she was going to have. Well, we eventually both fell asleep around the campfire. I woke up first, in the morning. She never woke up at all. Blood clot got into her brain, and nobody could have known about it.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)
 So, Tina...we can talk about God
 not seeming fair.

Tina smiles a little at him. He smiles back.

TINA
 You're not as boring as Father
 Pierce.

Then she abruptly makes the sign of the cross.

TINA (CONT'D)
 Let's get this over with. Bless me
 Father, for I have sinned. My last
 confession was two weeks ago.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Chris rides in the passenger seat of Sister Teresa's car,
 while Teresa herself is driving. Chris seems very pensive.

TERESA
 You really need to get a cell
 phone. And a car.

CHRIS
 I don't know how much the
 Franciscan Sisters are paying these
 days...

TERESA
 HA!

CHRIS
 ...But I've got to save my
 stipends.

TERESA
 This car technically belongs to the
 school. I took a vow of poverty,
 while you're over here with a rainy
 day fund...

CHRIS
 I need to eventually get the
 furnace fixed in the church.

TERESA
 You shouldn't be paying for that.
 That's literally what collections
 are for.

CHRIS

The parish isn't going to approve the funds. You know Father Pierce. In the meantime I'm tired of being cold during Mass. So.

Beat.

TERESA

So, how was little Tina? I know her classmates are going to ask about her.

CHRIS

She...is having a hard time.

He struggles with his words for a moment. Teresa patiently waits for him to finish.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

When you're talking to people who need help, and you're giving them...comfort, I guess...do you ever find that's it's hard to be...honest?

Teresa thinks about that for a moment.

TERESA

Honest? No. Do you?

CHRIS

Hmm. If I was dying right now, what would you tell me?

TERESA

Well. I don't know. I guess I'd ask you how you felt about the condition of your soul. I would make sure you felt at peace. I'd tell you that God works in mysterious ways, but that in the end he wants the best for us, and even dying is part of his plan. I'd remind you again and again just to focus on the tiny pinpoint of light at the end of the tunnel, because that's God inviting you to spend eternity with him. And he wants you, wants you to join him in heaven.

CHRIS

Okay. Yeah.

He's unconvinced. Obviously something is bothering him.

TERESA

Why?

CHRIS

No reason.

TERESA

You're not actually dying right?

CHRIS

No. Would you rather I be?

TERESA

Nah. It's always a hassle when we need to find a new priest. Not to mention without a priest here we all have to go downtown to Father Pierce's Mass...and nobody wants that.

Chris smiles to hear that.

INT. CHRIS' RECTORY HOUSE - NIGHT

The tiny living space is crowded. Four men sit on a couch and chairs, playing CARDS over a small round table.

The men are Chris, Herbert, OFFICER TODD (60, white hair and a police uniform) and FATHER PIERCE (55. with a lean face, steely gray hair and a sharp glance).

Behind them, the TV is softly on.

PIERCE

...So I was trying to explain to her how Transubstantiation is not meant to be understood scientifically.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

That the molecules, for example, in the communion wafer will change in essence, but not in form. We won't be able to see it, but the change will be complete...

HERBERT

I fold.

TODD

I call.

Pierce lays down a winning hand, chuckles, and grabs the chips on the table.

CHRIS

I need to stop playing with you.

PIERCE

Truly, I don't think you can afford it.

TODD

Here, give me that. My deal.

Todd gathers the cards and starts shuffling.

HERBERT

How was Tina? Robert told me she's stable.

CHRIS

Yes. Your granddaughter was well when I saw her. You know, you can go see her. She'd probably love that.

HERBERT

And see Danielle? Nah.

Pierce directs a pointed frown at Chris.

PIERCE

I'm glad you're enjoying your time with the Oakwoods. You deserve it.

Chris ignores Pierce's passive-aggressiveness. Todd deals the cards to everyone. Pierce turns to address Todd.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

Father Chris was always the second choice when the Oakwoods had to call a priest. I was only unavailable one day and they started calling him on a regular basis.

HERBERT

My son's picky when it comes to priests.

PIERCE

Even though they technically live in my parish, geographically. Did you know they are some of the biggest tithers in the diocese?

HERBERT

Only reason that bitch married my kid. For the money.

PIERCE

If you're accepting money from Robert Oakwood, Father Chris, I would hope you'd inform the parish.

Chris gets a little impatient. He slams down his hand of cards, and looks hard at Pierce.

CHRIS

Give your friend this Augustine quote: "You are not to eat this body which you see. It is a mystery that I put before you: I will give you spiritual life, not fleshly." So no; Transubstantiation doesn't need to be physical in a scientific sense.

He stands up and starts to walk away from the table.

Herbert's attention is grabbed by the news report on TV.

HERBERT

Hold on. The news.

He reaches over to turn the volume up.

Chris turns around to look, with disinterest at first.

CHRIS

This stuff has been playing on repeat all day long...

The news report proceeds with urgency. The voices of the reporter and scientist are shaky.

SCIENTIST (ON TV)

The fact is, there are miscalculations that have been made.

REPORTER (ON TV)

Miscalculations?

SCIENTIST (ON TV)

Obviously, the scientific community can only work with the data it has, and at no point did we have all the data. There is always a margin of error involved.

REPORTER (ON TV)
Margin of error? The data was
wrong. Flat-out wrong. And lives
depended on that huge, wrong
margin! How many lives?

The scene cuts away as a SECOND REPORTER now addresses his viewers.

Meanwhile, Chris is intrigued by the report now. He slowly moves back to the table and sits down again.

REPORTER 2 (ON TV)
For viewers just now tuning in: the
asteroid Beelzebub, we are being
told, is in fact on a direct track
of collision with...Earth. We've
only just received these reports,
and...we do advise people not to
panic. The severity of such a
strike, a hypothetical strike, is
still unknown...

Yet another Reporter, jittery and shaking, pipes in. She's panicking and unprofessional.

REPORTER 3 (ON TV)
They said just last week it would
be an extinction level event. That
was when the percentage was just 2.
Did they give us the wrong
information just to keep everyone
calm?

REPORTER 2 (ON TV)
Once again...we are advising people
not to panic. The president, I've
just been told, is getting ready to
address the nation later tonight...

Chris shuts off the TV with a REMOTE CONTROL.

All four men stare at one another. Their eyes are wide, their mouths slightly agape.

Then the PHONE RINGS. That breaks the moment of silence. They all start to twitch and quiver nervously.

Chris is the first to move. He stands up and walks to his window. The phone continues to ring.

Chris looks out and upward into the dark night sky. That bright streak is still faintly visible among the stars.

HERBERT

I should be getting home. I have a bedtime.

PIERCE

They said only twelve percent...how is this...it can't be right.

TODD

I, uh...I should get out there. People are going to get weird tonight.

Todd straps on his BELT and HANDGUN, then he and Herbert leave.

Chris steps toward his ringing phone. Pierce puts a hand on his shoulder. Pierce himself is stunned.

PIERCE

Good luck, Father. It's not going to be an easy night.

Pierce leaves too.

Chris makes himself comfortable on a barstool, then answers the phone...

His own voice is weak, stunned and shaky. He tries to give it a little more strength as he talks, with little success.

CHRIS

Hello?... Yes, Mrs. Carmony. I did just see the news. Yes, I'm here. I'm here.

He sits and listens patiently.

EXT. CHRIS' RECTORY HOUSE - NIGHT/MORNING

His rectory is right beside the Church location, in the same building complex with the school.

Night goes on, and we can see the light still on through Chris' window. His SILHOUETTE on the window shade casts a shadow, as it sits and stands and sometime paces all night long. The PHONE keeps ringing.

TIMELAPSE through the night as the stars spin overhead. We can see the ASTEROID LIGHT whirl overhead too.

Morning comes, and the light in the room has never shut off.

Very slowly, eventually, the front door opens. Chris walks out. Now he's wearing the full priestly garments for Mass. He puts his hand to his mouth as he yawns. Then he marches slowly across the parking lot, toward the church.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

Chris approaches the front of the church. As he does so, he glances over at the Nativity scene.

The statue of Mary is missing.

CHRIS

Really?

He looks up at the sky, exasperated.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY - MORNING

This is the little room off the side of the church. Chris is busy preparing for Mass. He's tired and distracted, and accidentally nearly knocks over the CHALICE he's preparing.

Teresa appears in the doorway. She's a little dazed, like everyone else.

TERESA

(softly)

Hey.

CHRIS

Hey.

TERESA

Are you alright?

Chris keeps working, not turning around to look at her.

CHRIS

Are you alright?

TERESA

I'm a little tired... Quite a few phone calls from my students.

CHRIS

Yeah. Same.

Chris picks up the chalice and gets ready to walk out to start Mass. Now he turns around to look at Teresa.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

About how many people are out there?

TERESA

Maybe two dozen. I really, really
thought there would be more today.
Especially...

CHRIS

I don't see why it shouldn't be
like any other Tuesday morning
Mass.

He walks forward, and she steps aside to let him leave the
room. She chews on her fingernail after he leaves.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Chris walks up the aisle of the church.

It's not a very big church, nor very elaborate. It has the
usual Catholic decor, though none of it is gaudy.

There are a few people in the pews. Most of them seem
stunned, or in tears, or fervently engaged in quiet prayer.
Danielle is among these last, sitting by herself and
clenching her hands together with her eyes shut.

Teresa, too, takes a seat in a back pew.

CHRIS

In the name of the Father, and of
the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

CONGREGATION

Amen.

A WIDE ANGLE of the altar and the congregation fades into a
TIMELAPSE that hurries us along to the middle of the Mass:
Chris is now standing at the pulpit, reading out of a book.

CHRIS

...A reading from the holy gospel
according to Luke.

CONGREGATION

Glory to you, oh Lord.

CHRIS

"Then he said to them, 'And there
will be signs in sun and moon and
stars, people fainting with fear
and with foreboding of...'"

Chris stops himself. He moves his finger down the page to
reveal the words: "FOR THE HEAVENLY BODIES WILL BE SHAKEN."

He stops reading, and nods with a grim smile to the people, as he flips through the pages looking for something else. He finds it, turns the page, and begins again.

In the pews, Danielle lifts her eyes abruptly off the pages of her book and gives Chris a concerned, angry glance.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

"Therefore I say unto you, be not anxious for your life...But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you..."

The church door opens. A strange figure enters quietly. The newcomer is wearing torn up jeans and no shirt. He has a paper BAG over his head, with slits cut out for his eyes.

This is ART (40, skinny, sunburnt, filthy).

Chris sees him, but goes on reading.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

"...Be therefore not anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Without warning, Art lets out a wild scream. He holds up a CARDBOARD SIGN that reads "THE TIME IS HERE."

ART

Thou shalt make no graven images, or anything else made by man. Those who do, shall be cast into the fire, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Teresa stands up in her pew and rushes over to Art.

Chris continues as if nothing is wrong.

CHRIS

(*ignoring Art*)

The gospel of the Lord.

CONGREGATION

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Teresa puts a hand on Art's shoulder.

TERESA

Hi, Art. How are you this morning?
Let me go buy you a cup of coffee.
With whipped cream.

CRAZY ART

And that day will close on you
suddenly like a trap. For it will
come on all those who live on the
face of the whole earth.

Chris casts an annoyed glance toward Art, but continues going through the motions of the next part of the Mass.

Danielle, eyes wide with indignity, pulls out her PHONE and dials a number.

Teresa stays with Art, having no luck in trying to nudge him out the door.

CHRIS

The Lord be with you.

CONGREGATION

And also with you.

ART

No he is not! The Lord does not be
with us! We abandoned the Lord, so
the Lord abandoned us!

CHRIS

Lift up your hearts.

CONGREGATION

We lift them up to the Lord.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Mass is over.

The people are trickling out from the church doors, slowly and in complete silence.

Chris and Teresa are already out here. Officer Todd has his POLICE CAR pulled up close to the church, and he's holding Art in handcuffs. The bag is off Art's head.

CHRIS

This is really not necessary.

TODD

He gets himself into trouble at least once every year about this time.

TERESA

He didn't actually try to hurt me.

TODD

The phone call I got said differently. I just need to take him in and process him, same as always.

TERESA

He's harmless.

(then, to Art)

Art, I thought we agreed you weren't going to take the Nativity decorations anymore. Where did you take Mary?

She points, annoyed, toward the incomplete Nativity set.

ART

There must be no graven images. If the Lord is made angry, I tried to pacify him, but it's too late, for all mankind must pay for their transgressions.

TODD

Come on, Art.

CHRIS

For God's sake. It's the week of Christmas, and it's...you know, it might be...

Todd proceeds to push Art, gently and kindly enough, into the back seat of the cruiser.

TODD

It's Tuesday, Father. It's Tuesday.

He sighs heavily, then gets into the driver's seat.

When the car pulls out, only Chris and Teresa are left in front of the church. For a long moment they stand beside each other, confused and cold.

TERESA

The news says it's going to happen on Christmas.

Chris doesn't answer at first. He's really digging deep for something happy to say. He begins quoting something playful:

CHRIS

"I got five pieces of candy." "I got a chocolate bar." "I got a quarter." ... "I got a rock." A...rock.

Chris points at the sky. Teresa is not amused.

TERESA

That was a Halloween movie. Wrong holiday.

CHRIS

True. But the rock thing is still...appropriate...

TERESA

It gets a four out of ten.

She walks away. Chris frowns to himself.

Then Chris walks over to the Nativity set. He addresses the Joseph statue.

CHRIS

All alone, aren't we?

Looking dejected, he continues to stand for a while longer.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Chris wheels a SHOPPING CART through the store.

A few people around him are looting, but just as many are carrying out their shopping in an orderly way.

Carefully he looks at all the PRICE TAGS, picking up the very cheapest of the items.

He sets his eye on an expensive WINE BOTTLE. The price tag reads \$149.95. He shakes his head slowly at the sight, and walks on by.

BART (identical in nearly every way to his brother, Art) pushes a full shopping cart down the aisle, filling it up until it nearly spills over. Chris looks at him with some confusion, then loses sight of Bart.

Turning around another aisle, Chris sees Father Pierce, surrounded by a group of young men and women, all softly sobbing.

Pierce is holding hands with them, hugging them, whispering to them. They cling onto him.

PIERCE

It'll be alright. It's in God's hands now. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for he is at my side. Trust in the Lord.

Chris winces to see the display. Then he frowns. He wishes he could provide people that kind of comfort.

He pushes his cart away.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Chris carries his grocery bags out through the parking lot. He gets to his BICYCLE and puts the bags in a basket mounted to the bike.

An argument in the parking lot catches his attention. It's Rose. She's arguing with CHUCK (35, skinny, preppy and dressed in a business suit). He's well put-together but his eyes are wild. He is trying to hold onto Rose's arm.

CHUCK

Do you know how long it took me to figure out where to find you? And do you know how long the drive was for me to get here? I have no interest in going back without you.

ROSE

Let go of me, Chuck. I'm serious. Let go of me right now.

CHUCK

Are you with somebody else now? Because I'll tell you the truth, no one will love you as much as I love you. I need you Rose, baby.

Chuck gets more physical with her. She punches him in the face. He reacts with more violence.

Chris walks over toward them.

CHRIS

Excuse me. Excuse me!

CHUCK

Who are you?

CHRIS
I'm Father Chris. Who are you?

Chuck lets go of Rose and turns to confront Chris.

CHUCK
I recognize your voice. You're the
guy who answered the phone for her.
A priest? Really?

ROSE
Nothing's...it's not that at all,
Chuck.

CHUCK
So, I don't understand. You're not
with someone else?

ROSE
I wish you would understand that I
just don't want to go back with
you, and it's really that simple.

Chuck smiles like a psychopath, and steps toward her with
violent intent.

CHRIS
Get away from her. I'll hurt you if
I need to!

Before he gets a chance to do anything, Rose whips out her
PEPPER SPRAY and sprays Chuck right in the face. Chuck
staggers backward, rubbing his eyes.

CHUCK
Ah! Goddammit!

ROSE
I have everything under control,
Father.

CHUCK
I just wanted to talk to you, you
bitch!

ROSE
I don't.

CHUCK
The world's fucking going to end in
six days. I don't want to be alone
for that, and you don't either!

ROSE
(frowning)
 At least being alone and happy is better than being with someone and lonely.

CHUCK
 I'm not leaving town without you, Rose.

He stumbles off toward the store, trying to keep his eyes open well enough to see.

In the background, Bart pushes his cart past Chris' bike, grabbing the grocery bags on his way by.

Rose steps closer to Chris.

ROSE
 Sorry you had to see that.

CHRIS
 I'm glad you're alright.

ROSE
 I'm trying, anyway.

CHRIS
 If he bothers you again...

ROSE
 I'll take care of it. Don't worry about me, okay?

CHRIS
 See you at the meeting?

ROSE
 The meeting's still on?

CHRIS
 As long as people show up for it.

He smiles politely. Rose smiles and gets into her old junker of a car. Then Chris walks back toward his bike.

He sees that the grocery bags are gone. He shuts his eyes, trying not to lose his patience.

INT. OAKWOODS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rob and Danielle Oakwood sit on their couch, watching the continuing NEWS COVERAGE. The two of them don't share any connection. They neither speak nor look at each other.

REPORTER (ON TV)

It's estimated that the rock responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs was between 10 and 80 kilometers wide, while the asteroid Beelzebub is somewhere in the range of 67 kilometers wide, of 41 miles, the size of two Manhattan islands...

The DOORBELL rings.

Danielle doesn't budge. Rob stands and goes to the door.

He opens it to reveal Chris.

ROB

Oh, hi Father.

Rob, with tears welling up in his eyes, gives Chris a big unexpected hug.

CHRIS

Hello Rob.

ROB

Thank you. I'm sure you're very busy, especially right now. She really wanted to talk to you again.

CHRIS

I'm happy to help however I can.

Rob reaches into his pockets, grabbing for some CASH.

ROB

Of course I'm happy to give you something for your time. I understand that it should be worth your while.

Chris looks at him with genuine concern and confusion.

CHRIS

Robert...no, that's...no. Thanks.

He steps into the house, and starts to walk past Danielle.

DANIELLE

Don't mention anything the news is saying to my daughter.

CHRIS

She doesn't know about it?

DANIELLE

(not looking at him)

No. And she doesn't need to. We all know the media's running wild with this story to cause panic. God has other plans for the world - He would never let that happen. Right Rob?

Rob nods sheepishly. Now Danielle turns her head to look at Chris.

DANIELLE (CONT'D)

Right Father?

CHRIS

Well...I'll agree with you that nobody should panic.

DANIELLE

Our daughter doesn't need to spend any energy worrying about things that don't matter.

CHRIS

Okay.

He opens the door to Tina's room.

INT. TINA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Chris walks into the room. He smiles to see that Tina is sitting up and reading a book.

TINA

Oh good. You're here.

CHRIS

You're looking well today.

TINA

I'm not really. My whole body still hurts. But I'm just more used with that now.

CHRIS

Hey, I'm just happy I get to talk to you again. Yesterday it seemed like everyone thought you weren't gonna pull through.

TINA

I'm still not.

CHRIS

Well...none of us do in the long run.

TINA

I was thinking about the story you told me about your sister, and I have a question.

Chris sits down beside her.

CHRIS

Yes?

TINA

Are you afraid of dying? I only ask because I'm not sure yet if I'm afraid or not.

CHRIS

You're not sure?

TINA

I know I'm mad about it, but that's a different thing. Sometimes I feel afraid, but sometimes I don't.

CHRIS

Afraid...I don't think I am, actually.

TINA

Will you be, when you get closer?

CHRIS

I guess I won't know for sure until I'm there.

TINA

Sometimes I think I should be more afraid, because I only want to pray to God when I'm afraid. But then I think: God doesn't want us to be afraid of things, so why do I only want to talk to him when I am? It doesn't make any sense, when I think about it.

Chris zones out for a long moment, staring at the floor.

TINA (CONT'D)

Anyway, mom says God always listens to prayers. I think he ignores me, most of the time anyway.

(MORE)

TINA (CONT'D)
So maybe I'd rather just not be
afraid, and not feel like praying.

CHRIS
Can I tell you a secret?

Tina nods.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I...don't believe in God.

TINA
You don't? So how can you be a
priest?

CHRIS
A priest's actual job is to try and
help other people. So whether or
not I believe...that's my own
problem, isn't it?

TINA
I guess. It's still weird.

CHRIS
I'm only telling you this so
that...so that you don't spend this
time being angry with God, and
worrying about why he does some
things.

TINA
It doesn't seem like something you
were supposed to tell me.

CHRIS
Well, there are two kinds of people
who believe in God. The first kind
looks up and feels love, and
comfort, like they have a friend in
charge of the whole universe and in
that friendship they'll do anything
for each other. The second kind of
person just worries all the time,
because God is...scary. I don't
think that second kind of person
should ever believe in God in the
first place.

TINA
So...you don't think I'll go to
heaven?

Chris is stumped. He may have taken this too far.

TINA (CONT'D)

You have to answer honestly, now.

There's a gentle knock on the door, and then it opens. Danielle pokes her head in.

DANIELLE

Tina dear, if you're done with your confession, it's time for your vitamins.

Chris stands up to go. Tina grabs his hand.

TINA

Next time I see you, I want you to tell me something that will help me not to be afraid. And I don't mean I want to hear about heaven.

CHRIS

I promise I'll think of something.

He walks past Danielle, out of the room.

INT. OAKWOODS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chris walks past Rob, who is still on the couch watching TV.

ROB

Oh. Let me walk you out.

Rob jumps up and opens the front door for Chris.

CHRIS

Thanks.

ROB

Uh, Father, are there any, uh prayers or special devotions you would recommend right now?

CHRIS

There are lots of devotions that can probably give you a sense of purpose and peace over the next few days...

ROB
(shaking, tearful)
 I was hoping, maybe there's a prayer that might be more effective, you know, for asking him not to let it happen...

CHRIS
(concerned)
 Well...the rosary is always good. But, may I be honest with you, Rob?

Rob nods nervously. Chris puts a hand on his shoulder.

Danielle has re-entered the room and overheard some of the previous dialogue. She approaches slowly.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
 I think you'll be happier if you don't try so hard to convince God to change his mind. Consider, for your family's sake, that whatever happens in the next week...

Chris stops short, as he sees Danielle.

DANIELLE
 You don't believe the fear-mongering public on this, do you? Father Pierce agreed with me that this whole thing is a test of our trust in God.

Chris hesitates, trying to minimize confrontation.

CHRIS
 And who am I to second-guess Father Pierce?
(then to Rob)
 I'm...I'm sorry I can't be more helpful right now.

He disappears out the front door.

EXT. CHURCH - EVENING

There are a few cars in the parking lot. Some people, including Rose, make their way into the church hall that's attached to the Church itself.

INT. CHURCH HALL - NIGHT

A small crowd sits on FOLDING CHAIRS. This is an AA meeting. Chris sits beside Rose.

A young man, DANNY (25) is standing up and telling his story. He's nearly in tears.

DANNY

...It's always been hard, and I'm sure I'm not alone in saying it's hardest when I'm scared. In the evenings sometimes I'll just sit, for hours, staring at the TV. And with everything that's going on, it would be so easy just to grab a drink, or two drinks, or six, and drown it out. Just, go numb for a while. And right now all I can do is tell myself...tell myself that I only need to be strong for five more days, because...because...

He sits down, to a sad little applause.

CHRIS

Thank you Danny. I think it might be easier for all of us if we spend less time looking at the TV. Let's fill this time with each other, with love, instead of focusing on all the things that are too big for us to do anything about.

Everyone nods. Then Rose stands up.

ROSE

Hello. You all know me. I'm Rose. I'm ten months sober, still. Like Danny said, it really isn't easy now, or ever. But I have a different point of view I want to share.

Chris turns his head to see Chuck entering the room. Chuck looks calm and sane. His eyes are still red from the pepper spray, but he looks friendly enough. Chris watches him like a hawk as Chuck sits down in one of the chairs, his eyes fixed on Rose.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Since our last meeting, we've gotten some really bad news. It seems like everything's changed. But I don't think we should change. When I first heard about the asteroid, it was terrible of course.

(MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)

I was numb for a while, but then I started to wonder why I didn't feel scared. Then I figured it out. The things that scare us the most are the things we have power over. Like, for me, the scariest thing in the world would be going back to the person I was before, because that's something I can control. What didn't scare me was finding out that the orbit of an asteroid and the orbit of our planet, two things that are so big we can hardly understand them, happen to be intersecting and probably ending life as we know it. Instead I felt...peaceful. Somehow it was...warm and welcoming, like when I was a baby and my grandparents would give me a great big hug I couldn't resist. There's nothing we can do, so why be scared? What really matters is that we stay strong, because even though I'm not afraid of dying, I am afraid of living my last days in a way that I don't feel good about. And that's why I'm going to stay strong, no matter if I live another five days or five decades.

This receives a healthy applause. Chris smiles thoughtfully. He glances at Chuck: Chuck too has tears in his eyes.

Rose returns to sit beside Chris.

CHRIS

Thank you, Rose.

EXT. CHURCH HALL - NIGHT

Chris and Rose step outside, as all the others spill out from the hall.

Rose holds out a pack of CIGARETTES.

ROSE

I know you want one.

CHRIS

I...oh boy. Of course I do.

He reaches for the cigarette. Rose lights it for him.

Across the parking lot, he spots Sister Teresa cleaning the windows of one of the buildings.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Sister! What are you doing?

TERESA
(shouting)
Have you seen kids do that thing where they lick their hands and smear it all over the glass? Turns out, they keep doing that until they're twelve. Why? Why do they do this?

CHRIS
It's ten at night. Make the little brats clean it in the morning.

Teresa walks toward him.

TERESA
Yeah, well. I might not have any students in the morning. Almost all the parents have pulled their kids out. I don't blame them for wanting to spend time together.

CHRIS
Sister, you've met Rose, haven't you?

TERESA
I have. It's a small town. Hi again, Rose.

CHRIS
I'm going to have her start writing my homilies. She has much more moving things to say than I do.

ROSE
Oh my God. Don't be ridiculous. Sister, you've known Father Chris for a while, right?

TERESA
We went to high school together, and we've talked on and off through the years. I may have had a small part in helping him get the assignment at this parish.

Chuck walks out of the hall, and stands sheepishly nearby, his hands in his pockets.

ROSE
Excuse me.

CHRIS
Are you sure?

ROSE
Yeah. I'll be fine.

She walks over to Chuck, and they walk a little ways off together.

Chris offers Teresa the cigarette he's smoking.

TERESA
Blah. No thank you.

CHRIS
Have you never smoked?

TERESA
Not once. I think I'll keep it that way.

CHRIS
You'd hate it. But I would love to see the look on your face.

Teresa lifts the window cleaning RAG she's been holding, and smashes it against Chris' face, wrecking the cigarette.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Hey! What was that for?

TERESA
I'm saving you from a long and horrific battle with lung cancer.

CHRIS
But...well...thanks.

He looks up. The asteroid light is visible in the sky, brighter than before.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
What have you been telling your students?

TERESA

Wow. That's a hard question. Usually I've been trying not to talk about it, but they're all so scared all the time, it does come up. I try to make them feel less scared. For each child, it might a different thing they need to hear. Why do you ask?

CHRIS

Right now, there's no difference between children and everyone else. They're all confused, scared, and trying to make sense of what's happening. We're supposed to help them understand, somehow.

TERESA

It's not hard to understand.

CHRIS

No?

TERESA

God chose this moment to hurl a rock at us. And that's that. We don't know why, or why now, but that's above our pay grade. Underneath all the emotions - and we are fully within our rights to feel emotional - it's that simple.

CHRIS

I agree with all of that...except for one thing, and that one thing is my problem.

TERESA

What is?

Chris hears a sound from nearby. It's the noise of CRYING.

CHRIS

Oh no. I should go. We'll talk soon.

He lays a hand on Teresa's shoulder. They smile at each other, and Teresa walks away.

Chris walks toward the sound of crying.

He finds CHUCK sitting on the ground, in tears. There's no sign of Rose.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Chuck?

CHUCK

Leave me alone.

CHRIS

Alright. I won't bother you. But I'll sit here and listen if you just want to talk.

He sits down a few yards away from Chuck.

CHUCK

She won't listen to me. She knows I would never hurt her. I just need her to be around right now. I don't know what to do without her.

CHRIS

You know you're not alone, Chuck. Everybody is in the same boat right now. Maybe Rose isn't the one, but there are other people who can help you. You can start coming to Mass, or join a support group...

CHUCK

Fuck that. Nah. Why am I talking to you anyway?

He stands up to go. Chris stands up too.

CHRIS

Are you using right now?

Chuck stops in his tracks.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Rose told me you used together. I can tell you that if you're using, or if you're drinking, it's not going to make you feel any better.

Chuck spins around, angrily. He gets right in Chris' face.

CHUCK

Tell me something I don't fucking know!

He shoves Chris down to the ground.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

You stay away from my girl.

He storms off into the darkness.

Chris lays on the ground helplessly for a moment, staring up at the asteroid in the sky.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

It's morning. Chris is dressed in his running clothes again. But he's staring at something, and he's upset.

The Joseph statue in the Nativity scene has been removed. Now only the Shepherd figures are left.

Chris sighs, then turns and starts his morning run.

EXT. SUBURBAN CITY STREET - MORNING

On his run, he doesn't pass anybody at all. The streets are eerie and empty.

He COUGHS a little.

CHRIS
Damn cigarettes.

He runs slowly. There is very little pep in his step.

Eventually he stops. He's breathing heavily and sweating.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
What's the point...

He starts walking for a little while.

Then he suddenly shivers.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Right. Cold.

He breaks into a run once again.

INT. PRISON - DAY

The hallway door BUZZES. Officer Todd opens the door and lets Chris in.

TODD
Thanks for coming. He just said he wanted to see a priest.

CHRIS
Was Father Pierce busy?

TODD

We try not to call Father Pierce
unless we have to.

They walk down the hallway through the holding cells.

CHRIS

I'm surprised you've still got him
here.

TODD

Eventually his brother will come
bail him out. But in the winter
months he's better off in here.

He opens the cell door, revealing Art. Chris walks inside.

CHRIS

Hello Art.

Art responds by violently leaping to his feet.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'm Father Chris. Remember me?

ART

The false prophet. You weren't the
light of the world. People think
it's nobody's fault, but it's the
fault of the shepherd. You and all
the other shepherds. You led the
sheep to the slaughter. Now the
stars fall from the heavens to
destroy the sinners.

CHRIS

I wish I could understand what you
mean, Art...

ART

Lies! Lies! Lies! God is a God of
love, you told the sheep. But hark,
don't you recall the God of
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who
destroyed the earth with water and
destroyed his enemies with fire and
the sword? You preached a gospel of
mercy and the sheep ate until they
were fat and sinful, so they were
not prepared when the slaughter
came.

Chris is taken aback. Art's presence is powerful despite his
instability.

TODD

Alright, that's enough Art. Sit down. Father, you can come out of there.

Chris looks sadly at Art, unsure whether he should leave or say something more. He takes a step toward the door, but turns back to Art.

CHRIS

Art, is there anything I can say to you? What do you want me to say, right now?

ART

No more lies. Say no more lies.

Chris takes a deep breath and approaches Art again.

CHRIS

No more lies, Art.

ART

Promise me, no more lies.

CHRIS

I promise. No more lies.

Art breaks down, becoming suddenly emotional. He gives Chris a big hug.

Todd approaches cautiously, but Chris puts out his hand to indicate that everything is okay.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Art, will you tell me where the Nativity statues are?

ART

What Nativity statues?

CHRIS

Okay.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

There's a long line outside of the CONFSSIONAL.

Danielle is the next person in line. She's looking stern, as usual.

INT. CONFSSIONAL - DAY

Rob sits on the other side of the screen from Chris.

ROB

I can't find it in myself to be as strong as my wife. My faith is failing. I've put my trust in the panic that's spread by the news. and I've been feeling so much fear, and I know fear is from the devil.

CHRIS

Well, you are correct that fear is from...the devil. But that's not to say it is unfounded. To battle fear is different from pretending the source of the fear doesn't exist. God doesn't want us to fear, but he does want us to be strong, and prepared too. Focus on preparing yourself for what may happen, rather than neglecting your responsibilities, your soul, your family and your own peace of mind.

ROB

Well then, there is something else. I have felt sexual attractions to...others...outside of marriage.

CHRIS

Have you acted on these attractions?

ROB

No.

CHRIS

Attractions are completely normal. Healthy. While we should avoid temptation, we should not let ourselves feel scrupulous guilt over every little thought.

ROB

Yes, but... Yes.

Rob wants to say more, but he hesitates and says nothing.

CHRIS

Now, please go ahead and say your act of contrition.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Rob walks out of the confessional. Danielle goes in next, giving Rob a habitual glare on her way by.

INT. CONFSSIONAL - DAY

Now it's Danielle's turn in the confessional.

DANIELLE

I confess my feelings of anger, often directed toward my co-workers and against my husband. There are many occasions when I feel I'm being undermined because I have a better handle on a given situation. Instead of taking a deep breath and calmly explaining why I'm right, I lose patience. It is justified anger.

CHRIS

Mhh-hmm.

DANIELLE

Right now, in the middle of all this blasphemous madness, I can't help but feel a deep rage against my husband, and against my sister, and against everyone who lacks faith so much that they actually think God would go back on all his promises. Don't they know that Christ's second coming must take place? Don't they remember God's promise after the great flood that he would never destroy mankind again? Now I'm ranting. I'm angry now. The lack of faith is maddening!

CHRIS

If I may...you might consider attempting to see things from your husband's point of view. If he is frightened, then anger is not a virtuous or helpful response...

DANIELLE

Has he...has he been talking to you? What did he say? This is our marriage you're talking about now.

CHRIS

Danielle...Mrs. Oakwood...

DANIELLE

You know, just by mentioning something he said is breaking your sacred seal of the confessional.

CHRIS

The...what?? You're the one who brought up your husband!

DANIELLE

I'll be going to Father Pierce for my next confession. Now absolve me.

Chris puts his head in his hand. He's exhausted.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Rob sits in one of the pews, praying.

Danielle slams the door of the confessional. Surprising Rob, she walks up beside him and pulls him up by the arm.

She rushes him out of the church, past the long line of people waiting for confession.

INT. CHRIS' RECTORY HOUSE - DAY

Chris lays on the floor of his living room, staring at the ceiling. He's aimless. Listless.

Finally he stands and walks into his kitchen. He pulls out a WINE GLASS, and sets it on the counter.

He stares at it for a long moment, before picking it up, clinking it against something imaginary, and miming the act of drinking it.

Then, still miming, he acts out refilling the glass, and drinking it down again.

He starts laughing at his own ridiculousness, and lays his head on the counter, exhausted.

The DOORBELL rings.

Chris sighs. He buttons up his cassock and straightens it out, and goes to the front door.

He opens it. It's Father Pierce.

CHRIS

Father Pierce.

PIERCE
Good afternoon.

CHRIS
To what do I owe the visit?

PIERCE
May I come in?

Chris lets him in. Pierce sits down on the couch without invitation.

PIERCE (CONT'D)
The bishop is unavailable for hearing reconciliation.

CHRIS
Ah. I did just have scheduled confessions for three hours...

PIERCE
I knew there would be a line.

CHRIS
Sure. I'll be right back.

Chris retreats back into his room to retrieve the STOLE (the fabric piece he wears for confession).

Pierce spies the glass sitting on the counter.

PIERCE
Have you been drinking, Father Chris?

CHRIS
Drinking? No.

PIERCE
I hope not. The diocese received some cautionary warnings about that, you know. About you.

CHRIS
That's just...

Chris, exasperated, removes the glass and puts it back into the cupboard. Then he sits in the couch across from Pierce.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
No. I haven't been drinking. But if I were, I would offer you some.

PIERCE

I don't drink. A good priest must maintain his faculties of mind at all times.

CHRIS

Yes. Of course.

Pierce crosses himself. Chris becomes extremely businesslike and detached. He's good at his job.

PIERCE

Well.

CHRIS

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

PIERCE

Bless me father, for I have sinned. My last confession was last week.

CHRIS

Yes Father. I'm listening.

PIERCE

I have had several outbursts of anger, both alone and with others.

CHRIS

Was anyone hurt by these outbursts?

PIERCE

No. No. But I spoke ill of others, to their faces and behind their backs.

CHRIS

How many times?

PIERCE

Six. Seven. I have also used language that I'm ashamed of. In this past week I have given in to doubts, and feelings of despair, instead of maintaining my trust in God's will.

CHRIS

God would never hold you responsible for that, Father. Nobody is unshaken right now. Was there anything else?

PIERCE
I...I've shared impure physical
contact with somebody.

Beat.

PIERCE (CONT'D)
Um...there was nothing
inappropriate, of course. But it
was in violation of my holy vows,
and for that I am most contrite.

Beat.

CHRIS
Did you engage in intercourse?

PIERCE
No. No, there was no intercourse.
Not technically.

Beat. Chris is waiting for Pierce to provide more details.

PIERCE (CONT'D)
That's all.

CHRIS
(*uncomfortably*)
When you say there was nothing...
inappropriate...what do you mean?

PIERCE
I mean that both parties were
consenting. Now, Father, will you
absolve me?

CHRIS
(*hesitant*)
For your penance, pray...five
Rosaries.

PIERCE
Five? Alright. Fine. And, I should
never need to ask this, but what I
said will remain here? You will
respect the seal of the
confessional?

Chris is angered by that question. He glares at Pierce and
doesn't answer.

PIERCE (CONT'D)
Of course you do.

CHRIS
Please recite the Act of
Contrition.

PIERCE
Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for
having offended thee, and I detest
all of my sins because of thy just
punishment...

Chris is distracted and uncomfortable now. He has a sickening suspicion, but he stays silent and looks at Pierce.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

It's a Sunday morning. People stream into the church, as the BELLS ring.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

An altar boy, BEN (15), lights the fourth CANDLE in the ADVENT WREATH.

Then he walks back down the aisle toward the sacristy at the back of the church.

Herbert, meanwhile, walks up to the pulpit and begins making an announcement.

HERBERT
Today's hymns can be found on page
42 of the hymnal. There will be a
second collection today, so please
be generous with your donations.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY - DAY

As usual, Chris prepares the chalice for Mass. He's dressed in his full vestments, purple in color.

Ben walks in behind him, and starts getting the INCENSE ready.

CHRIS
Ben...you've been an altar server
for a while. Did you ever serve at
Saint Mary's, with Father Pierce?

BEN
No. My family's always gone here.
Why?

CHRIS
Just wondering.

Suddenly a woman appears at the door of the sacristy. This is RUBY (55).

RUBY
Excuse me Father, would you lead us
all in a song, during your homily?

She walks into the sacristy, followed by a group of other people, all downcast and nervous.

RUBY (CONT'D)
We were hoping you could lead us in
singing "On Eagle's Wings." It's
such a hopeful song, for this dark
time.

She hands Chris her MUSIC HYMNAL book.

Another older man, TOBIAS, pushes his way into the room.

TOBIAS
Father, will you say a prayer with
me right now?

RUBY
What a good idea. Let's all come
together and pray.

More people come into the room. They all take hands together, and Chris' hands are forcefully taken. He feels overwhelmed.

CHRIS
Oh...alright.

More people push their way in.

PARISHIONER 1
Can you please say a blessing over
me?

PARISHIONER 2
Who's a patron saint we can pray to
right now?

PARISHIONER 3
My father never received a proper
funeral. Can you bless his ashes? I
have them right here...

Chris can't respond fast enough to everybody.

Suddenly he hears Herbert's voice from the loudspeaker.

CHRIS

Excuse me...

He pushes past everybody, to step out of the sacristy.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Entering the main church, Chris looks up to see Herbert still giving his announcements. Now, Herbert seems more excited.

HERBERT

If I may say a few words...I don't know what you're all afraid of. We should be excited that we are alive right now. Of all the generations that have ever been alive in the history of the world, we get to be here when the end comes. Who would have thought it! We are the very last generation of people, ever! We should consider ourselves lucky. We should consider ourselves blessed! Do you know how important we all are? We're the last humans! Us! Who could have guessed?

Rob and Danielle are sitting near the front of the church. Danielle turns angrily to Rob.

DANIELLE

Make your dad stop. He shouldn't be talking like that.

Rob just shrugs.

Chris yells from the back.

CHRIS

Herbert! Mr. Oakwood!

Herbert doesn't hear him.

Chris turns to the group of nervous people around him.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Would you all do me a huge favor? Go up there and tell Herbert I said you could lead the congregation in prayer, right now. Lead them in the song. It'll be good for everyone. Be sure Herbert stops talking.

He herds the group of people away from the sacristy and they all head toward the pulpit.

Chris breathes heavily and ducks back into the sacristy.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY - DAY

Inside the sacristy, Chris shuts the door. He leans back against it for a moment, continuing to breathe quickly. He puts a hand on his chest.

BEN

Are you alright?

Chris angrily throws the hymnal book across the room.

CHRIS

I don't know what they want me to say! How am I supposed to make anyone feel better right now? Do they want me to tell them God is just fucking with us and he's going to pull a massive switcheroo and say "gotcha," like a Norse prankster god? Or would they rather hear that Jesus is going to show up and save the day at the last minute, like a goddamn superhero? Am I supposed to be some kind of lying chump?

He calms down. Ben has picked up the hymnal, and he's staring fearfully at Chris.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. That was bad. If nothing else, I should be calm, right?

Ben doesn't answer at first.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Nobody should see me like that.

BEN

Actually, Father...I don't like it when grown ups act like they're not angry and scared. That just makes me madder and more scared. Maybe it's okay to not pretend everything is fine.

CHRIS

Maybe. Thanks. That's the smartest thing I've heard all day.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Mass is now in progress. Chris stands at the pulpit.

CHRIS
The gospel of the Lord.

CONGREGATION
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone in the congregation sits down. Chris stands at the pulpit for a moment, looking out at the people.

They look back at him expectantly, their eyes full of need.

Chris looks down at a few sheets of PAPER in front of him, and frowns.

CHRIS
This is a...I... I'm sorry. I have
no homily to give today.

He walks away from the pulpit. There's a collective sigh of disappointment from the congregation.

Sister Teresa, who sits among them, frowns with concern.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

More time has passed. Mass is over.

Chris stands at the door, watching the people leave. Nobody greets him or shakes his hand. It's a silent affair as everyone walks out gloomily.

Danielle and Rob exit the church.

CHRIS
Robert. Danielle. How's Tina?

ROB
Tina's not doing very well. She's
relapsing and...

DANIELLE
Father Pierce will be giving her
the sacraments from now on.

CHRIS
Father Pierce?

DANIELLE

I asked him if he would be available, and he was very accommodating.

ROB

We appreciate your kindness, Father.

Danielle practically drags Rob away.

Chris stands still, frozen in an internal rage that he dares not let out. The rest of the people exit the church, but he barely sees them.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Chris pushes his cart around the store.

Around him, people are looting left and right. The shelves are nearly empty. The store is chaos.

Right through the middle of that chaos, Chris is acting normal. He's filling up his cart with essentials only.

He passes the bottle of WINE on the shelf. He stares at it for a long moment. Looking at the price tag.

He gives in. He grabs the wine and puts it in his cart.

He makes another round around the store, grabbing six-packs of beer, ice cream, pastries, cookies, candy, etc.

While other people run out the front doors, he stops at the cash-out aisle.

One scared, lone CASHIER is still working the register.

Chris loads his items onto the counter.

Without words, the cashier scans all the items.

The chaos continues around them.

CHRIS

Thank you for still working.

CASHIER

I wanted to go home, but I don't know what else I would do.

There's fear in the cashier's voice. Chris nods.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
That's 305.97.

Chris puts his credit card into the machine.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
The card...the card's been
declined.

Chris opens his wallet and pulls out some cash. He lays it
all down.

CHRIS
Put half on the card. This should
cover the rest. And throw in a pack
of cigarettes.

The cashier grabs cigarettes off the shelf behind him.

CASHIER
Do you want your receipt?

Chris looks around at the chaotic scene in the store.

CHRIS
No.

His response inspires a wry chuckle from the Cashier. Chris
smiles bitterly and pushes the cart out the door.

INT. CHRIS' RECTORY HOUSE - NIGHT

Loud CHRISTMAS MUSIC is playing.

The wine bottle is half empty.

Chris sits on his couch, a beer in one hand and a pastry in
the other. He drops both, to pick up his pack of cigarettes.
He pulls one out and lights it.

Immediately he sniffs the air.

CHRIS
Oh, gross. Not inside.

He stands up, staggers a little, and goes to the front door.

EXT. CHRIS' RECTORY HOUSE - NIGHT

Chris closes the door behind him, and continues smoking his
cigarette.

First he looks up at the sky. Seeing the bright streak of
light, he reaches his hand up and gives it the finger.

Then, while chuckling, he looks across the parking lot, and sees a LIGHT on through the church window.

He glances at his watch.

Shrugging, he walks across the parking lot.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Chris pulls open the doors of the church and goes inside.

There, he sees Sister Teresa near the altar, hanging decorations, setting up flowers, etc.

CHRIS

Do you not ever go home?

Teresa is surprised to see him.

TERESA

The church isn't going to decorate itself. Though, I wouldn't complain about a Christmas miracle where a kind priest sneaks in and does all the decorating at night when all the children and nuns are sleeping.

CHRIS

I'm sorry. Maybe I should have been helping more with that.

Teresa squints at him, realizing something is wrong.

TERESA

No. You should probably go to bed. You've got Mass in the morning.

CHRIS

I mean it. You've been doing so much work. I've been...going around and talking to people.

TERESA

To be honest, I like what I'm doing better.

She continues decorating, while Chris walks toward the pulpit.

CHRIS

Do you think people will even be here on Christmas to see the decorations?

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Who really wants to spend their last morning at boring old church?

TERESA

You say that like you hope they won't come.

CHRIS

I don't hope that... Yes I do, actually.

TERESA

Why?

CHRIS

Because they won't want to listen to me, and I don't want to talk to them. I can't help anybody.

TERESA

If by that you mean you can't stop the asteroid that's falling toward the atmosphere, you're right. You can't. But you can be strong in the face of it.

CHRIS

I'm plenty strong, Sister. I'm ready to get smashed. And by smashed, I mean pulverized by an asteroid, not...any of the other meanings of that word.

TERESA

Then you can help other people to be strong too. That's what you and I are meant to do.

CHRIS

I can't, though. I'm no good at it.

TERESA

But you are. I don't get why you're being so hard on yourself.

CHRIS

Because as hard as I try, I can't figure out how to talk to people who believe in God.

Chris sits down on the step of the sanctuary. He stumbles a little, and Teresa reaches out a hand to help balance him.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

And before you say anything, yes
I'm a little drinky. But that
doesn't matter right now.

Teresa sits down beside him.

TERESA

It's challenging for everyone to
maintain their faith at times like
this.

CHRIS

Sure. But try not having any faith.

TERESA

Everyone has lapses. Everyone.

CHRIS

Uh-huh. My life is a lapse.

TERESA

And sometimes we just need to keep
going through the motions while our
hearts figure out what's
important...

CHRIS

I've been going through the motions
since I was in grade school.

TERESA

Grade school? You've been a priest
for...

CHRIS

Eight years. I became a priest
because I wanted to help people.
And because I thought it would help
me to...believe better. See, when I
was a kid, I was told things about
the world. I was told that there
was a God, and he sent his son to
die for us, and his Apostle Peter
was the first Pope, and heaven and
hell and purgatory and limbo are
real places. I was told all these
things. At a certain point, I
learned enough about the world to
know that those things couldn't be
real...not really real. And I
realized I never believed those
things in the first place.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Because thinking something is real
is different from believing it.

TERESA

I know what you mean, in a way.
I'm...jealous...of those people
who, without even trying, can just
open their eyes in the morning and
see a world where they know God is
in charge. I always told myself it
was a gift given to those people,
while I had a heavier cross to
carry. Belief isn't easy, Father
Chris. It's like love. It takes
work. Especially when God is so
very silent and invisible.
Especially when he throws rocks at
us.

Chris chuckles through his welled-up tears.

CHRIS

You know, that rock that's causing
so much pain for so many
people...it's a relief for me.
Because I don't know if I could
have taken another year of
pretending to be someone I'm not.

Teresa wraps a comforting arm around Chris.

TERESA

Maybe you're not supposed to
pretend. Maybe God wants to reach
people through you in a different
way, you just haven't figured out
yet.

CHRIS

Haha. Well, I've got two days to
figure it out.

TERESA

Have faith in God, Chris. I
mean...Father. Sorry. Old habits.

Chris doesn't notice her slip. He's too crestfallen.

CHRIS

See, you can't even do it?

TERESA

Do what?

CHRIS
You can't talk to me without
bringing God into it. And I'm
sorry...but that doesn't do
anything for me.

He stands up and sadly walks toward the doors of the church,
still stumbling.

TERESA
You'll be here for Mass in the
morning? Father?

He walks outside and shuts the doors.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Outside the church, Chris stares upward once again at the
asteroid light. It's now bright enough to illuminate the
night.

He breaks into a hopeless, drunken laughter.

Something catches his eye; movement near the Nativity scene.

He takes a few steps closer to look.

In the darkness, Bart is removing one of the Shepherd
statues.

CHRIS
Art? Is that you?

Bart makes a run for it, carrying the shepherd with him.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Hey! That's shepherd number three!

Clumsily, Chris runs after the figure. He chases him through
the parking lot and off down the street.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

In a public park, decorated with many Christmas lights,
Chris finally overtakes Bart.

He grabs the statue out of Bart's hands. The two men
struggle over it for a moment.

BART
No, no, no, no, no!

CHRIS
You already took Mary and Joseph.
Leave the poor shepherds alone!

Finally he wrests the statue away and both men fall backwards on the ground.

Chris jumps back to his feet defensively. He sees that Bart is still on the ground, sobbing.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Oh. Dammit. Come on Art. Let's get
you someplace warm.

He walks toward Bart and puts out his hand to help him up.

BART
Bart. I'm Bart. Art's my brother.

CHRIS
Brother? Oh. I'm sorry, I didn't
realize...did you take the Mary
statue?

Bart stands up. He puts out his hands.

BART
Can you give me that, please?

CHRIS
Can you tell me why?

BART
You won't understand. Just give it
back.

CHRIS
These are the property of the
church...

BART
(angry)
No! They don't like it when you say
that about them. People can't be
property!

Chris softens his stance. He slowly steps toward Bart and sets the statue on the ground.

CHRIS
I see. I'm sorry. I didn't hear him
at first.

BART
I asked him if he wanted to come
with me, and he said yes.

CHRIS
And where is he going with you?

Bart abruptly approaches and picks up the statue.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Would it be alright if I joined?

BART
He says yes. I think it'll be
alright with the others too. But
you can't tell anybody else in the
whole world.

CHRIS
I think I can agree to that.

BART
Follow me.

Bart carries the statue. Chris follows him out of the park.

EXT. BRIDGE UNDERPASS - NIGHT

Under a bridge, hidden away from the streets, Bart leads
Chris into an area where several dozens of STATUES, of
various sizes and styles, are all gathered around.

Among them are the Mary and Joseph statues.

BART
These are all my friends. Everyone,
this is Shepherd Number Three,
and...I don't know your name so
please introduce yourself.

CHRIS
Um...hi, I'm Father Chris.

BART
Make yourself at home. Everyone is
welcome to the community kitchen.

He gestures toward the shopping cart from before, still full
of stolen food.

Bart proceeds to pull out food items from the cart and serve
them to the various statues.

CHRIS
You're too kind. Does your brother
live here with you?

BART
What brother?

CHRIS
Your brother Art.

BART
Oh, Art. He does sometimes. Between
you and me, I like it better when
he's not here.

CHRIS
Why's that?

BART
My brother's a little bit crazy.

CHRIS
Ah. I don't know if it's necessary
to say that...

BART
He thinks my friends aren't people.
And he talks about things that
aren't real. He's crazy.

CHRIS
What kinds of things that aren't
real?

BART
Lots of things.

CHRIS
When I saw him, he was talking
about the asteroid. He told me it
was God's punishment.

BART
See what I mean? Silly, fake
things.

CHRIS
God, or the asteroid?

BART
Both.

CHRIS

You don't think the asteroid is real? It's that light in the sky, right there.

BART

Shut up! My friends and I have an agreement, that we won't talk about things that aren't real. If you can't agree to that, then you have to leave.

CHRIS

Okay. I can agree. I won't talk about it.

BART

I'm just so tired of everybody talking about things that don't matter, all the time. There are so many real, important things to talk about. Like, the smell of winter in the air, the shape of snowflakes, the different flavors of pop tarts.

CHRIS

What would you like to talk about?

BART

Hmm. I want to talk about my friends.

Without warning, Bart starts crying and falls to the ground. Chris rushes to sit beside him.

CHRIS

Um. Are you alright? Bart? It's okay. You can talk to me.

BART

I just remembered how lonely I was before I found my friends.

CHRIS

Before you found...these friends?

Bart nods through his tears.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

But what about all the other people? There are lots of places you could go to meet people who...other people who could be your friends.

BART
Are you talking about all the
people who aren't real?

CHRIS
I don't understand.

BART
Most people aren't real, Father
Chris. Do you know how you can tell
the difference?

CHRIS
I don't. How can you tell the
difference?

BART
They only think and talk about
faraway things that don't matter at
all. Things like asteroids, and
news reporters, and God. When they
talk about those things, they don't
actually notice you. You can always
tell a real person because you
don't feel lonely around them.

Suddenly re-energized, Bart stands up and continues tending
to the statues.

BART (CONT'D)
My brother, and all those not-real
people, try to make us afraid of
things that aren't real. But for
me, all I care about is that I'm
not lonely. Maybe an asteroid can
hit us, but I won't care about it
because I'll be too busy not being
lonely.

Chris contemplates that.

BART (CONT'D)
Shepherd Number Three says he wants
a cigarette, but I don't have any.
I'm sorry, Shepherd Number Three.

CHRIS
I have one I can spare.

Chris pulls out his pack of cigarettes, and hands one to
Bart. Bart puts it in the mouth of the shepherd statue.

BART

Oh boy. Shepherd Number Three says thank you very much. He's happy to have such good friends as us.

CHRIS

You're welcome, Shepherd Number Three.

EXT. CHRIS' RECTORY HOUSE - MORNING

Teresa knocks on Chris' front door.

TERESA

Father? Father Chris?

She knocks again. No answer.

She pokes her head inside the window. No sign of him.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

A few people walk into the church.

Sister Teresa walks from the rectory to the church. She's a little bit frantic.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The few churchgoers pray fervently in the pews. Danielle is among them.

Danielle checks her watch, impatiently.

Slowly, Teresa walks up to the pulpit.

TERESA

Uh, good morning. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, there will be no Mass today. For those who still wish to receive the sacrament this morning, Father Pierce's Mass at St Mary's will be at nine o'clock. As far as I know, we will still be holding confessions tonight, in preparation for...tomorrow. God bless you all. Have a good day.

There are a few indignant gasps in the congregation. A few people start to weep. Danielle looks disgusted.

EXT. OAKWOODS' HOUSE - DAY

Chris knocks on the door.

It is opened by Rob.

ROB
Father?

He's surprised at Chris' appearance. The priest looks disheveled and his cassock still has grass stains on it.

CHRIS
Hello, Rob. I'm sorry for being a
little bit of a mess.

Rob's eyes are red with fearful tears.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I was hoping to speak with Tina
again. May I come in?

ROB
We...we wanted Father Pierce
instead.

CHRIS
Is Danielle here?

ROB
No, she's...

CHRIS
That's what I hoped. Tina
explicitly asked me to come back
again. Today's really the last
chance for that, and I don't want
to let her down.

Rob nods sadly, reluctantly.

ROB
I...don't want to let her down
either.

He lets Chris in.

INT. OAKWOODS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Inside, Rob leads Chris across the living room to the door of Tina's room.

ROB

She's okay right now. If she takes another downturn, that could be it for her. But for now she's stable.

CHRIS

I'm glad. Take care of yourself, Robert.

ROB

Yeah.

Chris walks into Tina's room.

INT. A MUCH BIGGER CHURCH - DAY

This is St. Mary's, a much larger, fancier church than the one we've seen.

Father Pierce is saying Mass.

Danielle is in the congregation, which is still fairly sparse as its a weekday Mass.

PIERCE

At the Savior's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say:

CONGREGATION

Our father, who are in heaven, hallowed be thy name...

The congregation goes on with the prayer. But Father Pierce is visibly shaken. He looks distracted, scattered. He wipes sweat away from his face.

Danielle looks up and notices how shaken he is.

As the prayer goes on, Pierce grows more and more distracted.

CONGREGATION (CONT'D)

...But deliver us from evil.

Silence reigns for a moment. Pierce stands in stunned, petrified terror.

The silence goes on for a long time. Someone in the congregation coughs.

Danielle, of course, is the one to try and get his attention.

DANIELLE
Father Pierce?

Pierce looks back up, and around at the congregation.

PIERCE
Yes. Yes. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

He has a panic attack, and rushes off the sanctuary.

His panic is contagious. Most everyone in the congregation starts frantically sobbing.

Danielle sits back, seemingly affronted by Pierce's behavior.

DANIELLE
Unbelievable.

INT. TINA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Tina is in her bed, awake, but staring idly at the ceiling.

Chris knocks on the door.

TINA
It's you!

CHRIS
It is me. I wanted to stop by again. I owe you something.

TINA
Yeah you do. You're supposed to tell me something that'll make me feel better.

CHRIS
Without mentioning heaven, right?

TINA
No heaven. That's all anyone ever says. "You're going to be in God's arms in heaven, Tina. You're going to be a beautiful little saint, Tina. Please pray for the rest of us, Tina." It sounds nice, but it doesn't make this any better.

Chris sits in the seat beside Tina.

CHRIS
Your mom is mad at me, you know.

TINA
Big surprise. She's mad at everything.

CHRIS
Did you tell her my secret?

TINA
Of course not. I'm good at secrets.

CHRIS
Well that's good. But it just means she's mad at me for other reasons. She didn't want me to come see you.

TINA
Why not? What reasons?

CHRIS
Your mom and dad...they still haven't told you much about what's going on outside, have they?

TINA
What's going on outside?

CHRIS
You haven't watched the news?

TINA
Are you kidding? They don't let me watch the news. Just boring cartoons for me, that I've seen a thousand times.

CHRIS
Well...if you're good at keeping secrets, can I tell you another one?

TINA
Sure.

CHRIS
It's not really a secret. Everyone else knows about it. But it has to stay a secret that I told you, since it would only make your mom more mad.

TINA
Okay. I'm sold.

Chris thinks for a moment, and stammers through the next thing he says, almost making it up as he goes along.

CHRIS

The fact is...the odds of being born, of being alive, on our planet, in this giant universe, are so miniscule. Just to experience life, at all, is such an extremely precious thing. We have life because of an incredibly unlikely sequence of events, over which we have no control. So in a way, it's all borrowed time. It was never ours to begin with.

Tina looks at him with a raised eyebrow. This isn't really helping.

TINA

Okay...?

CHRIS

Anyway. That's not what I came over to tell you. I know you feel like you're alone. Like you're getting left behind while everyone else gets to go on living. But you don't have to feel that way. We're all going to be dying together. Tomorrow.

Shocked silence. Tina's face freezes.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

For decades, astronomers have been watching an asteroid that was heading toward earth. Now it's on a direct collision course, and on Christmas... They're saying it's going to be an extinction level event.

Tina still doesn't say anything. She stares at him blankly.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Like the one that killed the dinosaurs.

Tears appear in Tina's eyes. She is not feeling comforted.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Oh no.

TINA
My mom, and my dad, and all my
friends...?

CHRIS
Tina, I wanted to tell you because
I thought it would help.

TINA
You mean I'm not going to die of
cancer at all? Why wouldn't they
tell me that? Why wouldn't they
tell me that everybody else was
going to die too?

Tina is crying now. Chris is overwhelmed and confused.

TINA (CONT'D)
Mommy...no!

Chris stands up, and wanders between the bed and the door,
unsure what he's supposed to do.

CHRIS
Tina...Tina...oh goddamn it.

The door opens. Rob walks in. Danielle is just behind him.

ROB
Tina? What's wrong?

DANIELLE
Father Chris? What are you doing
here?

CHRIS
She wanted to...I thought I...

Rob goes to Tina's bedside. Danielle gives Chris a stern
look, then joins her husband. Chris walks slowly out of the
room, his eyes wide with guilt and confusion.

TINA
Daddy! Mommy! Why didn't you tell
me there was an asteroid? I don't
want everybody to die tomorrow!

INT. OAKWOODS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chris walks sheepishly through the living room, then stands
and waits by the door. He can hear the muffled cries of
Tina, and the muffled sounds of her parents' voices.

A moment goes by, and Danielle walks out of the bedroom door.

Without a word, she approaches Chris sternly.

CHRIS

I'm so sorry, Mrs. Oakwood.

Danielle gets closer to him, and SLAPS him across the face.

Anger passes over his face, but then he nods in acceptance.

He opens the front door and disappears outside.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Over the next few sequences, a slow Christmas song like "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem" plays like a merry little dirge.

Hands in his pockets, Chris walks moodily through the park.

He passes by an OLD COUPLE, sitting on the bench together. Quietly, peacefully, they hold each others' hands.

He turns to watch Ben, the young kid, playing with his DOG. The dog retrieves a ball and returns it to Ben, who hugs the dog with tears in his eyes.

INT. DINER - DAY

Chris sits alone in the diner.

The TV is still playing the news. It shows 3D renderings of the asteroids approach to earth. More importantly, it shows a COUNTDOWN clock: 20 HOURS, 22 MINUTES TO IMPACT.

Behind the counter, Rose and Anne clear away dishes and coffee cups.

While putting the cups away, Anne breaks down into tears. Rose runs to comfort her, putting a hand on her back.

Chris turns in his seat. He looks at Herbert, who is sitting in a booth. Herbert wears a wide smile. Seeing Chris, Herbert holds up his coffee mug in greeting. Chris smiles bitterly, and holds up his coffee cup in return.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Walking slowly back to the church, Chris glances at the Nativity scene. He's surprised to see Bart there, along with Teresa.

Bart's shopping cart is with them, but it holds several of the Nativity statues. Teresa is warmly chatting with Bart. Both are smiling, as they put the Joseph and Mary statues back in their places.

Then Teresa hands Bart a paper cup of coffee and a wrapped burrito. They sit cross-legged on the ground beside the Joseph and Mary statues, as if the four of them are having a picnic.

Chris walks past them, toward the doors of the church.

When Teresa sees Chris, her face becomes concerned.

Sheepishly Chris waves to her, then goes inside the church.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

A few hours have passed.

The line for the confessional is once again quite long. Rob is in line, among many others.

Sitting in one of the pews, praying fervently, is Father Pierce. He still seems shaken and frightened.

Pierce pulls himself together, stands up, and promptly cuts in line, standing just behind Rob. The people behind him respectfully shrug.

Someone comes out of the confessional, then Rob goes in.

INT. CONFESSIONAL - DAY

Rob sits nervously in the seat, with Chris opposite him.

Chris is exhausted and exasperated. He has a dead, empty stare and not much patience.

ROB

Bless me father, for I have sinned.
My last confession was two days
ago.

CHRIS

Yes, go on.

ROB

It's...it's these feelings I have
about my marriage. Or rather, the
feelings outside of my marriage.
The impure thoughts, the sexual
thoughts...I can't seem to stop
them.

CHRIS

As I've said before, these thoughts in themselves are nothing to be ashamed of, as long as they're not entertained. Is there anything else?

ROB

These thoughts I have...they're about other men.

CHRIS

Okay.

ROB

I've had them as long as I can remember. There's something wrong with me. I can't control these thoughts, these urges...about men.

Chris has lost what little patience he had, and he rattles off his reply quickly and without much sympathy.

CHRIS

About men? Honestly, that last detail isn't even important. A thought is a thought. God doesn't care...I don't care if it's about a woman or a man or a snowman. If you stay faithful, you'll be fine. The thing you need to think about is your bond of marriage, which was a solemn vow between you and your wife - and God. You need to think about how much that vow means to you. If you are not invested in your marriage, if you think you never really were, then by all means you should seek out an annulment, if you can.

ROB

Right. I won't really have time for an annulment, will I? Not with the...

CHRIS

Listen. No. You listen to my advice and you take it to heart like there's going to be a day after tomorrow, and a next year and a next decade. Did you see the line of people out there?

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'm not about to try and talk to them all like they're gonna die tomorrow, because that's not a truth they can handle, and it's not a truth you can handle. So get a hold of yourself, think about your marriage, stop feeling guilty about everything, and get yourself a damn annulment!

Rob, wide-eyed and shaking, crosses himself and leaves the confessional.

Chris shakes his head sadly, with a tad of regret as he calms himself down.

Then Father Pierce sits across from him.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

In the name of the father, and of the son and of the holy spirit.

PIERCE

Bless me father, for I have sinned. I...I know I've confessed this same sin very recently, but it is temptation God keeps sending me, again and again. As a man, with weakness, I have fallen into it again.

CHRIS

What is the sin?

PIERCE

I'm guilty of...sensuous contact. Sexual, by nature.

Chris' acute suspicions come back. He becomes instantly alert.

CHRIS

Are you aware of the gravity of this, especially for a member of the clergy? Especially if it's something you've repeated?

PIERCE

I'm aware of its gravity. You don't need to preach to me. Now, please absolve me.

CHRIS
How many times have you committed
this sin?

PIERCE
I can't really count it.

CHRIS
Was this sin committed with a
member of your congregation?

Pierce grits his teeth. He doesn't want to answer.

PIERCE
Yes.

CHRIS
Was it someone over whom you exert
some measure of influence?

PIERCE
How am I supposed to answer that? I
exert influence over everyone in my
congregation.

CHRIS
Was this person of a legal age to
provide consent?

PIERCE
In the eyes of God, there is no age
of consent...

CHRIS
Tell me, Father!

PIERCE
It was one of my altar boys!
Several...of my altar boys. You'll
respect the seal of the
confessional, won't you? This
information stays here? I am
contrite, and I will not do it
again.

Chris' eyes glaze over with deep hatred and anger.

CHRIS
No, you won't. Because you're going
to be dead tomorrow.

Chris stands up and pushes open the door of the
confessional.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Chris bursts out of the confessional, startling the many people in line.

He crashes through the other door, and grabs Pierce by his collar.

PIERCE

What in God's name are you doing?

Past the many gasping and protesting people, Chris drags Pierce through the church. Pierce struggles, but he's much weaker than Chris.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The doors open, and Chris emerges, dragging the older priest.

Bart, meanwhile, is still sitting by the Nativity figures. He watches with curiosity as the scene unfolds.

Mercilessly, Chris drags Pierce up to eye-level, then hits him with a punch to the face.

Once Pierce is down, Chris picks him up and hits him again.

The people start to spill out of the church. They stand around watching, nobody wanting to make a move to interrupt.

Chris finishes soundly beating Pierce. The older priest is still conscious, but his face is a bloody mess.

Teresa runs out of an adjacent building.

TERESA

What's going on? Father! Step away.
Step away!

The nun's commanding tone makes Chris finally take a step back, away from his fallen peer.

CHRIS

I hope there's such a place as
hell, Father. You'll be there
tomorrow.

Without another word, he turns away and storms back toward his rectory.

Teresa looks after him with disbelief. Then she turns her attention to Pierce and helps him to his feet.

Suddenly Chris turns around, and doubles back toward the church.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
There's still an hour left of confessions.

He disappears into the church. Everyone looks at one another with some confusion.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Chris is in handcuffs.

Officer Todd walks him down the hallway toward the cell. Sister Teresa walks behind them. While Chris seems very calm and resigned, Teresa is indignant and angry.

TERESA
Where did that even come from? I know things have been stressful, and God knows I can forgive the drinking and the mood swings but you could have killed Father Pierce! What's going on with you, Chris?

They reach the cell. Todd opens it and Chris walks in freely. Todd removes his handcuffs and prepares to shut the door.

TERESA (CONT'D)
Just tell me you'll be at Mass in the morning.

TODD
Sorry, Sister. He'll be in here in the morning, unless he's bailed out. I need to wait to see if Father Pierce presses charges.

TERESA
(*frustrated, shouting*)
There are going to be hundreds of people at that church in the morning, needing the sacraments, not to mention comfort and peace of mind. God knows I'd go up there and say Mass if I could. It'll be Christmas Day. You can't make an exception? For our last Christmas?

TODD

I wish I could, really. But there are enough eyewitness accounts...I can't let him walk in good conscience.

CHRIS

It's alright, Teresa. Nobody wants me talking up there tomorrow. I don't even know what I'd say.

Teresa ignores him and continues talking to Todd.

TERESA

Can I talk to him for a while?

TODD

Sure, that's okay. Give me a shout when you're done.

He opens the cell and lets Teresa in. Then Todd walks away down the hallway.

She and Chris both take seats facing one another.

Teresa takes a few long, deep breaths to try and calm down.

TERESA

Father Pierce refused to go to the hospital. He went straight home. He was terrified. What happened, between you two?

Chris shrugs.

CHRIS

You saw it.

TERESA

But, why?

CHRIS

He's had it coming.

TERESA

I'll be the first to admit he's not the most pleasant person. But everyone trusts Father Pierce. He's a staple of the community, and of the diocese...

At that, Chris holds his head in his hands, in grief and disgust.

TERESA (CONT'D)

Did he say something in confession?

Chris doesn't answer.

TERESA (CONT'D)

Oh my gosh, he said something to you in confession.

CHRIS

I didn't say that.

TERESA

You've never been able to keep things from me, Chris. Oh my gosh. Father Pierce...why didn't you...why didn't you just tell the police?

CHRIS

He told me in confession, Teresa. Confession!

TERESA

You could still tell Officer Todd, and get out of this.

CHRIS

No!

TERESA

What does the seal of the confessional mean to you anyway? You don't believe in God, so what does any of that matter?

CHRIS

This has nothing to do with God! This is about a promise I made eight years ago when I became a priest. If I can't keep the other promises - if I can't help people - then I need to at least keep the promises I can.

Teresa sighs, then comes over and sits beside Chris.

TERESA

Why do you keep saying you can't help people?

CHRIS

Ha. Where should I start? One thing I'm good at is finding the wrong things to say to people.

TERESA

But maybe that's what God wants from you.

Chris looks at her with exasperation.

TERESA (CONT'D)

Sorry...I won't mention God, I promise. Maybe...your wrong-headedness is what people really need. I know it helps me. You help me every day.

The look on Chris' face turns to surprise, but he doesn't say anything.

TERESA (CONT'D)

Do you know how hard it is to be a non-cloistered religious woman at my age? I've watched all my friends - the friends we used to go to school with - going out and living lives and doing...all the things I'll never get to do. People think of nuns as old, serious women who hit students with rulers and sing psalms all day. But I still...want things. Before you came to Saint Gregory's, I had almost given up. I was sure I'd made a mistake. I was mad at God. I thought he'd tricked me somehow into living this claustrophobic, trapped life. I wasn't about to give up my vows, either. So there was really only one way out that was a viable option.

CHRIS

Sister Teresa...

TERESA

But when you came, when you were assigned to this parish against all odds, you reminded me that it was okay to be both religious, and also a person. You joked, you laughed, you were rude. You didn't say any of the right things.

(MORE)

TERESA (CONT'D)

And that was okay. That saved me.
You showed me how to be joyful in
what I do.

CHRIS

Teresa I had no idea...

They look at one another for a long time.

They both look down, to see that their hands are touching.

Their eyes go back up to one another.

Their faces move closer together.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

The world is ending tomorrow...

At that, they grab one another's faces and kiss. It's not a
quick peck, but a passionate, loving kiss.

Then they both pull back. They're both confused, alarmed,
and thoughtful. Chris sits and looks at the floor, while
Teresa looks up at the ceiling.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I don't think we should...

TERESA

No. Not at all.

CHRIS

It's just that I'm...

TERESA

And I can't...

Nether can finish a complete sentence.

CHRIS

Anyway, the world is ending
tomorrow.

Then Teresa looks back at him, sincerity in her eyes.

TERESA

You need to be at Mass in the
morning. A lot of people are going
to need you.

CHRIS

I don't know what I can say.

Teresa stands up.

TERESA
Officer Todd!

Todd appears at the far end of the hallway, walking toward the cell. Teresa lowers her voice and turns back to Chris.

TERESA (CONT'D)
You'll be there. Somehow. Maybe you don't have faith in God. So you'll just have to deal with me having a teensy bit of faith in you.

Todd opens the gate. Teresa leaves.

Chris sits thoughtfully on his bench.

TODD
Again, real sorry to keep you in here on Christmas Eve, but...you know.

Chris only answers with a sour smile.

TODD (CONT'D)
And, uh, Father...I haven't gone to church in twenty years, but could I bother you to hear my confession? Ya know...just in case?

Chris sighs.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT/DAY

The light in the sky is now moving visibly, and growing larger.

TIMELAPSE brings us to morning.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

The Nativity scene stands undisturbed.

Sister Teresa approaches it, carrying the little statue of BABY JESUS.

She sets it in the manger, between Joseph and Mary.

Then she stands up and turns around, to see people already trickling in from the parking lot to the church.

TERESA
Good morning. Merry Christmas.

Danielle is here, and she's pushing Tina in a WHEELCHAIR.
Behind them walks Herbert.

TERESA (CONT'D)
Merry Christmas, Mrs. Oakwood.

DANIELLE
What's merry about it? Father
Pierce didn't show up for his
midnight Mass, so here we are,
forced to sit through another Mass
with Father Chris.

HERBERT
It's gonna be a full house here
today...at least we'll all be
together for the big one.

TERESA
Tina? You're out and about?

DANIELLE
She insisted on coming out after
Father Chris...

TINA
Mom, I can talk for myself!...
(then, to Teresa)
When I found out everyone was going
to die today, I decided I didn't
want to spend the day in bed. I was
upset at first, but now it's not so
bad when I think about it.

TERESA
Well, you look beautiful.

TINA
Thank you.

Danielle pushes Tina on toward the church.

Herbert follows, with a smile on his face.

HERBERT
Just two hours to go! Exciting
stuff!

Teresa sighs, and nervously looks around the parking lot,
hoping to see Chris.

INT. JAIL - DAY

Chris is asleep on the bench.

He hears a creaking as the cell door is opened. This wakes him up. Todd walks into the cell.

TODD

You've been bailed out, Father.

CHRIS

Bailed out? I didn't want to be, you know. I'd really rather be in here for it.

TODD

Well, shit. Make up your mind. If you want to go, you can go. Or stay.

Chris stands up. He looks across the hallway. He sees Rob, smiling gently and waving.

Chris grimaces. He has a decision to make, and he doesn't like it.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Chris gets out of Rob's car, and together they walk toward the church.

ROB

I didn't know what else to do. Father Pierce wasn't answering his phone, and every other priest in the diocese is busy. God knows Danielle didn't want me to do it, but what choice did I have? Plus, Father, I wanted to thank you.

They stop at the door of the church.

CHRIS

For what?

ROB

Nevermind. I know you're not supposed to talk about confession stuff.

Rob opens the door.

Chris looks off to the side. There sits MART (identical to Art and Bart), sitting on a bench near the Nativity scene, seemingly deep in prayer.

CHRIS

I'll be inside in just a minute.

Robert nods and goes inside. Chris approaches Mart.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Bart? Bart?

He smiles to himself, then goes over to the Nativity set. He picks up the Baby Jesus, and walks over to Mart with it.

He holds out the statue as a gift, then taps Mart on the shoulder.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

There's a new friend who wants to meet you.

Mart snorts and lifts his head. He's actually been asleep.

MART

What?

CHRIS

Merry Christmas, Bart.

MART

Bart? I'm Mart.

CHRIS

What?

MART

I'm just trying to sleep. Leave me alone. What the hell would I want that for?

Mart stands up, grumbling, and walks away.

Chris shrugs, confused and disheartened. He walks over and puts the baby statue back in the Nativity.

Then he opens the door of the church and goes inside.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

As soon as he enters, Chris stops short.

The place is absolutely packed with people. Sitting room is scarce and people are standing in the aisles. Rob has to weave his way through thick crowds of people to rejoin his family.

Chris freezes up where he stands.

Someone in the back row turns their head and sees him. Then more people turn their heads.

Sister Teresa, sitting near the back, turns to look at him too. Rose is here too, and Tina also turns to look.

He looks at their faces; they're mostly all scared. Some have tears in their eyes. Some are hugging their children. And they're looking to him, needing something from him.

He nods quickly and darts off to the side of the building, to the sacristy.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY - DAY

Once inside the sacristy, Chris shuts the door.

He backs up against it, having another panic attack like he did before in this very spot. His breath comes fast and heavy, and he's shaking.

When he looks up, he realizes Ben, the altar boy, is in the room.

BEN

Father?

Chris steps away from the door, then opens it.

CHRIS

Ben, go sit with your family. You should be with them today.

BEN

But you don't need...?

CHRIS

Really, I've got this.

Ben reluctantly steps out of the door and into the main church.

Chris again shuts the door.

He takes a few more deep breaths.

Then he darts across the room, to the other door.

This door leads to the outside. He opens the door and disappears outside.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Chris strides as fast as his legs can carry him across the parking lot and up the street.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

People in the congregation begin to stir.

Danielle checks the time on her WATCH, and then sighs angrily.

A few people, in various stages of frustration, start to trickle out of the church.

Teresa looks around, concerned. She sees Ben in the congregation. She narrows her eyes, and stands up.

Pushing her way through the crowded church, she makes her way toward the sacristy.

She pushes open the door.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY - DAY

The sacristy, of course, is empty. Teresa sighs, and puts her hand to her face in genuine sadness.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Chris finds himself wandering through the park.

He plops himself down in the bench.

Everything is silent. No music, no people, no birds, no wind.

He lays his head back. This is peaceful.

The asteroid can be seen growing rapidly brighter, visible in the daylight.

He watches it for a long moment. Then smiling, he shuts his eyes.

He sits like that for a long moment. It seems he's going to stay that way.

Then his eyes shoot open. His sense of contentment vanishes.

He lifts his head up and stares straight ahead.

CHRIS

Well. Hell.

Making a new determination, he stands up, and takes a few steps back in the direction of the church...

Suddenly, a voice behind him:

CHUCK

Father?

Chris whips around.

Chuck is there, standing behind the bench. His hair is a mess, his eyes bloodshot. His whole body is shaking.

CHRIS

Chuck?

CHUCK

Didn't think I'd see you here. I was on my way to the church.

CHRIS

So was I. Will you join me?

CHUCK

No thanks. I was actually coming to find you. But this works just as good.

CHRIS

What?

CHUCK

She's not religious, Father. So when she told me she didn't want to spend today with me because she was going to your Church...well I knew. I told you to stay away from my girl.

Chuck produces a GUN from his jacket pocket.

Chris remains entirely calm.

CHRIS

I see. Chuck, first of all she's not your girl unless she wants to be, and she doesn't. Second of all, if she's going to church it's not for me. I'm an awful priest. Nobody comes to church for me.

CHUCK

I was gonna get you while you were doing your prayer service. Kill you right in front of her so she'd know in the end that she's mine. Forever.

CHRIS
That's a stupid idea. We're all
going to be dead in less than two
hours anyway.

CHUCK
Shut up! It doesn't matter that
we're all gonna be dead. I want her
to know. I want her to know!

The stand-off continues a few moments.

Chris takes a tiny step toward Chuck.

CHRIS
Chuck...

BANG.
The gun goes off. It catches both
men by surprise.

CHUCK
I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Chris puts a hand to his side. It comes away with BLOOD. He
stumbles back, landing on one knee.

Chuck panics outright.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry!

He throws the gun to the side, and runs away, vanishing into
the distance.

Chris remains on his knee for a little longer. His breaths
come shallow and fast. His eyes nearly glaze over as he
stares ahead in stunned silence.

From across the park, in the far distance, he almost thinks
he sees...three FIGURES. Art, Bart and Mart, maybe. They
seem to be standing and watching him, illuminated by
sunlight.

Chris shakes his head to wake himself up.

He SLAPS himself in the face, and takes several deep
breathes.

The three figures suddenly aren't visible anymore.

Chris stands up, grunting as he does so.

CHRIS
Alright. Alright. Merry Christmas.

Limping, he starts making his way toward the church.

EXT. SUBURBAN CITY STREET - DAY

Chris continues his trek back to the church. There's a thin trail of BLOOD on the ground behind him. He's grimacing with each step.

Chris approaches the strip of road with no shoulder.

A CAR appears behind him.

Chris is focused on keeping himself walking. He doesn't think to look over his shoulder.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Pierce is the one driving. His face is still bruised and bandaged. He looks stern.

He sees the figure of Chris walking ahead of him in the road.

Pierce squints, trying to figure out who it is...and then he recognizes Chris.

His eyes become hard and unreadable. His foot pushes down on the gas pedal, while he holds the steering wheel with both hands.

EXT. SUBURBAN CITY STREET - DAY

The car gets closer and closer. Chris still isn't paying any attention...

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Pierce narrows his eyes.

Suddenly, with no change of expression except for a heavy exhale, he turns the steering wheel and stomps the brakes.

EXT. SUBURBAN CITY STREET - DAY

Chris turns around just in time to see...

The car screeching to a halt just a few yards away from him.

The car door opens. Pierce jumps out of the vehicle.

PIERCE

What's happened to you?

Pierce is trying very hard not to care, but something good in him is coming to the surface.

CHRIS

Nothing. I'm just on my way to Mass.

Pierce walks closer, and sees all the blood.

PIERCE

No. You're not alright.

Chris coughs, and stumbles.

Pierce turns away and walks back toward his car. It almost looks like he's choosing to leave.

But then he opens his car door.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

Would you like a ride to the church?

Chris turns around to look at Pierce. His eyes are angry. Then back around he turns, and keeps trudging forward.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

It's where I was heading anyway.

That makes Chris turn around again.

CHRIS

Why?

Pierce pauses and hesitates before answering.

PIERCE

Because it's a holy day, and I didn't say Mass this morning, so I still need to attend.

Chris turns and keeps walking forward again.

Pierce now yells after him.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

For God's sake! Get in the damn car. You're not going to make it if you walk!

Chris stops one more time, and turns around.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Chris sits in the passenger seat of Pierce's car. He's pale with a vacant stare. Pierce seems very grim.

The RADIO is on, a frenzied voice announcing the countdown.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

New data is suggesting that the point of impact will be near the Atlantic coast, with an impact power of something near fifteen billion atomic bombs. We're now a little over an hour out, and while taking refuge in storm shelters may provide some peace of mind, it's highly unlikely to hold back the effects of the shockwaves and devastating storms that will follow the impact...

Pierce switches off the radio.

CHRIS

So. About an hour.

PIERCE

Maybe less for you.

He glances at Chris' wound. It's still bleeding a lot, from just below his heart.

Chris looks around the car. He spots a HANDGUN stashed away beneath the dashboard.

CHRIS

You weren't on your way to kill me, were you?

Pierce looks at him nervously, then looks back at the road.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

It's an original idea: get me in the church, in front of everybody...

Pierce keeps glancing back and forth nervously. Finally he's able to stammer:

PIERCE

No!

Chris lets the matter go. He almost seems to think it seems funny. He cracks a smile.

Pierce pointedly changes the subject.

PIERCE (CONT'D)
If you would like, I can hear your
confession now.

Chris smiles again, weakly.

CHRIS
No thank you. I'll take my chances.

Chris nearly shuts his eyes.

Then they shoot open again.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
But, you need to tell them. The
Archdiocese needs to know, and the
police need to know too.

Pierce sighs, heavily.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
That is...it's what you should do,
if we all had more than an hour
left to live. You have to promise
me that's what you would do. Let's
just call it your penance.

Pierce sighs again. His voice trembles.

PIERCE
If that were my penance, would you
absolve me?

CHRIS
Yeah. If that was your penance,
I'll absolve you.

Pierce, looking very sad, nods his head in agreement.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Already people are spilling out of the church.

Pierce's car pulls in to the Church parking lot.

Sister Teresa runs to greet it.

TERESA
Father Pierce?

Pierce steps out, then walks toward the crowd of people who
are leaving the church.

He greets them in a booming voice.

PIERCE

Good morning. Merry Christmas. Mass will be commencing shortly. Please, everyone go back inside.

The crowd stirs, then slowly starts moving back inside.

Many of the people stop to stare upward. The vision in the sky is quite impressive, bright and apocalyptic.

PIERCE (CONT'D)

I said, everyone go back inside! You're here for Mass. There's no point taking pictures, is there?

His loud, authoritative voice pushes everyone to go inside. In another moment, the last of the crowd has entered the church.

Pierce walks back to the car and opens the passenger door for Chris.

Chris stands up straight, hiding his blood beneath a COAT, which had been sitting inside Pierce's car.

Chris begins walking as quickly and upright as he can, though there's still a telltale grimace and limp.

TERESA

What happened? Where did you go? You were here, then you left!

CHRIS

I had a real bad stomach ache. I'll get through though.

TERESA

What are you doing with Father Pierce?

CHRIS

Long story. Doesn't matter. I'm sorry I kept everyone waiting. Now I have to get ready.

He groans as he opens the door of the church. He and Teresa go inside.

Pierce stops at the door, and looks back. There's a trail of blood trailing back from the church to his car.

Following that line of sight up, he looks at the sky. The asteroid is bright and massive in the sky. The sky itself is turning a different color. There are no birds, and no wind.

Pierce reaches into his pocket. He takes out a KNIFE that was hidden there.

He sighs, shuts his eyes, and with an effort throws the knife on the ground. Then he walks into the church.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY - DAY

Chris enters the sacristy and shuts the door behind him.

He takes off the coat, to see his shirt is dripping blood.

He looks into a mirror that's mounted on the wall.

CHRIS
Well that looks painful.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The congregation stirs as they all find their seats again. A BELL rings and everybody stands up.

Chris appears, walking down the aisle. He's wearing the whole priestly garb, white in color. His wound is hidden underneath the vestments.

Teresa smiles widely to see him here, and okay, and beginning the final Mass.

CHRIS
In the name of the Father, and of
the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

CONGREGATION
Amen.

A LITTLE LATER

We skip to a short while later, and the Mass continues. Chris is standing at the pulpit.

CHRIS
This was the true light that,
coming into the world, enlightens
every person. He was in the world,
and the world came into being
through him, and yet the world did
not know him.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

He came to his own, and his own people did not accept him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God. And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. The word of the Lord.

CONGREGATION

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

The congregation sits down, and Chris stands still at the pulpit.

He's still pale, but nobody can tell from far away. His eyes are still glazed over, and his stare is becoming vacant.

He breathes in and out a few times, and smiles to himself. He looks out at the congregation with a renewed strength.

CHRIS

Bless me, brothers and sisters, for I have sinned. My last confession was...about a month ago.

There are some raised eyebrows in the congregation. Even Teresa looks confused.

Chris leans in on the pulpit with his head tilted up to see the people.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I...am a bad priest. I confess to that. I confess to being a priest who tried to run away from this Mass because he was too afraid to face the people who needed him. To being a priest with imposter syndrome, who finds himself feeling not like some specially anointed vessel that can handle the responsibilities of peoples' souls but more often like he's just a regular person. To being insensitive, lacking in sympathy, to people with struggles I could never imagine.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I confess to not believing in God.
I got it into my head when I was
young that I could serve my flock
as a member of the clergy, and that
believing in God was a less
important detail. Turns out, it was
harder than I thought, and it made
me a worse priest.

He's already begun to tear up, though he's holding himself
back from crying to hide it from the congregation.

Meanwhile Teresa, looking up at the altar and realizing the
Chalice is not there, stands up and pushes her way to the
back of the church.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I confess to being in love, with a
woman I should never, ever be with.
Love can look like a lot of things,
you know, and I would have always
found a way to keep loving you,
somehow, in one of those many ways.

Teresa stops in her tracks. She blushes deeply and smiles. A
tear runs down her cheek. Then she steps into the sacristy.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY - DAY

Teresa opens the cabinets to retrieve the Chalice and all
its accessories, and hurriedly starts putting them all
together.

TERESA

Forgetful much, Father Chris?

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Meanwhile, the windows of the church are letting in a
reddish light, and have gotten brighter.

There's an eerie noise outside, like a steady wind.

Herbert looks at his watch, and nods in eager anticipation.
Everyone else, while fearful, are entirely invested in
Chris' sermon. He's successfully distracting them.

CHRIS

And I confess not treasuring more,
every single moment of my life that
I spent with people I loved. Life
isn't a thing that ends.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

It's a collection of all those good, beautiful moments that we do share. It doesn't matter how long our lives have been, or how short. Those collections of our good moments are always going to be enough. Because in the end there are no separations between people. It's just a great big pile of those beautiful moments from all of us, and that's heaven.

He's getting weaker, and leaning into the pulpit. But people are in tears. Many are hugging one another, holding each others' hands, etc. But it's no longer fear. Chris is hitting an emotional chord with all of them.

Herbert looks at his watch with expectation. He nods to himself, then looks upward with an awed look, and shuts his eyes.

A few small BEEPS go off in the church. Peoples' phones. A few of the people pull out the devices to check them.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Oh, and before I forget...not that I have much time in which to forget... there's one more confession. I wasn't going to say anything, because it's not really a sin, but...

People have somewhat stopped paying attention, though Chris is too weak to really notice or care.

Instead, a hushed, rapid murmur begins to stir through the crowd as more people check their phones. The doors of the church open, and some of the people in back start to exit the church.

INT. CHURCH SACRISTY - DAY

Teresa glances out the door connecting with the main church, and sees all the people going outside.

Overcome by curiosity, she opens the door that leads outside, and steps out herself.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Chris blinks a few times, and finishes the sentence he'd already begun.

CHRIS
...I was shot today.

He loses his grip on the pulpit, and slides down to the floor.

There are a few gasps from people up front, but for the most part nobody seems to notice.

The entire congregation buzzes and stirs and moves toward the back of the church, to the exit.

Chris lays on the floor, gazing upward, the look on his face peaceful.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

People begin to spill out of the church. More and more come out, shoulder to shoulder pushing their way past each other.

As soon as they emerge, they all look up at the sky.

The ASTEROID is massive in the sky, a visibly large ball of white light.

Teresa joins the crowd from the other door, and finds herself standing beside Father Pierce, Danielle, Tina, Rob, Herbert and Rose.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Everyone has left to see what's going on outside, and Chris is left alone.

He is having trouble breathing, now. As his eyes glaze over, he tilts his head to the side.

Through his blurred vision, it looks like he sees the three figures of ART, BART, and MART standing at the front of the congregation, lit brightly by a convenient beam of light that gives them a mysterious, heavenly glow.

As he turns his head back over to look upward, he smiles wryly.

CHRIS
Well, that's kinda ridiculous.

His eyes glaze over one last time, and he exhales.

As his body grows still...he's gone.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Everyone stands and waits for a long, terrifying moment.

The massive light streaks across the sky, heading from one side of the sky to the other. Then, it begins to get smaller again.

Stunned silence comes over the gathered crowd.

They all look at each other, then back at the sky.

People begin to pull out their phones, while others check the time.

Herbert looks down at his watch, and then grunts in disappointment.

Everyone else begins to look at one another with a new energy, as if this crowd of people are only meeting each other for the first time.

Pierce is nodding to himself with stern resolve. Rob has a slight smile on his face, while Danielle is smirking knowingly. Rose and Teresa both smile as well.

Aside from Herbert, only little Tina looks disappointed.

TINA

Well, fuck.

THE END