

Twas the Night 55 Days Before Christmas

Written by

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THE VOICE OF VALUE VAULT
Store 236 contains content that may not be suitable for
all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

SCENE 1, EXT. STORE

Camera beeps

THE WATCHMAN

(interview)

The job of a watchman is sacred.
You've taken a solemn vow to watch
over your territory no matter what
may happen. No matter if it's
blazing hot or freezing cold or
pouring rain. No matter the danger
you might face. You're the only one
standing between your charge and
destruction. It's not a job for the
faint of heart. I've been watching
over this store for close to five
years now, and I can tell you, they
need me more than they know. Some
weird shit happens here.
And not normal weird. *Weird* weird.
The kind that requires a sharp eye
to spot. And nothin' gets past me.
I'd defend this place with my life
if I had to.

JUDE

(interview)

Yeah, I have no idea where he came
from. I've asked corporate about it
and they said they definitely didn't
hire him. But he keeps the raccoons
away from the dumpsters, and chases
the truant students off when they
smoke by the front door - oh, and
this one time, a customer started
threatening us because we refused to
give him a discount, and the
watchman just...tackled him. In the
middle of the store. Hauled him out
too. Guy never bothered us again, so
we let him hang out. We offer him
snacks and sodas and whatever, but
he always turns them down. Says
keeping watch is reward enough,
whatever that means.

(beat)

You know, I don't think I even know
his name.

THE WATCHMAN

YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW MY NAME.

Theme

SCENE 2, INT. BREAK ROOM

Camera beeps

JUDE

(interview)

If you've ever shopped in...literally any store, you know that the second Halloween ends, it's all holiday merch, all the time. And Value Vault is no exception. Corporate expects us to have the halls fully decked the second we open on November 1st. They used to let us set up after hours so the customers wouldn't be in the way, but then they decided that the overtime wasn't worth it. So we spend Halloween decorating for Christmas.

And before you ask, yes, the majority of customers think it's too early, and to them I say, we know! We don't have a choice! Trying to do our regular jobs and unpack and decorate is hard enough, no need to point it out all the time. The day is every bit as chaotic as you're imagining, but luckily, we have a secret weapon.

OLIVER

(interview)

This is my Woodstock. My Oscar night. My...what's the football thing again?

DOCUMENTARIAN

The Super[bowl]?

OLIVER

(interview)

My FIFA World Cup. Today, the boxes are the stars. We get seasonal deliveries all year, but the holiday delivery is by far the biggest. Not only do we have merch to stock, but there's so much decor. Once we're done, it's gonna look like a Hallmark special threw up in here. It's trippy.

JUDE

(interview)

I've worked with Oliver for four years now, and the only time I've ever seen him get worked up is the day we unpack the holiday merch.

OLIVER

Alright, comrades, listen up. The task before us is herculean and of great importance. Within these boxes lies all the holiday cheer Value Vault has to bestow upon the community. The boxes are the keepers of that cheer, and they are entrusting it to us. We will not fail them.

NAT

(whispers)

What is happening?

MORGAN

(whispers)

Eh, he always gets this way on holiday merch day.

AUBREY

(whispers)

Yeah, just roll with it, it'll be over soon.

OLIVER

Jude has wisely entrusted today's shift assignments to me. Everyone's gonna rotate jobs so we can all experience the full spectrum of today's box ballet. Aubrey and Nat, you're gonna start unpacking back here with me.

KEN

Oh, um, Oliver? I was gonna teach Nat balloons today. We got all those free Halloween balloons to hand out from corporate, so I figured it was the best time.

OLIVER

Uhh...can you do it quickly?

KEN

Well, I mean, I could, but I don't want to rush it. You wouldn't rush your boxes, would you?

OLIVER

Well said, brother. Ok, Morgan, you'll be with Aubrey and me. Ken and Nat can do the registers.

AUBREY

Nat's not trained on register.

OLIVER

She's not?

AUBREY

Nope. I haven't had a chance to train her yet. I was gonna do that next week after the holiday merch rush was over.

Paper rustles as OLIVER flips through his assignment sheets

OLIVER

I don't...I didn't account for that. Oh my god, the whole thing's ruined.

JUDE

You know what, I'll be on the floor anyway, why don't I grab a register while Ken teaches Nat, then you can take Morgan and Aubrey. Does that sound good?

OLIVER

That should...yeah, that'll work. Phew. Thanks, Jude. Give me twenty minutes to get everything organized, then Morgan and Aubrey will unpack with me. Once everyone's gotten their lunch break, they'll hit the registers, and Nat can help me stock shelves. Ken, my man, you good to decorate? We need that artistic eye of yours.

KEN

Ooh! Yes, of course! Oh! And that way I'll be near the door to hand out the Halloween balloons too!

OLIVER

And Jude? You're my eye in the sky, watching over us all, keeping shit in line, everything the shiny plastic touches is your kingdom.

JUDE

You got it, buddy.

OLIVER

Hands in, everyone. May the boxes
guide us to the most festive holiday
ever and bring peace to the hearts
of everyone everywhere on three.
One, two, three:

The next few lines overlap

OLIVER (cont'd)

(with solemnity)

May the boxes guide us to the most
festive holiday ever and bring peace
to the hearts of everyone
everywhere.

KEN

(just so excited)

May the boxes guide us to the most
festive holiday ever and bring peace
to the hearts of everyone
everywhere!!

NAT

May the...holiday boxes bring...
festive peace to - oh god.

JUDE

Holidays, peace, boxes, hooray.

AUBREY

How does this get longer every year?

MORGAN

Yeah I'm not saying that.

Overlap stops

OLIVER

Awesome. Let's get to it.

JUDE

Happy Halloween. And god bless us,
everyone.

SCENE 3, INT. STORE, REGISTERS

Light muzak plays

MORGAN

Here's your receipt. Thank you for
wasting your life at Value Vault.

KEN

And don't forget your free Halloween
balloon! Have a spooooooky day!

CUSTOMER

Um...thanks.

Muzak cuts. KEN and MORGAN are being interviewed separately.

Camera beeps

KEN

(interview)

Halloween is my favorite workday of
the year. It's so much fun!

Camera beeps

MORGAN

(interview)

I hate working on Halloween. All the
weirdos come out.

Camera beeps

KEN

(interview)

I mean, we have candy in the break room -

Camera beeps

MORGAN

Our knock off candy's the worst. Who
wants to eat a Regis Nut Butter
Round, whatever that is?

Camera beeps

KEN

(interview)

- you get to come to work in
costume -

Camera beeps

MORGAN

(interview)

Ken is the *only* one who does that.

Camera beeps

KEN

(interview)
- oh! All the kids stop by on their
way to trick or treat -

Camera beeps

MORGAN
(interview)
Last year, some lady took her eyes
off her son for two seconds and by
the time she found him, he'd eaten
three bags of candy.

Camera beeps

KEN
(interview)
- we get to play spooky music all day -

Camera beeps

MORGAN
(interview)
I swear to god if I have to hear
Bobby Pickett's voice one more time
I am going to lose it.

Camera beeps

KEN
(interview)
- plus this year, corporate sent us
these Halloween balloons to hand
out! Aren't they cool? I can't wait
to see the look on people's faces
when they get their free balloon.

Camera beeps

MORGAN
(interview)
And on top of everything else,
everyone expects us to discount the
Halloween candy since it's the last
day of the season. You want a
discount, come back on the first of
November when it's *actually* out of
season.

KEN
(overlapping)
It's the best

MORGAN

(overlapping)
It's the worst.

Light muzak plays

KEN
Alright, Nat, it's your big day. Are you ready?

NAT
To...learn balloons?

KEN
To learn the art of balloons! It's not as simple as you might think. You've gotta stretch them out just enough, inflate them just right - if you over-inflate, they're prone to bursting, if you under-inflate, they get all flaccid -

NAT
Ew.

AUBREY
Ken, what have I told you about using that word in public?

KEN
-plus you've got to make sure you hold them on the nozzle real tight. This one time, I let one slip when it was almost full, and it went flying clear across the store and hit Jude right in the face. She...was not happy with me.

NAT
That seems like a lot to remember.

KEN
Well, that's 'cause it is, but I have got total faith in you. I'll teach you everything you need to know. Not that you'll be doing balloons that often, but hey, you know, I could get sick, or I could go on vacation, and I wanna make sure the balloon counter is in the best possible hands.

NAT
(unconvinced)
Ok.

KEN

Hey, don't look so worried about it, you can handle it. Plus it's really fun over here, it's the best part of the store. Lesson one: everyone's happy when they're buying balloons.

MORGAN

He's lying, Nat. Balloon customers are the meanest people you'll ever meet!

KEN

(laughing)

Don't listen to Morgan, they say that about everyone.

MORGAN

And I'm right every time.

KEN

Ok, watch me: you stretch the balloon like so..

Balloon stretches

KEN

...then you slip it over the nozzle here, hold it nice and tight, then you turn the valve to inflate it...

Balloon inflates

KEN

Not too much, not too little, annnnd...done! Feel that.

NAT pokes the balloon

KEN

Well?

NAT

It's a balloon?

KEN

It's a *perfectly inflated* balloon! See how it's nice and firm but it still has just a little give? That's what you're looking for. Here, now you try.

NAT

Ok. So I stretch balloon, I put it over the nozzle, and turn the valve - oh!

NAT turns the valve on way too fast and the balloon goes flying off the nozzle, across the store

KEN

Oh! Shoot.

JUDE

(from a distance)

OW. Dammit, Ken!

KEN

Sorry, Jude! I knew I was forgetting something. You've gotta turn the valve nice and slowly or the helium really packs a punch. That's my bad.

NAT

Oh god. I'm so sorry!

KEN

Hey, it's ok! You'll get it. We've got lots of these Halloween balloons to inflate, it'll be good practice. Here, come on, we'll try again...

SCENE 4, INT. STOCK ROOM

Door opens, light switch is flipped, fluorescent lights buzz

OLIVER

Look at them. Have you ever seen anything so beautiful?

AUBREY

As far as boxes go? No, this is definitely the best.

Door closes

MORGAN

Yeah, I've got to hand it to you mate, this really something. Shall we?

OLIVER

Not yet. First, we take a moment to center ourselves - align our energies with that of the boxes -

MORGAN

Abso-fucking-lutely not.

AUBREY

Oliver, buddy, I realize this is your big day, but can you not be weird about it? We just wanna get this done. Besides, uh...won't your boxes be happier once they've fulfilled their purpose of...sharing the... cheer they contain with us? Or whatever?

OLIVER

You are so right. Ok. Then we begin. 67 boxes, all ready to make spirits bright. Wait. I'm short a box.

MORGAN

How can you tell?

OLIVER

I can see it. The energy's wrong. 24 is missing. Where is Box 24??

AUBREY

Hm, couldn't tell you. You didn't leave one out back did you?

OLIVER

...oh no. Hang on, 24, I'm coming!

Footsteps as OLIVER leaves. Door opens, then closes

AUBREY

...yeah, that should keep him occupied for a minute.

MORGAN

You got it then?

AUBREY

Yep, I came in early and stashed this one -

(Aubrey grabs a box)

- behind the softlines overstock. God bless Oliver for keeping such a detailed inventory of what was in each box, I never would've found it otherwise.

AUBREY opens the box

MORGAN

(gasps)

It's beautiful.

AUBREY

It's perfect is what it is. Here, go
shove this stuff in your locker.

MORGAN

Wait, why has it got to go in my locker?

AUBREY

Because I have a date tonight so
there's an extra outfit stashed in
mine, and I am not wrinkling my silk
blazer.

MORGAN

You're going on a date on Halloween?

AUBREY

Yes I am.

MORGAN

What are you going to do, like, take
her trick or treating?

AUBREY

In a manner of speaking.

MORGAN

...I have follow up questions.

AUBREY

Stash the box for me and maybe I'll
answer them.

MORGAN

Ugh, fine.

AUBREY

Quick, before Oliver comes back -
hey!

Footsteps

AUBREY

What are you doing?

DOCUMENTARIAN

My...job?

MORGAN

And your job is spying on us, I
suppose?

DOCUMENTARIAN

Ah! Well, um, no, but it is my job
to document goings on in the store -

MORGAN
Well there's nothing *going on* back here. So why don't you just get back to the floor and forget you saw anything?

DOCUMENTARIAN
Uh - all I saw was you two with a box -

AUBREY
Ok, but do you wanna know what really happened? You didn't see *anything*.

DOCUMENTARIAN
...right. Um...I'll just leave then.

MORGAN
Yeah. You will.

SCENE 5, INT. STORE, JUDE'S REGISTER

Jazzy muzak plays

JUDE
Ok, your total today is \$16.85, will that be cash or -

Running footsteps approach

OLIVER
Jude! We have an emergency!

JUDE
Oh god, what happened? Is everyone ok? Did Morgan get too enthusiastic with a box cutter again? I told you to watch them!

OLIVER
No, worse: I'm missing a box!

JUDE
Oh my god. Ok, Oliver, we need to review your definition of the word 'emergency.'

OLIVER
What else would you call it?

JUDE
I would call it a...temporary setback. You're sure all the boxes were delivered?

OLIVER

Inventoried them myself. Everyone was present and accounted for

JUDE

Ok, then it has to be here somewhere. You checked the entire stock room? The loading dock?

OLIVER

Yup, both. It isn't there.

JUDE

Ok, try the break room, it's possible someone accidentally took it with the break room supplies.

OLIVER

Good call. I'm gonna go look. Thanks, Jude! Keep your eyes peeled.

JUDE

I will.

(turns back to the customer)

I am so sorry about that.

DECORATIONS CUSTOMER

No problem.

JUDE

Great, you can tap or insert when you're ready.

Credit card terminal chimes

DECORATIONS CUSTOMER

Was he ok?

JUDE

Hm? Oh, definitely not.

JUDE completes the transaction and prints the receipt

DECORATIONS CUSTOMER

Isn't it a little early for Christmas decorations?

JUDE

Haha, you would think so, wouldn't you?

Bag crinkles

JUDE
Receipt's in the bag. Thank you for
shopping at Value Vault.

KEN
And have a spooooooky day!

KEN hands DECORATIONS CUSTOMER a balloon

DECORATIONS CUSTOMER
Oh! Thank you.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
(stoned laugh)
Hi, how are you?

JUDE
(suspicious)
I'm fine.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
Great. Us too.
(laughs)

TEEN CUSTOMER 2
Yep, we're good. Just doing a little
shopping.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1 laughs again

TEEN CUSTOMER 2
(under their breath)
Fuckin' cool it.

JUDE
Uh huh. This is a store.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
Haha, yeah. Uhh...we're, we're just gonna,
we'll just take these.

JUDE
Hmm. 12 cartons of eggs, huh?

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
Yep. Uh huh.

JUDE
And what exactly will you be doing
with 144 eggs?

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
(laughs)
Oh. We're uh...

TEEN CUSTOMER 2
We're baking.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
Yeah!

TEEN CUSTOMER 2
We love to bake.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
Yeah, totally. We love baking.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1 laughs

JUDE
I see. What are you baking?

TEEN CUSTOMER 2
Hm? Oh, um, like just SO much stuff.
Just like uh...a bunch of cakes.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
Yeah, like, uh...probably some pies.

TEEN CUSTOMER 2
Yep, some pies. Maybe a torte.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
Yeah, uh - hey, what the hell's a torte?

TEEN CUSTOMER 2
(sighs)
It's a kind of cake, jackass.
Remember? We found that recipe?

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
What? I don't know what you're - oh! Ohhh,
you're talking about a tart.

TEEN CUSTOMER 2
Um, no. I'm - I'm talking about a torte. It's
called a torte.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1
What? Bro, isn't that what I said? That's the
same -

TEEN CUSTOMER 2
No, it's not.

JUDE

Right. You know I can't sell
you these, right?

TEEN CUSTOMER 2

Uh, and why not exactly?

TEEN CUSTOMER 1

It's - ugh! It's not like we're
gonna throw them at *your* store,
what's your beef?

TEEN CUSTOMER 2

Oh my GOD, dude, shut up!

TEEN CUSTOMER 1

Oh my god, what?

TEEN CUSTOMER 2

Alright, we get it, no eggs. So for
like...completely unrelated reasons,
you guys don't sell toilet paper, do
you?

JUDE

Not to you we don't.

TEEN CUSTOMER 2

Fine, buzzkill.

TEEN CUSTOMER 1

Ugh, byyyye.

Footsteps as the teens start to leave

KEN

You guys want balloons?

TEEN CUSTOMER !

Awww, sick! Balloons! Thanks, man!

Door opens, bell jingles, TEEN CUSTOMER 2 laughs

KEN

You are welcome! Have a spooky day!

TEEN CUSTOMER 1

Hell yeah!

TEEN CUSTOMER 2

Alright, now get out!

Door closes

KEN

Jude, how'd you know they were gonna egg stuff?

JUDE

Because they were teenagers buying 12 dozen eggs on Halloween.

KEN

Huh.

NAT

That was a good call. I went to high school with those guys. The only thing they bake is themselves.

JUDE

That sounds about right. You mind running these back for me, Nat?

NAT

No problem.

JUDE

I can help who's next!

Metal clatters onto the counter

JUDE

16 cans of silly string! Absolutely not.

SCENE 6, INT. AISLE 10

Camera beeps

OLIVER

(interview)

I still haven't found Box 24. I've searched the stock room, the loading dock, the break room, the supply closets...nothing. I have no idea where it could be. I just have to believe that, wherever it is, its contents are bringing someone joy.

(beat)

Hey, you float all around the store, right? You didn't see a rogue box, did you?

DOCUMENTARIAN

(interview)

Oh, uh, me?

(laughs uncomfortably)

Ah, cer - certainly not. No, uh, I,
I most definitely haven't seen
anything.

OLIVER

(interview)

Ah. Bummer. Well, the good news is
Aubrey, Morgan, and I got all the
other boxes unpacked. Ken got the
decorations up, and everything looks
festive as hell, and now Nat and I
are stocking the shelves. Despite
the setback, it's been a pretty
great day.

Vibe-y muzak plays

OLIVER

Here, careful with this one, it's a
little heavy.

OLIVER hands NAT a box

NAT

Oof, got it, thanks. Where do these go?

OLIVER

Box 17, seasonal candles. Those will
go up in the front section, second
set of shelves, all the way on the
right.

NAT

Next to the mugs?

OLIVER

You got it.

NAT

Ok, I'll take them up when I'm done
with the wrapping paper.

Cardboard rustles

NAT

Oh, god, they smell awful.

Cardboard rustles

OLIVER

Yeah, they always do.

NAT
People actually buy these?

OLIVER
You bet. They're only \$2, so they'll
sell out before you can blink.

NAT
Oof. No accounting for taste I guess.

OLIVER
You said it. Personally, I'm more
into those things you plug into the
wall. Keeps things smelling nice
longer, you know?

NAT
That makes sense.

OLIVER
Candles are nice sometimes though.
Good for ambience. You're probably
not allowed to have those in your
dorm though, huh?

NAT
Oh, I - I live at home.

OLIVER
Ah, saving a little money. Smart. I
commuted all four years. Way more
cost effective. Plus then I could
light whatever I wanted on fire.

NAT
What?

OLIVER
Candles.

NAT
Riiight. Speaking of, I think the
wrapping paper's done. I'll get
these cinnamon bombs up front.

OLIVER
Yep, looks good. I'll go get the
gift bags. We make a good team, Nat.

NAT
Yeah, this is way better than doing
balloons. Morgan was right, those
people are so mean.

SCENE 7 INT. STORE, REGISTERS

Slightly unsettled piano muzak plays

KEN

Thank you for shopping at Value
Vault! Have a spooooooky day!

(turns to another
customer)

Thank you for shopping at Value
Vault, have a -

CROW CUSTOMER walks into KEN, bonking the balloons together

CROW CUSTOMER

Hey! Watch it!

KEN

Oh! I am so sorry, sir.

CROW CUSTOMER

You should be sorry! What were you
thinking??

KEN

I just didn't realize you were
behind me.

CROW CUSTOMER

Well you should've been paying more
attention! I could've been hurt!

KEN

Again, I am really, really sorry.
(beat)

Um...would you like a balloon?

CROW CUSTOMER

No, I wouldn't like a balloon! Do I
look like a child to you?

KEN

Oh, no, of course not, but they're
for everyone, not just for [the
kids] -

CROW CUSTOMER

You listen to me: I am a very busy
person, I have far more important
things to do than stand around
talking to you about something as
stupid as *balloons*.

KEN

Oh. I uh...I just thought -

CROW CUSTOMER

You just thought what? That you could make up for almost knocking me over with a goddamn *balloon*? Tell me, is handing out balloons what you thought you'd be doing with your life? Is this *fulfilling* for you?

KEN

I mean...I enjoy it.

CROW CUSTOMER

You enjoy handing out balloons? You're a grown man, and that's what you enjoy? What could possibly be enjoyable about something so trivial?

KEN

I...I like making people happy.

CROW CUSTOMER

Oh! You like making people *happy*. That is the most pathetic thing I have ever heard in my life!

AUBREY

NOW, SIR!

Footsteps as AUBREY comes over. The Voice is the highest we've heard it yet

AUBREY (cont'd)

There is *zero* call to be quite so unkind when my associate here has done absolutely nothing to you.

CROW CUSTOMER

Absolutely nothing?? He almost ran me over!

AUBREY

Oh, so in addition to being unkind, you're a liar as well?

CROW CUSTOMER

How dare you!

AUBREY

Because I think you know just as well as I do that you walked into *him*. And instead of saying excuse me and going on with your life like any reasonable person, you've decided to take time out of your day to berate him for what? For handing out balloons? For making people smile? Or is it just out of jealousy, since he's full of the joy that you so

clearly lack?
You, with your ill-fitting suit and
stereotypical douchebag haircut,
here on your lunch break from
whatever dead-end corporate job has
left you so goddamn miserable?
Funny, you having the nerve to call
him unfulfilled when that's so
clearly a projection of your own
unhappiness.

CROW CUSTOMER

Wha - you can't -

AUBREY

I'll tell you what's going to happen
now. You're going to take the balloon
that my friend so kindly offered
you, and you are going to say thank
you, and then, you are going to
leave and never come back. In fact -
Morgan?

MORGAN

On it.

MORGAN snaps a polaroid of CROW CUSTOMER

MORGAN (cont'd)

Very nice. Really does show off your
worst side.

AUBREY

That picture is going to go up on
the Wall of Shame. That's the wall
where we hang pictures of the worst
people who have ever set foot in
here, so that everyone will know
that you are never to be helped in
this store again. And if you ever
try to shop here again, you will be
removed. And I don't think you want
to know how we'll be accomplishing
said removal. Have I been clear?

Muzak shifts to something bouncier

CROW CUSTOMER

I -

(clears his throat)

Fine. Not like I'd ever want to come
back here again.

(takes a balloon)

Thank you.

KEN

You're welcome. Have a -

AUBREY

Ken! No. He gets none of your kindness.

(to CROW CUSTOMER)
You can leave now.

MORGAN
You heard the lady! Out the door,
make sure to let it hit you on the
way out.

CROW CUSTOMER
Alright, I'm going, you don't need
to shove!

Door opens, bell dings

MORGAN
Maybe not, but I want to.

Door closes

NAT
Damn, Aubrey. That was amazing.

AUBREY
I uh...hoo! I think I blacked out a
little.

MORGAN
Don't worry, I recorded it. That was
your finest work by a mile.

AUBREY
You ok, Ken?

KEN
Yeah. Yeah, I...I think so. Thanks,
Aubrey. He was...he was really mean,
but it's nice to know you guys have
my back.

AUBREY
Forever and always, my friend.

Outside, we hear crows cawing and the flutter of many
wings

CROW CUSTOMER
(from outside)
No! Those are mine! Get back here
you dumb birds!

NAT
...did a bunch of crows just steal
that man's bags?

MORGAN
Heh. And his balloon.

AUBREY
A murder of crows. Huh.
(under her breath)
That's clever.

MORGAN
Psh. Heh. Serves him
right.

A knock on the glass door

MORGAN
Oi, is he trying to come back in??
Don't even think about it!

CROW CUSTOMER yelps

AUBREY
Yeah, you better run!

Footsteps as JUDE approaches

JUDE
Hey, uh...is everything ok out here?
I thought I heard yelling.

MORGAN
Someone was mean to Ken.

JUDE
WHAT? Ok, ok! Documentary crew, turn off those
cameras, we're going to deal with this right
now.

KEN
It - it's fine, it's ok, Jude,
Aubrey came to my rescue. We're
fine.

JUDE
Oh - ok. Are you alright?

KEN
Yeah, I'm alright. Thanks.

JUDE
Oof. Did you guys get a picture of him?

MORGAN
Oh yeah. Here you go.

JUDE
Ahhh, perfect. Ken? You wanna do the

honors?

KEN

Oh! Yeah, sure, love to.

MORGAN

There we go. He won't be bothering us again.

SCENE 8, INT STORE

Fluorescent lights buzz

NAT

Really? No one else thinks the crow thing was weird?

MORGAN

Eh. Not really. Don't go by me, though, I've been desensitized and all that.

NAT

I mean - I'm serious. What are the odds that a dozen crows not only fly by the second someone who was mean to Ken leaves the store, but they also steal *his* bags?

KEN

I think he bought tin foil. Crows like shiny stuff, right?

NAT

But it was in the bag! They couldn't see it! Aubrey, you really didn't think it was weird?

AUBREY

Hm? Oh, I hadn't really thought about it.

NAT

Oliver?

OLIVER

Crow karma.

NAT

But -

AUBREY

Nat, we have far more pressing matters to attend to. Everyone ready?

KEN

No, wait, which one is first?

MORGAN

You throw this, then wrap this.

AUBREY

Shh! Keep it behind your back,
she'll see!

KEN

Oh! Sorry!

NAT

Are you sure she isn't going to be
mad?

MORGAN

Nah. She'll pretend, but secretly
she'll love it.

AUBREY

Everybody shut up!

Footsteps as Jude approaches

JUDE

Ok, good to go, everyone. I don't
know about the rest of you, but I
could really use a Halloween
drink.

(beat)

What's going on? Why are you all staring at me?

AUBREY

Ready, everyone?

JUDE

Ready for what? What is happening?

MORGAN

Aim...

JUDE

No! No, no, no! Morgan, what are you doing??

MORGAN chuckles mischievously

AUBREY AND MORGAN

FIRE!

KEN

Yah!

Everyone throws tinsel at Jude, laughing as they do so

JUDE

(feel free to ad lib)

What? No! No! No tinsel! Dammit!
Ahhhh, I just fixed my hair, come
on! Nat?? Nat, I thought you were
better than this!

NAT

(giggling)

Sorry, Jude!

AUBREY

Aw, look at her! She's beautiful!

OLIVER

The silver really brings out her
eyes.

MORGAN

We should put her on top of a tree.

JUDE

I don't like any of you right now.

AUBREY gasps

AUBREY

Wait! We forgot the piece de
resistance -

JUDE

Nope!

AUBREY

Ken?

Jingling as KEN places a crown of ornaments on JUDE's head

KEN

Aaand - there! Ta da! I hereby crown
you Queen of Christmas!

MORGAN

God save the queen!

The others cheer and applaud

JUDE

Ken?

KEN

Yeah?

JUDE

Is this crown made of ornaments?

KEN

Oh! Yeah! Aubrey and Morgan found them for me. Isn't it great?

JUDE

Mm. Mhm. Mhm.

(chuckles)

Well that explains the missing box, I guess.

AUBREY

Oh, don't worry about that, those ornaments were...broken. When they got here.

MORGAN

So broken.

AUBREY

The tinsel too. Just tangled beyond all hope.

MORGAN

Yep. Sorry, Oliver.

OLIVER

I'll allow it. Box 24 had a grander purpose than I could've imagined.

JUDE

You two do realize you're both sweeping all of this up in the morning, right?

AUBREY

Totally.

MORGAN

Worth it.

JUDE

(sighs)

Well, now I officially need a drink. Anyone care to join me? Because one of you is buying my first round.

MORGAN

I'm in.

KEN

Me too!

OLIVER

Not me. I'm gonna need at least 10
hours of sleep after today.

MORGAN

(chuckles)

You've earned it.

OLIVER

Night, everyone.

AUBREY

I, too, am out, unfortunately, but
Jude, I just sent you money for your
first round. Get Ken's too.

KEN

Aw!

JUDE

You got it, Aubs.

MORGAN

Oi! What about me?

AUBREY

What about you?

MORGAN

You're not buying *my* first round?

AUBREY

I am not.

MORGAN

Ugh, you're the worst. You look
great, though. And you were right
about not wrinkling that blazer.

AUBREY

Told you. Ciao, babes!

MORGAN

Don't do anything I wouldn't do!

AUBREY

No promises!

KEN

Knock 'em dead, Aubrey!

Door opens, bell jingles, then door closes

JUDE

What was that?

MORGAN

She has a date.

NAT

On Halloween?

MORGAN

That's what I said!

JUDE

Nat, care to join us? We can hit the pub on Main Street, they're only 21 and up after 10.

NAT

Thanks, but I have an exam in the morning.

JUDE

Ew.

MORGAN

Ugh, gross.

NAT

I know.

JUDE

Next time then. Morgan, Ken, you two go get us a table, I'll lock up.

MORGAN

On it.

KEN

See you there. Oh! And, uh - Merry Christmas, Jude!

JUDE

It's still Halloween, Ken.

KEN

Oh! Yeah. Right.

(beat)

You want a spooky balloon?

JUDE laughs

JUDE

You know what, Ken? Yeah, I will
take a balloon.

KEN hands JUDE a balloon, JUDE's crown jingles as
she removes it

MORGAN

No, don't take the crown off yet!

KEN

Yeah, we worked so hard on that!

MORGAN

Yeah!

JUDE

I am not going to go to a bar with a
crown of ornaments on my head.

MORGAN

Oh yes you are!

The crown jingles again as MORGAN tries to put the crown
back on JUDE's head

JUDE

Hey! Ah ah ah! Morgan, get away from me!

MORGAN

Ugh. Spoilsport.

JUDE

Go on. Get out of here. Go, go, go.

Door opens, bell jingles

MORGAN

Deck the Jude with strands of
tinsel -

MORGAN AND KEN

Fa la la la la, la la la la!

JUDE

Get out!

MORGAN
We're going!

Door closes

JUDE
(sighs)
Hm.

Crown jingles, JUDE laughs

JUDE
Yeah, fine.

JUDE places the crown back on her head, then flips a lightswitch. Door opens, the bell jingles, door closes. The crown jingles as JUDE walks

THE WATCHMAN
The hell happened to you?

JUDE
If you must know, I am the queen of Christmas.

THE WATCHMAN
I see. Well. You have a good night, your highness.

JUDE
Thank you, loyal subject.
(laughs)
Have a good night, Watchman.

JUDE walks away, crown jingling

SCENE 9, INT. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT

A low spooky theme plays and swells as the dialogue goes on

VOICE
Halloween is a...curious holiday.
People put on masks, paint their faces, wear clothing that is not their own, all in an effort to become monstrous. Ironic, really, when the true monsters lie within them. All of their sins lurking just below the surface. The PTA president pocketing money that should be going to the children. The pious reverend, preaching love and forgiveness on

Sunday, then hiding behind a
 keyboard to spew hatred on Monday.
 The dental hygienist, stealing
 prescription pads and selling them
 to the highest bidder, endangering
 their community. The costumes are
 unnecessary, for we rarely see these
 people's true faces. Some, though,
 do not bother to mask it at all. We
 saw that today. The people here
 protect each other as best they can,
 but their efforts will not always
 suffice. The day when drastic
 measures are again appropriate is
 fast approaching. I am sure of that,
 though I do not look forward to it.
 I can only hope that no one here
 suffers too greatly in the process.

Music cuts

CREDITS

Bouncy muzak plays

THE VOICE OF VALUE VAULT

Thank you for joining us for today's
 installment of Store 236.

This episode, Twas the Night 55 Days
 Before Christmas, was written and
 directed by Mel Nichols, with sound
 design by Sam Stark, and vocal cuts
 by Maddie J. Cooper.

It featured Hera Alexander as Jude,
 Lindsay Zana as Aubrey, Kirsty
 Woolven as Morgan, Oz Zeno as Nat,
 Michael E. Freemantle as Ken, Harley
 Ronan as Oliver, Sam Stark as The
 Watchman, and Interiority as The
 Documentarian.

With Cass Scott, Kasha Mika, Kale
 Brown, and LoserCee as the customers,
 and additional voice work by Amy
 Young.

Store 236 was created by Mel Nichols.
The show is produced by Interiority,
with additional story development by
Hera Alexander and Amy Young,
production assistance by Julia Lynn
Sepúlveda, scoring by Amy Young, and
graphic design by Jon Stollberg.

If you enjoyed today's episode, you
can rate and review us on your
favorite podcatcher, follow us on
Bluesky and tumblr at [store236pod](#), or
support us at [patreon.com/store236](#).

If you didn't, crows will be stealing
your belongings. *All* of them.

Thanks for listening.