

THE TALE OF MAD MEL MELVIN

Written by

Erik Schmudde

SAMPLE

THE SOUND OF A POCKET WATCH TICKING, distant, growing louder.

FADE IN:

WE ARE FLYING through fog, a moonlit forest below, heading toward a remote suburb -- **NAPER** -- with a landmark pointing into the sky.

VOICE (V.O.)

Dad always says that dreams come from collecting moments, and that when you're a kid you have to go out there and find them before the ticking clock stops.

We are very low, gliding fast over the trees as the ticking builds. The landmark comes into focus. A CLOCK TOWER, three-stories high with a twisted torso and leaning.

VOICE (V.O.)

So -- we did...

EXT. TOWN OF NAPER - RIVER - MORNING

A FOOT SPLASHES in a SHALLOW RIVER, water ripples follow --

CHRISTOPHER "STRETCH" STRETCHER, 8, tall and scrawny. He runs into the river to his dad, **JEDEDIAH**. He's 40, energetic and charismatic with soft eyes and a pointed chin. Stretch hands him a rock.

STRETCH (V.O.)

We found them building dams in the river and playing catch in the backyard. Fixing things around the house and climbing trees.

We pull back to see Stretch's sister, **NELLIE**, 11, hanging from a tree upside down.

INT. STRETCHER HOME - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

In the center of a dark room sits a homemade tent created from bedsheets and blankets tied to chairs and tables. A LIGHT from inside creates FOUR SILHOUETTES.

STRETCH (V.O.)

We even found them camping in our own family room.

INSIDE THE TENT

A PLASTIC LANTERN sits between sleeping bags and snacks. Nellie, Stretch, and his mom, **AMELIA**, an intelligent business woman always presentable, stare with frightened eyes at --

JEDEDIAH -- as he dramatically tells a scary campfire story.

JEDEDIAH

He hides in the closet. *"Johnny I want my liver back."* The footsteps get closer. The door handle rattles and then -- and THEN -- AND THEN --

JEDEDIAH SCREAMS, scaring his family. Laughter ensues, followed by playful pillow fighting.

ON JEDEDIAH -- smiling as he watches his family, beaming.

STRETCH (V.O.)

Dad's entire life was about finding moments, but they weren't all good.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Jedediah walks down the sidewalk with Stretch, playfully stepping over every crack. They look up when they hear LAUGHTER and see KIDS PLAYING HOPSCOTCH.

Stretch turns to his dad with an asking smile --

JEDEDIAH

Go ahead.

-- And runs over, his shyness evident the closer he gets.

STRETCH

Hi... Can I play with you guys?

The kids glare at Stretch, clearly seeing him, and then turn back to their game as if he didn't exist.

ON JEDEDIAH -- his happiness changing to concern.

Stretch, uncomfortable, picks up a ROCK and stands in line -- but the kids continue to ignore. His eyes open to the scene around him, how people look at him --

-- Kids look, then whisper, laugh, and leave.

-- TOWNSFOLK stare with scowls.

A PARENT grabs her DAUGHTER, who turns to Stretch while being pulled away --

DAUGHTER

Thanks for killing the fun, freak!

Stretch, now alone, hangs his head. Confused. Embarrassed and humiliated. He looks over to --

A distraught, and fearful Jedediah.

STRETCH (V.O.)

That day everything changed.

INT. STRETCHER HOME - STRETCH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stretch throws off his blankets and gets out of bed, walking toward the window where he looks out, and sees Jedediah on the ROOFTOP, sitting on a BLUE BLANKET and looking out.

STRETCH (V.O.)

Dad started spending a lot of time on the roof. He would sit there all night with his head tilted to the side, and barely move.

STRETCH

Dad...?

Jedediah turns to Stretch, his demeanor tranquil.

JEDEDIAH

Hey -- what are you doing up, kid?

STRETCH

Whatcha thinking about?

Jedediah gestures for his son to join him. Stretch climbs out of the window, onto --

THE ROOFTOP

Jedediah helps Stretch sit down, staying silent, then extends his arm outward, showing his son --

An enchanting view. The rooftop lies perfect height to the treetops, which flow like a green ocean into the starry sky.

JEDEDIAH

Just because you get old, kid, doesn't mean you stop dreaming. Out there, that's where they come true.

STRETCH

What's your dream, dad?

JEDEDIAH
I don't want to be hated anymore.

Jedediah turns to Stretch, gives a gentle kiss on the head.

ON STRETCH -- mesmerized as he stares straight ahead. Then he looks back over to Jedediah --

STRETCH (V.O.)
*The next year dad started chasing
that dream.*

-- Who is no longer sitting there.

INT. STRETCHER HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Stretch sits at the table with Amelia and Nellie next to an empty chair, their behavior in contrast from earlier. Somber.

STRETCH (V.O.)
*He'd be there for breakfast, gone
by lunch, and not come home for a
week. We didn't now when he was
coming or going -- except for one
day. There was one day dad would
never miss.*

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Lightning flashes across FOUR, NON-CARVED PUMPKINS, hinting --

It's HALLOWEEN. Stretch, now 11, kneels on the couch dressed as a pirate, head between curtains as he looks out the window, waiting. He perks up --

Stretch sees Jedediah coming out of the darkness --

The front door flies open and Jedediah steps through, dressed as what can only be described as Indiana Jones. Torn fedora hat and jacket, a BACKPACK hanging from his shoulder.

Jedediah drops to his knees and wraps Stretch in a tight hug.

STRETCH
I like it when you're home.

JEDEDIAH
I always come home, kid. But if
somehow I shall lose my way?

STRETCH
I'll stop time.

JEDEDIAH
Exactly! That way we never lose
another second together.

Jedediah tosses his hat toward the coat rack, badly misses.
Then a DROP OF WATER falls on his head. They both look up and
see the start of a SMALL CEILING LEAK.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)
We'll have to fix that. Where's
your mom and sister?

Stretch points to the shouting coming from upstairs.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)
(sighs)
Arguing again.

STRETCH
Dad, can we have a catch tomorrow?
Just you and me.

JEDEDIAH
Something on your mind, kid?

STRETCH
I want to know why you're gone all
the time.

Jedediah winces, cut by those words. THUNDER RUMBLES and
HEAVY RAINFALL follows, which Jedediah notices.

JEDEDIAH
Doesn't sound like you'll be trick-
or-treating anytime soon. Why wait?

Stretch smiles, disbelief meets excitement, leading us to --

A TIME CUT -- Jedediah and Stretch sit by the fireplace with
a CHESS BOARD (MONSTERS VS. KNIGHTS) between them.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)
When I was your age, your
grandfather told me a story and it
pulled me in faster than quicksand,
taking every last breath. It opened
my eyes to a world I didn't know
existed, to a legend only found in
the deepest part of your
imagination. Mad Mel Melvin.

ELECTRICITY HUMS before LIGHTNING STRIKES, so powerful the
house lights flicker on and off, leaving Stretch amazed.

STRETCH

How did you do that?

Jedediah grabs the knight chess pieces, PAWNS, using the board to visually illustrate his story.

JEDEDIAH

Not very long ago, a boy was tormented for being different and all he ever wanted was to feel accepted. That day came when the very children who hurt him extended an invitation to play Ghost in the Graveyard. He agreed, but was unaware of their true intention.

STRETCH

Which was...?

JEDEDIAH

To banish him.

Jedediah removes a single pawn from the group and places it alone, near the monster side.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

They took the boy into the graveyard and left him. It was cold, it was dark. He screamed and cried. The harder he fought to get out the more lost he became until finally, he disappeared.

STRETCH

What happened to him?

Jedediah looks at the storm raging outside the window, and then places the pawn between the monster pieces.

JEDEDIAH

He fell into a gateway, a portal to between worlds where all monsters were said to exist. He became one himself. The gateway can only be opened from the outside, so for years he wandered the darkness plotting his revenge, convincing himself that every bad child was a threat to all who were good.

Jedediah replaces the pawn with a monster piece, the KING, and slides it forward, leading other monster pieces across the board as they close in on the knights.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

Then one day, someone opened the gateway on Halloween. Mad Mel made his return. He stormed back into Naper with his army of monsters and took away all the bad children for an eternity of servitude, scarring this town till this very day.

Jedediah sweeps knight pawns off the board. Beat. Stretch reaches and pushes the monster king back.

STRETCH

But he was stopped, right?

Jedediah places KNIGHT CHESS PIECES between the board and fireplace, creating FOUR SHADOWS stretching across the board onto the monster king piece.

JEDEDIAH

By a group known as the Four Shadows. They were the ones who discovered the gateway's location and found a way to keep it from opening, trapping Mad Mel Melvin and his monsters inside. Now...

Jedediah grabs his backpack, starts rummaging through it --

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

...to make sure the gateway was never found again, they created all these puzzles and traps to protect its location. The answers to these puzzles were written in clues...

-- And pulls out an OLD JOURNAL. Binding worn, leather cracked. Loose pages sticking out and frayed.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

...and kept in a single journal in case there was ever a need to find the gateway again.

STRETCH

How'd you find that?

JEDEDIAH

Therein lies another story. Take a look.

Jedediah hands Stretch the journal. Stretch flips through the delicate pages, a collection of notes and scribbles, before stopping on one that grabs his interest.

STRETCH

(reading from journal)

It starts with the twelve angered --
high amongst the tower's height.
The place where only the third --
can restore his forgotten sight.

(to Jedediah)

There's more written but it's not
finished. Parts are missing.

JEDEDIAH

Those parts are the clues you must
solve. Mad Mel Melvin still exists
today, endlessly wandering the
darkness between worlds -- trapped.
This journal can lead me to him.

Stretch turns and looks out the window, thinking, watching
the storm get angrier outside.

STRETCH

Why dad? Why release a monster?

JEDEDIAH

Because the man believed to open
the gateway that night was Franklin
Stretcher, your great-grandfather.

ON STRETCH -- digesting this information.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)

And now our last name has become
synonymous with horror. That's why
people look at you different.
You've inherited a dislike of
indisputable strength and I cannot
let my kids grow up under such
hatred, such pain -- not like I
did.

STRETCH

Why'd he do it?

JEDEDIAH

I don't think he did, and I hoped --
hope -- finding the gateway will
help prove that, clear our name.

STRETCH

How?

THUNDER BOOMS and LIGHTNING STRIKES. House lights go out.
Rain pours down the chimney and FIRE SIZZLES OUT, leaving --

Total darkness. Between flashes of lightning we see Jedediah run to the window and look out.

JEDEDIAH
Power's out in the whole town.
(beat)
I have to go.

STRETCH
What?!

Jedediah grabs the journal from Stretch, somewhat aggressive, and throws it into his backpack. At the front door, he puts on his jacket and hat. Stretch follows.

Jedediah grabs the door handle and yanks the door open. The STRONG WIND pushes Stretch back a step.

STRETCH (CONT'D)
But you just got home.

Jedediah steps through the doorway into the raging storm.

STRETCH (CONT'D)
(yelling, emotional)
STOP!

Jedediah stops and turns. He sees Stretch standing in the large doorway, raindrops mixing with tears. Jedediah goes over and holds his son.

JEDEDIAH
Do you know why I love Halloween?

Stretch shakes his head, "no."

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)
Because when you were little you
never talked, not a sound. Your
mother and I got worried so we took
you to all these doctors and
nothing seemed to work.

Thunder BOOMS. Stretch jumps. Jedediah holds his hand.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)
And then came Halloween. We were
carving pumpkins and you reached in
and pulled out a gooey mess and you
know what you said -- "ewe."

Jedediah and Stretch laugh. The smile on Jedediah's face stays as he remembers the moment.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)
That was your first word and
there's nothing more magical than
hearing your kid talk to you for
the first time. And since that day
we have never missed a year carving
pumpkins together, right?

STRETCH
It's tradition.

JEDEDIAH
Then who am I to break it?

Jedediah looks at his son quietly. He wipes the tears from
his cheeks and then walks away, stopping again a foot away.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)
Hey, kid.

Stretch looks up as Jedediah tosses him a small, BURLAP
POUCH, no bigger than his hand.

JEDEDIAH (CONT'D)
Time isn't something to just
follow. Listen to it, even when the
ticking stopped.

Jedediah smiles, and then disappears into the darkness.

STRETCH (V.O.)
That was the last time I saw him.

INT. KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Next day -- Stretch sits at the table with pumpkins still not
carved. He's alone, waiting for a father who will never show.

STRETCH (V.O.)
*I've had a billion questions run
through my head since that night,
but only one keeps me up.*

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Stretch sits next to Jedediah's blanket and stares out over
the treetops. He looks to his left and sees the Clock Tower.

STRETCH (V.O.)
*I want to know what made him leave
that night.*

EXT. CLOCK TOWER - NIGHT

A wood fence guards the Clock Tower with a sign: KEEP OUT --

TWO RAGGED BOYS dive into frame -- Both 12, **FUSE**, easily irritable, a weak body with the heart of a lion, and **BOXER**, hefty and soft-spoken, stuck in an battle with bad luck.

They pull two pickets apart and peek through.

SUPER: ONE YEAR LATER

FUSE

Betcha' a cow tail and kitchen sink
he doesn't make it past the door.

BOXER

I don't think this is a good idea.

FUSE

There's a surprise.

BOXER

You shouldn't have dared him, Fuse.
(far off look)
Any kid who tries to ring the bell
of the clock tower...

FUSE

Here we go --

BOXER

...gets punished by the Timekeeper
who lives inside, and I heard he
smashes kids' fingers with a hammer
and uses the tips for soup
crackers. Chicken noodle, I think.

FUSE

Eyewash. Ringing the bell is like,
a right of passage or something.
I've done it.

BOXER

No you haven't.

Fuse turns to Boxer with a crazy look in his eyes.

FUSE

Call me out again, Boxer, and watch
what happens.
(silently)
Watch.

BOXER

You haven't, and no kid in the history of Naper has either.

FUSE

Even better. We'll be legends.

EXT. TREES NEAR THE CLOCK TOWER - NIGHT

Amid shadows, Stretch, now 12, and going through that preteen growth spurt where everything in the mirror is awkward, pulls back branches to reveal the Clock Tower. Time reads: 12:00. A cold-sweat moves over him, and then --

He's gone, dashing across the open lawn...

EXT. CLOCK TOWER - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

...until he reaches the door. When all appears safe, Stretch waves over **SLICK** (purple jacket, silver chain, greased hair says it all), who slides directly to the lock.

Slick pulls out a SWISS ARMY KNIFE, unlocks and opens door.

INT. CLOCK TOWER - GRAND STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Stretch and Slick enter and look up to see a high stairway disappear into blackness. Stretch takes a step forward --

SLICK

Hold up. This train has reached its station, my man. I got you in. Job's done. You're on your own.

STRETCH

Where the balls shown last week against the Creeper?

SLICK

Girls were present, ain't nobody here for me to impress. Besides, I heard this old timer uses kids teeth to play checkers, and the ladies need these pearly whites.

STRETCH

Actually they're more yellow. If I'm not back in ten minutes --

SLICK
I'm getting the hell out of here.
I'm not kidding.

Not surprised, Stretch grabs the swiss army knife and throws it into his BACKPACK, then starts climbing. Alone.

EXT. CLOCK TOWER - NIGHT

Fuse and Boxer wait, eyes locked on Clock Tower when they hear a RUSTLE, SOMEONE RUNNING --

They quickly turn and find nothing more than branches swaying in the wind. Nerves settle before they turn back to see --

SLICK'S HEAD -- pressed between the pickets. Fuse SCREAMS. Boxer throws up his fists in a boxing stance (this explains the nickname).

FUSE
You got a death wish?

Slick jumps over the fence, joining them.

FUSE (CONT'D)
You're supposed to be inside,
Slick. Me and tub-boat here got
lookout.

SLICK
I gave our fearless leader ten
minutes to get back. Not my fault
he don't trust my lack of courage.

INT. CLOCK TOWER - BELFRY - NIGHT

Stretch enters and sneaks behind a wood post. He scours the room, finding himself inside the inner workings of a great timepiece. The CLOCK FACE is on the North wall, which is controlled by COMPLEX GEARS in the center. All other walls are brick.

Stretch hears an old man's COUGH, followed by HAMMER CLANKS. He turns to look for the Timekeeper, when --

A BAT wings by, startling him, before flying between beams to the RUSTED BELL above. The attached bell rope is tied below around a beam running above gears, out of reach.

Stretch grabs a nearby BROOM. Reaching into his backpack, he pulls out the swiss army knife and DUCT TAPE, unfastens the CAN OPENER TOOL and tapes it to the broom.

EXT. CLOCK TOWER - NIGHT

Fuse is inches from Slick's face, pointing his finger.

FUSE

I don't give a rat if he said your
teeth were blue. Get back inside.
I'm warning you.

SLICK

Not happening, short stack. You do
it. The Timekeeper is already
crazy. You go in, he sees an elf.
Thinks nothing of it. By that time
Stretch has rung the bell, and we
all get out of here with our toes
still intact.

Before Slick knew what hit him, the squirmy runt was on him.

INT. CLOCK TOWER - BELFRY - NIGHT

Stretch, an anxious look, advances and ducks behind the
gears. The bell rope is a few feet above him. A strong pull
and ring and he's done the impossible.

That's the goal. Isn't it?

Gritting his teeth, Stretch leaps onto the gears and extends
the broom. The can opener is on the verge of the bell rope,
hooks on. He looks down to the moving gears beneath his feet,
then --

Stretch is catapulted across the room, over the gears and
into a cluster of ROPES that swing him into the capture of a
WEIGHTED NET.

Suspended, Stretch lets out an ear-splitting SCREAM.

STRETCH

(yelling)

LET ME GO!

Not a second later, the net drops, crashing onto the floor
with Stretch tangled inside. A combination of rolls and swim
strokes set him free.

Stretch GASPS.

The **TIMEKEEPER**, 60, stands, framed by the clock face, with
his wild electric hair and crooked frame, an outstretched
hammer by his side. He charges forward --

Stretch scrambles, hurling the net off himself, and --

TIMEKEEPER

No --

-- The weights entangle the broom. The netting gets caught in the gears. It attacks the machine's heart and jerks the broom and bell rope tight, JAMMING all moving parts --

ON STRETCH -- smiling --

We hear METAL SCRAPE. Rusted flakes trickle down on Stretch and the Timekeeper as they look up --

The bell begins to move as the gears swallow the net and broom. The entire contraption dies in a billow of smoke --

BREAKING THE CLOCK TOWER.

The bell rocks free, clapper swings --

EXT. CLOCK TOWER - NIGHT

Boxer enjoys a snack, paying no attention to the fight behind him (Fuse is now pinned by Slick), when --

The BELL TOLLS, a haunting chime, that reverberates through Naper. Everything is still. Boxer looks past the other two --

BOXER

Guys.

The clock face hands rotate in opposing directions, an infinite spin, before stopping on 12:00.

An OMINOUS GROAN turns the kids around. Boxer's jaw drops. Fuse and Slick's jaws drop. They see --

A COLD CHILL, similar to the monster San Francisco fog, roll down Main Street swallowing buildings, before --

Climactically charging through the boys and settling into a soft haze. The three exchange a "holy shit" look.

INT. CLOCK TOWER - BELFRY - NIGHT

The belfry is now dark. Lifeless. Smoke dissolves and in the moonlight we see Stretch, looking up at the Timekeeper, expecting the worst.

TIMEKEEPER

You have no idea what you've done.

Stretch, a sinking feeling. He sees on the Timekeeper's waist a POCKET WATCH with the imprint of 'MMM' on its cover: it's clear he's seen this before.

TIMEKEEPER (CONT'D)

Go! Now!

Stretch hurries off.

EXT. CLOCK TOWER - NIGHT

Stretch runs across lawn. He trips, falls, scrambles back up.

SLICK

Is there a new sheriff in town?

Slick raises his hand for a high five, but --

Stretch runs through it, past all three friends, leaving two dumbfounded and one questioning his hands' existence. They watch Stretch jump over the fence and disappear.

EXT. TREES NEAR CLOCK TOWER - NIGHT

Combination lock SNAPS open and with one strong heave the connecting chain releases from his BICYCLE.

Stretch starts pedaling, just as Fuse, Slick, Boxer arrive.

FUSE

What the hell happened?

Stretch says nothing, his silence forcing them to follow.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

All four ride their bicycles through the haze. We overhear Stretch telling his story along the way. Approaching the street's end they veer off...

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

...into the neighborhood, each house built close enough the rooftops nearly touch. They pass curious TOWNSFOLK (wearing nightwear) staring and pointing to the Clock Tower.

STRETCH

Scary Nelson's yard.

They duck under a flurry of low branches, continuing...

EXT. GUMSHOE ROW - NIGHT

...around the bend to the last four penniless houses that sit isolated from the rest. The kids split. We follow Stretch to the very last house.

INT. STRETCHER HOME - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Stretch closes the door and steps in a puddle. He looks up and sees THAT SAME CEILING LEAK SEEN BEFORE, but now triple the size. He hears yelling, his expression indicating a familiar welcome home.

Around the corner he finds Amelia, disheveled, and Nellie in a heated argument. Now 15, Nellie is a stunning teenager who is everything Stretch is not -- and knows it.

NELLIE

I hate you! You have no idea what it's like to be fifteen!

AMELIA

You're right, Nellie. I went from 14 to 16 and said hell with 15. Who do you think you're talking too?

Floor CREAKS. Amelia turns and sees Stretch.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Do you have a problem too?

Stretch lowers his eyes. Then runs upstairs.

INT. STRETCH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stretch opens the drawer to a crooked desk, reaches inside, and pulls a KNOB that unlocks a SECRET COMPARTMENT on top. He opens it, stares inside for a moment.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Stretch climbs out, avoiding soft shingles, before sitting down on his own ragged blanket.

TIGHT ON STRETCH -- thinking as he looks out over that still amazing view. On the roof. Next to his dad's blanket.

NELLIE (O.S.)

Hey loser.

Stretch SIGHS and rubs his face as Nellie climbs out the window. He watches Nellie sit on Jedediah's blanket, as if it's nothing.

NELLIE (CONT'D)
Whatcha doing?

STRETCH
Nothing.

Nellie studies Stretch.

NELLIE
You were thinking about dad again,
weren't you?

STRETCH
I don't know.

NELLIE
Yes, you were. You always get this
stupid look on your face. It's
really quite pathetic. Watch...
(impersonating Jedediah)
Here's my thrilling story. Once
upon a time there was a monster
named Mad Mel Melvin who would rise
and take away all the bad children.
The End.

Nellie is amused by her bad performance. Only her.

STRETCH
I thought you never listened to
stories about dad.

NELLIE
Trust me, I wish I didn't, okay?
But you can't help remembering when
certain people, who will remain
nameless, talk about it so much.
(beat)
I mean you, dork.

STRETCH
Got that. Mad Mel only took the bad
kids, which means you'd be a goner.

NELLIE
Whatever. Haven't seen him. It's
obviously not true.

STRETCH

Dad swore it's why everyone hates us.

NELLIE

You mean you. And dad's dead.

Stretch turns --

STRETCH

You don't know that.

NELLIE

Whatever. Doesn't matter. Whole town thought he was a crazy idiot anyway, just like you, and your loser friends.

STRETCH

Everyone except you, right?

NELLIE

Exactly. I'm pretty.

Nellie blows kiss, exits.

After a brief pause, Stretch pulls out what he took from the crooked desk -- THE BURLAP POUCH JEDEDIAH GAVE HIM THE LAST NIGHT HE SAW HIM.

Stretch opens and pulls out a POCKET WATCH.

TIGHT ON COVER -- THE SAME EXACT 'MMM' IMPRINT THAT STRETCH SAW ON THE TIMEKEEPER'S WATCH INSIDE THE CLOCK TOWER.

Stretch opens the pocket watch and sees its broken. He glances to his left at the darkened Clock Tower, also broken.

Time has stopped.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

That morning -- Boxer ascends into view carrying a stockpile of odd objects: cardboard, bedsheets. It's peaceful, until --

Boxer trips and falls. Everything scatters all over.

EXT. MAIN STREET - BAKERY - DAY

Wood shutters FLY OPEN from the second story window. The portly BAKER, 50, squeezes through the window.

BAKER
Happy Halloween!

LOUD CHEERS compel us to PAN DOWN where everyone in town, seemingly, are engaged in transforming Main Street for the annual Halloween Festival.

The setup of tables and chairs and banners and music, the sounds of their actions take them to song the way the Dwarfs were at Bilbo Baggins' house in The Hobbit.

<SONG NUMBER BEGINS> *Every line a vignette.*

BOOKSELLER
<Wart the Witch, or catch the ghost...>

SHERIFF
<A fiery stalk for every post>

BAKER
<Fill the pumpkins with sweets of green...>

ALL TOWNSFOLK
<WE LIVE OUR LIFE FOR HALLOWEEN>

The band plays their instruments as Boxer, with stockpile rearranged, walks past.

ALL TOWNSFOLK (CONT'D)
<Tables are placed in a labyrinth zone -- chairs are stacked like a skeleton's bone>

BOOKSELLER
<The Mummy...>

SHERIFF
<The Dummy...>

BAKER
<Try a Spooky Bat Ghost>

ALL TOWNSFOLK
<THESE ARE THE ONES WE LOVE THE MOST>

Boxer walks past the Ghoulish (Carnival) Games.

ALL TOWNSFOLK (CONT'D)
<We gather to revel the dead in the night -- then dance to music that haunts us with fright.
(MORE)>

ALL TOWNSFOLK (CONT'D)
*It all begins with a Halloween
 spell. Beware...>*

BOOKSELLER
<The Creeps...>

SHERIFF
<The Weeps...>

BAKER
<The Ghouls...>

SHERIFF
<The Fools...>

BAKER
<The Haunts...>

BOOKSELLER
<The Taunts...>

Boxer throws down objects, jumps onto a chair and yells --

BOXER
<LOOK OUT FOR MAD MEL>

Townsfolk GASP. Boxer steps down.

ALL TOWNSFOLK
<WE LIVE OUR LIFE FOR HALLOWEEN>

<SONG NUMBER ENDS>

Boxer gathers his objects. Ahead we see his destination --

Down the road, isolated, lies a hideous haunted house made from cardboard boxes and bedsheets, similar to the indoor tent we saw earlier.

EXT. HAUNTED HOUSE - DAY

Written across the front its name: **THE SCARIEST HAUNTED HOUSE
 IN THE WORLD... EVER!** Scattered about --

Fuse fiddles with the mechanics of his LIFE-SIZE DUMMY SCARE MACHINE. Stretch sits curled on the ground. Slick stands behind crates.

SLICK
 ...play guitar. Paint my Lisa.
 Button my blazer. Whistle.

STRETCH

Checkmate. Right there. You don't need fingertips to whistle.

The dummy springs to life, scaring Fuse, who unleashes a fury of fisticuffs in return.

STRETCH (CONT'D)

Just do it, Slick.

SLICK

No. I don't care if you feel bad. I'm not going back there.

STRETCH

Why not!?

SLICK

Because today's Halloween, the one day of the year I can pass for normal and maybe get a girlfriend.

STRETCH

Why just on Halloween?

FUSE

Everyone else looks weird too.

SLICK

Exactly!

STRETCH

You had a shot last month with the Baker's daughter.

SLICK

Did you see her eyes?

STRETCH

They were a little crossed.

SLICK

A little -- After I kissed her she thanked my twin.

STRETCH

Do this, and I'll never bother you again for the rest of my life.

SLICK

Says your tombstone.

STRETCH

This time I mean it.

SLICK

C'mon man. Can't we do this tomorrow?

STRETCH

No. Today. Now.

SLICK

But the party kicks off soon and we have our haunted house to run. We got to be here for all the people.

STRETCH

We've never had a single visitor -- ever. Not even our own family will come see it, so who cares.

Slick, a troubling look, steps out from behind the crates.

SLICK

What up, Stretch? That ain't you.

An awkward pause.

STRETCH

Just forget it.

Slick and Fuse look at each other, concerned. At the same time -- Boxer emerges, wheezing and sweating.

FUSE

Why you breathing so hard?

Boxer glares back at him.

FUSE (CONT'D)

Scratch that. Don't care. We're leaving.

Stretch looks up, gleaming.

STRETCH

Yeah?

SLICK

If I lose teeth, I'm taking yours.

A dark cloud blocks the sun. A THUNDEROUS NOISE. The boys turn to see the **CREEPER**, 15, hard, mean, the type of kid only a mother could love, storming towards them with --

Nellie and her best friend **HALEY**, 15, shy, plain Jane who is wise beyond her years, by his side.

CREEPER

Finally. We found the four pieces
of gum that live on the bottom of
Naper's shoe.

NELLIE

It's that time, Gumshoes.

The Creeper charges forward --

The GUMSHOES -- Stretch, Slick, Fuse, Boxer -- turn to run,
but are trapped by the Creeper's henchman, the muted twins
SLUDGE and **PIPSQUEAK**.

THE CREEPER -- throws them into the haunted house breaking
the front. Cardboard walls and decor come crashing down.

CREEPER

Now I feel better.

The pile disbands and the Gumshoes emerge. Nellie kicks them
while they're down, making Stretch glare at her.

CREEPER (CONT'D)

Look at him, Nellie. He's as still
as your dead dad.

NELLIE

If they ever find the body.

Like that, it's over. They leave. The Gumshoes are left
beside a broken haunted house. Beaten and humiliated.

FUSE

Your sister sucks.

STRETCH

No. We just react differently.

The dark cloud passes and sunshine returns.

SLICK

Let's go before I change my mind.

EXT. CLOCK TOWER - DAY

The Gumshoes stand by the front door, KNOCKING, with a late
afternoon sun behind them (it's only midday). Odd.

FUSE

No way he hears a knock from way
down here.

STRETCH
Heard of an echo?

FUSE
Heard of an idiot? Give Slick 10 seconds and we're in faster than Boxer eating a cow tail.

BOXER
You're hilarious, Fuse.

STRETCH
I don't think breaking into the place of the person you've come to apologize to is a good idea.

FUSE
Screw that. Even if he heard us there's like 50 billion steps. I'd be celebrating graduation by the time the Timekeeper got down here, that crazy, old, butt-ugly...

Fuse continues his tirade, during which Stretch notices the number of shadows on the ground --

Five, not four. The fifth silhouette has wild electric hair.

FUSE (CONT'D)
...slobbering, hunchbacked, wart-nosed, fat maniac.
(nudged)
What?

Stretch points. The Gumshoes turn to find the Timekeeper.

FUSE (CONT'D)
My parent says I don't know when to shut up. He's right.

TIMEKEEPER
Go away.

STRETCH
W-We came to --

TIMEKEEPER
I don't like kids, especially idiotic miscreants like yourselves.

STRETCH
But we're sorry.

TIMEKEEPER

For which part I wonder. Breaking
into my tower, or actually breaking
it?

Gumshoes enclose into a huddle and discuss. The Timekeeper,
irked, SIGHS as Stretch turns back.

STRETCH

Both?

The Timekeeper scowls at the Gumshoes --

TIMEKEEPER

The ignorance of your generation is
inconceivable.

-- And passes through them to the door.

SLICK

Totally agree. Let's go, Stretch.

The Gumshoes turn to leave, but not Stretch, who is stuck
between his friends and the Timekeeper.

STRETCH

S-Stop...

The Gumshoes stop. The Timekeeper turns and faces Stretch,
who is flustered, struggling to find words. He steps toward
him, curious.

TIMEKEEPER

Why are you really here?

Stretch looks at his friends who are hanging on his response.
The Timekeeper notices his hesitation.

TIMEKEEPER (CONT'D)

If these idiots are true friends,
their opinions of you will not
change. Am I clear? Good. Answer
the question.

Stretch reaches into his pocket and pulls out Jedediah's
pocket watch. The Timekeeper looks at it.

TIMEKEEPER (CONT'D)

When did you get that?

STRETCH

Don't you mean how?

TIMEKEEPER

No -- when?

STRETCH

The night my dad disappeared. I didn't come last night to ring no bell. I came to break it. Dad use to say that if he ever got lost I should stop time. So, I did.

The Timekeeper stares at Stretch with intensity.

FUSE

You lied to us? How do you think that makes me feel, Stretch?

TIMEKEEPER

Shut up.

(to Stretch)

What did you think would happen?

STRETCH

I don't know, but obviously he wanted me to find you. The last time I saw him was last Halloween. He saw something. He looked out the window when the power went out and something ran through his head. Then he left.

TIMEKEEPER

And he didn't tell you why.

Stretch, fighting emotion, shakes his head, "no."

The Timekeeper nods his head, satisfied. As for Slick, Fuse, and Boxer -- it all makes sense now.

STRETCH

Please. I need to know what this watch means. I need to know why he left. You can't turn me away.

The Timekeeper turns and enters the Clock Tower, SLAMMING the door shut behind him.

Heartbroken, Stretch sinks to the ground.

FUSE

Come on, Stretch. We don't need that mothball smelling, weird...

(nudged)

What?

Slick turns around and sees the Timekeeper staring with a glare. Fuse, slyly, steps behind the others.

TIMEKEEPER
(re: Fuse)
I don't like him.

STRETCH
Not many do.

Fuse nods in agreement.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

We PAN DOWN from FIREWORKS exploding over Main Street to --

A ROARING crowd. Confetti poppers BURST. The Halloween celebration begins with the entire town present.

INT. CLOCK TOWER - BELFRY - DAY

Looking down. Slick stares out the clock face watching the celebration. He sulks over and sits by Fuse and Boxer. The Timekeeper approaches with a CRACKER BAG, offering --

TIMEKEEPER
Soup crackers?

The kids, terrified, shake their heads, "no." The Timekeeper heads over and sits by Stretch.

STRETCH
After he disappeared it only got worse. What people said about my family. They call dad a monster.

TIMEKEEPER
Your dad was a great man. Don't you listen to any idiot that says otherwise. Ever. Am I clear?

Stretch nods, "yes."

TIMEKEEPER (CONT'D)
Good. We don't have a lot of time so I'm going to get to it. A few years ago your dad came to me asking questions about Mad Mel and the night the gateway opened.

FUSE
That was Stretch's great-granddad.

The Timekeeper throws a handful of crackers at Fuse.

STRETCH

Dad didn't think it was him. That's why he went looking for the gateway, to prove it.

TIMEKEEPER

I know, but your dad wasn't looking for the gateway when he told you that. He already found it.

STRETCH

What?

TIMEKEEPER

Your great-granddad did open the gateway. He did release Mad Mel Melvin. Your dad was wrong -- and he sat in that exact seat when I told him.

A dreadful pause.

STRETCH

So -- I am a freak.

The Timekeeper watches Stretch's eyes fill with emotion.

TIMEKEEPER

Your father told me he was terrified for you, for his family. He said he failed as a father because he couldn't protect you now that he knew the truth, but I didn't see it that way. So, I offered him a job.

BOXER

As a clock guy?

The Timekeeper looks to the heavens, "why me?"

TIMEKEEPER

That watch your father gave you is the mark of timekeeper, appointed by descendants of the Four Shadows to protect the people of Naper from the monster Mad Mel Melvin. I am a timekeeper, and so was your father.

Stretch stares, silent.

SLICK

That's awesome.

STRETCH

Why does nobody know about this?

TIMEKEEPER

People don't need to know about it, and they don't care to. They're happy now. They're celebrating Halloween again. What they don't know, can't hurt them.

STRETCH

But it could change the way people look at my family --

TIMEKEEPER

Your father knew he couldn't change the past or how people perceive it, but the future was still unwritten. If Mad Mel Melvin were ever to rise again, it would be a Stretcher who saved the town, not hurt it. He understood that. I taught him everything -- about the legend, the puzzles, and how the clock tower controls the gateway. That's what the Four Shadows discovered. As long as it keeps ticking on Halloween. As long as time keeps moving that gateway will remain locked. But if it stops --

A SHADOW LINE travels across the floor, changing the room from day to night. The Gumshoes, with heightened worry, run to the clock face and look out --

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

The shadow line moves across the celebration, until the entire town is covered in darkness.

INT. CLOCK TOWER - BELFRY - NIGHT

Moonlight striking through the clock face illuminates the Gumshoes and Timekeeper.

STRETCH

That's what dad saw that night. The clock tower dark. He knew the gateway opened.

TIMEKEEPER

The gateway can only be opened on Halloween, when the dividing line between the living and dead is blurred. And thanks to you and your idiot friends last night, it has opened again.

BOXER

It was Stretch's idea.

TIMEKEEPER

That doesn't matter now. Soon the bats from the belfry will call him, and he will make his return.

Slick buries his hands in his face.

FUSE

My dad is going to be so pissed.

STRETCH

Why don't you warn anybody?

TIMEKEEPER

There's no point. To them I'm as crazy as your own family.

STRETCH

Then close the gateway.

TIMEKEEPER

I cannot do it alone.

STRETCH

Then how did you do it before? My dad obviously came here that night and Mad Mel didn't come back, so you had to stop him. What happened?

After a brief pause, the Timekeeper turns and walks to the clock face, slowly. Looks out.

STRETCH (CONT'D)

You're not going to tell me?

A horrible pause.

TIMEKEEPER

I suggest you hide -- hide well.

Stretch storms out. Slick and Fuse follow, but Boxer walks over to the Timekeeper.

BOXER
We're just kids. Why do adults
always forget that?

The Timekeeper lowers his eyes as Boxer walks away.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Stretch storms past the ghoulish games before Slick, Fuse,
and Boxer finally corral him.

FUSE
Stretch. Stop!

Stretch stops and faces them with teary eyes.

STRETCH
Go ahead, Fuse. Call me the
pathetic, good-for-nothing
pantywaist that I am, who gets beat
up by his sister and cries over his
lost daddy. Do it!

Fuse locks eyes with Stretch. The standoff pushes Slick and
Boxer back a step.

FUSE
You don't tell us something about
your dad again, and next time, I'll
pound ya.

Stretch's anger breaks into a smile. The mood lightens.

BOXER
Truth is we all wish we could have
at least one parent like your dad.

STRETCH
Thanks guys.

SLICK
So... What do we do?

Stretch looks past Slick.

STRETCH
Mom!

AMELIA -- costumed as a ghost with white hair, makeup, and
dress, turns anxious when the Gumshoes approach.

AMELIA
Christopher. What -- Are you okay?

STRETCH

Not even a little bit. Just found out how dad was a Timekeeper and protector to all of Naper. Cool, right? Oh, and last night I broke the clock tower and opened the gateway to between worlds. Totally by accident, but any second Mad Mel Melvin is going to show his ugly mug and steal all the bad children, which means after tonight I will become an only child, because my sister is the devil.

SLICK

True story.

Amelia ignores Stretch, her eyes find everything but him.

AMELIA

That's nice, Christopher. Glad you're having fun.

STRETCH

Mom, I'm serious. Dad --

AMELIA

It's just a story, Christopher, and I don't want you talking to that Timekeeper.

STRETCH

But dad once said --

AMELIA

I don't want to hear anymore about your father.

A pause.

STRETCH

Why are you so scared to talk about him?

Amelia, avoiding eye contact, finds her escape --

AMELIA

Have fun.

-- Leaving Stretch and the Gumshoes. Alone.

STRETCH

Nobody's going to believe us.

INT. CLOCK TOWER - BELFRY - NIGHT

The Timekeeper stands heavy-hearted, having not moved, his mind traveling. We hear BATS SCREECHING. He looks up.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Boxer stands with his arm raised, it's slapped down.

FUSE

Boxer, we're not in school. Just say what you're thinking. I can't stand it when you do that.

BOXER

We got to hide, seriously. There's nothing else we can do.

A HAND ENTERS FRAME and clutches Boxer's neck.

CREEPER

You can always die.

The Creeper shoves Boxer into the other Gumshoes. Sludge, Pipsqueak, Nellie, and Haley gather behind him.

STRETCH

Not now, Creep.

CREEPER

There's no reason to be impolite.

STRETCH

You're kidding me, right?

NELLIE

We were actually on our way to your haunted house, okay? Thought it would be cool this year.

SLICK

For real?

NELLIE

No.

INT. CLOCK TOWER - BELFRY - NIGHT

The Timekeeper backs away, his eyes watching BATS circling above. They converge on the bell rope.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Sludge and Pipsqueak gesture (pantomime) at the Creeper to use the Gumshoes for piñatas.

CREEPER

But it's Halloween. This night
calls for something -- scary.

The BELL TOLLS THREE TIMES, stopping the celebration. The townsfolk all freeze, stare at the Clock Tower.

What we hear next, reader, is not cheerful, but something from the darkness part of your imagination. The townsfolk look down Main Street in the direction of --

A WHISTLING TUNE -- a lonely, sinister WHISTLING tune that heightens suspense the way it did for Kill Bill and the one-eyed assassin. It reinvigorates childhood fear in seconds.

A collective GASP, as --