

SNOOP

FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE, FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Twelve-month old HOWIE COOPER crawls across the carpet floor.

MOM and DAD and four-year old sister ANNE watch TV from the couch.

Baby Howie scuttles past the TV. Past the fireplace. Beneath the Christmas tree.

He stops at a gift wrapped in silver paper. It's shiny like a mirror. He studies his reflection, then paws at the gift. The wrapping paper tears open.

Mom sees this. She nudges Dad.

MOM

Look at Howie. The little snooper.

Baby Howie paws at the gift again, giggles.

EXT. DRY CLEANERS, PARKING LOT - DAY

Howie is now a marginally nerdy-looking four-year old. He's waiting in the station wagon as Mom runs into the cleaners.

Deftly, he unbuckles his car seat, slips out of the car, opens the driver's side door, pops the trunk latch.

He walks around the car. Lifts the hatchback trunk. Looks inside. Sees a teddy bear in a shopping bag. Does a quiet little celebration dance.

HOWIE

Yes.

He waves to the teddy bear.

HOWIE

See you at Christmas.

He closes the trunk. Gets back in the car. Buckles himself in.

HOWIE

Man, I'm good.

Mom returns.

MOM

See, Howie, that was quick.

HOWIE

Yep.

Howie smiles with practiced innocence.

INT. HOWIE'S HOUSE, PARENTS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Howie is now a fully nerdy-looking seven-year old. He is tiptoeing in the dark around his parents, sound asleep in their bed.

With expert fingers, Howie removes a small Monet print from the wall. He squats, sets it gently on the floor.

There is a SAFE on the wall where the print was.

Howie leans close to it. Spins the dial slowly. Left, right, left. He opens the safe.

A wrapped gift is inside. Howie undoes a taped flap of wrapping paper. Pulls back the other flaps. Reads the side of the box.

The gift is a digital camera.

Howie nods, pleased.

INT. HOWIE'S HOUSE, FAMILY ROOM - DAY

It's Christmas morning and the floor is littered with torn wrapping paper, ribbons and bows, toys and clothes and boxes.

The Coopers in pajamas lounge amid the festive chaos. Howie wears a Santa hat.

There are two unopened gifts by the Christmas tree. One big gift, one not so big.

DAD

Okay, Santa's Little Helper. Two more. They're both for you.

HOWIE

Not helper.

HOWIE

No.

(yes, he forgot)

Howie exaggerates surprise. Touches his cheeks, drops his jaw, boggles his eyes.

DAD

If you didn't snoop so much, this might be fun for you.

HOWIE

Snooping is fun for me.

ANNE

It's the only thing he's good at.

MOM

Anne.

Howie hangs his head.

MOM

You're good at plenty...
(her voice trails off)

HOWIE

No, I'm not.

He narrows his eyes.

HOWIE

But I am: The Greatest Snooper In The World.

Anne sighs disdainfully.

Dad chuckles.

HOWIE

What? I am.

Howie looks to Mom for support. She hesitates.

MOM

Maybe.

Howie's hurt.

HOWIE (V.O.)

Maybe?

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Lunch time. Howie and his chubby friend TATER sit across from each other at a lunch table.

HOWIE

Maybe?

TATER

You're the best that I've seen.

HOWIE

I knew every gift I was getting --
except the ones from Santa.

TATER

He gave you the glow-in-the-dark
football?

Howie nods.

At the next table, a SMUG-FACED BOY among a group of COOL KIDS takes notice of Howie and Tater.

SMUG-FACED BOY

Glow-in-the-dark footballs are for
scared-of-the-dark babies.

Smug-faced Boy laughs it up with his cool pals.

Howie and Tater return to their lunches.

TATER

Forget him. He probably got coal.

HOWIE

Yeah.

TATER

I just thought of something. You
should start a snooping business.
Next Christmas.

HOWIE

Charge people money to snoop out
their presents?

TATER

Maybe not.

HOWIE

Maybe yes way. Everyone wants to
know what they're getting for
Christmas.

TATER
Even Chuck Fiddle.

Howie looks at CHUCK FIDDLE, the smug-faced boy, who at the moment is entertaining his buddies with an orange slice grin.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

INSERT: One Year Later.

The now eight-year old Howie has set up shop. He sits on a folding chair before a card table. Taped to the edge of the table is a poster that reads,

HOWIE COOPER - SUPER DUPER SNOOPER

Hands folded on the table, Howie awaits customers.

JAMES, a tall boy with glasses, approaches to investigate.

HOWIE
Hi, James. You look like you need help. How can I snoop?

JAMES
I want a Dinky Bot for Christmas. I don't know if I'm getting one.

HOWIE
Dinky Bots are the best.
(sweet little robot voice)
Program me.

JAMES
I really want one.

HOWIE
I'll snoop for you for five dollars. That's cheap.

JAMES
If you don't find anything, do I get a refund?

HOWIE
I guarantee you I'll find what's there.

Howie hands James a full color brochure explaining his snooping services. James looks it over.

HOWIE

My skills are top secret. One thing
I do is Method Snooping. That's all
I can say.

Just then, the Cool Kids with Chuck Fiddle come strolling
along. Chuck looks at Howie and James. Reads the sign.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Howie Cooper. Super Duper LOSER.

James scrams.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Why would anyone pay a loser like
you to do what they can do better
for free?

HOWIE

No one's better than me.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Ooh hoo hoo.

HOWIE

I'm the best snooper in the world.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Prove it.

HOWIE

Sure. Five dollars.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Ha. You can't prove it. Anyway,
it's impossible. You can't be the
best.

HOWIE

Why not?

CHUCK FIDDLE

Santa Claus.

Chuck looks at his friends. They snicker.

HOWIE

What about Santa?

CHUCK FIDDLE

Nobody could snoop on Santa.

HOWIE

I could. If I could get to the North
Pole.

CHUCK FIDDLE

If you do it, I'll be your best friend. I'll even let you be one of us.

The Cool Kids pose hip hop style and in unison shout,

THE COOL KIDS

Cool Kids.

HOWIE

I will. I'll go to the North Pole. I'll snoop out what Santa's bringing you for Christmas.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Go for it.

The Cool Kids snicker.

HOWIE

I'll bring my camera.

Chuck gives Howie a big thumbs up. The Cool Kids sneer. Howie returns the thumbs up. He is oblivious to their devices, takes all this very seriously indeed.

EXT. NORTH POLE - DAY

Tundra.

And... here's Santa's Workshop. Essentially a warehouse with Gothic tracery, finials, flying buttresses and reindeer gargoyles.

Connected to it by a short annex is a modest chalet with a large wreath on the door. In one window, there's a cozy light.

INT. SANTA'S CHALET, GREAT ROOM - DAY

By the cozy light, SANTA CLAUS works alone at his desk.

Behind him, a door slowly, silently opens.

A big elf -- six-foot, gaunt, with eyes shrewd like flint -- creeps into the room. This is BUB. He's dressed in green with gold trim.

Bub skulks behind Santa, across the room to another door. Carefully he opens it, steps into...

SANTA'S LIBRARY

Closes the door. He's alone. Surrounded by books.

He glances about. Spots something. Something on a dictionary stand, on a table. He hurries over to it.

It's not a dictionary.

It's not a book.

It's THE LIST... Santa's List.

Bub flips through its pages and grins wickedly.

On each page are several entries. The name of a boy or a girl. Then -- Naughty or Nice.

Bub stuffs The List down his pants, by his crotch. Turns for the door.

But the door opens before he gets there.

It's Santa. He blocks Bub's path. He's not happy.

BUB
(fake smile)
Hello, Santa.

SANTA
Give me The List.

BUB
What list?

SANTA
The List. In your pants.

Bub removes The List from his pants.

BUB
Well isn't that strange?

He gives The List to Santa.

SANTA
You must stop this foolishness, Bub.
Sneaking in. Trying to steal The
List. I will catch you every time.

BUB
That's what you always say.

SANTA
Guards.

A moment later, two guards arrive: TOUGH ELF and FAT ELF. They wear green with white trim and wield large candy cane billy clubs. They are fully two feet shorter than Bub.

SANTA

Be gone, Bub.

EXT. SANTA'S CHALET - DAY

A back door opens. Bub is cast out of the chalet by the guards.

Bub stumbles, nearly falls.

The door is slammed shut. Then there is only the sound of a soft wind sweeping across the tundra.

BUB

Curse you, Santa Claus. Tyrant.
Everyday we toil in obscurity, making
toys. You work one day a year.

He trudges through the snow, away from the Chalet.

BUB

One day. And for this, people love
you. Make ornaments and chocolates
in your image. You get the glory
and the sleigh. We get the shaft.

He is heading for an igloo in the distance.

INT. HOWIE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Howie and Tater are passing through the kitchen, when the portable TV on the counter top catches their attention.

They stop.

Anne, hunched over a pile of homework at the kitchen table, looks up, notices them.

Howie points to the TV.

HOWIE

This is the commercial.

TATER

The reception stinks.

The TV image is snowy.

Howie touches the TV antenna. The image improves a tad.

TATER

Let me.

Tater touches the antenna. Perfect image. No snow.

Anne is perplexed.

The boys watch the commercial.

THE DINKY BOT COMMERCIAL

In a bedroom, two ten-year olds , PROUD BOY and SMILEY BOY, ogle a chihuahua-size toy robot on a desk. The robot is blocky. Its eyes are wide and square. Its mouth is tiny.

PROUD BOY

Dinky Bot. Check it out.

Proud Boy presses a button on the Dinky Bot's back. Sweetly, it says,

DINKY BOT

Program me.

Proud Boy grins at his friend.

PROUD BOY

Watch this.

He taps a number of keys on the keypad in the middle of the robot's chest.

PROUD BOY

Eat car, Dinky Bot.

He presses a GO button in the center of the keypad.

On roller feet, Dinky Bot rolls across the desk. Rolls around a ruler in its way. Stops at a Matchbox car. Bends at the waist. CHOMPS the car. Stands up with car in mouth.

PROUD BOY

Good Dinky Bot.

CLOSE ON the Dinky Bot.

HYPED-UP VOICEOVER GUY

Navigate. Investigate. Dominate.

Dinky Bot, for creative minds. From Tabula Rasa.

BACK TO SCENE

HOWIE

Man.

TATER

I can't wait till Christmas.

Tater lets go of the antenna. The TV picture goes snowy again.

TATER

You guys need a regular TV in here.

Anne, staring at the TV:

ANNE

How'd you do that?

Tater opens his mouth wide. Displays his teeth. Nearly all of them have silver fillings.

TATER

Metal mouth. Nineteen cavities.
I'm a human antenna.

ANNE

You're both freaks.

Howie pats Tater on the back.

HOWIE

Let's get to work.

INT. HOWIE'S HOUSE, FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Howie paces the family room. Tater sits on the sofa, snacking from a bag of potato chips.

HOWIE

We have to go to the North Pole.
Find Santa. And snoop.

TATER

Do you really think it's possible?

HOWIE

All things are possible with me.

TATER

We don't even have money for a plane
ticket.

Howie paces faster. Think, think, think.

TATER
Potato chip?

Howie ignores this.

TATER
Always helps me.

HOWIE
There's got to be a way.

TATER
Maybe we shouldn't be trying this.
We might get lost. Or frozen. Or
starve.

Perishing the thought, Tater snarfs a handful of chips.

HOWIE
Remember what Chuck said. If we do
this, we'll be Cool Kids.

TATER
He meant you.

HOWIE
Shhh--

An idea. Howie stops pacing. He's looking at the fireplace.

HOWIE
Santa comes down chimneys...

TATER
On Christmas?

HOWIE
No, Easter.

TATER
All right.

HOWIE
If that's how he gets here, maybe
it's how we get there.

TATER
To the North Pole?

HOWIE
Yes.

TATER
I don't get it.

HOWIE
Santa climbs down chimneys -- I'm
going to climb up one.

 TATER
And then what?

 HOWIE
I don't know. See what happens.

 TATER
Like what?

 HOWIE
I don't know. Do you have to be so
negative? Just let me try this.

 TATER
I'm not stopping you.

Howie approaches the fireplace. Slides the mesh screens
apart. Reaches in. Opens the flue.

He removes the logs, one by one, and sets them on the ultra-
clean carpet.

He steps onto the hearth. Hunches. Ducks into the fireplace.
Steps onto the grate. Stands erect.

It's dark and sooty in here. He coughs.

 TATER
How is it in there?

 HOWIE
Fine.

 TATER
Can you climb it?

Howie doesn't answer. With his palms, he presses against
the sides of the flue. Jumps up. Splays his arms and legs,
trying to wedge himself up there. It doesn't work.

 HOWIE
New plan.

EXT. HOWIE'S HOUSE, ROOF - DAY

Tater heaves himself onto the roof from a ladder propped
against the gutter. He's wearing a winter coat, a ski hat
and thick gloves. Slung over his shoulder is a coil of rope.

He squats beside the brick chimney top. Loops one end of the rope around the chimney.

From a pocket, he takes out a walkie talkie. Activates it.

TATER

Here comes the rope.

He drops the free end of the rope down the flue.

IN THE DARK OF THE FIREPLACE

The rope drops onto Howie's head.

From his back pocket, Howie grabs his walkie talkie. He activates it.

HOWIE

Got it.

TATER (V.O.)

I was wondering. Why can't you use the ladder?

Howie is vehement:

HOWIE

Does Santa use ladders?

Howie pockets his walkie talkie. Grabs the rope. Hoists himself up a few feet, then pauses, huffing and puffing.

TATER (V.O.)

Need help?

Howie yells up,

HOWIE

Maybe.

ON THE ROOF

Tater tugs on his end of the rope. Begins to lose his grip. Wraps the rope round his wrist. Braces his feet against the chimney. Tugs again, harder.

IN THE DARK OF THE FIREPLACE

Howie hangs on. Slowly, he is raised by Tater, through the dark and the soot.

He gets stuck near the top.

ON THE ROOF

Tater yanks, unsticking Howie...

Who shoots out of the chimney top like a cork...

And crash lands on the roof.

Tater drags Howie up to the chimney, deposits him there. They sit and lean against it. Out of breath, they suck air.

TATER

That was fun. Are we done?

Howie -- covered in soot -- looks at Tater, looks away, says nothing.

Tater removes his winter coat. No big deal, he was wearing two coats in order to give one to Howie. Which he now does.

HOWIE

Thanks.

TATER

Be prepared. That's my motto.

Howie gets up, puts the coat on. Turns and looks at the chimney. Looks at the spot where his head was resting.

There is a metal panel.

HOWIE

What's this for?

Tater shrugs.

Howie touches the panel. Slides his fingers across it. He's looking for a latch, a crack, some way to open it.

Frustrated, he strikes the panel with the butt of his hand.

HOWIE

Come on.

With this the panel swings open...

Revealing a BIG RED BUTTON labeled, EMERGENCY.

TATER

Emergency. That's strange. What could it be for?

HOWIE

Emergency...

TATER

We probably shouldn't press it. There's no--

Howie presses the button.

TATER
--emergency.

HOWIE
Now there is.

Howie and Tater wait for something to happen.

The wind blows. Nothing else happens.

TATER
Weird.

But then Howie sees something. In the sky, in the distance.

HOWIE
Look.

Tater looks. Sees a reindeer, flying toward them.

A reindeer.

Flying toward them.

TATER
Holy cannoli.

The reindeer flies over the nearby housetops. Here it comes.

Gracefully, it touches down on Howie's roof.

This is a noble animal. Intelligent eyes.

Howie cautiously steps up to the reindeer. Cautiously touches its back.

The reindeer nods approvingly. It lies down.

Howie straddles its back. Wraps his arms around its neck.

Tater is in awe of Howie's courage, gumption.

TATER
Oh, man.

HOWIE
Will you take us to the North Pole?

The reindeer nods. Looks at Tater.

TATER
Us?

The reindeer nods again.

Tater shrinks back.

TATER

This must be it. We're here.

Bub calls to them as they draw close and circle round the igloo.

BUB

Welcome.

The reindeer lands next to Bub and the igloo.

Bub is plainly amused by the boys' haggard appearance. Both boys are wind-burned and wild of hair. Howie is still black with soot.

BUB

Hi there. B-U-B Bub is my name.

HOWIE

Hello. I'm Howie Cooper. I'm the world's greatest snooper and I'm here to prove it.

TATER

I'm Tater. His friend.

HOWIE

You must be our escort.

Bub nods vigorously -- he is seizing an opportunity.

BUB

I am. I will take you to Santa.
(to the reindeer)
Cheers, Blitzen.

BLITZEN nods, lies down. Howie and Tater dismount.

Blitzen trots, takes to the air, flies out of sight.

BUB

Come, let us warm up in my igloo.

HOWIE

Great. I'm freezing.

Tater seems leery of Bub -- but he is also shivering cold; he follows Bub and Howie into the igloo.

INT. BUB'S IGLOO - DAY

A cot. A cat sleeping on it. A trunk beside it. In the middle of the igloo, a potbelly stove with a kettle on. Beside the stove, a pail of coal.

With a hand shovel, Bub dumps coal into the stove.

He hands Howie a none-too-clean dish towel.

Howie looks at it, confused. Looks at himself -- *oh, I'm covered with soot* . He wipes himself all over, inadequately.

Howie and Tater take a seat on the cot. Beside them, Bub's cat wakes up.

TATER

What's your cat's name?

BUB

Tuh-mah-toe.

HOWIE

Like tomato.

BUB

You say Tomato, I say Tuh-mah-toe.

HOWIE

Doesn't he get cold in here?

BUB

He's cold blooded.

Tater changes the subject.

TATER

Are you one of Santa's Little Helpers?

Bub sidles up to Tater. Hovers over him.

BUB

I am two heads taller than any other elf. Nothing about me is little.

HOWIE

He just means helper. Not little.

BUB

Well. I used to be Santa's right hand guy.

FLASHBACK - SANTA'S WORKSHOP, HALLWAY

Bub, slightly younger, struts down a long hallway.

He passes Tough Elf, Fat Elf and BALD ELF.

TOUGH ELF, FAT ELF AND BALD ELF

((perfunctory))

Morning, sir.

After they've passed, there is a commotion behind him.

Bub turns to see the three elves rushing over to Santa, who's just entered the hallway. They cozy up to Santa, fawn over him, pat him on the back.

Coolly, Bub observes from a distance.

FAT ELF

Hi, Santa.

TOUGH ELF

You're looking swell, sir.

BALD ELF

Top of the morning to you. Can I get you anything?

SANTA

Thank you, Cocoa would be nice.

Bub is jealous. He fumes and glowers.

BACK TO PRESENT

Bub gazes wistfully out the igloo doorway.

BUB

Then we had a falling out -- office politics, very boring.

FLASHBACK - SANTA'S WORKSHOP, CHRISTMAS GOODS STORAGE ROOM

A room full of Christmas knickknacks, decorations, service, greeting cards and so on.

Holding aloft a plastic Santa statue, Bub stands before a crowd of elves. He towers above them like a coach over his Little League team. He speaks into a bullhorn.

BUB

Where are the ELF Christmas cards?
The plastic ELF statues? The milk
and the cookies on a plate for us?
Nowhere. We see only The Fat One.
Enough. It is time for regime change.
Democracy. An elf in power. Down
with Santa.

The crowd is offended. Some snarl at Bub. Others defiantly spit at the ground.

In the middle of the crowd are Tough Elf and Fat Elf.

TOUGH ELF

Down with Bub, I say.

The crowd roars in agreement.

FAT ELF
We love Santa. We're happy.

BUB
Complacent sheep, you are.

TOUGH ELF
Let's bring him to the big guy. See
if he changes his tune.

Several elves seize Bub. They hoist him upon their shoulders.
He's kicking and screaming as they take him away.

BACK TO PRESENT

Bub shakes off the unpleasant memories.

BUB
Let's have cocoa.

He fixes three cups. Hands two of them to the boys.

Howie takes a sip.

HOWIE
Hot.

Shrinking back, Howie spills a few drops.

A mouse scurries out from under the cot. Begins to lap up
the spilt cocoa.

Howie pulls his legs up onto the cot.

HOWIE
Mouse.

Bub picks up the mouse. Cups it in his hands.

BUB
This's Puh-tah-toe.

HOWIE
Like potato.

BUB
You say Potato, I say Puh-tah-toe.

TATER
You have a cat and a mouse?

BUB
They are best of friends.

Bub's cat hops off the cot. Hisses at the mouse. Laps up the rest of the spilt cocoa as the mouse scurries away.

Skeptical, Tater suddenly demands of Bub,

TATER

How are you going to help us?

BUB

I will take you to Santa's Workshop.
Are we ready already?

HOWIE AND TATER

Yes.

BUB

Then let's blow this macho taco stand.

The boys are confused.

BUB

Let's go.

EXT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP - EVENING

Bub and the boys walk through the snow. Trudge up a gradual incline.

TATER

My feet feel like popsicles. Too bad I can't eat them. I'm so hungry.

BUB

We're almost there. Look.

They see the Workshop. Barely visible, about a quarter of a mile on.

HOWIE

Too cool.

TATER

Ugh.
(just plain tired)

BUB

That's it. Santa's Workshop.

Howie takes out his digital camera. Hands it to Tater.

HOWIE

Take a picture of me and Bub.

Tater is hurt. He's been excluded.

Howie and Bub pose. Bub puts his arm around Howie's shoulder.
Tater snaps a picture. Returns the camera.
They walk on toward the Workshop.

 HOWIE
This'll be great. Chuck's gotta
love this picture.

 TATER
Yeah. Great.

 HOWIE
You should be happy, we're at the
North Pole. Santa territory.

 TATER
I just hope, when you become a Cool
Kid, we're still friends.

 HOWIE
You'll be a Cool Kid, too.

A fragile smile from Tater.

They arrive at a door to the Workshop.

 BUB
Here we are, Santa's Workshop, where
toys are born.

 HOWIE
Oh. Maybe we should give you one of
our walkie talkies. Just in case.
We don't want to lose you.

Howie proffers his walkie talkie. Bub takes it.

 BUB
Yeah, fine. What's the reception
limit, two hundred yards?

Tater opens his mouth to show Bub his fillings.

 TATER
I'm a human antenna, see. Anything
I touch gets perfect reception.

 BUB
O-kay.

Bub knocks on the door.

They wait.

As the door opens, Bub sidles behind Howie.

Now they see who's opening the door. It is a Bald Elf.

Then, happening fast:

Bub shoves Howie.

Howie collides with Bald Elf.

Howie and Bald Elf fall together.

Bub darts past both of them, into the Workshop, out of sight.

Bald Elf catches a glimpse of Bub tearing off.

BALD ELF

What? Bub? Guards.

Tater is bewildered. Doesn't move a muscle.

Tough Elf and Fat Elf come running outside with their candy cane billy clubs at the ready.

Fat Elf grabs Tater.

Tough Elf grabs Howie -- yanks him to his feet.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, LOUNGE - NIGHT

A glorified break room. Plush furniture. Bookshelves. A bay of lockers. A kitchen nook.

Howie and Tater sit on a sofa. They are guarded by Tough Elf and Fat Elf.

Bald Elf struts about, lecturing them.

BALD ELF

We can't find Bub. He's slippery like a snake. I can't believe you let him back in. Why did you do it?

HOWIE

Well, we--

BALD ELF

Save it for Santa. You are in big trouble. Big.

(to the guards)

I'm going to fetch Santa. Don't let these two so much as twiddle their thumbs. Got it?

FAT ELF

Yessir.

TOUGH ELF

You can count on us, Tobias, sir.

Bald Elf -- TOBIAS -- struts out of here.

The guards scowl and cross their candy cane billy clubs in front of Howie and Tater.

INT. SANTA'S CHALET, GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

Santa and MRS. CLAUS sit together in a love seat, sharing a moment by the Christmas tree.

There's a knock at the door.

Santa gets up, opens the door.

It's Tobias.

TOBIAS

We have uninvited guests. Two boys.
They let Bub in. He's still at large.

SANTA

Do you mean human boys?

TOBIAS

Yes. How they got here, I don't
know.

SANTA

Must be they found one of my chimney
emergency buttons.

Santa looks concerned.

SANTA

I will talk to the boys.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Howie and Tater on the sofa. The guards watching them.

HOWIE

(whispers to Tater)
We've got to escape. Like, now.
Before Santa gets here.

Tough Elf pokes Howie with his candy cane billy club.

TOUGH ELF

No talking.

HOWIE

Sorry, sir. I was just thinking. I feel bad about letting Bub in. But. If you were to catch him, you'd be heroes, right?

Fat Elf gets dreamy-eyed.

FAT ELF

Yeah...

He licks his lips.

FAT ELF

For heroes, they throw dinner banquets. All you can eat.

Howie takes his walkie talkie out of his pocket.

HOWIE

I have this walkie talkie. Bub has the other one. I can call him and find out where he is. If you guys caught him, I'd feel much better.

FAT ELF

That's very big of you.

TOUGH ELF

Let's try it. Go ahead and call.

Howie activates the walkie talkie.

HOWIE

Breaker breaker.

Static. Poor reception.

Howie motions to Tater. Tater touches the walkie talkie. Howie tries again.

HOWIE

This is Howie. Bub, do you read me?

A moment passes -- without static. Howie holds his breath, waits for an answer.

BUB (V.O.)

I read you, Howie. Go ahead.

HOWIE

We lost you coming in. Where are you?

BUB (V.O.)

Umm...

CLICK.

End of conversation. Bub got wise to Howie.

HOWIE

Shoot.

Tough Elf gets excited. Makes big, sweeping hand gestures as he talks.

TOUGH ELF

No, that was good. I could hear dripping in the background. That means he's in the cellar.

FAT ELF

I heard it, too.

Tough Elf snatches the walkie talkie from him, puffs out his chest, marches toward the door triumphantly.

TOUGH ELF

Good work, kid.

HOWIE

Thanks. We'll wait right here.

TOUGH ELF

He'll make sure of it.

(to Fat Elf)

Don't let them so much as wiggle their toes.

FAT ELF

I won't.

Tough Elf leaves.

Howie looks glum. Hangs his head. He thought both guards would leave.

TATER

(to Fat Elf)

Don't you see what he's doing?

HOWIE

What? Who?

FAT ELF

Yeah -- what, who?

TATER

Your friend is going to be the hero.
He's going to get all the credit.

Howie catches on to Tater's ruse.

HOWIE

Yeah, that's not fair. You're the
one with the hard job, watching us.

TATER

You'd better go, too.

Fat Elf gets a far-away look in his eyes.

FAT ELF

He'll hog our dinner banquet.

TATER

Right.

HOWIE

Right.

FAT ELF

Thanks very much, boys. You're good
people.

Fat Elf gets up. Goes to the door. Waves goodbye. Leaves.

Howie and Tater are beaming. They do quiet high fives. Up
high, down low, too slow.

Then they hear the door being locked.

TATER

He locked the door.

HOWIE

Dang. At least we're alone. Let's
snoop.

They begin to poke around the room.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, CELLAR - NIGHT

Bub is hiding in the shadows near some barrels of cider.

There is a dripping sound, from somewhere in the dark.

Bub sees Tough Elf approaching, walkie talkie in hand. He
backs further into the shadows.

INT. SERVICE TUNNEL - NIGHT

A long underground tunnel between the Chalet and the Workshop.

Santa, Mrs. Claus and Tobias enter it from stairs at one end. They begin the long walk to the other end.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Howie checks the front and back doors. Yes, they really are locked.

He snoops. Under sofa cushions and lamps, behind books on the bookshelf.

HOWIE

Well, the guards are so dumb -- maybe there's a spare key in here they forgot about.

TATER

If I were a spare key, where would I be?

HOWIE

If I were a dumb elf, where would I put a spare key?

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, CELLAR - NIGHT

Tough Elf arrives at the barrels of cider.

Bub sneaks behind him. In one swift motion, he swipes Tough Elf's candy cane billy club and with it clobbers him on the head, knocking him out cold.

He drags the body. Deposits it in a dark corner.

BUB

Have a nice nap.

Now -- footsteps again.

Fat Elf is approaching.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Howie paces the room. He shakes his arms, shakes his legs, shakes all over -- thusly preparing to Method Snoop.

Gradually, he transforms himself into a version of Tough Elf:

He puffs his chest out the way Tough Elf does. Marches the way Tough Elf does. Makes big, sweeping hand gestures the way Tough Elf does.

Tater watches him.

TATER
What are you doing?

HOWIE
Method Snooping -- shhh.
(imitates Tough Elf)
I'm a guard... I'm an elf guard...
Where did I put that key?

Tater searches through the lockers.

TATER
Howie. If we do get out of here --
and you snoop out Chuck Fiddle's
Christmas presents -- and then, if
we have time...

HOWIE
I'll snoop your gifts, too.

TATER
I want a Dinky Bot.

HOWIE
Duh.

Howie enters the kitchen nook. A little area with a toaster oven, a couple of cabinets, a small counter top.

He's in the zone now.

HOWIE
Hmm.

He opens a silverware drawer.

HOWIE
There you are.

Behold. A large, fancy, silver key.

Howie hustles to the nearest door, the back door. Inserts the key in the lock. Turns it.

Click. It works.

HOWIE

Howie Cooper does it again. Ooh,
I'm good.

TATER

Wow, Howie.

HOWIE

Don't be so surprised.

TATER

No, I knew you could do it. You're
awesome.

HOWIE

Awesome is not the word for it.

TATER

You're the greatest.

HOWIE

That's the word.

Just then, Tater's gaze lands upon a stack of clothes in a locker he's searching. The clothes are green with white trim.

TATER

Look. I found something, too.

Tater unfolds the top item. It's the shirt of an elf's uniform.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, CELLAR - NIGHT

Bub stands over the bodies of Tough Elf and Fat Elf, both unconscious. He pries loose the walkie talkie from Tough Elf's hand. Slips it into his pocket.

INT. SERVICE TUNNEL - NIGHT

A door in the middle of the tunnel opens. Bub enters the tunnel. Begins the long walk, just as Santa did, moments ago.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Howie and Tater are dressed in elf uniforms. They almost look like elves. Nah, not really. They are the right height, though.

A STORAGE ROOM

Of girls' stuff. Dolls. Toy microwaves. Toy phones. An abundance of pink. All stocked neatly on shelves.

Howie and Tater look the room over.

HOWIE AND TATER

Yuck.

HOWIE

Girl Stuff. Let's get out of here.

TATER

But don't talk to those elves.

HOWIE

You worry too much.

They leave this room.

IN THE HALLWAY

They saunter past the Loitering Elves. Howie nods to them as if they are old friends. They ignore him.

Howie and Tater enter the next room.

ANOTHER STORAGE ROOM

This one is filled with pet supplies.

TATER

Ooh.

HOWIE

Pet Stuff.

Tater walks over to a box of Milk Bone dog biscuits. Opens the box. Pops a biscuit in his mouth. Chews.

HOWIE

Man. How hungry are you?

TATER

I always eat these.

Tater offers one to Howie. He declines.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Santa, Mrs. Claus and Tobias enter the lounge through the front door. They glance around. No boys here.

TOBIAS

Oh, no. They're gone. Santa, I'm
sorry, this is my fault. -- Those
bumbling guards.

Santa notes the open lockers and the open silverware drawer.

SANTA

Ah.

TOBIAS

These boys are out of control.

SANTA

Bub is out of control. Boys are
only boys.

MRS. CLAUS

And don't know any better.

SANTA

Yet.

TOBIAS

You're not going to let them off the
hook.

SANTA

Never.

Tobias nods with an air of moral satisfaction.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Howie and Tater rejoin the hallway from the Pet Supplies
storage room.

They avoid looking at the Loitering Elves behind them.

They enter the next room.

ANOTHER STORAGE ROOM

This one is filled with MONEY. Bills. Coins. Stacks and
stacks -- of every currency in the world.

The boys' jaws crash to the floor.

HOWIE AND TATER

Jackpot.

HOWIE

Look at all this money. There must
be some from every country.

TATER

How'd Santa get so rich? Taxes?

HOWIE

No. Don't you get it -- this is for cash gifts.

TATER

Holy spumoni.

They walk up and down the rows of money, ogling.

Howie finds the USA currency section. Hoists a stack of dollar coins.

TATER

Don't. You might drop them.

Howie pretends to lose his balance and nearly spill the stack of coins.

HOWIE

Whoa.

Tater returns a scolding look.

HOWIE

Take a picture.

TATER

We better not. Let's go, before someone finds us.

HOWIE

Just one.

Tater acquiesces. Takes the camera back out.

Howie poses with the stack of coins balanced in his hand.

Tater snaps a picture.

Just then, there is the sound of a DOOR OPENING -- Howie startles.

And spills the coins.

It's very loud:

COINS DROPPING -- and ROLLING -- and SPINNING.

Bub enters the room.

BUB

Hi again. Were you missing this?

SANTA
Why are you here?

Howie is intimidated.

HOWIE
To prove I'm the world's greatest
snooper?

SANTA
I see. Are you?

HOWIE
I guess not.

SANTA
Is this to impress someone? Perhaps
a girl?

Tater is amused.

Howie is embarrassed.

HOWIE
No -- Chuck Fiddle. He's the leader
of the Cool Kids.

SANTA
(nods slowly)
I understand.

Santa draws a big question mark on the dry erase board.

SANTA
Tell me, what do you think is the
best thing about Christmas?

The question was clearly meant for Howie, but Tater throws
in his two cents.

TATER
Christmas Eve. At first, I can't
sleep. Then I have the best dreams.
Then I wake up, and they come true.

Again, Santa nods slowly. He's pleased with Tater's answer.

SANTA
What about you, Howie?

Howie shakes his head. Wants to keep his trap shut.

SANTA
No? Okay... What's the best
Christmas gift you ever got?

Howie shrugs.

TATER
Mine is a Dinky Bot.

Howie does a double take. Screws up his face.

HOWIE
You never got a Dinky Bot.

TATER
Not ac-tually... but in my mind I
have. I can see it. It's so real.
I love that feeling.

HOWIE
Puh-lease.

SANTA
Well put, Tater. Howie, don't snoop.

HOWIE
But--

SANTA
It ruins Christmas.

HOWIE
Okay. I won't snoop.

Santa notices the camera in Tater's pocket.

SANTA
Now, let's you and me take a picture.
You'll show it to Chuck Fiddle.

Howie brightens.

HOWIE
Really?

Tater snaps a picture of Santa and Howie. Santa looks jolly.
Howie looks relieved.

SANTA
Time to head home, boys.

Santa pats Howie on the head.

SANTA
It was nice to meet you in person.

HOWIE
You, too. You're fatter than I
thought. I mean jollier.

SANTA

Ho ho ho.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, REINDEER STABLES - NIGHT

The stables are lit by lanterns. There is a pen for each of the eight reindeer.

A female elf STABLE HAND -- looking every bit the British Airways flight attendant -- leads Howie and Tater to Blitzen in his pen.

She signals Blitzen, points to the ground. Blitzen lies down.

STABLE HAND

Take your seats, please.

The boys climb onto Blitzen's back. Blitzen stands.

Stable Hand opens the pen door.

STABLE HAND

Enjoy your flight.

Blitzen trots...

OUTSIDE

Lifts off.

Up and away.

Howie looks back at Santa's Chalet and Workshop in the distance.

HOWIE

Goodbye.

He looks forward. Strokes Blitzen. Rests his head on the reindeer's soft fur. Closes his eyes.

EXT. HOWIE'S NEIGHBORHOOD, SKY - NIGHT

Slowly, they descend over the residential streets and cul-de-sacs twinkling with streetlights, big screen TVs in front room windows and Christmas lights on shrubs and gutters.

Howie is asleep. Tater nudges him awake.

TATER

We're home.

Howie looks about, gets his bearings. His house is two streets away.

HOWIE
(to Blitzen)
Can you drop me off on my roof?

Blitzen adjusts his angle of approach, then lands on Howie's roof.

Howie dismounts.

TATER
It's so late. My parents are going
to kill me.

HOWIE
I forgot about my parents.

Howie's nervous.

TATER
Here's your camera back.

Tater gives Howie the digital camera from his pocket.

HOWIE
Bye.

And, briefly regarding Blitzen,

HOWIE
I like you.

A friendly snort from Blitzen. Then the reindeer trots along the roof, lifts off, flies away -- off to Tater's house.

By the light of the moon, Howie finds the rope still tied around the chimney. He drops the free end down the flue.

He descends the rope.

Stops short. The flue door has been closed. Howie reaches down, pries it open.

He touches down on the logs upon the grate -- the logs have been replaced. He stumbles on them.

He pulls the screens open, steps out into...

THE LIVING ROOM

Howie removes his dirty shoes. Sets them on the hearth.

Suddenly, light.

Mom is here. In her robe. Squinting.

HOWIE

Hi, Mom.

Mom grits her teeth.

MOM

Casually he said.

Mom looks Howie up and down. Her sooty son upon her once clean carpet. She notes his funky, wind-blown hair.

MOM

And where were you?

HOWIE

Nowhere.

He can't avoid her probing gaze.

HOWIE

Okay, somewhere. The North Pole.

She is so not buying this.

HOWIE

It's a long story. Basically? I found this red button on the chimney which called Blitzen. You know, the reindeer.

MOM

Howie--

HOWIE

He took me and Tater to the North Pole. We met this elf named Bub.

MOM

Howie--

HOWIE

He got us into Santa's Workshop. It was the best. But we got caught.

MOM

Howie!

HOWIE

And Santa sent us home.

MOM

Go to your room.

HOWIE

You don't believe me, ask me any question about Santa. Or his Workshop. Or elves.

MOM

We'll sort this out in the morning.

HOWIE

I have pictures.

Howie produces his digital camera. Turns it on. Shows Mom the North Pole pictures:

-- Howie with Bub in front of the Workshop.

-- Howie holding the stack of coins in the Money Room.

-- Howie with Santa in the War Room.

Mom patiently looks at the pictures.

Then, a reluctant smile.

MOM

Did you do this on the computer? You have talent. Now go to your room.

Defeated, Howie hunches, drops his pleading smile.

INT. HOWIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Howie lies in bed. His face is illuminated by the glow of the digital camera's LCD screen.

He switches from picture to picture, staring at them glumly.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Howie and Tater walk to school. They're all bundled up.

They walk quietly for a bit.

TATER

What's wrong? Did you get in trouble?

HOWIE

I'm grounded for two weeks.

TATER

Bummer. My parents were jealous.

HOWIE
They believed you?

 TATER
Sure.

Tater drops back. Grabs a handful of snow. Makes a snowball.

 TATER
Look out. I'm armed and dangerous.

Howie eyes the snowball. Keeps walking. He couldn't care less.

Tater catches up to him. Packs the snowball tighter.

 TATER
It's got your name on it.

Howie shrugs.

Tater keeps fishing for a response.

 TATER
Snowball sandwich.

Howie won't bite.

Tater winds up at close range. Lets the snowball drop to the sidewalk.

 HOWIE
I'm depressed.

 TATER
Yeah.

 HOWIE
I'm not the world's greatest snooper anymore.

 TATER
You never were.

 HOWIE
I thought I was. Life was good then.

 TATER
You're still you. At least, you look the same.

This strikes Howie:

 HOWIE
I do?

He's pensive now.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Passing period. Boys and girls mill about and swarm to their classrooms.

Howie finds James in the crowd. Tater tags along.

HOWIE

Hi, James. Got any questions for the World's Greatest Snooper, or did my brochure address your concerns?

Tater can't believe his ears.

TATER

(under his breath)

Hey.

Howie pulls Tater aside.

HOWIE

Shh.

TATER

Don't lie to him. You're not the best.

HOWIE

That's between me and Santa.

Tater takes off -- leaves Howie to his devices.

Howie gets back to business.

HOWIE

Have you made up your mind? Are you going to go with the best or settle for the rest?

JAMES

What rest? It's you or I snoop for myself.

HOWIE

I'll give you a one dollar new customer discount.

JAMES

All right.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE, BASEMENT - DAY

Howie and James on the couch before the TV. James plays a videogame.

Howie watches.

HOWIE

Before I start, I need to ask you,
where have you snooped already?

James answers Howie at opportune moments, between flurries of button mashing.

JAMES

Let's see... Um... Under my parents'
bed... In their closet... And...
That's it.

HOWIE

Lazy. I'll get to work.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE, ATTIC - DAY

Howie searches through the clutter of the attic. Opens a trunk. Empty.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE, GARAGE - DAY

Howie searches through the clutter of the garage. Opens a cabinet. Only tools here. No gifts.

EXT. JAMES' HOUSE, BACKYARD, SHED - DAY

Howie unlatches the shed door. Tries to open it. Snow on the ground impedes it. He yanks on the door. Success.

But inside there are only gardening tools and lawn equipment.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE, BASEMENT - EVENING

Howie rejoins James, still playing the video game.

HOWIE

James, can I meet your parents?

Momentarily,

JAMES
They're not here.

HOWIE
When will they be home?

JAMES
I don't know, late. They work out
after work.

Howie furrows his brow.

HOWIE
Everyday?

JAMES
(cursing the TV)
No-ooo!

James throws down his controller. Game Over. James turns
off the TV and the video game console.

JAMES
What?

HOWIE
I said, do your parents work out
everyday?

JAMES
Yes.

HOWIE
Is it far?

JAMES
No.

HOWIE
Let's go there.

INT. HEALTH CLUB, MEMBERS SERVICES DESK - NIGHT

Howie and James approach a HIGHLY FIT CLERK.

Howie speaks up.

HOWIE
Hello. We need help. My friend
here, his dad--

JAMES
Mister Ronald Rooney.

HOWIE

--left a present in his locker. He needs it right away. There's this party.

The clerk is skeptical. He keys something into a computer.

HIGHLY FIT CLERK

Ron Rooney. He left ten minutes ago. Let's have a look.

INT. HEALTH CLUB, MEN'S LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The clerk opens a locker with a key. There's a bag of gifts inside.

HIGHLY FIT CLERK

You're right.

Howie paws through the bag. Finds one gift in particular. Peels back a flap of wrapping paper. Sees text on the packaging.

Bingo -- it's a Dinky Bot.

James sees this. Beams.

JAMES

That's it.

Howie suppresses his excitement.

HOWIE

No, it's not here.

He replaces the flap of wrapping paper.

HIGHLY FIT CLERK

What?

JAMES

I mean, he's right, that's not it.

The clerk shakes his head, annoyed at these boys yanking his chain.

EXT. JAMES' HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

On the front stoop, James counts four dollar bills, gives them to Howie.

JAMES

How'd you know to look in my dad's locker? Was that Method Snooping?

HOWIE

No, logic. You said your parents are always at the club. Lockers are good hiding places. Moms' lockers never have enough room...

JAMES

Oh. Neat. See you tomorrow, Howie.

Howie heads home with a spring in his step.

HOWIE

Maybe I'm not the best, but I am pretty darn good.

He breaks into a skip.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

A FASHIONABLE TEACHER addresses the class of third graders.

FASHIONABLE TEACHER

Now it's time for show and tell. Howie, I know you're excited. You may go first.

Howie leaves his desk, goes to the head of the class. He's got his digital camera in hand.

Filled with pride, he looks out upon the rows of boys and girls. Looks at Chuck Fiddle, doodling in a notebook.

HOWIE

I took some pictures.

Chuck looks up from his notebook.

Howie catches his gaze.

HOWIE

I think they speak for themselves.

Howie switches the camera on. Displays the first photo:

-- Howie and Bub in front of Santa's Workshop.

HOWIE

This is me and Bub. He's one of Santa's elves.

BOYS AND GIRLS

Ooh.

HOWIE

See, that's Santa's Workshop.

BOYS AND GIRLS

Whoa.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Yeah, right.

Howie is peeved at the sarcastic comment. He switches to the next photo:

-- Howie holding the stack of coins in the money room.

HOWIE

This is the room where Santa keeps all the money for cash gifts.

BOYS

Wow.

SLEEPY BOY says,

SLEEPY BOY

It's like a bank.

HOWIE

It's better.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Yeah, sure.

Howie switches to the third and final photo:

-- Howie and Santa in Santa's War Room.

Immediately,

CHUCK FIDDLE

Oh, I bet.

FASHIONABLE TEACHER

Chuck Fiddle, keep your comments to yourself.

HOWIE

Here's me and Santa.

A PREPPY GIRL raises her hand. Howie calls on her.

HOWIE

Yes?

PREPPY GIRL
What was Santa like?

HOWIE
Oh, he was real nice.

Sleepy Boy raises his hand. Howie points to him.

SLEEPY BOY
How did you get to Santa's Workshop?

HOWIE
I can't tell you. Santa kind of
doesn't want us snooping around.

CHUCK FIDDLE
Oh, come on. You did that on your
computer. Anyone can do that.

HOWIE
No.

CHUCK FIDDLE
Yes.

HOWIE
No.

CHUCK FIDDLE
Yes.

HOWIE
No.

Just then, a large classroom window SHATTERS as...

Blitzen -- with Bub on his back -- leaps into the classroom.

Chuck screams.

Shards of glass fly everywhere.

Other kids scream.

Blitzen lands between rows of desks.

The teacher screams. She forms a cross with two rulers in
front of her, warding off the evil that has invaded her room.

Bub doffs his hat ceremonially.

BUB
Good day, children.

The teacher pushes her desk away. Runs frantically for help,
tottering and clacking in her high heels.

A dozen kids follow her lead, run after her.

BUB
Don't be afraid. I am a kindly elf.

SLEEPY BOY
That's the elf in the picture.

HOWIE
(in shock)
Bub.

Chuck is in shock, too -- cowering under his desk.

BUB
My reputation precedes me. Yes, I
am Bub. Friend to children of every
shape, size and hue. Blitzen, let
me down.

Blitzen lies down.

SLEEPY BOY
That's Blitzen.

PREPPY GIRL
He's so cute. Hi, Blitzen.

Blitzen looks at her warmly as Bub dismounts.

Bub walks over to the teacher's desk. Sits on the desktop,
legs crossed over the edge, teacher-like.

BUB
I am Santa Claus's head elf.
(under breath)
Formerly.

Some of the girls surround Blitzen. They pet him and hug
him.

BUB
I am here on a mission.

Bub gets off the desk. Goes to the chalkboard. Grabs a
piece of chalk. Writes NICE KIDS.

BUB
Nice kids. What do nice kids get
for Christmas?

BOYS AND GIRLS
Toys.

GIRLS
Clothes.

BOYS

Candy.

BUB

That's right, they get toys, clothes,
et cetera.

Bub writes TOYS next to NICE KIDS.

Then he writes NAUGHTY KIDS on the chalkboard.

BUB

Naughty kids. What do naughty kids
get for Christmas?

BOYS AND GIRLS

Coal.

Bub writes COAL next to NAUGHTY KIDS.

BUB

Precisely. Naughty kids get coal.
But is that fair?

BOYS AND GIRLS

Yes.

BUB

No. It's not fair. All kids should
get coal, I mean toys. And clothes.
Et cetera.

The boys and girls are nervous about this idea.

BUB

Think about it. Isn't Christmas the
one time of year when we should put
aside labels like Naughty and Nice
and just get some toys?

GIRLS

And clothes.

BOYS

And candy.

BUB

Et cetera.

BOYS AND GIRLS

Yeah.

Already the kids have warmed to Bub's idea.

BUB

Don't you think so?

BOYS AND GIRLS

(louder)

Yeah.

BUB

Isn't that the spirit of Christmas?
Toys and clothes and candy, et cetera,
for every girl and boy?

BOYS AND GIRLS

(pep rally volume)

Yeah.

BUB

You said it. Don't let anybody say
kids aren't smart.

Bub writes TOYS FOR EVERYONE on the chalkboard.

PREPPY GIRL

Don't forget clothes.

SLEEPY BOY

And candy.

Bub scribbles ETC. next to TOYS FOR EVERYONE.

BUB

This is my mission. But there's one
thing. To make this happen, I'm
going to need The World's Greatest
Snooper.

Howie blinks.

BUB

That would be you, Howie. Right?

Howie looks at Chuck Fiddle, still balled up and quivering
under his desk. Chuck looks pathetic, but Howie's determined
to prove himself.

And yet...

HOWIE

I told Santa I won't snoop anymore.

BUB

It's only one more time. For a good
cause.

The kids chant.

BOYS AND GIRLS

Howie, Howie, Howie.

HOWIE

What do you want me to do?

BUB

Come back to the North Pole with me.

HOWIE

And then what?

BUB

I'll tell you on the way.

Here Howie has a VISION -- he sees Tater. Tater says,

TATER

No, Howie.

Meanwhile, Bub climbs back onto Blitzen, and beckons Howie to join him.

IN HOWIE'S VISION, TATER SAYS,

TATER

He's a liar.

Howie rubs his eyes to get rid of the vision.

He joins Bub. Sits behind him on Blitzen.

The kids cheer.

HOWIE

(softly, to himself)

Sorry, Tater.

BOYS AND GIRLS

Bye, Howie. Good luck.

Howie waves goodbye.

Sleepy Boy tosses Howie his coat. Howie puts it on.

Blitzen takes a few steps. Leaps through the broken window. Flies away.

Chuck crawls out from under his desk.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Wicked.

The kids gather by the window and watch Howie fly away.

At the door, Fashionable Teacher returns along with THE PRINCIPAL and THE JANITOR.

FASHIONABLE TEACHER

Where are the reindeer and the elf?

PREPPY GIRL

They went back to the North Pole.

SLEEPY BOY

With Howie.

The teacher passes out.

The Principal and The Janitor look at each other askance.
They help the teacher up.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD, SKY - DAY

Howie and Bub gaze down at the neighborhood shrinking below them as Blitzen soars ever higher.

Bub looks at Howie. Cocks an eyebrow as if to say, *cool, huh?* A moment later,

HOWIE

Why does Santa hate you?

Ruining Bub's mood...

BUB

He doesn't hate me. We're like brothers, sometimes we bicker.

HOWIE

What about Tobias? And the guards? They don't like you either.

BUB

I think for myself. Most people don't. They feel threatened. Inferior. They lash out -- like this.

Comically, Bub swipes a hand at Howie -- like a tiger clawing its prey.

BUB

Plus, I'm tall. Taller than Santa. Short guys hate tall guys. They like shorter guys. Or elves, short ones.

HOWIE

That's why Santa kicked you out of his Workshop?

BUB
 (amused)
 Sadly, yes.

Bub sees that he's winning Howie over. Pats him on the head.

BUB
 Why don't you take a nap. You'll
 need your strength for snooping.

HOWIE
 What am I going to snoop?

Blitzen perks his ears up. He glances back at Bub. Bub notices this.

BUB
 Something fun. I'll tell you when
 we arrive. Rest up, little buddy.

Howie accedes. Rests his head. Closes his eyes.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

After school. Kids heading home.

Three police cars are parked on the grass by the broken window of Howie's classroom.

Scores of kids linger nearby to watch BUMBLING COPS act clueless.

Tater is among this crowd. He looks troubled.

He opens his backpack. Grabbing a bag of potato chips, he finds beneath it his walkie talkie. He lets the chips be, takes out the walkie talkie. Activates it.

TATER
 Breaker, breaker. Howie, do you
 read me?

EXT. SKY OVER ARCTIC - DAY

Blitzen soars over majestic, barren tundra, far below.

Howie dozes behind Bub. He wakes to the muffled sound of Tater's voice coming from his jacket pocket.

Bub hears the sound, too; assumes it's Howie talking.

BUB
What's that?

Howie takes his walkie talkie out. As he does,

TATER (V.O.)
Howie. Are you there?

Quickly, Howie switches the thing off. Slips it back in his pocket.

Bub turns round. Eyes Howie.

BUB
What's going on?

Howie plays innocent, looks like an angel.

HOWIE
I said, Wow, I love your hair.

Bub touches his hair.

BUB
You noticed.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Tater frowns at his walkie talkie.

TATER
Too far? I need more cavities.

EXT. NORTH POLE, BUB'S IGLOO - DAY

Blitzen descends for a landing. Touches down, comes to a halt.

Blitzen lies down. Bub and Howie dismount.

Bub walks away gingerly, bow-legged.

BUB
My butt hurts. That reindeer needs
a saddle.

Blitzen bristles -- then trots, takes off, flies away.

INT. BUB'S IGLOO - DAY

They enter.

BUB
Home sweet home. Cocoa?

HOWIE
No, thanks.

Howie plops his rear onto Bub's cot.

BUB
Let's get down to business. Here's
the plan. I want you... to snoop...
for me... The List.

Howie's eyes bug out.

HOWIE
Santa's List?

BUB
Precisely. I'll get you into Santa's
Chalet. You snoop out the List.
Then, bring it to me.

HOWIE
I don't know...

BUB
What's to know? I have The List, I
move all the kids from the Naughty
column to the Nice column.

HOWIE
Santa's List. I think that's off
limits.

BUB
Don't be naive. There're no limits,
we fight the good fight.

HOWIE
Yeah, b--

BUB
But nothing.

HOWIE
There's got to be some other way.

BUB
No. None.

HOWIE

We can talk to Santa. Have a discussion.

BUB

Ha. Discussion. Funny. Santa brooks no discussions. It's his way or the tollway. He rules with an iron fist.

HOWIE

Not the Santa I know.

Bub grits his teeth.

BUB

You met him once.

HOWIE

(wavering)

Yeah.

BUB

Darned right.

Howie folds his arms.

BUB

I know you're apprehensive. That's only natural. Focus on results. The good that will come of this.

Howie rubs his temples. Too much thinking.

BUB

Think of the happy children of the world come break o' Christmas morn. Not one lump of coal. Not one heavy heart. Not one frown.

HOWIE

I'll do it.

BUB

Good boy. Hold that thought.

HOWIE

Holding.

BUB

Let me get you some elf wear. Then we're ready for the dumpster.

A quizzical look from Howie -- *dumpster?*

EXT. SANTA'S CHALET, DUMPSTER - DAY

Howie and Bub are buried in the trash of a dumpster outside a big sectional industrial door of Santa's Chalet.

A rotting banana peel has become perched on Howie's head.

BUB

This is your ticket in. When the door opens, the operator will activate the robotic dumper.

Howie nods.

BUB

I will distract him. When he stops the machine, wedge yourself into the empty trash can. Understand?

HOWIE

Let's get this over with.

Bub consults his wristwatch.

BUB

Any second now.

There is a MEOW.

In the trash, under some coffee grounds, is a cat.

Bub scolds the cat.

BUB

Shh. Not yet, Tuh-mah-toe. Wait for my cue.

Suddenly, the big sectional door is raised open. Howie and Bub duck back into the trash.

There's a series of HYDRAULIC SOUNDS.

From under the banana peel, Howie spies the robotic dumping arm swing a trash can out over the dumpster -- right over his head.

The robotic arm tilts the can...

And dumps the foul trash on Howie and Bub.

This is the cue. Bub pinches his cat, Tuh-mah-toe.

The cat SHRIEKS.

Bub pops his head out of the trash and waves his arms at the OPERATOR -- a burly, sweaty elf in coveralls -- at the controls of the robotic dumper just inside.

BUB
Whoa, whoa, whoa.

Bub pinches the cat again.

The cat SHRIEKS again.

BUB
Stop the machine. Did you hear that?

The Operator stops the machine.

BUB
It's a wee kitty cat.

Bub nudges Howie to get him going.

The trash can is directly above Howie, empty and upside down. Howie stands up. He's dressed in an elf outfit.

Howie jumps up, thrusts his feet out and wedges himself into the can. As luck would have it, the shape of the trash can is such that there's a sort of ledge where Howie can set his feet to hold fast.

BUB
(calling to Operator)
Okay, my man. You're good to go.

OPERATOR
What're you doing in the dumpster, anyway, Bub?

BUB
Times are tough.
(then, whispering to
Howie)
It's all you, kid.

Bub climbs out of the dumpster, waves to the Operator again.

BUB
Don't mind me. I'm outta here.

Bub jogs away.

The Operator shrugs. Turns the robotic dumper back on.

The robotic arm tilts the trash can upright...

Which swings the attached lid shut...

And which tilts Howie upside down. Howie rights himself, sits in the bottom of the can.

The robotic arm swings back inside the Chalet. With Howie concealed in the trash can.

The Operator powers down the robotic dumper. Closes the sectional door. Wheels the trash can, and Howie, out of here.

INT. TRASH CAN - DAY

Howie listens in the dark to the sound of CASTERS WHEELING across linoleum.

INT. SANTA'S CHALET, KITCHEN - DAY

The Operator deposits the can in this large, fancy kitchen. Then he leaves.

INT. TRASH CAN - DAY

Howie listens to FOOTSTEPS RECEDING. Waits till they're gone.

He stands slowly, pressing his head up against the lid. The lid raises. He peers out.

An elf COOK is chopping onions at a butcher block. He's also humming to himself.

A pained expression on Howie's face as he hatches a plan...

Aha! Hatched.

Howie mimics the sound of RUNNING WATER.

The Cook continues to hum.

Howie mimics -- GURGLING WATER.

The Cook stops humming. Shifts his pelvis.

Howie mimics -- FAST RUNNING WATER.

COOK

Funny, I just went to the bathroom.

(shifts pelvis again)

Oh, well.

The Cook hurries out of the room.

Howie climbs out of the trash can. Into,

THE KITCHEN

He sneaks to the nearest door. Opens it. Peers out. Sees a hallway. It's empty.

INT. SANTA'S HALLWAY - DAY

Howie walks along, past several doors. At last, one door he picks. Cracks it open.

His face lights up.

HOWIE

Boy Stuff.

A storage room like the others -- with boys' stuff. Sporting equipment, toy cars, trucks, trains and planes, video games, art supplies, candy.

HOWIE

I don't have time.
(on second thought)
I gotta look.

He enters.

EXT. HOWIE'S HOUSE, ROOF - DAY

Tater shows two POLICEMEN the red emergency button on Howie's chimney top. Howie's Mom and Dad are up here, too.

POLICEMAN #1

You press it.

POLICEMAN #2

You press it.

Policeman #1 presses the button.

EXT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, REINDEER STABLES - DAY

In Blitzen's pen, a red light flashes. Blitzen is not there to see it.

EXT. HOWIE'S HOUSE, ROOF - DAY

POLICEMAN #1

How long?

TATER

Like, a minute.

Policeman #2 stares at his wristwatch, marking time.

Howie's Mom and Dad are distraught.

DAD

Tater, you told me it took a few hours to fly to the North Pole.

TATER

Blitzen probably has to fly slower with passengers.

The Policemen share a look. Patience boiled over.

POLICEMAN #2

Minute's up.

POLICEMAN #1

Yeah, Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, we're doin' all we can. We'll call you if anything develops.

The cops leave via the ladder.

MOM

Howie really is at the North Pole, isn't he?

Dad embraces Mom as she begins to cry softly.

DAD

Try that thing again, Tater.

Tater takes his walkie talkie out of his pocket. Activates it.

TATER

Howie. Come in, Howie.

No response.

MOM

He's too far.

DAD

It could be his battery died.

TATER

Or else he turned his walkie talkie off. But I won't give up.

INT. SANTA'S CHALET, BOYS' STUFF STORAGE ROOM - DAY

Howie is agog. This place is nirvana for boys.

The first thing that catches his eye is a skateboard. He takes it from the shelf...

Rides it up and down the aisles.

Next, he comes across a motorized mini police car. He slips in...

And cruises the aisles, mars lights flashing.

He points accusingly at stuffed animals, as if they are hoodlums he is keeping his eye on.

He pulls over. Plays at apprehending himself.

HOWIE

Freeze, Cooper. Hands up. You are trespassing. This is the North Pole. No kids allowed.

He fiddles with the toy police radio. Picks up the handset.

HOWIE

We got a zero four niner here. Situation developing. I'm gonna need backup.

Howie thinks he's very funny.

Now he sees a camcorder. He takes it.

CUT TO:

HOWIE

-- Camcorder in hand, looking at the LCD display as he films all the boys' stuff.

HOWIE

They can't say I did THIS on my computer.

Howie pans the camcorder. Stops at a cache of Dinky Bot boxes.

HOWIE

Dinky Bots.

(zooms in)

Wish you were here to see this, Tater.

Suddenly, Howie looks sad.

HOWIE

Or -- just here.

Loneliness has snuck up on him.

Now, a VOICE -- as someone taps Howie's shoulder.

VOICE

Excuse me.

Howie tenses his shoulders.

HOWIE

Not again.

He's sure he's caught. He slips the diminutive camcorder into his pocket. Then turns, sheepish.

It's not Santa or Bub. It's a HAIRY ELF standing before him.

HAIRY ELF

Could you help me?

HOWIE

Me?

HAIRY ELF

I'm a visitor. Could you point me to the Pet Supplies room?

Howie can't see why not.

HOWIE

Sure.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, HALLWAY - DAY

Howie and Hairy Elf walk down the hallway.

HOWIE

Where're you from?

HAIRY ELF

Canada. I'm a wood elf.

HOWIE
I've never seen a wood elf before.

 HAIRY ELF
We hide.

 HOWIE
Oh. Here we are.

They stop.

 HAIRY ELF
Thank you kindly. Will you accept a
gift of finest chocolate for your
trouble?

Hairy Elf produces a bar of chocolate.

 HOWIE
Yes, I will.

Howie takes the chocolate. Pockets it.

Hairy Elf salutes Howie. Opens the door to the Pet Supplies
storage room, goes in -- leaving Howie in the hallway.

 HOWIE
What a nice guy. I have to get to
work. Let's see... this way.

He heads back toward the Boys' Stuff room. Passes the door
and keeps going.

 HOWIE
Maybe through the kitchen.

INT. SANTA'S CHALET, KITCHEN - DAY

He enters. Sees the Cook at the kitchen island, pounding
meat with a tenderizer.

Howie crouches low. Skirts round the island and the Cook.
Leaves the kitchen through the far door.

INT. SANTA'S CHALET, PANTRY - DAY

Howie passes through here. Opens another door. Peeks into
the next room...

INT. SANTA'S CHALET, GREAT ROOM - DAY

By the cozy light, Santa works at his desk. Mrs. Claus stands beside him. Santa puts down his pen. Takes his glasses off. Holds them to the light, sees a smudge. Wipes the glasses clean in his cottony soft beard.

SANTA

The big day is almost here. One more week. Isn't it great?

Mrs. Claus sits on Santa's lap. Rests her head on his shoulder.

MRS. CLAUS

You're just like the kiddies.
(she loves that about
him)

Behind them, a door slowly, silently opens.

Howie creeps into the room, just as Bub once did. He skulks behind Santa and Mrs. Claus, across the room to the stairs. Pads up them.

INT. SANTA'S CHALET, ATTIC - EVENING

An enormous attic filled with rows and rows of trimmed Christmas trees. Under each tree is a bevy of wrapped gifts.

Howie takes out the camcorder. Films this Christmas splendor.

He narrates.

HOWIE

It's the mother lode.

He halts at the sight of two ROAMING GUARDS patrolling the attic.

He hides behind a Christmas tree in the corner. Puts the camcorder away.

HOWIE

Think.

Howie studies the gifts around him.

Then he slips out of his elf outfit. His own clothes are underneath.

He snatches a big red bow off of a big gift. Sticks the bow to the top of his head. It falls off -- it won't stick to his hair. So he sticks the bow to his forehead.

A Roaming Guard approaches.

Howie freezes. Makes a dumb, lifeless face. He's trying to pass for a mannequin.

The guard stops toe to toe with Howie.

ROAMING GUARD

You must be new. What is your name,
I wonder.

The guard begins to grope Howie, looking for a tag.

ROAMING GUARD

No tag?

He gropes Howie's arms, legs, feet, neck.

Howie bites his lip. It's all he can do to keep from squirming and laughing.

ROAMING GUARD

Yo. Dexter.

The other guard jogs over.

DEXTER

Yo. Joe. Hey, whazzat? New toy?

JOE

Far as I can tell. But it's got no tag.

DEXTER

I'll find the tag.

Dexter gropes Howie very roughly. Howie closes his eyes -- OOPS -- bad mistake. He's barely keeping it together. He's dying to laugh.

DEXTER

You win, Joe. No tag.

JOE

Yo. It's eyes are closed.

JOE

Were they open?

DEXTER

Weird toy.

JOE

Let's get Santa.

DEXTER

He'll know what's the deal.

The two guards go downstairs.

The big red bow peels away from Howie's forehead. It falls.

Howie relaxes. Opens his eyes.

Big sigh.

HOWIE

No time now. I've got to Method
Snoop.

He shakes his arms, shakes his legs, shakes all over --
preparing himself.

HOWIE

Jolly.

Howie adopts a jolly face. Thrusts his belly forward to
look fat.

HOWIE

Nod like this.

He nods slowly, the way Santa does.

HOWIE

Eyes like this.

Howie gathers a slow-burning intensity in his eyes.

HOWIE

Ho ho ho.

I'm Santa.

He walks down the aisles, trundling the way Santa does.

HOWIE

Now, where'd I put that List?

As Howie nears the center of the attic, he sees something.

Could it be? In the middle of the center aisle: a pedestal
supporting a dictionary stand.

Howie approaches.

Yes. It is. The List -- on display -- glowing slightly.

HOWIE

Holy Santy.

The List.

Howie opens The List.

He flips through it. It's big as a phone book, but the paper is of finest quality and the script of highest artistry.

Howie stops flipping and opens randomly to page 437 -- Rockenbach, Zach thru Rockwell, Jenny.

HOWIE

Let's see what... Jenny Rockwell...
is getting for Christmas.

On this page are:

Twenty names.

Followed by either Naughty or Nice.

But no mention of toys and goodies.

HOWIE

Doesn't say?

Now Howie focuses on something he paid no attention to before. Next to each name, a button-like icon labeled View.

HOWIE

View...

He traces his finger down the page. Stops on the View icon beside Jenny Rockwell's name.

HOLOGRAPHIC VIDEO FOOTAGE LEAPS OFF OF THE PAGE.

It's 3D video footage -- hovering in air -- in brilliant color -- projected a foot off of the page.

HOWIE

Dude.

Howie takes the camcorder out of his pocket. Films the holographic video. It shows a grade school age girl opening a Christmas gift... a camcorder.

HOWIE

Camcorder. Lucky.

But when the girl in the video opens the camcorder box, it's empty. She frowns.

Howie regards the camcorder in his hand. Looks again at the video footage. At the empty box in the footage. At the picture of a camcorder on the side of the empty box.

HOWIE
 Coal. Hey, I'm done. I know what
 Chuck's getting.

Howie closes The List. Lifts it off of the pedestal.

 HOWIE
 Forget Bub. This List is mine.
 (pretends to show
 Chuck)
 See, Chuck -- I snooped Santa.
 (pretends to be Chuck)
 Howie, you rule.

Howie tugs at his waistband. Fits The List between his butt
 and the seat of his pants. He now has a large block of a
 derriere.

 HOWIE
 Wait a minute. I can't take Santa's
 List, he needs it. I know. I'll
 mail it back. After I show it to
 Chuck.

Howie heads back to the stairs.

Tiptoes down the stairs.

Cracks the door to Santa's Great Room.

Peeks in.

SANTA PEEKS BACK

Howie screams bloody murder.

He pushes the door open, knocking Santa. Ducks between
 Santa's legs, then tries to make a break for it.

Santa chases him down fast. Tackles him.

Mrs. Claus helps Howie up.

 MRS. CLAUS
 You can't outrun Santa, sweetie.

The two Roaming Guards come and restrain Howie.

INT. SANTA'S WAR ROOM - NIGHT

Santa and Howie sit at the conference table.

SANTA

The question is, what part of Don't Snoop don't you understand?

HOWIE

It's just that I'm a slow learner.

SANTA

Perhaps what you need is a story. There once was a boy named Bill.

Santa gets up. Walks over to a utility closet.

SANTA

(small voice)

Who had a small voice.

He opens the closet. Takes a BULLHORN off of a shelf.

SANTA

But he wanted
(big voice)
a big voice. So he got
(into bullhorn)
a bullhorn.

HOWIE

Cool.

SANTA

Bill took the bullhorn with him everywhere he went. Even to school.
(into bullhorn)
I pledge allegiance to the flag.

Howie laughs -- rather nervously, though.

SANTA

That's what the kids at school said... They called him Bull. But Bill didn't care.

HOWIE

He was just glad they could hear him.

SANTA

One day at recess, some of the boys said, get Bull's horn. They ran after him, grabbed Bill's bullhorn and threw it up in the air.

Santa mimics the chase, the steal, the throw.

SANTA

It broke into a hundred pieces.

HOWIE

That's mean.

SANTA

Bill said,
 (small voice)
 no.

HOWIE

That's it?

SANTA

Nope. Then he stood tall -- he'd
 always been a huncher -- held his
 head up, pushed his chest out. A
 big voice came from his gut,
 (big voice)
 NO.

HOWIE

Then what?

SANTA

Recess stopped. Everybody just
 stopped, and they all stared at Bill.
 From then on, Bill knew the secret
 to a strong voice. Not bullhorns.
 You need to stand tall and talk from
 your gut.

Howie nods.

SANTA

Understand?

HOWIE

Sure.
 (but he doesn't)

SANTA

Think about it on the way home.

HOWIE

I can go home?

SANTA

You can go home.

HOWIE

Yes. Thanks, Santa. I'm really
 ready.

Santa looks Howie up and down.

SANTA

You know, you look taller than before.

HOWIE

Thank you.

CLOSE ON Howie's rear end seated on the chair, raised a couple of inches by The List stuffed in the seat of his pants.

HOWIE

I'll be good from now on, Santa. I swear.

SANTA

Don't swear. Just do it.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, REINDEER STABLES - NIGHT

Howie is mounted on Blitzen in his pen.

The Stable Hand opens the pen door.

STABLE HAND

You're quite the frequent flyer.

She gives the reindeer a little slap.

STABLE HAND

Home again, home again, off you go.

Blitzen trots...

OUTSIDE

Lifts off. Up and away.

EXT. BUB'S IGLOO - NIGHT

Bub is standing over some bratwurst sizzling over a fire pit beside the igloo. At the same time, he's watching Santa's Chalet with binoculars. He sees Blitzen with Howie bolt out of the stables, take to the air and ascend.

Bub tosses the binoculars.

Grabs a great big slingshot planted in the snow beside him.

In his other hand, he grabs a pair of barbecue tongs. He picks up a RED HOT COAL from the fire pit.

He fits the burning coal into the sling shot's leather pouch. Pulls the powerband back...

EXT. NORTH POLE, SKY - NIGHT

As Blitzen rises away from Santa's Chalet and nears Bub's igloo below, Howie gazes up at the twinkling stars.

Overhead, he sees what appears to be a red shooting star. Shooting up -- not down.

 HOWIE
 (to Blitzen)
 Did you see that?

Blitzen nods his head. Looks down.

Howie looks down, too. He sees a red light coming toward them fast.

A burning coal. It whizzes by.

 HOWIE
 What the heck?

Howie sees Bub far below, by the light of the fire pit.

 HOWIE
 Bub.

EXT. BUB'S IGLOO - NIGHT

Bub reloads the slingshot with another hot coal. Aims it at Blitzen soaring above.

 BUB
 Be the coal.

He fires off the shot.

EXT. NORTH POLE, SKY - NIGHT

Howie watches another glowing red projectile (he still doesn't know what it is) shoot toward them from the ground. He can see it's going to hit Blitzen.

 HOWIE
 Turn.

Blitzen turns. Too late -- the burning coal strikes him near the heart.

Blitzen wails. Shudders. Rolls over in mid air. Plummets.

Howie clings to him.

EXT. BUB'S IGLOO - NIGHT

Bub hoots. Jumps for joy. Lobs the slingshot into the pail of coal beside the fire pit. He races toward the area where Blitzen is going to crash.

EXT. NORTH POLE, TUNDRA - NIGHT

Blitzen and Howie land on their sides in a small snow drift.

Howie is knocked unconscious.

Bub comes running. Pounces on Howie to pin him down.

INT. TATER'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tater lies in bed, walkie talkie beside him. He watches TV. Its glow is the only light in the room.

He picks up the walkie talkie. Activates it.

TATER

Talk to me, Howie.

(no reply)

Then maybe I give up.

He shuts his eyes for sleep.

INT. BUB'S IGLOO - NIGHT

Howie comes to. Sees Bub grinning, waving The List at him.

BUB

Success, my good boy. Where did you find this, then?

HOWIE

(without thinking)

The attic.

BUB

Perfect.

Howie tries to sit up. Finds himself tied to the cot with rope. He can barely move.

HOWIE

What are you going to do?

BUB

Well, I'm certainly not going to
live up to my end of the bargain.
As you did not live up to yours.

Bub opens The List. Flips through the pages for Howie to see.

BUB

But I thank you, Coop the Snoop. I
put you to the test, and indeed you
delivered.

Howie sees that every name on these pages is followed by
Naughty.

HOWIE

You changed everyone to Naughty.

BUB

Lumps of coal -- heavy hearts -- and
frowns for every boy and girl. Of
every size, shape and hue.

Bub chortles.

Over Howie's face crashes a great wave of anguish.

HOWIE

Why did I believe you? I should
have listened to Tater. Or Santa.

BUB

I'm more interesting. I tell better
stories.

HOWIE

But why? Do you hate kids?

BUB

Not anymore than grown-ups. Santa
is the object of my objection.
Everyone else is gravy.

Bub gathers a stack of blankets and a coil of rope from the
trunk at the foot of the cot.

He heads for the door.

HOWIE

Where are you going?

BUB

To put The List back. Don't worry,
when I return I shall cut you free.

(MORE)

BUB (CONT'D)

Or not. I might keep you on the floor. You'd make a nice cat bed.

HOWIE

Have fun getting caught.

Chortling again, Bub leaves.

Howie is alone.

Wait -- no, he's not. Puh-tah-toe the mouse is under the potbelly stove.

HOWIE

Hi, Puh-tah-toe. I'll call you Potato. You're my friend, right? Like Tater -- remember him?

Howie's face lights up. He's remembering...

The walkie talkie! It's in his pocket.

If he can only move his hand enough under these ropes that bind him, and reach into that pocket...

He does it.

Then moves the walkie talkie toward his mouth. He switches it on with his teeth.

HOWIE

Tater. Hello?

INT. TATER'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tater is asleep. He's snoring lightly. The TV is still on.

From the walkie talkie beside him:

HOWIE (V.O.)

Please be there, Tater.

The sound of Howie's voice blends with the sound from the TV. Tater smacks his lips, resumes snoring.

INT. BUB'S IGLOO - NIGHT

The mouse watches Howie struggle to speak into the walkie talkie.

HOWIE
You've got to be there.

INT. TATER'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tater rolls over and -- THUD -- falls out of bed. He picks up the walkie talkie. Activates it.

TATER
Howie?

INT. BUB'S IGLOO - NIGHT

Howie sighs. Enormous relief.

HOWIE
I knew you were there.

INTERCUT WALKIE TALKIE CONVERSATION

Howie roped to Bub's cot. Tater reclining in his bed.

TATER
I'm here, I'm here.

HOWIE
I'm in Bub's igloo. He tied me up with rope. Can you go up on my roof and press that red button?

TATER
We tried. It's not working.

HOWIE
I'm going to die... You were right about Bub.

TATER
There must be a way out.

In the igloo, the mouse twitches his whiskers -- scurries toward Howie -- stops and watches him.

HOWIE
Potato looks hungry. When I die, he can eat me.

TATER
Wait. Potato? Do you have any food on you?

Howie laughs lamely.

HOWIE

I'll get you myself.

Howie resumes running, but veers for the reindeer stables.

Bub guides Blitzen and circles back toward the igloo.

Flying low, Blitzen swoops past the fire pit.

Bub snatches the pail of coal sitting there -- with the slingshot inside it.

Blitzen rises again. Just off the ground. Heads toward Howie.

Bub fires a lump of black coal at Howie. It misses.

Bub fires another lump of coal. It hits Howie's foot.

HOWIE

Ow, ow.

Howie limps the rest of the way to the reindeer stables.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, REINDEER STABLES - NIGHT

Howie approaches the nearest pen. A sign on it says, DASHER.

HOWIE

Please help.

Howie points frantically to the sky. Dasher sees Blitzen in flight, with Bub upon his back.

Dasher snorts. Nods. He will help Howie.

As Howie opens the pen, Bub and Blitzen swoop out of the sky, and with his slingshot Bub fires a lump of coal at Howie in the stables.

The coal explodes against the pen door in a black cloud of dust.

Howie vaults up and mounts Dasher.

Dasher trots...

OUTSIDE

Takes to the sky.

CUT TO:

THE CHASE

Bub and Blitzen are rising over the Workshop.

Howie points them out to Dasher.

Dasher speeds through the air, straight for them.

HOWIE

Get me close, I'm jumping over.

Just then, Bub fires another lump of coal. It whizzes inches from Howie's ear.

HOWIE

I don't think that coal is hot. I
don't think it can hurt us.

Another lump of coal rockets toward them. Dasher makes an evasive maneuver. But can't dodge it. He is hit in the forehead.

Stunned, Dasher blanks out, closing his eyes -- and he plummets.

But a few seconds later, he recovers. Shakes off the pain. Flies onward and upward.

HOWIE

I was wrong.

Bub fires another lump of coal.

Dasher succeeds in dodging.

HOWIE

We need to fight back.

Dasher is closing in. He's ten yards from Blitzen.

Bub fires again.

Dasher is hit again. In the chest. He veers off course for a moment. Recovers.

HOWIE

Snowballs. Take us down.

Howie points down.

Dasher descends. Touches down in the snow.

Bub fires a lump of coal. It misses.

Howie dismounts. Removes his jacket. Collects a heap of snow in it. Remounts.

Dasher trots, lifts off.

Blitzen is circling back after the last flyby.

As Dasher pursues Blitzen, Howie makes snowballs. He packs them hard.

Bub fits another lump of coal in his slingshot.

BUB

Don't mess with me, kid.

He fires the coal.

Howie ducks, and it passes him by.

He palms one of his snowballs, cocks his arm back to throw.

HOWIE

Eat snow.

He throws the snowball. It misses.

Bub sneers.

BUB

I'm not hungry.

Blitzen and Dasher continually circle each other as Howie and Bub fire away.

BUB

Eat coal.

Bub fires a lump of coal. It hits Howie's jacket. The jacket, with the heap of snow and the stash of snowballs on it, falls to the ground.

BUB

HA ha. Coal wins.

In his hand, Howie has one snowball left. He throws it. It hits Bub's pail of coal. The pail falls to the ground.

HOWIE

Ha HA. Snow wins.

BUB

You're empty-handed. Go home.

Bub kicks Blitzen; Blitzen rockets away.

Dasher rockets after them.

HOWIE

I'll go home when I'm good and ready.

Dasher and Howie are gaining on Blitzen and Bub.

Blitzen tries to shake him:

Flies low to the ground. Inches from the snow.

Turns sharply.

Rises.

Dips.

Swerves.

Flies straight for a wall of the Workshop. Turns at the last moment.

All the while, Dasher keeps up.

As Blitzen passes over Santa's Chalet, Dasher pulls alongside him.

HOWIE

Why, Blitzen? I thought you were on my side.

Howie grabs onto Blitzen's antlers. Pulls himself over. Straddles Blitzen's neck. He is now facing Bub.

HOWIE

You're toast.

BUB

Come and get it.

Dasher stays close, in case he's needed.

Howie pounces on Bub.

They claw at each other. Yet they keep their balance. It's a long way down to the ground.

The List is in Bub's pants, protruding over the waistband. Howie takes a hold of it. As he grapples with Bub, The List opens. Howie brushes against the page -- against a View icon.

Holographic video footage plays. A boy opening a gift box, finding a lump of coal, frowning.

Howie brushes against another and another View icon.

More holographic video footage -- more kids getting coal.

Howie is filled with righteous anger. He lets out a war cry.

BUB
Oh, no. Santa.

Howie's still trying to pull Bub down.

BUB
I'll burn it.

Bub fishes a book of matches from his pocket. Lights a match.

Howie, clinging to Bub's feet, tries to blow the match out from a distance. This doesn't work.

Bub lights The List on fire.

BUB
Why did I waste time rewriting this?
Fire -- fire, my friend. Burn.

Howie gets up. Grabs for The List.

Bub holds it at arm's length, out of reach.

Howie ENVISIONS -- countless children, all at once, from around the world, opening gifts and finding... nothing, not even coal.

Howie begins to spin Bub.

Spinning with him...

He loses his grip. They spin apart. Fall separately.

Bub, tired, still holding the flaming List, starts to crawl away.

Howie, tired too, crawls after him.

A pathetic chase is this.

Santa arrives. His sleigh swoops low. It glides across the snow. Glides in beside them.

Santa Claus wields a big, empty toy bag. Raises it... And,

HE BAGS BUB

The List falls to the snow. The flames go out. But it is ruined.

Santa knots the top of the bag. Tosses it -- with Bub writhing and cursing inside -- in the back of the sleigh.

Santa parks the sleigh beside Blitzen, who's lying in the snow not far from Howie.

CUT TO:

SANTA AND BLITZEN

Blitzen looks dazed.

Santa opens a pouch of herbs. Feeds them to Blitzen.

Blitzen leans his head against Santa's.

SANTA

You're fine now. My herbs are stronger than Bub's.

Santa scratches Blitzen's chin lovingly.

CUT TO:

HOWIE, PICKING UP THE LIST

He flips through its charred remains.

Santa glides over in his sleigh.

Howie brings the blackened List to Santa. Hands it over.

HOWIE

This is yours.

SANTA

What is it?

HOWIE

The List.

Santa flips through the charred remains.

Awkward silence.

HOWIE

You want me to explain?

Affirmative.

HOWIE

I was at school. It was show and tell. All of a sudden, the window blows up and Bub comes in riding Blitzen.

Santa nods slowly. Such a good listener. Howie can't stand that about him.

HOWIE

Oh, forget it. It's my fault. I
took The List. I hid it in my pants.
Now look, it's burnt to a crisp.

Howie breaks down and cries.

Santa climbs out of the sleigh. Puts an arm around Howie.

SANTA

You say it's your fault. What about
Bub?

HOWIE

(through tears)
He helped me.

SANTA

Mmm hmm.

Well, Christmas is one week away. I will need all that time,
working nonstop, to rewrite The List.

Howie acknowledges this, full of grief.

SANTA

Do you know what that means?

Howie shakes his head.

SANTA

It means you stopped a terrible,
terrible thing from happening --
just in time.

Santa squeezes Howie in a big embrace.

SANTA

Christmas would have been ruined.

Howie is speechless.

SANTA

You did good.

And Howie is happy.

EXT. SOUTH POLE - NIGHT

A reindeer comes in for a landing in the tundra...

It's Blitzen. With Mrs. Claus riding on him, bare back.
The saddle Bub had rigged is gone.

A large bag is slung over Mrs. Claus' shoulder. Something in it is squirming.

Blitzen touches down. Trots to a stop.

Mrs. Claus dismounts. Opens the bag.

Bub bursts out. He's ranting and raving and cursing at her. But he's incomprehensible because his mouth is taped shut.

He tries to peel the tape off.

MRS. CLAUS

Sorry I had to shut your trap. Your mouth was a real drag, aerodynamically speaking.

She points to a sign nearby. It reads, SOUTH POLE.

MRS. CLAUS

Welcome to your new home, the South Pole. It's all yours.

She remounts Blitzen. Waves to Bub.

MRS. CLAUS

Toodle-oo.

Blitzen trots and takes to the air.

Bub succeeds in removing the tape from his mouth. He calls after Mrs. Claus as she rises out of sight.

BUB

Wait. What am I supposed to do, sell fish to penguins? You won't get away with this. I have rights. -- I know where you live.

His voice fades away.

INT. SANTA'S WORKSHOP, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Howie sits on the sofa. Squeezed against him on either side are Tough Elf and Fat Elf.

TOUGH ELF

I pegged you wrong, kid. Santa told me you saved Christmas. How'd you do it?

HOWIE

You wouldn't understand. You're not a professional, like me.

Just then, Santa appears. He waltzes onto the scene from behind the sofa.

SANTA
And what sort of professional might
Howie be?

Howie shrinks back.

HOWIE
Santa.

FAT ELF
Professional Christmas-saver.

Santa lifts his eyebrows, looks down his nose at Howie.

HOWIE
No, no. We were just talking.

SANTA
Did you tell them how you nearly
ruined Christmas before saving it?

HOWIE
I was about to.

TOUGH ELF
What's this?

FAT ELF
Huh?

Tough Elf points his candy cane billy club at Howie.

TOUGH ELF
I hope you like peppermint, kid, cuz
I'm about to give you a mouthful.

Tough Elf raises the club to strike Howie.

Santa stays the club with his hand.

SANTA
Stop. I have forgiven Howie. You
will, too.

Tough Elf grumbles.

HOWIE
Sorry, Santa.

SANTA
Tell them.

HOWIE
 (to the Guards)
 Sorry.

SANTA
 Now repeat after me. I am not a
 professional Christmas-saver.

HOWIE
 I am not a professional Christmas-
 saver.

SANTA
 I am not the world's greatest snooper.

HOWIE
 I am not the world's greatest snooper.

SANTA
 Yes, no one is. You are only the
 world's greatest you. Now goodbye,
 I have work to do.

HOWIE
 Goodbye, Santa.

Santa leaves, shooting Howie a look that is both affectionate
 and warning.

Howie bows.

HOWIE
 World's greatest me. I like that.

EXT. HOWIE'S HOUSE, ROOF - EARLY MORNING

Howie dismounts from Blitzen.

HOWIE
 I'm glad you're on our side. I
 thought you went bad.

He salutes Blitzen.

Blitzen bows.

HOWIE
 It's too bad you can't talk.

Blitzen leans in close to Howie's face. Opens his mouth...

BLITZEN
 Who said I can't?

Howie is stunned.

HOWIE

Wha--? I don't get it.

BLITZEN

People talk too much.

That's all Blitzen has to say about that.

Blitzen licks Howie's face. Howie is disgusted and enjoying it at the same time.

Blitzen trots and flies away.

Howie waves goodbye.

Then he slides off of the roof, hangs onto the gutter and finds a footing on the ledge below, by his bedroom window. He opens the window and climbs into...

HIS BEDROOM

Mom and Dad are waiting there, on his bed.

They hug Howie. Tight.

MOM

You're home.

DAD

We love you.

MOM

Yes. You're grounded for a week.
No TV, no snacks, no friends, no
games.

She strokes his hair. Dad kisses his forehead.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Howie and Tater walk to school. They're all bundled up.

HOWIE

If it weren't for you, I'd be dead
now. Or else I'd be Bub's cat bed.

TATER

You don't have to thank me. Unless
you want to, say, give me some of
your lunch.

COOL KIDS

Cool Kids!

Howie has been waiting for this moment: he stands tall, holds his head up, puffs his chest out. Then he talks from his gut.

HOWIE

No, thanks. I'm not cool. I'm just warm and happy.

TATER

(setting Howie up)
If we're not cool, what are we?

HOWIE

One, two, three...

HOWIE AND TATER

Nerd Kids!

Chuck is embarrassed. His face turns red. He does not look cool. Desperately, he tries to turn the tables on Howie.

CHUCK FIDDLE

Forget you, lame-o. I was pulling your chain anyway.

Chuck's words condemn him. He wanders off. Alone. The Cool Kids -- with no center of gravity -- disperse.

The onlookers cheer.

Howie and Tater begin to move along -- Howie running a gauntlet of high fives all the way.

Howie's teacher in her classroom doorway gives Howie a thumbs up.

James steps out from among the onlookers.

JAMES

That was awesome, dog.

HOWIE

Thanks, dog.

JAMES

Can you teach me to be like you?
I'll pay you.

HOWIE

Don't be like me. Be like you. Be the world's greatest you.

JAMES
Oh, uh, yeah, okay.

James blushes. Then strides off confidently.
Howie and Tater walk together past the crowd.

TATER
Chuck won't bother us anymore.

HOWIE
I feel bad for him, though. He's
getting coal for Christmas.

TATER
Maybe he'll change for next year.

HOWIE
I guess it's possible.

TATER
So -- what am I getting?

HOWIE
It's a surprise.

TATER
What are you getting?

HOWIE
I never looked.

Howie is worried -- maybe HE will get coal for Christmas.

INT. HOWIE'S HOUSE, FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Christmas morning: the room is a shambles of torn wrapping
paper, toys, clothes, small appliances, boxes, ribbons, bows
and breakfast leftovers on paper plates.

But the Coopers are not quite finished with gifts. Howie
picks one up. Reads the tag.

HOWIE
From Santa.

Howie opens the gift with trembling fingers. Ever so slowly.
It's a bullhorn.

Howie is disappointed.

DAD
Strange.

HOWIE

It's a gag gift. Santa's funny like that.

MOM

Why don't you open your last present. It's from us.

Howie picks up the last present. Begins to open it, dispassionately, as if he doesn't expect anything good.

But then he sees what it is.

A Dinky Bot.

HOWIE

Dinky Bot, yes! Woohoo!

He opens the box, takes out the Dinky Bot. Dances around with it.

DAD

I haven't seen you this excited since...

MOM

Ever.

Howie runs to the phone. Dials.

He puts the Dinky Bot to the mouthpiece. Presses a button on the Dinky Bot's back.

HOWIE'S DINKY BOT

Program me.

AT TATER'S HOUSE

Tater laughs.

TATER

Hold on.

AT HOWIE'S HOUSE

Howie listens into the phone. Hears:

TATER'S DINKY BOT (V.O.)

Program me.

He laughs.

Now he puts his Dinky Bot to the bullhorn -- and the bullhorn to the phone. Presses the button.

HOWIE'S DINKY BOT
PROGRAM ME.

Howie laughs, buckles over.

On the line, Tater laughs just as loud.

Anne rolls her eyes.

ANNE
You nerd.

A sly grin from Howie.

HOWIE
That's me.

BEGIN CREDITS

EXT. SOUTH POLE, OCEAN SHORE - DAY

From the frozen shoreline, Bub calls to a penguin on a nearby iceberg.

BUB
Hey, you. Can you fly me to the
North Pole?

The penguin blinks.

BUB
Can you swim me there?

Blink. Blink.

BUB
Arrgggh!

END CREDITS

FADE OUT.

THE END