

CHRISTMAS *EVE*

A Screenplay
by
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FADE IN:

EXT. GERMAN VILLAGE (1934) -- CHRISTMAS EVE -- DARK

Heavy snow is falling out of a deep gray sky. The church looms high above the houses of Lüdenhausen on a rather steep hill. The adjacent cemetery is old, the snow covered head stones are crooked with age.

The village itself looks rather desolate, the small timber frame houses mainly built in the 15th and 16th century, are somewhat neglected. We see a poor area.

The village is quiet under the thick blanket of never-ending snow. We HEAR a thin metallic sound coming from the church's steeple, barely reaching the ground. It rings six times. From within the church we HEAR muffled singing and organ music.

BEGIN TITLES

EXT. IN FRONT OF CHURCH -- DARK

The heavy church door slowly opens and a flood of warm candle light falls into the yard. Inside the organ is PLYING a Christmas song.

A group of worshippers starts filing out. We HEAR a multitude of voices AD LIB wishing each other Merry Christmas.

END TITLES

A family of four, father August, mother Minna and two daughters, Selma and Anne, gathers outside. The other

worshippers AD LIB about the early winter weather and the biting cold.

WOMAN 1

Merry Christmas, Minna, merry
Christmas, August, and God bless.

MINNA

To you too, Sabine.
Merry Christmas, Hans.

WOMAN 2

Merry Christmas! How's it going,
August? Any news?

AUGUST

(grumbling)

News? What news? Jesus Christ!

MINNA

(evasive)

He's doing as good as he can,
Marie. We all are, isn't that
right, children? Huh? Isn't
that right?

(upbeat)

How's your mother these days?
Is she still running a fever?
Huh? Still running a fever?

WOMAN 2

I don't know, we don't have
much hope. Wait up Peter, put
on your gloves. Men!

PETER

Let's go, woman.

WOMAN 2

What's the rush?

AUGUST

Merry Christmas. Peter, come on over soon.

I need a talk with you, for crying out loud.

PETER

I be there. Take it easy, old friend. Take it easy.

AUGUST

You got it. Hi there, Marlis. How's it all going?

WOMAN 3

Merry Christmas, kids. Minna, I've some clothes from my Hanna in the attic..

MINNA

Yeah?

WOMAN 3

Yeah. I kept 'em for my grand kids, but -- well, you know --

MINNA

Yeah. I know, huh? I know.

WOMAN 3

(sighing)

No grand kids for me. I wonder if you can use 'em.

MINNA

Can I use 'em? You're kidding, huh? Can I use 'em?

WOMAN 3

I bring 'em by next week, O.K.? Time to go on, right?

MINNA

You say it. And merry Christmas,
Marlis, merry Christmas, huh?
I see you. And thank you, huh?

WOMAN 3

Merry Christmas to y' all.

POLICE MAN

(teasingly)

How's my favorite godchild?
You been good this year?

ANNE

Uncle Gerd! Of course I been good.
What do you think?

GERD

Just kidding, kiddo.
Merry Christmas to y'all.

SELMA

You coming with us?

GERD

No can do. Back to work.

AUGUST

Merry Christmas. How's the dog?

GERD

Getting old. Sad, but then --
who doesn't.

AUGUST

(nodding)

You say it, for crying out loud.

MINNA

You come on by for lunch
tomorrow, huh? You come, huh?

GERD

You got it. Gotta run.

AUGUST

You working tonight? Jesus
Christ! Never a day off.

While the parents AD LIB EXCHANGE good wishes with everyone passing by, Minna fusses over her two daughters who are getting impatient.

Meanwhile the pastor steps out of the church, walks straight up to the family of our and shakes their hands.

PASTOR

August, thanks for coming tonight.
I know this wasn't easy for you.
Keep up your faith.
God works in mysterious ways.

MINNA

(sarcastically)

You know it, Pastor. Huh?
Praise the Lord!

PASTOR

Merry Christmas, and God bless
you all. I come by next week.
I want to talk with both of you.

MINNA

You know where to find us, huh?
You know where. Huh?

AUGUST

Yep. It's time for a talk.
I need a talk with you alone,
Pastor -- if you will. And soon --

PASTOR

Why don't you stop by tomorrow

morning. I be here. Just me and
the Lord. Come on by, August,
we talk.

MINNA

(friendlier)

You are such a help, Pastor.
Such a help. Come along now
father. Come along now, huh?

AUGUST

I'm coming mother. See you
tomorrow, Pastor.

SELMA

Can we go now? I'm freezing.
What you looking at, stupid?

ANNE

Nothing.

SELMA

I give you nothing --

With the parents still turned towards the pastor, Selma
kicks her younger sister. Anne MOANS and rubs her shin.

ANNE

Mother!?

MINNA

Merry Christmas, Pastor, merry
Christmas.

PASTOR

Merry Christmas.

(bending down)

And you hang in there, young
ladies. You hear? God bless

you all. I pray for you.

MINNA

Hallelujah!

WOMAN 4

Can I have a word with you,
Pastor --

ANNE

Mother!!

MINNA

What?

ANNE

Selma kicked me.

SELMA

Nuh uh. Liar!

ANNE

It's true.

SELMA

(low voice)

Shut up, stupid.

ANNE

Mother!?

SELMA

(threatening)

Can it or else!

MINNA

What does Pastor mean, he has
to speak with both of us? Huh?
What does that mean?

(exasperated)

Leave your sister be, Selma,
leave her be. Huh?

AUGUST

Come mother, Jesus Christ, lets
get going. We talk later.

MINNA

Later, huh? Later.

AUGUST

Later, for crying out loud,
mother. Come girls.

MINNA

What a cold night this is, brrr.
Let's go. Huh? Come on, let's
get home before we all freeze
to the ground. Huh?

ANNE

(whining)

I'm so cold.

MINNA

Grab my hand, Anne. Selma, take
father's hand. Huh?
Take father's hand.

SELMA

I don't want to take father's
hand, it's cold. I want to take
your hand. Why can't Anne take
father's hand?

ANNE

Mother, I'm cold.

SELMA

(mockingly)

Mother, I'm cold!!!

AUGUST

(exasperated)

Jesus Christ, girls, be good.
It's Christmas, for crying out
loud.

MINNA

Stop fussing, let's go. Huh?
Come on, father, come on. Grab
Selma's hand, huh? Grab Selma's
hand.

SELMA

I don't want to!

AUGUST

Jesus Christ!

ANNE

Mother!! My feet are cold --
can we go now?

AUGUST

Come on now. Jesus Christ, girls,
behave. Lets go, mother.

MINNA

Put your hat back on, Selma --
what's wrong with you? Huh?
What's wrong with you.

SELMA

It's scratchy.

MINNA

Put that hat back on, now, huh?
Put it back on or ...

AUGUST

Come on, come on, mother.
Let's go, girls.

Minna takes both her girls' hands and with some last nodding and waving to the other families, off they go.

EXT. STEEP HILL IN FRONT OF CHURCH -- DARK

The family begins the treacherous descent, slipping and sliding on the icy ground covered already by almost two feet of snow which continuously falls, heavy and wet.

The flakes are almost as big as birds' eggs and Anne bends back her head, opening her mouth wide, trying to catch them with her tongue.

SELMA

Mother, Anne eats snow.

ANNE

Nuh uh, I don't.

SELMA

Uh huh, you do too.

MINNA

That won't harm her. Come on, Move it, Anne. Huh? Move it.

SELMA

(sotto)

That won't harm her -- perhaps there is rat poison in there and you drop dead.

ANNA

Mother! Selma says --

SELMA

(interrupting)

Shut up, stupid.

MINNA

Behave, huh? Behave!

AUGUST

Come on. Be good. For crying --

MINNA

(girlish)

I wonder, if Saint Nicholas left a present for us. Huh? Wonder, if he could find our house with all this snow coming down since days.

AUGUST

Mother, please.

MINNA

What do you say, Anne, huh?, did Saint Nicholas bring you a gift? Huh? What do you say? Huh?

SELMA

(sotto)

Not a chance in hell.

ANNE

Mother, Selma says --

MINNA

What? What is it now, huh?

SELMA

Nothing.

ANNE

You said --

SELMA

Can it!

MINNA

Selma! Keep moving. Huh? Keep moving.

EXT. SNOW-COVERED UNPAVED ROAD -- DARK

The family, huddled closely together, struggles through the heavy snow. It is dark. There are no street lights in the village. Now and then a window throws a thin ray of light into the road.

ANNE

(prattling)

I think Saint Nicholas brings me a doll -- or maybe a new hat -- no, wait a coloring book. Just like Carola has. With little angles in it. No, no. Wait, maybe it's --

SELMA

(irritated)

Why don't you shut up, stupid?

ANNE

I'm not stupid. You are. Mother!

SELMA

You get nothing and you know why? Because you're stupid.

ANNE

Mother, Selma says I'm stupid.

SELMA

Liar.

MINNA

(pulling Selma's arm)

Selma! Leave your sister alone. Huh? Leave her alone. Why can't you leave her alone? Huh?

ANNE

Yeah. Leave me alone.

SELMA

You leave me alone!

ANNE

Nuh uh, you leave me alone.
Mother!? Selma doesn't leave
me alone.

AUGUST

Girls, do you need a fight all
the time? Hurry up, It's freezing,
out here, for crying out loud.

MINNA

(impatiently)

What's wrong with you? Huh?
You're nine years old -- one
should expect a little more
sense than that. A little more
sense. Huh?

SELMA

(sotto)

I get you for that.

ANNE

Selma says --

MINNA

What did you say, girl? Huh?
What did you say?

ANNE

She says --

SELMA

Nothing. She says nothing.

(sotto)

Just wait till later --

ANNE

Selma says --

AUGUST

(interrupting)

Jesus Christ, mother. Let's get home. The snow's getting worse by the minute, for crying put loud.

MINNA

What you Jesus-Christing me for? Is the weather now my fault too, huh? The weather too?

AUGUST

Mother, take it easy, for crying out loud.

MINNA

(sighing)

A bad winter we have, huh? A bad winter. Too early, huh? Too early.

Minna holds tightly on to both girls, pulling Anne a bit who lags behind.

MINNA

Come on, Anne, hurry up a bit.

ANNE

(singing)

Hurry -- Hurry -- Hurry --
Look at the snow flakes --
Yummy.

SELMA

(hissing)

Shut up!

EXT. SNOW-COVERED UNPAVED ROAD -- DARK

The family struggles on through the heavy snow. They walk through the main part of the village, past a large fenced-

in farm house and the village inn and up again a smaller elevation towards their house.

All four people are involved in their own thoughts. Anne hums little nonsense phrases M.O.S.. Selma now and then passes a menacing look at her little sister.

EXT. OUTSIDE OPEN WINDOW OF A LITTLE OLD HOUSE -- DARK

Minna stops to SPEAK a few words with an elderly woman SHOUTING out off her window.

OLD WOMAN

Lina says that August took the train to Bielefeld last week to see the cancer doctor. What did he say?

MINNA

Merry Christmas, huh?, merry Christmas. No good news, Helene, no good news.

OLD WOMAN

So, is he getting any better then?

ANNE

Was Saint Nicholas at your house, Tante Helene?

MINNA

Get back inside, it's so cold, you catch your death. Huh? You catch your death. I come by tomorrow. Huh? Bring you some cookies. Huh?

OLD WOMAN

Did you bake Spekulatius?

MINNA

(sotto)

With what, huh? With what?

ANNE

Did Tante Helene get a present?

MINNA

Get back inside, now, get back inside. Huh? Merry Christmas, Helene, merry Christmas. Huh?

AUGUST

(to himself)

Nope, he isn't getting any better.

MINNA

Shush.

INTERCUT -- SELMA AND ANNE

Selma places a fast well directed kick at her little sister's calves. Anne knows better than to scream. She MOANS, covers her mouth and bites her lower lip, swallowing hard. A few tears start running down her face.

BACK TO SCENE

ANNE

(teary)

Father, can we go home?

August stands by, his shriveled face all dark and somber. He presses a fist into his stomach, GROANS and spits. His gloveless hands then shoved back deep into the pockets of his roomy military overcoat. He seems to be far away.

FLASHBACK -- INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

August sits in a chair in the consulting office while the Doctor leans over him.

DOCTOR

I'm so very sorry Mr. Winter.
There is nothing more I can do
for you. You should have come
earlier, much earlier.

AUGUST

(somber)

How much longer, Doctor?

DOCTOR

It's time to bring your affairs
in order. Three months, you have
three more months, the good Lord
willing -- I'm sorry.

END FLASHBACK

SELMA

Father, are you getting sick?

OLD WOMAN

You children come by next week.
I've a little something for you.

AUGUST

(muttering)

Much earlier, yeah. With what?
There isn't enough dough for
food in the house, for crying
out loud.

ANNE

A present?

OLD WOMAN

God bless you all. Merry Christmas.

(hesitant)

August? -- Ah, run along you all.

AUGUST

Merry Christmas to you too.
Keep warm.

AUGUST

(to Selma)

No, girl, I'm just fine.

MINNA

Get moving. Huh? Get moving.

EXT. SNOW-COVERED ROAD -- DARK

Silently, the four people struggle on, up the road toward their house..

The silence is deafening. The snow is falling relentlessly.

EXT. FRAU MEIER'S HOUSE -- DARK -- ESTABLISHING

Frau Lina Meier's house is a little bigger than those of her neighbors. It is the only one with a small front yard enclosed by a white picket fence.

The dark green shutters and the front door with a cut glass window are freshly painted. August looks at them proudly. He nods to himself.

AUGUST

(sotto)

Did a good job here, didn't you, old pal?

MINNA

Come on. Let's see if Saint Nicholas left a little something for you at Tante Lina's. Huh? You don't think he's forgotten you this year? Huh? You don't think that, do you? Huh?

SELMA

I don't care. I don't like Tante Lina. She prefers Anne anyway.

ANNE

That's not true. Not true at all.
 She says she loves all children
 And --

SELMA
 (interrupting)
 Shut up.

ANNE
 Selma doesn't leave me alone.

MINNA
 Now you know that isn't true,
 Selma. Huh? She loves both of
 you. She's your godmother. Huh?
 Your godmother.
 (exasperated)
 Now you behave or --

AUGUST
 Calm down, mother. Jesus Christ,
 why --

ANNE
 (interrupting)
 There she is.
 (excited)
 Tante Lina, open the door, we are
 here. Was Saint Nicholas there?
 Fast, open up, open up.

EXT. FRAU MEIER'S FRONT DOOR -- DARK

The front door is now being opened by the Frau Lina Meier. She is a short, skinny woman in her early fifties. She is dressed in a dark gray woolen dress with white lace collar. Around her shoulders she holds a wide knitted scarf.

Frau Meier is all smiles and goodwill. August nods at her.

ANNE
 (agitated)

Was Saint Nicholas here?

FRAU MEIER

Look who's here!

AUGUST

(serious)

Merry Christmas, Lina.

FRAU MEIER

(smiling)

Same to you. August

AUGUST

I gotta run girls, I gotta
use the john. Jesus Christ, I
don't know, my stomach just
doesn't feel right tonight.

MINNA

Run along. Huh? Run along.

ANNE

Come on. Let's see if --

SELMA

(interrupting)

You said you are fine.

AUGUST

Jesus Christ. Gotta run now.

SELMA

(reproachful)

You say that every year, father.
Why don't you come with us and
see if Saint Nicholas left a gift
for me? Please!

MINNA

Merry Christmas, Lina, merry

Christmas.

SELMA

Come on, father!

ANNE

Yes, father, come on.

FRAU MEIER

Let your father run along,
children. Merry Christmas, August.
I see you later. I be over for
dinner around eight.

AUGUST

See you then, Lina. Behave girls,
for crying out loud.
Bye now mother.

FRAU MEIER

Come inside children, it's cold.
Come on inside, Minna. We don't
need all his cold air in the
house.

August nods to them and slowly walks up the hill towards their own house. Minna and her daughters enter Frau Meier's house tightly closing the door behind them.

INT. FRAU MEIER'S FORMAL LIVING ROOM -- ESTABLISHING

Frau Meier has nicely wrapped the children's presents and placed them on a table right beside her old Lorenz radio which is PLYING Christmas songs.

Her furniture is pure Biedermeier and polished to a high shine. The walls are dressed up by two oil paintings and a gilded mirror which reflects the candle light.

Frau Meier does not have a tree but all four candles on her Advent's wreath are lit. The room looks warm and cozy, if little used.

ANNE

How come you don't have a
Christmas tree, Tante Lina?

FRAU MEIER

Take off your boots and coats.
You're trotting all that snow
onto my good carpet.

ANNE

I'm stuck in my sleeve.

SELMA

Oh man, I can't believe it.

ANNE

I'm stuck, I'm stuck.

MINNA

Now, now. Behave. Huh? Behave

FRAU MEIER

Come here, child.

Frau Meier helps the girls out of their boots and coats. She hands them to Minna who leaves the room to hang them up to dry.

ANNE

How come you have no Christmas
tree?

SELMA

Did Saint Nicholas leave a gift
for me?

FRAU MEIER

Of course he was here, children.
You were good, now weren't you?

ANNE

Where's your tree?

FRAU MEIER

No, no, Anne, I don't need a tree all for myself. That's frivolous!

ANNE

What's fribelous?

FRAU MEIER

Yes, when my Herman was still alive -- you know child, before he was killed --

ANNE

He was killed?

FRAU MEIER

-- was killed by that nasty horse that tried to run through the school yard -- ach, Herman -- I miss him so.

Minna enters the room, smiling at the scene childishly HUMMING "OH TANNENBAUM, OH TANNENBAUM" to herself.

FRAU MEIER

What was I saying?

SELMA

Tante Lina! The presents?

ANNE

Yes, the presents. What horse, Tante Lina?

MINNA

Don't interrupt Tante Lina, huh? Don't interrupt her. Go ahead, Lina, go ahead. Huh?

FRAU MEIER

As I was saying -- ah yes, when my dear Herman was still with me we had the most beautiful tree every year. He was like a kid in that regard -- he needed his tree. But since --

SELMA

(impatiently)

Did Saint Nicholas leave a present for me or not?

ANNE

For me also? Or not?

FRAU MEIER

-- since he's gone there is no joy in my life anymore, no joy. So I just keep that old Advent's wreath. Don't you think it's pretty? Ach, Herman --

ANNE

He was killed?

SELMA

Do we get a present?

ANNE

Yes, a present? What horse, mother?

MINNA

Shush.

FRAU MEIER

Of course there are presents. Saint Nicholas came by and asked if you were good girls and --

SELMA

(interrupting)

Oh, not that again, pleeease.

FRAU MEIER

Alright children, come along then.

Frau Meier walks across the room and picks up the parcels.

ANNE

Oh, look, mother.

FRAU MEIER

This one is for you, and this one for you, Anne.

SELMA & ANNE

(curtseying)

Thank you, Tante Lina.

FRAU MEIER

Unwrap children. Let's all see what's inside.

Come Minna, sit with me.

Frau Meier gestures Minna to sit down on her Biedermeier sofa. Absentmindedly, she strokes the gently curved wood and admiringly looks at the golden sofa and chair covers and the matching heavy curtains. A faint smile crosses her face.

FRAU MEIER

(sighing)

Ach, Herman -- my Herman --

Minna nods a few times and lovingly pats her friend's hand.

INSERT -- WALL GRANDFATHER CLOCK CHIMING

Its face reads six o'clock

BACK TO SCENE

Selma and Anne sit on the floor, excitedly unwrapping their presents. They carefully fold the familiar wrapping paper for next year's re-use.

They AD LIB SQUEAL with surprise when both of them find a beautifully crafted rag doll with their names embroidered on the white lace-trimmed aprons.

ANNE

Look, mother, look. I got a doll
-- a doll. I got a doll --
just as I wished for.

MINNA

What a pretty thing, huh? What a
pretty thing.
Say thank you to Tante Lina.
Huh? Say thank you.

ANNE

Thank you, Tante Lina.

FRAU MEIER

You are very welcome, child.

MINNA

Selma!

SELMA

Thank you, Tante Lina.

FRAU MEIER

You are also very welcome, Selma.

MINNA

Yes, Lina, thank you, huh? You are
such a good friend. Such a good
friend. Huh?

ANNE

Look mother. My doll has a

chocolate Santa in the pocket.
And cookies! Yours also, Selma?

SELMA

Tante Lina!?

FRAU MEIER

What child?

SELMA

Why did Saint Nicholas bring a
doll for Anne too?

MINNA

Shush, huh? Shush.

SELMA

I'm your godchild, not Anne.
Do you like her better than me?

FRAU MEIER

He wouldn't forget about your
little sister. That wouldn't be
right, child, now would it?

ANNE

It says "Anne" on the apron.
Just like me.

MINNA

Can't you just be happy, huh?
Just be happy, for once, Selma?

ANNE

Look Selma, it says "Selma" on
the apron. Just like you.

SELMA

Just shut up, will you?

ANNE

Mother!

MINNA

Be good, huh, be good.

ANNE

You got a chocolate Santa also.
Shall we eat it now?

SELMA

Sure, go ahead, eat it.
(mumbling)
Then it's gone and I still have
mine and you don't.

The two women are comfortably seated on the sofa, smiling
at the children.

MINNA

Don't eat that Santa yet, Anne.
It's so pretty. Huh? So pretty.

ANNE

Selma says --

SELMA

(sotto)
Shut up, stupid.

ANNE

Mother?!

SELMA

Don't you dare.

MINNA

Be careful, Selma, don't break
Santa's head off, huh?

Selma, casting an exploring look at her mother and godmother, breaks the head of her Santa and stuffs the pieces back into the doll's apron.

FRAU MEIER

Now, child, what did you do that for? Hmm?

MINNA

Selma! For God's sake, what is the matter with you, huh? What is the matter?

Selma doesn't answer or even bother to look up.

FRAU MEIER

Calm down, Minna. Lets not get all aggravated.

MINNA

You're right, huh? You're right. Come here Anne, let me have a look at your doll. Let me have a look. Huh?

ANNE

It has my name on it. Just like me.

MINNA

Don't eat all the cookies at once Selma, don't eat 'em all at once. Huh?

SELMA

I don't.

MINNA

Leave some room for dinner, huh? What a pretty doll that is. What a pretty doll. Huh, girls?

FRAU MEIER

I still can't believe that you managed to get that goose. In these times! How did you do that?

MINNA

(laughing)

That's my little secret, huh?
That's my own little secret.

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. You know, I sure miss my ham, though. Bad times, this, bad times. Not even one pig in the stall.

MINNA

Not a one in the whole village.
Huh? Not a one.

FRAU MEIER

(shaking her head)

Bad times this. I can feel it.

MINNA

We won't just eat goose, Lina,
Huh? I put some nice potatoes and carrots around the bird, put'em all around the bird. Huh?

FRAU MEIER

Mmmm, that sounds good.

MINNA

They are slow cooking in the oven since this morning already.

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm.

MINNA

There's nothing better than a

slow-cooked goose with potatoes,
nothing better. Don't you think?
Huh? Don't you think, Lina?

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. Do we have red cabbage
with it? Did you use the juniper
berries I gave you?

MINNA

(nodding)

And for dessert we have canned
plums, the big juicy ones, huh?

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm

MINNA

I picked'em on that piece of
land that the old Schafer bought
from the village last summer --

FRAU MEIER

You didn't.

MINNA

Ha, ha, I betcha he's wondering
why that old tree had no fruit
this year, huh? Still wondering.

FRAU MEIER

He probably tries to get his money
back from the village.

MINNA

You say it, huh? Probably, ha, ha.

FRAU MEIER

(slowly nodding)

I baked a whole bunch of cookies --
I bring'em with me.

MINNA

Not with real butter? Huh?

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. With real butter. And
real eggs and all.

MINNA

But where, how ...

FRAU MEIER

(mischievously)

You have your little secrets and
I have mine, right?

MINNA

We eat 'em afterwards, huh? I
have some coffee. I saved it
all year long. All year long.
Just for Christmas, huh?
Real coffee.

FRAU MEIER

You mean: real coffee beans?

MINNA

Yep, real coffee, huh?
Real coffee.

FRAU MEIER

It truly is Christmas, isn't it?

MINNA

Truly is, huh? Truly is.

FRAU MEIER

Willi sent a bottle of wine again.
Wonder, if he thinks that makes
up for all the grief he gives me.

MINNA

What's your brother up to these days? What's he up to, huh?

FRAU MEIER

Last I know he joined the Nazis and is some kind of big shot now. Wants nothing to do with his old sister any more.

MINNA

Well, at least he didn't forget to send the wine. Huh?

FRAU MEIER

We have a glass tonight.

MINNA

Wine and real butter cookies and real coffee -- Heaven on earth. Huh? Heaven On earth.

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. You say it, Minna.

MINNA

Did Willi write a letter with it, huh? What he say? Huh? What he say?

FRAU MEIER

Not a word. He never writes a word. Makes you wonder what he's up to.

MINNA

Not a word, huh? Not a word.

FRAU MEIER

Not a word.

Minna slowly nods her head a couple more times.

INTERCUT -- SELMA AND ANNE

The children separately plying with their dolls, now and then looking longingly at the two women conversing so intimately.

BACK TO SCENE

The two woman watch the children play. Anne cuddles her doll while Selma looks at hers almost with suspicion.

FRAU MEIER

What's wrong, Selma? Anything wrong with the doll? What's with that face, child?

SELMA

Why did Anne get the same doll like I?

MINNA

Selma!

ANNE

It's because Saint Nicholas loves all children, right, Tante Lina?

SELMA

Blah, blah, blah.

FRAU MEIER

Now, now child. Why don't you be nice to your little sister? After all, it's Christmas and we are supposed to be happy and love each other.

ANNE

See.

SELMA

Shut up.

MINNA

(flaring up)

Selma, behave, huh? Behave.

FRAU MEIER

Ach, if only my Herman could be here with us today.

MINNA

You know that he's right here with us. You know that, now don't you? Huh? You know that.

FRAU MEIER

Of course, you are right.

ANNE

(inquisitively)

He's here? Where is he?

SELMA

(teasing)

Right there, behind you, stupid.

ANNE

(afraid)

Tante Lina, Selma says ...

FRAU MEIER

Go play, child.

INTERCUT -- INT. SMALL ROOM -- AUGUST AND MINNA'S PLACE

August is bend in front of the tile-covered, ceiling-high stove, poking the wood and briquette he has added a few minutes earlier. Little sparks are flying.

We HEAR Christmas music coming from a small old-fashioned radio. August HUMS along with the familiar tunes.

BACK TO SCENE

The girls are getting restless. Casting imploring looks towards her mother who is still in conversation with her friend Frau Meier.

FRAU MEIER

Did you hear about Kolling's daughter?

MINNA

Which one?

FRAU MEIER

The oldest, Ingrid. The one who was running around with that no good feller she met at the Singers' Fest.

MINNA

That old guy --

SELMA

(interrupting)

Can we go home now?

ANNE

Yes, can we go now and see if Santa was at our house also?

FRAU MEIER

That's the one.

MINNA

Tell, tell, huh? Tell!

FRAU MEIER

They say that he got her pregnant and then she tried to run away. Her old man caught her and gave

it to her good.

MINNA

The old Kolling? Not the old
Kolling, huh? He can't harm a
fly. Can't harm a fly. Huh?

FRAU MEIER

Listen up.

MINNA

What?

FRAU MEIER

That girl, Ingrid, she tried to
set the house on fire. But her
old man found out from her sister
and beat the living crap out of her.

MINNA

Nooo.

SELMA

(yelling)

I want to go home now!

(sotto)

Set the house on fire -- cool.

FRAU MEIER

You know what next?

MINNA

What?

ANNE

(urgently)

Mother, can we go now?

FRAU MEIER

Just a minute, children. Well,
she did run away and now all
hell is lose. The police and --

ANNE

Mother!?

MINNA

We better get going now. Better
get going. Huh? Tell the rest
later, huh? Tell it later.

INSERT -- GRANDFATHER CLOCK

It is a quarter to seven.

BACK TO SCENE

Minna looks at Frau Meier, shakes her head a couple more
times in disbelief, SIGHS heavily, gets up to fetch their
coats. Even though they live next door, she bundles them
all up tightly.

The girls grab their gifts, and after thanking Frau Meier
with a deep curtsy and some expected words M.O.S., they
finally get ready to leave.

MINNA

Be over in an hour, Lina, huh?
Don't forget the wine --

FRAU MEIER

Not a chance.

MINNA

What a feast we have, what a
feast, huh? And I not a word
about war and bad times. Not a
word, huh?

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. You say it. Not a word.

MINNA

We have us a nice Christmas,

the five of us. A nice Christmas,
huh, Lina? Huh, children?

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. The best. You say it,
Minna. Run along now, children.

EXT. SNOW-COVERED ROAD -- DARK

Minna, Selma and Anne scramble up the hill towards their own house. The snow is still falling heavily. All is very quite. They HEAR the faint sound of the church's bell.

INTERCUT -- INT. AUGUST AND MINNA'S LIVING ROOM

August dressed in his Sunday's best hangs several chocolate ornaments into the beautifully decorated Christmas tree. Then he places a small wooden rocking horse amidst several wrapped packages in front of it.

AUGUST'S POV -- HORSE

August stands back, admiring it with a sparkling eye, smiling.

DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK -- INT. LOW CELLAR

August is bend over in the low cellar finishing up the little wooden horse. A small shelf with canned fruit and vegetables sits along one side.

On the other side there is a little heap of dirt, almost totally covering potatoes, carrots and beets.

His few tools are strewn all over the mud floor. Leaning against the outside wall we see the beginnings of a doll house. August looks weak, he wipes his brow, COUGHS and spits. Shaking his head, he leaves the cellar with one last look at the unfinished doll house.

END FLASHBACK

CUT TO:

INT. AUGUST AND MINNA'S LIVING ROOM -- DIMLY LIT

Apples are baking behind the upper opened iron doors of the stove and August deeply inhales the warming scent. There is a bowl with hazel and walnuts on the table joined by a plate of nicely decorated sugar cookies.

August surveys his little living room appreciatively. He proudly smiles again.

AUGUST

(muttering)

Look at you, little horse. The girl will be so happy.

You're not all useless, yet, old pal, not yet.

(pensive)

Three months tops, the Doctor says, three more months. Jesus Christ --

(alert)

Wonder if I should write Selma an IOU note from Santa. Poor girl.

(wondering)

Wonder where she got that violent streak of hers from. Not from my side of the family, that's for sure.

Sometimes I wonder -- I've a Speak with Minna. After Christmas. Plenty of time --

He goes back to HUMMING along with the song in the radio. It's his favorite: "OH HOLY NIGHT.." Arranging and rearranging the presents he looks at his pocket watch.

FADE TO:

INSERT -- POCKET WATCH

It shows three minutes to seven.

CUT TO:

BACK TO SCENE

AUGUST

They be here any minute now.

(agitated)

Our last Christmas together.

Jesus Christ, our last Christmas.

Jesus Christ!

EXT. SNOW-COVERED ROAD -- DARK

By now the three people outside reach the house and Minna slightly taps at the living room window. The children are running ahead in excitement.

In the background we HEAR the tiny metallic sound of the church bell tolling seven times.

MINNA

Wait for me, huh? You hear? Wait up!

(to herself)

It's already seven o'clock.

Time to get home, huh? Time to get home.

SELMA

Hurry up, mother!

MINNA

Old woman is no freight train, huh?

SELMA

I'm so excited.

(to her mother)

Do you think I get a doll house?

I know I get a doll house.

ANNE

Do I get a doll house also?

SELMA

You? Come along, mother!

Hurry up.

MINNA

Yeah, yeah.

SELMA

(singing)

I get a doll house, I get a doll

House --

ANNE

Yes, come mother, hurry up.

MINNA

Coming, I'm coming, huh?

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CANDLE LIT

When HEARING the slight tap, August hurries to light the candles on the tree. He's so excited that the first three matches break before he finally manages to light one candle, then uses it to light the rest of them

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AUGUST AND MINNA'S HOUSE -- DARK -- ESTABLISHING

The house is located on the Western outskirts of the village in a rather narrow triangle between the road and a path.

It has an enchanting mood to it, timber framed, so small and triangular, not a straight wall. Its longest side is flush with the street, its narrow front has barely room for the entrance door and the small kitchen window.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT OF SMALL HOUSE -- DARK

Minna and the children stomp on the ground outside the door to rid their shoes and coats of the wet snow that covers them completely.

ANNE

Hurry up, mother. Mother! Selma pushed me.

SELMA

Nuh uh. Not true.

ANNE

Uh huh. It's true.

MINNA

Now, now. Behave, huh? Behave.

Selma casts a quick glance towards Anne. Minna opens the door and they step inside.

INT. TINY HALL LEADING TO SMALL LIVING ROOM -- DARK

The girls SCREAM with excitement and pleasure. The entire house is dark except for a kitchen light and the glow of the Christmas tree candles shining through a crack in the closed living room door.

A big rush of warmth greets them. They HEAR Christmas music plying behind the closed door.

INTERCUT -- MINNA AND AUGUST

Minna and August, who is peaking around the kitchen door, exchange a warm smile and a knowing nod.

BACK TO SCENE

Minna turns on the hall light and helps the squiggling girls out of their wet boots and garments which she hangs on wooden pegs to dry.

ANNE

Mother, hurry up, mother.

SELMA

I'm so excited!

MINNA

Wait, Anne. Huh? We all go in together. Selma, give me that glove. Huh?

SELMA

What glove?

MINNA

From the floor. Give me the glove. Put your boots away, Anne. Huh?

SELMA

It's not mine, it's Anne's.

MINNA

Give me that glove. Now, huh? You hear? Huh? Do you hear?

ANNE

I can see the Christmas tree. Hurry up --

August joins his family in the tiny hallway.

ANNE

(excited)

Where've you been father? Did you see Saint Nicholas? Did he leave a

present for us? Did you see him?

SELMA

(interrupting)

Was he here, father? Did he bring
me a doll house?
Did he? Did you talk with him?

AUGUST

(opening the living room)

Well, let's see if he was here.
Come along, mother.

MINNA

Let's go, huh, let's all go in
together. Oh, that lovely music.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- ESTABLISHING

The narrow room measuring about three by four meters, is furnished with a worn sofa strewn with knitted and crochet pillows and three wooden chairs surrounding an old wooden dining table covered by a crochet ivory lace cloth. A stool which holds the radio and the sideboard topped with a matching runner complete the furnishings.

Over the sofa hangs an oil painting. It's theme: swans on a lake in a heath landscape. A few framed cross-stitched pictures complete the decoration.

The towering ceiling-high, stove, covered with light green tiles reigns over the room. The entire space looks cozy and tidy.

SELMA

Oh, look.

ANNE

Oh, look father, look -- mother,
look --

MINNA

(dreamily)
Look at that tree, huh? Look how
pretty that tree is.

ANNE
So pretty.

SELMA
Presents!

AUGUST
They did such a great job with it
this afternoon, don't you think,
mother? Good job, girls.

INT. CHILDREN'S POV -- CHRISTMAS TREE AND PRESENTS

Selma and Anne are rushing towards the tree, then stop,
eyes wide and shiny. They look at the gifts.

Selma's eyes suddenly focus on the small wooden horse, she
tenses and on her expression of disbelief and total
disgust, we:

FREEZE FRAME.

FADE TO:

FLASHBACK -- ROAD -- DARK

Selma repeatedly singing: I get a doll house -- I get a
doll house -- I get a doll house --

END FLASHBACK

END FREEZE FRAME

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CANDLE LIT

Selma, pushing Anne out of her way into the wall, jumping towards the toy horse.

DISSOLVE TO:

Close up of Anne's white tear stained face.

DISSOLVE TO:

Minna rushing towards Anne, picking her up and hugging her consolingly M.O.S..

DISSOLVE TO:

Selma taking the horse and throwing it towards her mother and sister.

DISSOLVE TO:

The horse hitting Minna and Anne.

DISSOLVE TO:

August speeding towards Selma, slapping her in the face.

DISSOLVE TO:

Selma heartily kicking Anne.

DISSOLVE TO:

Selma running out of the room into the adjacent bedroom, CRYING and SCREAMING at the top of her lungs.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CANDLE LIT

AUGUST
Jesus Christ Almighty!

ANNE

My leg hurts. My head hurts.
 Mother --

MINNA

Here, take her. Huh? Take her.

Minna hands the CRYING Anne to August and resolutely walks up the few steps following the SCREAMING Selma. She closes the bedroom door behind her.

INT. THE COUPLES BEDROOM -- ESTABLISHING -- DARK

This room, up a few steps from the living room, is barely big enough for the double bed pushed against one wall, a nightstand and on a wall by itself the large armoire.

Through its wide opened doors we see clothes, the family's good dishes, wraps and boxes.

MINNA'S POV -- BED

Selma is lying on her back on her parents' bed sobbing and MUTTERING to herself.

SELMA

I hate'em -- I hate'em all --
 I run away and freeze and be
 dead and then they be sorry ...

MINNA

(exasperated)

Selma, Selma, girl. What next --
 Huh? What next?

SELMA

(screaming)

Leave me alone. I hate you. I hate
 you all.

MINNA

Selma, Selma, what's happening

with you, huh? What's happening?

SELMA

Go away. I hate you.

MINNA

(in denial)

It's Christmas, huh? We all make us a nice Christmas, a nice Christmas. Huh?

SELMA

(sobbing)

Nobody likes me. I hate you all. I hate you. Leave me alone.

MINNA

Nonsense. Come on. We go back in and have us a nice Christmas, huh? A real nice Christmas. Huh? Come on, girl, come on.

SELMA

(crying)

Why didn't I get a doll house?
Why did Anne get a horse?

MINNA

Come on, child, huh? Come on now.

INT. BEDROOM -- DARK

Minna pulls Selma off the bed, wipes off her tears and without saying another word pushes her back into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CANDLE LIT

Everybody pretends that nothing happened.

MINNA

It's time for the presents, huh?
Time for the presents.

ANNE

Father, come, presents.

AUGUST

It's about time, for crying out
loud.

ANNE

For crying out loud.

They all gather around the Christmas tree and Minna hands a
parcel to everyone.

MINNA

This is for you, Selma. And this
here for you, Anne.

SELMA & ANNE

Thank you, mother.

MINNA

Here, father. Looks like Saint
Nicholas left a little something
for you too.

AUGUST

Thank you, mother. You're too
good. Let's all unwrap.

(eagerly)

Now look at this -- Here's
another gift hidden way behind
the tree. Wonder who's it for.
Why, look at this -- it's for
mother, for crying out loud.

MINNA

Why, thank you, huh? Thank you.
Wonder what it is, huh? Wonder
what it is.

Silently they unwrap, careful not to rip the paper. They fold it meticulously and roll up the satin band.

Only after putting it all aside, they appreciatively assess their respective presents.

SELMA

Oh -- look at this, mother.
 Father, look a dress. It is so beautiful. Thank you, thank you soo much! It is soo beautiful. Just what I wanted.

MINNA

There you are. Huh? There you are. Good girl.

SELMA

(animated)

And I got a Sleeping Beauty book and coloring pencils.

Selma is stunned by the red and blue plaid dress with lace trimmed cuffs and hem, as well as by a small box of colored pencils and a coloring book of Sleeping Beauty. She is happy and content. No one mentions the terrible scene from before.

ANNE

A dress, a new dress also. Just like Selma's. Look Selma, it's just like yours.

SELMA

Just like yours -- It's always "just like yours".

ANNE

I am soo happy. A new dress and a doll and a -- horse.

SELMA

(muttering)

A new dress. Just what I need
for school.

Anne's face is still dewy from the tears she shed but a wide smile crosses her face when she unwraps the dress.

Instead of the pencils and book her father hands her the small horse.

AUGUST

I fix that for you, girl. Nobody
ever knows that this little feller
had a broken leg.
How do you like your gifts, Selma?

A deep SOB escapes Anne's little chest but her sunny nature gets the upper hand, she smiles and deep dimples appear in both her cheeks. Selma stares at her father.

SELMA

I like the dress and the book
and the pencils. Thank you, father.

ANNE

I like the dress also. Thank you
father. Mother, can father fix
the horse?

MINNA

Of course, he can, of course.
Saint Nicholas won't mind a
little extra help, huh? He won't
mind. Huh? Won't mind at all.

AUGUST

Of course he won't for crying
out loud. I fix it first thing
tomorrow morning - deal?

ANNE

(smiling widely)
Deal!

Selma, without as much as another word, returns to looking through her coloring book.

MINNA

(consolingly)

I know you wanted a doll house, Selma. Saint Nicholas told me yesterday that one of his elves got sick and couldn't finish the house. Huh?

AUGUST

You hear that, girl? He had nobody left a finish it up.

MINNA

He promised that he gives it to the Easter Bunny to finish it up. Huh? He promised me that.

ANNE

Did you really see Saint Nicholas?

AUGUST

What do you think? Of course she Did, for crying out loud.

SELMA

But why did Anne get the horse? Does Saint Nicholas like her more than me?

MINNA

Of course not, nonsense. He loves all children just the same, huh? Just the same.

ANNE

Tante Lina says so also.

SELMA

(aggravated)

You!! Just shut up.

AUGUST

Don't be silly. You get your doll house, I promise. Jesus Christ. And if I myself have a go to the Easter Bunny and get it for you. You get it, I promise you that girl.

SELMA

If you say so.

August receives a pair of brown mittens and brown and gray striped ear muffs. Minna discovers a pair of sewing sheers, the good kind that she has admired at the general store for quite some time.

MINNA

Wonder how Saint Nicholas knew that my old sewing sheers just didn't cut it any more? Huh? Wonder how he knew.

AUGUST

Wonder when Saint Nicholas had the time to knit these mittens and ear muffs for me?

(smiling at Minna)

Must have been while "he" sat with Lina all these evenings, gossiping. What do you think, mother?

SELMA

Saint Nicholas doesn't sit with Tante Lina and knits. You're silly, father.

ANNE

Yeah. You're silly, father!

August laughs out loud. He is truly happy at this moment, truly enjoying himself. All thoughts of pending death have left his mind for now.

MINNA

(teasingly)

Yes, father, you are silly, huh?,
real silly.

(upbeat)

This is a good Christmas, isn't
it? A good Christmas. Huh?
I better go check on dinner.
Huh? Better go check on dinner.
You hungry, huh?

ANNE

Yes, silly, Saint Nicholas doesn't
gossip with Tante Lina. He's busy
making presents.

AUGUST

(smiling)

Well, I still think he spends an
awful lot of time at Tante Lina's.

ANNE

Did you see him there?

SELMA

Stupid, you can't see him other
than on Christmas Eve.

AUGUST

Be good, girls. I'm just feeling
a little silly tonight.

ANNE

(mimicking)

For crying out loud!

AUGUST

Must be the candles and the music
and all these presents, for crying
out loud. Think we deserve all this?

SELMA

I didn't get a doll house.

AUGUST

You get your doll house, girl,
Jesus Christ, I promise.

ANNE

I also promise. I pray for it
very hard, every night. Until
it's here.

MINNA

That will surely help, Anne,
surely help. Huh? Selma, huh?

SELMA

(sarcastically)

Sure. Sure, that'll help.

They all smile - the happy family Minna wants them to be.
Minna gets up and leaves for the kitchen, HUMMING a
Christmas tune.

The children and August admire the Christmas tree.

AUGUST

This is the prettiest Christmas
tree in the whole world. What
do you say? Jesus Christ. Have
you ever seen such a nice tree?

ANNE

Who put the chocolate bells on it?
And look, candy also.

SELMA

We didn't do that this afternoon.

AUGUST

Must have been Santa then. Who else has chocolate bells and candy, for crying out loud?

ANNE

Can we eat one?

AUGUST

Nope. Not before we strip the Tree. In a week. After New Years.

Minna returns, smiles at her little happy family and walks straight into the bedroom.

MINNA

Time for the good dishes.

AUGUST

You know it's Christmas when mother gets out the good dishes.

INSERT -- CLOCK ON SIDEBOARD

It is CHIMING eight o'clock, PLYING a little melody.

BACK TO SCENE

The girls are dancing around the small room, holding their new dresses in front of them. August, all benevolently smiling, sits down on the sofa, trying on his mittens.

SELMA

Can we put the dresses on, father?

ANNE

Yes, father, can we?

AUGUST

Go ahead. Jesus Christ -- it's
only Christmas once a year.

The girls eagerly climb into their new outfits and admire
their reflections in the window.

ANNE

Look, father, look, we look like
princesses, don't you think, Selma?
Like the one on your book.

SELMA

You look like a gnome in a dress
and I look like Sleeping Beauty.

ANNE

Father, Selma says --

SELMA

(sotto)

Shut up, don't you dare!

AUGUST

Jesus Christ, girls, can't you
ever get along? Not even on
Christmas?

ANNE

We get along, father. Don't
worry. Right, Selma?

AUGUST

(muttering)

She's a hell of a woman. Oh,
mother, what will happen to you
and the girls once I'm gone?

SELMA

(perking up)

What did you say?

AUGUST

Just how much I love these
mittens. They come in handy.
I lost one a while ago. Now you
two look like little queens.

SELMA

I look like Sleeping Beauty.

ANNE

I also.

AUGUST

You sure do -- my own little
princesses.

ANNE

Don't loose these mittens, father.
It's a long time till next
Christmas.
I look like Sleeping Beauty also,
right, Selma?

SELMA

Sleeping Beauty gnome.

AUGUST

You say it, girl. A long long
time, for crying out loud. Now,
why don't you two set the table?
Help your mother out?

INT. BEDROOM -- DIMLY LIT BY BEDSIDE LAMP

Minna steps into the room and takes the good dishes out of
the armoire. She carefully wipes each piece with a soft
cloth and sets each piece down on top of the couple's bed.
She HEARS the knock at the front door.

MINNA

(calling)

Don't get up, father, Lina lets
herself in. Huh? Send her in here,

will you? Send her in here.

INTERCUT -- FRAU MEIER ENTERING THE LIVING ROOM

Frau Meier is carrying a covered plate heaped high with cookies and the bottle of wine which she hands to August.

FRAU MEIER

Merry Christmas, August. Here, take this. Be careful with the bottle. It's the best.

AUGUST

The best, you know it. Long live Willi.

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm, you say it. I see if Minna needs some help.

AUGUST

Go ahead, she's in the bedroom, getting out the good dished.

MINNA

(calling)

Come on in, Lina. Huh? Come on in.

Lina Meier peels herself out of her heavy overcoat, gloves and hat and holding them over her arm, walks into the couple's bedroom.

BACK TO SCENE

Upon entering, Minna looks up, smiling at her friend.

MINNA

Hang your coat on the ladder, huh? Hang it on the ladder.

FRAU MEIER

Can I put my overshoes here

also?

MINNA

Sure, need slippers, huh? Need slippers?

FRAU MEIER

No, no. I brought my own.

Minna beckons to hang the wet overcoat onto a nail in the ladder which is hidden from sight in the far corner behind the armoire. She continues her task, admiringly looking at the shiny plates and cups with their thin gold trims.

MINNA

Isn't life funny, Lina. How I've turned into my mother, huh? Five years, since she's gone, five years --

FRAU MEIER

Is it five years already? How time flies by when you get older.

MINNA

And here I am, living in her house, sleeping in her bed, polishing her dishes, huh?

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm.

MINNA

(proudly)

These dishes are my pride and joy -- my pride and joy.

FRAU MEIER

You say it.

MINNA

Do you know, that my mother
got 'em as a wedding gift from
her parents?

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm.

MINNA

From her parents. Did you know
that? Huh? Did you know that?

FRAU MEIER

Yes, yes, that's how life goes.
Today you're polishing dishes and
tomorrow you're in a cold grave
and your daughter does the
polishing.

MINNA

That's so right, huh, so right.

FRAU MEIER

I brought the wine. How's the
goose coming?

MINNA

Perfect, just perfect. What a
wonderful Christmas, huh? What
a wonderful Christmas.

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. And not a word about war
and bad times tonight.

MINNA

Not a word, huh? Not a word.

FRAU MEIER

Not a one.

The women nod pensively, smiling at each other. Then Frau
Meier turns serious.

FRAU MEIER

Did August tell you what the cancer doctor says?

MINNA

He's not talking much, huh?
Not talking much. Sometimes I wonder if he just doesn't want to scare me. I don't know, huh? I just don't know.

FRAU MEIER

He has to tell you. You have to prepare.

MINNA

What am I to do, huh? What am I to do, Lina?

FRAU MEIER

I don't know Minna, It's not easy. The children --

MINNA

Let's not talk about it tonight, huh? Not tonight. It's Christmas and we make it a good one, huh? A good one.

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. You're right, Minna. I was just wondering --

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CANDLE LIT

The girls have taken napkins and flatware out of the sideboard drawer and start setting the table.

August is watching them from the sofa. Slowly a tear makes its way down his skinny cheek. He hastily wipes it off when the women enter with the dishes.

FRAU MEIER

Now look at the table. Did your father do that, children?

ANNE

We did it, Tante Lina.

SELMA

Sure.

FRAU MEIER

No?!

MINNA

Selma, take Anne to the kitchen, Huh? And help her wash up before dinner. Hot water's on the stove.

SELMA

Come on.

ANNE

Can I take my horse?

MINNA

No, it waits here for you. It waits. Huh? Run along now. Huh?

ANNE

Father, can I take my horse, please?

AUGUST

You heard your mother. Now run along, girls. I'm getting real hungry here, for crying out loud.

SELMA

Come on, stupid.

ANNE

Mother, Selma says --

AUGUST

(angrily)

Selma!! Jesus Christ. I'll never hear that word again. You hear me, girl?

MINNA

You hear what your father says? Did you hear, huh? Did you hear?

SELMA

Yes, mother.

MINNA

Say what?

SELMA

I'm sorry father.

AUGUST

All right. Now run along. My stomach growls like a wolf.

ANNE

Like a wolf! My stomach growls like a wolf also.

SELMA

(subdued)

Come on now.

The girls leave the living room for the kitchen.

FRAU MEIER

They're good children.

MINNA

Yes they are, they are. If only Selma wouldn't be acting up all the time, huh?

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. She seems to be so angry.

MINNA

Wonder, where she gets that from,
wonder where she gets that from.
Not from my side of the family,
huh? Not from my side.

AUGUST

She grows out of it, mother.

FRAU MEIER

She just needs a little help.
Her teacher says so also.

MINNA

Your word in God's ear. But enough.
let's finish up the table, huh,
Lina? Let's finish it up.

FRAU MEIER

Mm-hmm. I hear the goose calling.

MINNA

I could eat a bite myself. What
time is it?

August takes a silver pocket watch out of his coat pocket.

AUGUST

Jesus Christ! It's almost eight
thirty. Way past our usual dinner
time.

MINNA

It's Christmas, father, it's
Christmas, huh?

INT. KITCHEN -- ESTABLISHING

This is the smallest of all rooms, barely two by two and a half meters. Along the inner wall there is an old-fashioned ceramic wood stove with many doors.

Beside it we see a washstand with a white metal bowl and soap dish, topped by a small dull mirror with a little glass shelf underneath it. Here we find the family's comb, some shaving utensils and toothbrushes leaning in a water glass.

Along the opposite wall stands a table with a chair at each of its narrow sides. A light blue glass lamp hanging from the low ceiling illuminates the scene.

The rings of the iron stove top are red with heat. A dark iron pot is steaming and so is the small bronze kettle. The biggest stove door is leaning open, revealing a cast iron baking dish containing the goose and vegetables.

ANNE

Mmmm. Hurry up, I'm hungry. Are you hungry also?

SELMA

Step back. The kettle is hot.

ANNE

I could eat that whole goose by myself.

Selma takes a knitted pot holder and grabs hold of the water kettle. She pulls it off the stove and starts pouring water into the wash basin. The hot steam envelopes her hand and arm.

With a SCREAM Selma jumps back letting go off the kettle. With Anne's horrendous SCREAM and look of pure agony we:

FREEZE FRAME.

FADE TO:

SAME SCENE REPEATING ITSELF -- DREAMLIKE

Selma taking the knitted pot holder, grabbing hold of the steaming hot water kettle, pulling it off the stove and starting to pour water into the wash basin. The hot steam enveloping her hand and arm, her jumping back and letting go off the kettle.

END FREEZE FRAME

BACK TO SCENE

Minna, August and Frau Meier come running into the kitchen. Selma is standing pressed into the far wall, her face deadly white, her eyes wide open, both hands pressed against her mouth.

Anne is standing, frozen in time, in the middle of the room, staring at her legs, burned, bright red, starting to build big watery blisters. She starts to WHIMPER now.

MINNA

Oh, my god, oh my dear god. Not
this, not tonight. What am I
going to do? Oh my god!!!!

August grabs hold of Anne who slowly sinks towards the floor. Minna seems unable to comprehend what has happened.

AUGUST

Mother, get a hold of yourself.
We need to get her to the doctor.

MINNA

God, oh God --

AUGUST

Get me the blanket from our
bed. I carry her there. Get me --

FRAU MEIER

(interrupting)

Give me the flour, Minna, we need to put some flour on the burns to keep the skin from bursting open.

MINNA

I do it. Huh? I do it. Hold still, Anne, hold still.

AUGUST

She isn't moving. Jesus Christ, she isn't moving.

FRAU MEIER

Hurry up, Minna. We need to get her to the doctor.

Minna grabs the flour canister and sprinkles flour onto Anne's legs. Then runs out of the room to return with August's coat and a woolen blanket which she tightly wraps around Anne, who is WHIMPERING lowly.

August puts on his old big roomy military coat, picks Anne up and pulls her close to his emaciated body. Frau Meier tightly wraps the coat around the two of them.

FRAU MEIER

(sotto)

I hope the doctor's in town. I heard that he's --

AUGUST

Jesus Christ. Hurry up. Hurry up, mother.

MINNA

Let's go, let's go. Huh?

INT. TINY HALL -- DIMLY LIT

Both women muttering to themselves M.O.S., throw on coats, hats and gloves and the troop leaves the house.

MINNA

Can you carry her, father? Shall I take her legs? Huh? Shall I take her legs?

FRAU MEIER

I take her.

AUGUST

No. no. I got her, run along.

MINNA

My God, how could this happen, huh? How could this happen? God in heaven --

EXT. SNOW-COVERED ROAD -- DARK

The group runs as fast as the heavy snow allows down the road. It is still falling without mercy.

FRAU MEIER

Minna, wait up. Where is Selma? Dear God, we forgot the child at home.

MINNA

(angrily)

She's alright, huh? She's alright.

FRAU MEIER

Let's hope the doctor is in.

MINNA

My God, what have I done wrong, what have I done wrong? Why does this happen to us -- why, huh?

FRAU MEIER

(interrupting)

Get a grip of yourself Minna, you hear.

(to herself)

God help us all.

August is running ahead, his breath is LABORING, he's tumbling under Anne's weight who is eerily still.

They run through the village, pass the church and into a small gate that SQUEAKS when August pushes it open with his foot. He kicks at the front door with all he has left of his limited strength and tries to yell. His voice is gone.

EXT. DOCTOR'S HOUSE -- DARK

The heavy front door opens almost immediately and a tall young woman in a big navy sweater and white woolen pants looks at them attentively. Without a word she motions them inside.

FRAU MEIER

Where's the Doctor? We need to see the Doctor. The child --

AUGUST

(interrupting)

Please, we need to see the Doctor.

FRAU DOCTOR

My husband left last week -- he's been called into the Army. He's --

FRAU MEIER

(muttering)

That's what I heard.

MINNA

What have I done, my God -- what have I done? Why Anne --

FRAU MEIER

(interrupting)

The child burned her legs. With boiling water. We need help.

AUGUST

Please, help.

FRAU DOCTOR

Come on in, come into the examination room. Close the door, Frau Meier.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM -- ESTABLISHING

The white room is small, brightly lit by a white porcelain lamp hanging over the examination table and a bronze desk lamp with a green shade that sits on an old mahogany desk. The chair is of the same material and upholstered in green.

There are cupboards along one wall and a picture of plying children on the opposite. A scale, a measuring device and three stools complete the furnishing. A brown leather doctor's bag sits on one of them.

FRAU DOCTOR

I'll examine the child, put her on the table, please Mr. Winter. And sit down yourself. I'll see --

MINNA

(interrupting)

We need to see the Doctor. Huh? The doctor. My girl is burned, Anne is --

FRAU DOCTOR

(loudly)

Calm down, Frau Winter. I'm a doctor myself. I haven't practiced since I married but still, I'm a doctor and I'm going to help the child.

(with authority)
 Frau Meier, please take the blanket.
 Herr Winter, hand me that bag, if
 you will. Frau Winter, calm down.

ANNE
 (awakening)
 It hurts, it hurts so bad.

MINNA
 Anne, what have I done, huh?,
 what have I done -- Selma! Did
 Selma do it, Anne, did Selma do
 it? She did it, huh? She did it.

FRAU DOCTOR
 I know, Anne, I know. Hold on
 to you mother's hand real tight,
 while I take a look at your legs.

AUGUST
 Give me your hand, girl

FRAU DOCTOR
 Frau Meier, hand me those scissors.
 And give me some room, please.

MINNA
 Hold on to my hand, Anne, hold on
 to my hand. Squeeze real tide,
 huh? Real tide. Huh?

ANNE
 It hurts, it hurts so bad --

August is sitting on one of the stools, his head is down,
 he weeps quietly, his meager shoulders shaking. Lina Meier
 puts her arm around his shoulders and holds him tight,
 while silent prayers escape her moving lips M.O.S..

The Doctor works in deep concentration. Minna's lips move in silent prayer while holding on to Anne's hand who now only MOANS from time to time. Nobody speaks for a very long time.

INSERT - DESK CLOCK

The face of the clock on the Doctor's desk shows eight fifty.

BACK TO SCENE

FRAU DOCTOR

Anne! Anne, how are you feeling?
Does it still hurt? You are a brave
little girl.

MINNA

Does it still hurt, huh? Does it
still hurt? Oh, my God -- how could
this happen? How? Did Selma --

FRAU DOCTOR

Frau Winter, please, you must
calm down. It doesn't do the child
any good when you're so upset.

ANNE

No, it's better. I'm so tired.
Can we go home? Father, don't
cry -- I'm not hurting anymore.
Please -- please --

FRAU MEIER

You hear, she is not in pain
anymore. Thank you, God.

AUGUST

Thank you, Frau Doctor. Thank you
for everything.

MINNA

Can we take her home, huh? Can we take her home?

FRAU DOCTOR

It's all right. You can take her home with you now. Put her to bed, keep her warm. She'll sleep through the night. I've given her something to make her feel better. I'll be at your house by 8:30 tomorrow morning to check on her.

AUGUST

Is there anything we can do for her over night?

FRAU DOCTOR

No, just let her sleep. Sleep is the best healer.

MINNA

Thank you, thank you, huh?
Thank you.

FRAU DOCTOR

We have to very careful to keep the wounds clean so that they don't infect. The burns are deep.

MINNA

Oh, God --

FRAU MEIER

Poor child.

FRAU DOCTOR

I'll give her something for the pain for as long as it's needed. Now, wrap her up warmly and run along.

(compassionately)

Herr Winter, is there anything I

can do for you? Anything?

AUGUST

No. no. But thank you for all
you have done for the girl.
God bless you, Frau Doctor.

FRAU MEIER

God bless you. Come, Minna.

MINNA

Thank you, thank you thank you.
Come on father, come on. Huh? Can
you carry her? Do you want me to
take her? Huh? I can take her.

FRAU MEIER

I help. Here is the blanket. Wrap
her up tightly, August.
It's so bitter cold tonight.

(sotto)

What a night -- it's the times.
Bad times are coming for us.
I can feel it --

AUGUST

No. No. I take her. Good night,
Frau Doctor, and --

FRAU DOCTOR

(interrupting)

Run along now, I'll see you all
tomorrow. If there's anything
you need, Herr Winter -- just
let me know.

ALL

Good night. Good night, Frau
Doctor. And God bless you.

EXT. SNOW-COVERED ROAD -- DARK

The small party makes its way back through the heavy snow. August is swaying slightly under the weight of the child. From time to time a deep SIGH escapes his mouth.

Minna walks beside her husband, holding his left elbow for support. She WEEPS.

Frau Meier walks a few steps behind the group, her lips are moving in silent prayer. Anne MOANS now and then. They silently cross the village and walk up the road to their house. The village is quiet and dark.

INSERT -- CHURCH CLOCK

The hands show ten twenty-eight.

BACK TO SCENE

The small group finally reaches the Winter's house.

EXT. MINNA'S HOUSE -- FRONT DOOR -- DARK

Minna opens the unlocked door for August and Anne and turns to Frau Meier.

MINNA

Are you coming in, Lina? You coming in, huh?

FRAU MEIER

Yes. Mm-hmm. I'm coming.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DARK

The room is crowded with carefully folded wrapping paper and the gifts the children had unpacked. The table is set in a festive way. The Christmas tree candles have burned themselves out.

The radio is still PLYING Christmas songs. Minna turns on the ceiling lamp, walks to the radio, turns it off and wordlessly begins to stack the unused plates and glasses.

AUGUST

Help me with the girl, will you?
Where do I put her down?

MINNA

Put her on our bed. I won't
close an eye this night anyway,
not an eye. Huh? Lina, can you --

FRAU MEIER

(interrupting)

Where is Selma? Selma! Selma!
Minna, where's the child?
SELMA! Minna, the child --
Where's Selma?

AUGUST

(urgently)

Mother! Help me with the girl.
Should we undress her or just
leave her be?

MINNA

Leave her be, leave her be. Just
put her down, huh? She's fast
asleep anyway. Fast asleep. Huh?

August leaves for the couple's bedroom carefully carrying the sleeping Anne. At the small steps leading to the bedroom he staggers and stumbles into the Christmas tree. The tree tips towards the wall.

Moving back, Anne's legs sweep the stack of Minna's good plates off the table.

DISSOLVE TO:

Close up of Minna's face: freezing, turning deadly white, her lips a thin line, her eyes ice cold.

CUT TO:

BACK TO SCENE

MINNA

(hysterically)

My dishes -- my good dishes!
This is the worst, huh?, the
worst. Mother will turn in her
grave. This is the worst. This
is the end, huh? The end.

FRAU MEIER

Get a hold of yourself, Minna.
It's only dishes after all.

MINNA

(yelling)

Only dishes you say, only dishes?
Huh? Do you know what these mean
to me, do you know, huh?

FRAU MEIER

(sighing)

I know. Mm-hmm, I know.

AUGUST

It'll be all right, mother.
Calm down. I put the girl down.
Jesus Christ, I need a put her
down. Now.

August manages the few steps up to the bedroom and heavily walks in. Minna straightens up the tree then bends to pick up the broken plates and throws them into the ash can beside the stove.

FRAU MEIER

SELMA! Where are you, child?

Minna, I think Selma's gone.

MINNA

(shrilly)

Gone...nonsense, gone! I tell
you where she is -- in the cellar.

FRAU MEIER

Where?

MINNA

In the back, where she always hides
when she's in trouble. Huh? SELMA!

FRAU MEIER

Minna, please.

MINNA

Come on up. Now! Or do I have to
come down there, huh? Do I have
to come down?

FRAU MEIER

Minna, you have to calm down. It's
not her fault. It was an accident.

MINNA

An accident, huh, an accident.

FRAU MEIER

(sternly)

Yes, Minna, an accident!

MINNA

(wailing)

Why, why us, huh? My good dishes.
An accident. All that ever meant
a thing to me, gone, my good dishes,
huh? My good dishes.

FRAU MEIER

Minna, Minna, don't talk like
that, it's sinful.

AUGUST

(calling)

Mother! I need your help in here,
for crying out loud.

Minna walks up to the couple's bedroom. She firmly closes the door behind her, leaving Frau Meier standing in the middle of the living room, still wearing her overcoat and boots. Frau Meier leaves the room through the other door.

MINNA'S POV -- COUPLE'S BED

Anne is lying on the bed, covered with the woolen blanket, sleeping. Her face looks pale and shrunken. She MUMBLES in her sleep.

August sits beside his daughter, holding her hand. He silently weeps, shaking his head over and over. His street clothes are carelessly flung over the foot end of the bed.

INT. BEDROOM -- DIMLY LIT BY BEDSIDE LAMP

Minna takes off her wet boots and throws her coat on the floor with them. She casts an angry look towards her husband, then walks over to Anne and covers her with the goose down cover. Anne doesn't move.

AUGUST

(mumbling)

Three more months he says. Jesus Christ! What is happening to all of us?

MINNA

(agitated)

What are you saying? What do you mean, three more months? Huh? What do you mean? Huh?

AUGUST

Jesus Christ, mother, calm down,

everything will work out. The girl will be getting well. The Doctor says so herself, now doesn't she? All will be well.

MINNA

(sneering)

The doctor, huh? What doctor?

AUGUST

A fine job she did with Anne.

MINNA

(crying violently)

Why, father, why us, huh? And My good plates, gone, all gone. What did we do wrong. It's Selma,

(MORE)

MINNA (CONT'D)

isn't it, huh? it's Selma, huh? Where did we go wrong with her? Why is she such a burden, huh?, such a burden. Huh? -- my dishes -- my good dishes.

FADE TO:

INTERCUT -- CELLAR -- DARK

Selma is crouching in the dark room, between the heap of dirt, covering the potatoes and carrots and the beginnings of the doll house. She is pale, her face is closed. She strains to listen to what's happening upstairs.

BACK TO SCENE

AUGUST

(very calm)

Mother! Don't talk in sin. Selma's a good child. A little difficult at times. But not a bad child.

(more excited)

I don't understand you, for crying
out loud. What is it -- Why are
you always so bitter with her?
What did she ever do to you?

MINNA

(hysterically)

You don't understand, you don't
understand, huh? Just take her
side. That is typical -- typical.
You always take her side. Huh? No
wonder she's so difficult. Difficult?
Ha, she's a devil, a devil that's
what she is, huh? A devil. Huh?
It's God's punishment.
God is punishing me.

AUGUST

Jesus Christ, mother, what are
you talking about?

MINNA

(at the top of her lungs)

What am I talking about, huh?
What am I talking about? You've
always been suspicious about her
being yours, always, huh? Just
how you look at Bruno every time
you see him. Huh? Just as you --

AUGUST

(exhausted)

Mother, let's not fight. Not
tonight. Not about the children.
Not about anything. I'm tired,
so tired, for crying out loud.

MINNA

(hysterically)

You are tired? What am I, huh?
 What am I? I'm laboring all day,
 all day and never a thank you?

AUGUST

Jesus Christ. Mother, please, calm
 down.

MINNA

Never a thank you. You are tired?
 Look at me, just look! Huh? What
 do I look like? Huh? You tired?
 Ha, that I don't laugh. Ha!

AUGUST

Mother, please. Jesus Christ
 Almighty.

INT. CELLAR -- DARK

Frau Meier is descending the few steps into the dark
 cellar, holding a candle. She's still in her street
 clothes.

FRAU MEIER 'S -- POV CELLAR

Selma is huddled at the far side, wearing her new dress and
 clutching her coloring book. Her stare is blank. She does
 not react to Frau Meier's approach.

BACK TO SCENE

Frau Meier slowly approaches Selma, shielding her candle
 from the draft, carefully stepping on the damp dirt floor.

FRAU MEIER

Selma, child. Come here, come
 to me, child. Selma, come to me.

Selma shows no sign of hearing Frau Meier.

FRAU MEIER

Selma, please. Come, I take you

home with me. You stay with me tonight. Come, child, come with me. Brrr. It's freezing down here.

SELMA

(sobbing)

I didn't do it on purpose, the kettle was so hot. It fell.

FRAU MEIER

(consolingly)

I know that child.

SELMA

I don't know. I didn't do it on purpose, Tante Lina. I didn't

FRAU MEIER

I know that, child. It was an accident, a terrible accident.

SELMA

(sobbing)

I didn't do it on purpose.

FRAU MEIER

Anne will be all right. The doctor took care of her.

SELMA

She is not dead? I didn't --

FRAU MEIER

She'll be fine. It's freezing down here. Come with me, child -- let's go upstairs where it's warm.

SELMA

(crying)

I can't. They hate me. They think I did it on purpose. They hate me.

FRAU MEIER

Nobody hates you. It was an accident, a terrible accident. Come on up. Give me your hand. My God, you're ice cold! Come on, child, let's go upstairs.

SELMA

Where's Anne now? I didn't do it on purpose -- I didn't --

FRAU MEIER

She's sleeping. She'll be all right.

SELMA

Is she still hurting?

FRAU MEIER

No, no. The doctor gave her something for the pain. She gets more when she needs it.

SELMA

I didn't do it on purpose. They all think I did it on purpose. I don't hate her. I don't.

FRAU MEIER

I know that child, we all know that. Come on, now.

Frau Meier grabs Selma's hand and pulls her up the small ladder.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- LIT BY CEILING LAMP

The room is empty and cold. Frau Meier sits Selma down on the sofa. She throws a blanket over the child and puts a pillow under her head.

The bed room door opens and Minna enters, pale and distraught.

MINNA'S POV -- CLOCK ON SIDEBOARD

It is five past eleven o'clock

BACK TO SCENE

Frau Meier pats the sofa seat beside her.

FRAU MEIER

Minna, come sit with us. You must be deadly tired. Sit here beside us. It's so cold in here. Should I put some wood on the fire? I go make us some hot tea.

Without as much as a word, Minna sits down heavily and covers her face with both hands. Selma, beside her, watches her with fear.

MINNA

(calm and mean)

Why did you do it, girl, huh?
Why did you do it?

FRAU MEIER

Don't talk like this, Minna.
It was a terrible accident. You hear me, an accident.
It's nobody's fault.

SELMA

I didn't do it on purpose --
I don't hate her.

MINNA

(exasperated)

Nobody's fault, huh? Nobody's fault?

SELMA

I didn't.

FRAU MEIER

No, Minna, it's not the child's
fault. You know that, now do you?

Minna covers her face with both hands again. Frau Meier gets up to leave the room. At the door she turns around and looks at her friend and the child. With a deep SIGH she turns the light off and closes the door behind her.

INT. KITCHEN -- LIT BY CEILING LAMP

Frau Meier picks the kettle of the ground, refills it and places it on the stove top. She strokes the remaining coals and adds some wood to get the fire going again.

She sadly looks at the goose and, shaking her head, pushes the pot back into the oven, closing the door on it. She then sits down on the far chair, puts her head onto her arms resting on the table top.

FRAU MEIER

(muttering to herself)

How can all this be happening --
it's Christmas - nothing like
this should be happening. Herman,
ach, Herman -- August with his
cancer -- and Selma, getting so
bad lately. Perhaps rumors are
true and she's not August's child
after all. Bruno? Nah! We all pay
-- all pay for our sins.

INTERCUT BEDROOM -- DARK

Anne is sleeping, barely visible under the down cover in the couple's bed. August is stretched out beside her on top of the covers. He has thrown his big heavy coat over himself, a light SNORE escapes his open mouth.

INTERCUT LIVING ROOM -- DARK

Selma is deep asleep, huddled at her mother's side who is restlessly sleeping herself.

BACK TO SCENE

The water kettle starts WHISTLING, increasing in volume. Frau Meier lifts her tired head from the table top and barely getting up, pushes the kettle to the rear of the stove top.

Her head falls back onto her arms. She is fast asleep within seconds.

INSERT -- CLOCK ON SIDEBOARD

The time is twenty-three minutes after eleven

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DARK

A small flame is visible behind the Christmas tree licking up the wall. Within seconds the entire tree is in flames. Then the drapes, the walls, the ceiling and all of the old furniture is burning brightly in no time at all.

FADE TO:

EXT. AUGUST AND MINNA'S HOUSE -- DARK

The snow is still falling. High flames are shooting out off the downstairs windows. Within minutes the entire small old house is engulfed in flames shooting in the dark sky.

EXT. NEIGHBORING HOUSES -- DARK

Doors and windows in neighboring houses are being opened and people in night wear are CALLING out to each other M.O.S..

EXT. CHURCH STEEPLE -- DARK

The church bell is frantically RINGING through the night.

DISSOLVE TO:

Close up of the church's clock. The hands are slowly moving towards midnight.

EXT. AUGUST AND MINNA'S HOUSE -- DARK

Much of the village's population is at the scene of the fire. Everybody is carrying some bucket or pot or can - anything that can be used to throw water at the burning inferno.

Desperately, some people throw handfuls of snow at the flames. SHOUTS are being exchanged AD LIB.

Mothers hug their WEEPING children and men and women stand helplessly by while within minutes the small house burns to the ground M.O.S..

EXT. SNOW-COVERED STREET IN FRONT OF BURNING HOUSE -- DARK

Finally, the small red old fire truck arrives with its bell RINGING shrilly. Too late. There is nothing to be saved any more. The three century old house is gone, only a pile of smoldering rubble is left.

POLICE MAN - GERD

Make room for the truck, people
-- let the truck through! Move back,
people! Make room for the truck!

FIRE MAN - JOSEPH

Is everybody safe? Where are
August and Minna and the kids?

POLICE MAN - GERD

Get out of the way, people.

NEIGHBOR 1 - FRITZ

How could this happen?

NEIGHBOR 2 - HERMAN

They must all be in there. August
and Minna and the children.

They're all dead --

FIRE MAN - JOSEPH

Step back, folks. Get away from the fire. Has anybody seen August and Minna and the kids?

POLICE MAN - GERD

Nobody has seen them. There must be all in there. Oh, my God!

NEIGHBOR 1 - FRITZ

I just spoke with August in church. How could this happen?

NEIGHBOR 2 - Herman

Help us God. They're all dead ...

NEIGHBOR 3 - PAULA

Only this morning I say to Minna that I come and help with the kids if August gets worse.

NEIGHBOR 4 - HEDWIG

This is too much to bear. You know, too much.

FIRE MAN - JOSEPH

Folks! Listen now, get away from that fire. Has anybody seen Lina?

NEIGHBOR 3 - PAULA

Isn't she here, Joseph?

NEIGHBOR 2 - HERMAN

She can't be sleeping with all this commotion.
Oh God, they're all dead --

FRAU DOCTOR

I saw them all tonight. Frau Meier said that she was staying with

the Winters for Christmas Eve.

FIRE MAN - JOSEPH

That can't be -- Lina! My God,
Lina! My sister! Gone? I don't
believe this. My only sister.

NEIGHBOR 1 - FRITZ

Gone, they're all gone ... how
could this happen?

NEIGHBOR 3 - PAULA

Was August getting worse?

FRAU DOCTOR

No. no. It was the child. The
small one, Anne. She had her
legs burned with boiling water.

NEIGHBOR 1 - FRITZ

Her legs burned?

FIRE MAN - JOSEPH

Can anybody run to Lina's house
and see if she's there?

NEIGHBOR 6 - GISELA

She would be here by now if she
was home, right?

NEIGHBOR 1 - FRITZ

Joseph, you aren't saying ...

NEIGHBOR 2 - HERMAN

How could this happen, Pastor --
and on Christmas Eve? All dead,
all of'em.

PASTOR

I don't know, Herman, I really
don't know. God works in mysterious
ways. We have to accept.

NEIGHBOR 3 - PAULA

Where's Lina?

NEIGHBOR 1 - FRITZ

Lina's not at home. Peter checked on her. She must've been with Minna.

NEIGHBOR 7 - ARNOLD

Five people dead, five of our friends dead -- on Christmas Eve

.

NEIGHBOR 2 - HERMAN

How can we accept. Pastor, tell me; how can we accept this -- dead, all dead.

NEIGHBOR 3 - PAULA

And Anne had her legs burned with boiling water.

NEIGHBOR 4 - HEDWIG

That can't set a house on fire.

NEIGHBOR 1 - ARNOLD

We have to do something - save something. Five of our friends, gone.

NEIGHBOR 7 - FRITZ

What can we do? Tell me, what?

NEIGHBOR 6 - GISELA

Do? What can we do you ask? Pray, I say, pray.

(yelling)

Bruno, where are you? What on earth are you doing there?

Bruno, his hands on his back, slowly walks around the smoldering house. He seems to be looking for something. The heat is too intense to get close.

NEIGHBOR 1 - FRITZ

Gone, they're all gone ... how can something like this happen?

NEIGHBOR 5 - BRUNO

(sotto)

It just doesn't seem right, I say. How can the house burn to the ground with all of'em in there. One should've woken up, I say.

FIRE MAN - JOSEPH

And Lina wouldn't have slept at Minna's --

NEIGHBOR 8 - HANS

Perhaps they were drunk.

NEIGHBOR 4 - HEDWIG

Look who's talking. Drunk? With what - apple juice? In these times! Drunk.

NEIGHBOR 8 - HANS

I heard that Willie has sent wine again. Who knows --

NEIGHBOR 4 - HEDWIG

Shame on you. Both. How can you even think a thing like this?

POLICE MAN - GERD

There's nothing to save anymore -- nothing we can do. My God!

NEIGHBOR 2 - HERMAN

Minna, the kids -- August -- They're all gone. All dead.

FIRE MAN - JOSEPH

No, that won't set a house on fire, Paula. A Christmas tree can, though, or a stove if the door isn't closed tightly.

(yelling)

Bruno, get away from there.

NEIGHBOR 6 - GISELA

What on earth does he think he's doing there -- poking around the ashes like a madman.

NEIGHBOR 5 - BRUNO

(mumbling)

It just doesn't seem right, I say.

PASTOR

(slowly nodding his head)

We must. We must accept and pray. And go on with our life. It's God's will. We have to accept.

NEIGHBOR 5 - BRUNO

We'll never know what happened, I say. Nobody knows.

NEIGHBOR 6 - GISELA

What are you babbling about, old one?

NEIGHBOR 1- FRITZ

You say it, Bruno, no, nobody'll ever know.

POLICE MAN - GERD

(forceful though in tears)

Go home, people. There is nothing we can do here anymore. Go home now. Nothing left to do here.

FRAU DOCTOR

Is there anything I can help with?

PASTOR

No, Frau Doctor, this here is my business now. And, God, what a sad business it is.

NEIGHBOR 5 - BRUNO

Nope, no witnesses. Nobody'll ever know, I say.

POLICE MAN - GERD

You might want to look in at people's houses tomorrow, Frau Doctor. Everybody will have a very hard time.

(authoritative)

Go home people, go, go home.

FRAU DOCTOR

Anything I can do for you, Gerd?

POLICE MAN - GERD

No. No.

FRAU DOCTOR

How are you holding up? It's your family. Always thinking of others first.

POLICE MAN - GERD

Just doing my job. People, go, Go home now.

PASTOR

Yes, friends, go home and pray.

NEIGHBOR 9 - PETER

Pray for all of us.

PASTOR

Be in church tomorrow. God help us all. God be with us.

Everybody is in deep shock. Not much is spoken. Quietly the neighbors start walking back to their houses.

NEIGHBOR 5 - BRUNO

(agitated)

Wait!! There is something. I see something.

NEIGHBOR 4 - HEDWIG

What? What is it?

NEIGHBOR - 8 HANS

I don't see a thing.

NEIGHBOR 5 - BRUNO

(pointing)

Over there. There.

NEIGHBOR 2 - HERMAN

Bruno is right - there is somebody. Look, Hans, look. Gerd, over there.

POLICE MAN - GERD

I be damned!

NEIGHBOR 1 - FRITZ

Where?

NEIGHBOR 8 - HANS

You're right. He's right!

NEIGHBOR 5 - BRUNO

There, there, behind the tree, I say.

NEIGHBOR 8 - HANS

Bruno's right. There, look ...

POLICE MAN - GERD

It's a child.

PASTOR

God help us -- it's Selma.
Selma?! Selma!

FRAU DOCTOR
Quick, somebody, get the child.

NEIGHBOR 9 - PETER
I got her.

FRAU DOCTOR
Let me have a look at her.

Peter carries the shaking Selma on his arms. She is still wearing her new dress now all charred and blackened. Her little face is deadly white, she is in deep shock. Frau Doctor rushes towards her and gives her a fast look over.

SELMA
I didn't do it, I didn't do it --

FRAU DOCTOR
Still, Selma.

POLICE MAN - GERD
Hold still, Selma. Let Frau Doctor have a look at you.

SELMA
It's not my fault, I didn't do it on purpose. It was an accident. Tante Lina says so --

PASTOR
Hush now, girl. Be quite. Keep still.

FRAU DOCTOR
She seems to be alright. In shock and a little frost bitten but otherwise alright. Can someone carry her to my office?

NEIGHBOR 9 - PETER

I take her.

POLICE MAN - GERD

Go ahead, Peter. Do you need any help?

FIRE MAN - JOSEPH

(in shock)

I'd take y' all in the truck but I think it's safer for me to stay and make sure that no flames flare up again.

POLICE MAN - GERD

Move on now people. Time to go.

NEIGHBOR 9 - PETER

(to Gerd)

No. No. I'm fine.

SELMA

(whining)

I didn't do it on purpose. I don't hate her. Tante Lina says so too. Where's Anne?

NEIGHBOR 4 - HEDWIG

What's she talking about? She didn't do it?

SELMA

Mother! Father!

FRAU DOCTOR

She's in shock. She doesn't know what she's saying.

SELMA

Where's mother? Father!

NEIGHBOR 3 - PAULA

I carry her to your house, Frau Doctor. She's shaking.

NEIGHBOR 8 - HANS

It's alright, Paula, Peter got her.

FIRE MAN - JOSEPH

Here, Peter, take the blanket from my truck. Wrap the kid up.

SELMA

Where's mother? Mother! Mother!

PASTOR

It's alright, Selma. Hush now.

FRAU DOCTOR

Thank you. I will do a thorough examination and then let her sleep in my daughter's old room.

POLICE MAN - GERD

That'll be the best. I come by first thing in the morning to talk with her. Seems like she has something to say.

PASTOR

I'll meet you there.

FRAU DOCTOR

Let's go then. Good night all. Come along, Peter.

POLICE MAN - GERD

Step back, people, Let the man through.

NEIGHBOR 9 - PETER

Thanks, Gerd.

POLICE MAN - GERD

Now you all go home, people.
Joseph and I stay here to make
sure all is safe.

NEIGHBOR 5 - BRUNO

I stay here with you -- just in
case.

NEIGHBOR 6 - GISELA

In case of what. What? In case
the dead come back to haunt you?

PASTOR

Yes, neighbors, do as Gerd says,
go home. Go home and pray. God
bless you my friends.

NEIGHBOR 6 - GISELA

(sarcastically)

Come along, old one. Don't make
a fool of yourself.

NEIGHBOR 3 - PAULA

(muttering)

I knew it, I knew it all along.

NEIGHBOR 1 - FRITZ

Shush, woman. Not know.

(to Gerd)

Suspicious witches!

POLICE MAN - GERD

Rumors die hard, as we all know.

NEIGHBOR - 5 BRUNO

You go on home woman, I stay here
with Joseph and Gerd -- just in
case.

NEIGHBOR 3 - PAULA

Come on, Gisela, I walk with you.

NEIGHBOR 6 - GISELA

Coming.

(to Bruno)

Suit yourself. Fool.

Gisela, shaking her head at her husband, follows her neighbors who reluctantly walk back to their houses.

INT. FRAU DOCTOR'S LIVING ROOM -- DAY

The Pastor and Frau Doctor are sitting in two overstuffed chairs. Both are distraught. Pastor is still dressed in his outdoor clothes. Frau Doctor looking pretty in gray wool pants and a big black sweater.

PASTOR

(dumbfounded)

I don't believe -- when did you first notice that she was gone?

FRAU DOCTOR

(calm and reserved)

I went in to check on her about thirty minutes ago.

PASTOR

(yelling)

Thirty minutes!

FRAU DOCTOR

The bed was empty, the closet doors wide open and no Selma in sight.

PASTOR

(highly exited)

Are you sure that you looked everywhere?

FRAU DOCTOR

There are tracks in the snow in the back of the house. She left through the back door.

PASTOR

(agitated)

We have to notify the police and the neighbors. We must form a search party. We --

FRAU DOCTOR

(calm)

No. No. --

PASTOR

(interrupting)

She'll freeze to death out there in no time --

FRAU DOCTOR

(interrupting)

No, no. Calm down, Pastor. Just listen --

PASTOR

(almost hysterical)

Calm down? God in Heaven!

FRAU DOCTOR

Just listen, Pastor! Selma has taken quite a few of my daughter's clothes. They'll keep her warm enough.

(pensive)

-- for a while at least --

PASTOR

Thank God in Heaven!

(reflectively)

She is wise beyond her years. Scares me at times.

(jumping up)

I run and get everybody together.
We need a search party.

FRAU DOCTOR
(grabbing his arm)
No need, Pastor. Gerd has taken
charge already.

PASTOR
Gerd? But how -- ??

FRAU DOCTOR
He was here already - wanted to
talk with Selma.

PASTOR
He's not only a good police man
but also Minna's cousin and
Anne's god father.

FRAU DOCTOR
He'll find her.

PASTOR
Is he alone out there?

FRAU DOCTOR
No, no. Joseph and Bruno are
with him.

PASTOR
Bruno, hm? Did Selma talk to you
last night? Did she say anything
about the fire?

FRAU DOCTOR
No, she didn't say much at all,
the shock, you know. I gave her
a sleeping pill.

PASTOR

That was a good idea. That child is through more than one can imagine.

FRAU DOCTOR

They'll find her, Pastor. How far can a girl that age get?

PASTOR

You are right.

(reassuringly)

If anybody can find her it's Gerd and his men.

FRAU DOCTOR

(looking out the window)

The snow is almost three feet high and she's so small, barely nine years old.

PASTOR

Thank God it stopped snowing early this morning.

FRAU DOCTOR

They can follow her tracks.

PASTOR

Let's pray, Frau Doctor, let's pray for her safe return. And for all of us.

FRAU DOCTOR

Yes, Pastor, let's pray for all of us. Let's pray for the child. For all of us.

PASTOR

"OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN,

HALLOWED BE THY NAME -- "

FADE TO:

EXT. SNOW COVERED NARROW ROAD LEADING INTO THE DEEP FORESTS
SURROUNDING THE VILLAGE -- DAY

Selma is all bundled up in warm too big clothes, a hood covering her head. She is wearing high leather boots with extra woolen socks which she folded over the tops.

Her gloved hands are shoved deep into the pockets of the fur-lined long overcoat. This, as well as all the other items she has piled on, belongs to Frau Doctor's daughter.

Selma walks as fast as the high snow allows into the forest. A small stuffed knapsack hovers on her back. Selma turns around, darkly stares back at the village, then turns back and swiftly walks off into the woods.

FADE OUT.

THE END