

T H E M A C H I N E

Written by

Maximus King

FADE IN:

EXT. SNOWY PASS - NIGHT

A car drives slowly along a snow-choked mountain road.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

BRETT (45) white-knuckles the wheel. He squints at the road with laser focus as flecks of snow batter the windshield.

He blindly fumbles for his phone then makes a call. After a few seconds it answers.

BRETT

Cheryl? Hey, yeah, flight was delayed. I know, I know..

He sees a sign up ahead. It reads "REST STOP".

BRETT

I can hardly see anything in this storm. I'm gonna get off the road and wait it out for a bit. With any luck, I should be home around midnight. Cheryl? Hello?

He looks at his phone. It reads "call disconnected."

BRETT

Crap.

Brett tosses the phone on the passenger seat.

The car slips and slides as he steers it toward the rest stop entrance.

EXT. REST STOP - NIGHT

A small lane winds its way into a deserted parking lot.

Under the glow of a single streetlamp is a tiny concrete building engulfed in snow. A few picnic tables at the rear.

Brett's car slides into an empty space. He gets out, shivers in the blowing snow then sprints toward the building.

INT. RESTROOM - NIGHT

Your typical public restroom. Ugly, bland decor. Sheet of rusted metal for a mirror. Broken tiles.

Brett enters, heads straight for the urinal. He unzips his fly and unloads two hours worth of Mountain Dew.

BRETT
Ahhh, sweet baby Jesus.

EXT. REST STOP - NIGHT

Brett emerges, zips up his fly. As he races back to his car, something catches his eye. A flickering glow from an alcove at the end of the building.

He makes a b-line toward it.

EXT. ALCOVE - NIGHT

Recessed in the shadows stands a tall, rusty VENDING MACHINE made with riveted steel. Looks like its been here for years.

The feet are bolted to the concrete floor. Two light bulbs illuminate the interior. One broken, flickers on and off.

An inviting blue light pulsates around a rusty coin slot.

Brett peruses the offerings. Trays stuffed with soda cans and candy bars, all bearing the same no-frills wrappers.

A logo is displayed on the front of each snack -- a creepy CLOWN FACE with large HYPNOTIC eyes shrouded by an over-sized top hat.

Underneath the name and slogan -- "JOLLY DELIGHTS CANDY CO. A WONDER OF DELIGHTS WAITING JUST FOR YOU!".

A CLANK echoes across the lot. Brett scans the darkness as the wind whips an empty soda can under his car.

He turns back to the machine and fishes a handful of change from his pocket, dispenses three quarters in the coin slot.

He punches some buttons.

The machine RATTLES and SHAKES to life. A thick metal spiral COIL begins to rotate, GRINDING as it pushes a bag of JOLLY BEANS towards its impending doom.

Brett watches with trepidation as --

The spiral coil CREAKS to a halt. The bag of candy perilously dangles off the edge of the tray.

The machine continues to RATTLE as it powers down. Silence.

BRETT

Oh, come on.

Brett stares at his snack, as if its taunting him.

He thumps the side of the machine but the bag of candy doesn't move. He slaps the glass front. No dice. So he kicks the bottom.

The spiral coil begins to turn again.

BRETT

Yes!

The candy inches forward, but then the coil stops again. The treat hangs on for dear life, as if resisting to be consumed.

BRETT

Sonova!

The blue light around the coin slot pulsates once more.

Brett spots a small white CARD taped to the side of the machine. He flips it over. Scribbled in crude black pen are the words "USE AT OWN RISK!".

BRETT

Wonderful.

Brett slyly looks around the lot, checks the coast is clear.

He bends down and slides his hand into the collection slot, reaches up toward his snack.

Brett drops to his knees, low enough to get his arm further in, up to his elbow.

He strains as his hand navigates the machine's innards, fingers stretched out toward his prize.

His hand flaps around, the back scrapes along a sharp piece of metal on the corner of a tray.

BRETT

Ahh! Dammit!

He pulls his hand free and clutches it, rubs the small cut with the thumb of his other hand, sucks on it.

Not letting it get the better of him, he puts his arm back in, this time more careful as he changes his angle of entry.

His hand reaches upwards, fingers stretched as far as they've humanly stretched before, almost there, an inch or two more..

Brett's face a combination of pain and concentration, willing the snack to be his.

BRETT
 Yes, come to Papa, that's it, you
 got it. Almost...
 (groans)
 There...

The sleeve of Brett's shirt catches the edge of the spiral coil in the row below his candy, tears right through it.

BRETT
 Shit!

Brett jerks his arm back but the sleeve of his shirt is completely stuck, trapping his arm inside.

BRETT
 Nooooo!

He pulls with all his might, each tug tears his shirt a little bit more, the coil digging in deeper.

He flaps his arm around, pulls side to side, but it still won't budge.

Brett thinks for a second. He looks up toward the coin slot, then reaches into his pocket and pulls out some more change.

He thumb-sorts the coins, separates a few quarters from the smaller ones. He drops the rest back in his pocket.

Brett adjusts his position, strains as he moves like a contortionist, arm outstretched toward the coin slot.

He drops in three quarters, then studies the row of snacks.

He punches some buttons.

A few seconds later the machine RATTLES back to life. The spiral coil starts to rotate, slowly GRINDS forward, the coil's tip begins to rotate out of his sleeve.

BRETT
 Yes!

But then the machine begins to SHUDDER. The coil slowly GRINDS to a halt, and then--

It starts rotating BACKWARDS. Brett's eyes widen.

BRETT
 No, no!

The spiral coil tightens its grip on Brett's sleeve, wrapping more and more fabric around it with each turn.

As it pulls his arm further into the machine, Brett SCREAMS in agony as his body twists in the same direction, but of course, there's only so far you can go before -- CA-RACK!

Brett CRIES out in PAIN as his wrist SNAPS.

But the spiral coil keeps on moving, oblivious to Brett's pain. Keeps on GRINDING as it makes another rotation as Brett's arm rotates with it.

Brett lets out another SCREAM as his elbow SPLINTERS.

But the coil doesn't care, it keeps on going around and around. Sucking him further into the machine.

Tears of pain roll down his cheek, now pressed up against the glass. His arm now swallowed whole.

The spiral coil finally GRINDS to a complete stop. The machine RATTLES and VIBRATES as it powers down.

Brett passes out.

And then his bag of Jolly Beans frees itself, drops into the collection slot.

EXT. REST STOP - LATER

Snow continues to fall as the wind HOWLS through the lot.

EXT. VENDING MACHINE - NIGHT

Brett is curled over on his side, already engulfed by a thin blanket of snow. One arm twisted in the machine looking like a giant TWIZZLER.

A phone RINGS in the distance. Brett's moist snow-covered eyelids flicker open. Shivering, he looks over to his car.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Brett's phone lights up. A profile pic of Cheryl and Brett lovingly embraced flashes up on the screen.

VENDING MACHINE

All Brett can do is listen as the phone RINGS and it RINGS.

BRETT

If that's you Cheryl, please report me missing or something.

CAR

The RINGING ends. A notification BLIPS up on the screen -- "Hey babe!" -- "Can't wait up any longer. Hope you are okay. Will see you in the morning" -- "Love you ♥♥".

VENDING MACHINE

Weak and extremely cold, Brett turns back to the machine.

He spots something under it. The skeletal remains of a DEAD RAT. It's head, more preserved than the rest, stuck in a GLASS BOTTLE.

Brett slowly turns onto his back, each inch he moves results in extreme PAIN. With his free arm he reaches under the machine, rolls the bottle toward him with his fingertips.

But then he freezes, aghast. He spots the machine's power cord curled on the ground, not even plugged in.

BRETT

The hell?

He looks up at the machine with a new found curiosity.

BRETT

That...that's not possible.

He retrieves the bottle and smashes it. Groggled out, he shakes the rat's bones free. Then he stares at his hand, clutched within a shard of glass as sharp as any blade.

Weighing his only option, or lack thereof, he presses the glass tip against his shoulder. Shaking uncontrollably, he pushes down as it pierces the fabric of his shirt.

He closes his eyes and grits his teeth. Deep breaths.

But he relaxes. Can't do it. So he drops the glass and looks up toward the starless stormy sky.

And pleas for divine intervention.

BRETT

I never really believed in you and maybe, maybe that's why this is happening? Well hah-hah, joke's on me, huh?

(MORE)

BRETT (CONT'D)

(takes a deep, long breath)
 Look, let me go and from now on
 I'll never take your name in vain
 again. It'll be "gosh darn it" all
 the way like Mr Johnson always
 says. I'll even return his mower
 first thing in the morning. I'll
 pay my taxes on time. No more
 claiming tax breaks for a
 babysitter that I know you know I
 don't hire cos I don't have any
 babies. I'll even go to church. I
 can't promise I'll enjoy it but
 I'll go and that's, well, that's me
 being honest.

(beat)

See? I'm turning over a new leaf!
 So please, give me a sign you can
 hear me. Something, anything to let
 me know you're considering giving
 me a second chance and I promise
 with all my heart and soul I won't
 let you down.

(then)

So, whaddya say, big guy?

Dead silence lingers for several moments. Brett lowers his head and begins to weep.

But then the snack Gods answer, the machine POWERS ON. It RATTLES and SHAKES back alive.

Inside the bulbs morph DEEP RED. The sounds of mechanical gears and pistons all move in complete unison as if the machine is SUPERCHARGING.

Brett's eyes snap open, consumed with fear as the coil starts turning. GRINDING backwards once more.

And then his arm finally gives. It SNAPS in two.

BRETT

Argh, Jesus Christ!

Brett SHRIEKS as he's pulled further into the collection slot, now up to his head.

Eating him alive.

The sheet metal around the slot GROANS as it BENDS and BUCKLES inwards to accommodate Brett's head.

Brett kicks his legs, grips the slot with his free hand, pushing, resisting..

But he can't fight it. He's too weak. And just like that, Brett's head is swallowed by the machine.

INT. VENDING MACHINE - NIGHT

A snacks-eye view as Brett's MOANS echo around the inside.

The coil SHUDDERS to a stop. Brett catches his breath, but now the coil on the top row starts turning, GRINDING and pushing a can of SODA forward.

Brett's eyes widen even more, if that's even possible, as a soda can tosses itself over the edge, landing squarely on the bridge of Brett's nose -- CRUNCH!

BRETT

Ahhhh!!

Blood sprays out of his nostrils, up and over a tray full of Jolly Moon Pies.

A BULB EXPLODES, shattering into a cloud of FRAGMENTED GLASS that rains down on Brett's face.

Brett's SCREAMS are drowned out by a HISSING sound, coming from the bowls of the machine. His eyes frantically dart around, looking for the source.

A HOSE breaks free, starts spraying PNEUMATIC FLUID everywhere, the walls, the snacks, Brett's eyes and face.

It BURNS him in an instant. Brett SCREAMS as his face vanishes beneath an ACID FOG.

EXT. VENDING MACHINE - NIGHT

Blood SPLATTERS out the collection slot, staining the snow red. The machine RATTLES like a giant MEAT GRINDER.

And all we hear are Brett's muffled SCREAMS as his body is slowly devoured by the machine.

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

EXT. REST STOP - DAY

The snow glistens under a fiery morning sun.

A MINIVAN slowly pulls into the lot. A large CARGO TRUNK strapped to its roof.

It parks next to a junky, rusty VAN. A large logo on the side bears the same name and clown face as the candy in the machine -- "JOLLY DELIGHTS CANDY CO."

The van peels away just as the minivan pulls to a stop.

Doors to the minivan open on all sides. Out steps a FAMILY of four -- DAD (40s), MOM (40s), BOY (5) and GIRL (14). Dressed head to toe in chic winter clothes.

They stretch, as if they've been on the road for hours.

DAD

Ooh that drive's a killer. Right, number one and number two. This is the last stop until we get there!

The teenage girl leans against the minivan, starts texting.

DAD

That includes you Victoria!

She rolls her eyes. The boy spots the vending machine, runs over to it.

BOY

Candy!!

Dad scoops up a ball of snow.

DAD

Alrighty, who's gonna be my first vic-

The boy's SCREAMS cut him off.

EXT. VENDING MACHINE - MOMENTS LATER

The boy stands in front of the machine with a face of horror as Dad rushes over to him in a panic.

DAD

You okay?! What happened?!

Dad's concerned eyes dart around as his boy stomps his feet.

BOY

No M&Ms! No Reese's Pieces!

Dad lets out a SIGH of relief, puts his hand on his chest.

DAD

Jeez.. don't do that to me!

He looks inside the machine, as do we. The inside is SPOTLESS. No sign of Brett. No blood. Snacks all neatly RESTOCKED. Immaculate.

DAD

Well good, you've had enough this entire trip. You're gonna get Diabetes. Bathroom, now, go!

Head hanging low, the boy saunters off toward the restroom.

Dad glances at the machine. Spots something..

DAD

What the heck? Is that...

He leans in closer. Eyes going wide...

DAD

A Jolly Nut Supreme? I ain't seen one of them in years!

Excited, he rifles through his pockets, retrieves a fistful of change. Separating a few quarters, he inserts them into the slot then punches some buttons.

The machine RATTLES and WHIRS to life. The spiral COIL turns and GRINDS pushing the candy bar out of the tray. It RATTLES to a STOP. The machine POWERS down.

His candy bar balances precariously on the edge.

DAD

Ugh.. are you kiddin' me?

He shakes the machine. Slaps it. Kicks it. He looks back toward the van. Daughter engrossed in her phone. Mom emptying trash into the trashcans. Coast is clear.

So he turns back to the machine, reaches his hand into the slot, up toward his stuck candy bar.

The machine begins to POWER back on, starts GRINDING again.

And as his fingertips stretch toward the candy bar, the clown's face now seems to take on a more sinister appearance..

Wide, creepy grin. Large hypnotic eyes. And then we --

CUT TO BLACK.