

CHRISTMAS BLISS

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT (WINTER, 2023)

JOE MILLER, 50s, walks alone against the harsh wind.

He walks past several houses brightly decorated with Christmas lights. He looks in the large window of one home where the spawn of Norman Rockwell gathers around a Hallmark tree.

The MOTHER, FATHER, and TWO SONS all wear matching pajamas and big smiles. Someone says something funny, everyone laughs. MOTHER notices Joe staring in the window, walks over with a sweet smile plastered on her face.

MOTHER

Pervert!

The mother whips the drapes shut; Joe shuffles back to the road. He reaches the end of the happy street and turns out of sight.

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

Joe arrives at the massive rusty bridge. He reaches inside his coat, pulls out a piece of paper. He puts it back inside his coat and searches for the strength to make the biggest decision of his life.

ONE DAY EARLIER

INT. IBLC BANK - NIGHT

INTEREST BUILDING AND LOAN COLLECTION BANK, a small, clean business with warped wood paneling and cracked marble floors. Joe stands patiently behind a counter in a faded tweed jacket and oversized pants.

An ANCIENT WOMAN slowly unloads her pockets onto the counter.

ANCIENT WOMAN

It's in here somewhere.

She puts down a pack of gum, a sheet of 6-cent stamps, the Holy Grail, and a small lizard. Finally, she holds up her driver's license.

ANCIENT WOMAN (CONT'D)

Here is it!

JOE
I believe you were looking for your
paycheck.

ANCIENT WOMAN
Paycheck? This isn't the DMV?

The Ancient Woman leaves her mess. Joe pulls out his cell.

JOE
Hey, cucumber.

INT. TOY SHOP - NIGHT

Sweet little store decked out for the holidays. EMMA, 18,
wipes down the counter by the register, talks on her phone.

Behind her, two nutcrackers come to life, looking around and
waving their swords.

EMMA
Hey, Dad. Not too busy. You? Oh,
how much later? Okay. No, that's
fine.

Emma whips around, the nutcrackers freeze.

EMMA (CONT'D)
I'll tell Marcy I can lock up.
Bye.

INT. MILLER BANK DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Joe counts money. He has several stacks already laid out. He
slowly places each bill down and quietly says each number.

JOE
Five hundred thirty-eight, five
hundred thirty-nine, five hundred
forty...

PETE, 65, short, hyper, pops out of a back room holding up a
newspaper and walks by Joe as he talks.

PETE
Three fifty-two. Was two
ninety-seven. Up fifty-five cents
from the thirteenth to the twenty-
third. Gas prices these days.

Pete disappears. Joe looks at the money, pushes his stacks
together and starts counting all over again.

EXT. TOY SHOP - NIGHT

Snow falls. Emma locks up, heads down the street. She passes a series of stores, which all happen to be COFFEE SHOPS, save for the last store which is an INSOMNIA CLINIC. She sits on a bench and waits.

Joe pulls up in his old Mercury sedan, Emma gets in.

EXT. MILLER HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe pulls into the snow covered driveway. As he approaches, his son CARL, 17, sees him. He sands what looks to be half a table.

CARL
Working late today?

JOE
Last minute paperwork. Did you go into work?

CARL
Yeah, but it was pretty slow. Most people are looking for cheap stocking stuffers, not expensive furniture.

JOE
Got that right. I actually made a loan for twenty dollars today. What are you working on?

Emma, holding a couple of wrapped gifts, walks up to the porch.

CARL
I offered to finish this up and bring it back after Christmas. Like it?

JOE
It's missing two legs.

CARL
It's a new line. We call it Recession Furniture.

INT. MILLER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Emma and Joe enter the middle-American suburban home. Garlands and wreaths attempt to cover the cracks in the walls and water damage near the ceiling. Bless 'em, they're trying.

The first "person" to greet Joe is BOOGS, the family's golden retriever.

JOE
Oh, hello Boogs.

Joe kneels down to pet Boogs and notices he has something in his mouth.

JOE (CONT'D)
What have you got there, boy?

Joe pries a wooden salad fork out of the dog's mouth.

JOE (CONT'D)
Did you steal this from Betty?

Boogs barks triumphantly.

BOOGS
(in subtitles)
I am the harbinger of your doom!

JOE
Who's a good boy?

Boogs barks again and wags his tail.

BOOGS
(in subtitles)
The end is nye!

INT. MILLER KITCHEN

Joe's wife, Betty, busily fusses around the kitchen.

She turns down the heat for a skillet on the stovetop, then pulls a pie out of the oven and places it on the counter. She gracefully picks up a chocolate dish and puts it in the refrigerator.

All this while in a vintage A-line dress, heels, and meticulously done-up hair. Joe enters with the spoon.

JOE
Looking for this?

BETTY

Oh, for heaven's sake! Did Boogs get that spoon again?

Betty speaks with an eerie calmness and a big smile.

JOE

Maybe he's trying to give you a message.

BETTY

And what's that, dear?

JOE

Put down the cooking utensil and back away from the stove?

BETTY

Really, now. This is nothing. Sally Evans, down the street, has to cook for a family of seven every night.

JOE

Yes, and only two cooks and a housekeeper to help her, the poor thing. Anything I can do to help?

BETTY

No, no. You just sit there. I'm almost done anyway.

Emma enters the kitchen.

EMMA

Maybe we should keep the dog out of the kitchen while you're on a cooking spree.

Betty is focusing her attention on the food in the skillet with her back to Joe and Emma.

BETTY

Oh, did he get another one of my spoons?

EMMA

Kinda.

Emma places a butcher knife on the counter by Joe.

JOE

I better keep an eye out for Grandpa. Don't work too hard.

BETTY
Impossible!

EMMA
What'cha got going on in here?

BETTY
Very exciting, I found three new recipes online! Of course, some ingredients were outside my budget, so I had to improvise.

Betty points to each monstrosity as she names it.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Cheeze Whiz risotto, Coq au Vin a la possum and grape juice, and pop tart Tarte Tartin.

EMMA
That's... creative.

Boogs barks.

BOOGS
(in subtitles)
The end is nye!

INT. MILLER HOUSE FOYER - NIGHT

Doorbell rings, Joe answers. GRANDPA, a tall, slender man of 80 stands on the doorstep. With the front lawn aglow from Christmas lights and snow softly falling, Grandpa almost appears angelic.

GRANDPA
Joe! I was hoping this was the right house! How's my favorite son?

JOE
Just fine, Dad. Just fine. Let me take your coat.

GRANDPA
Oh, thank you. Smells like Betty's hard at work in the kitchen.

JOE
Yes, but don't say anything. She's very sensitive about her glandular problems.

GRANDPA
Oh, right. Of course.

Emma enters.

EMMA
Grandpa!

GRANDPA
Zuzu!

EMMA
No, Grandpa. I'm Emma.

GRANDPA
Right, right. Emma! How are
you? You look so grown up! And more
and more like your mother everyday.

EMMA
(not pleased)
Awesome.

Emma hugs Grandpa and Carl enters from the opposite side of
the foyer.

CARL
Grandpa!

GRANDPA
Zuzu!

CARL
I'm not Zuzu.

GRANDPA
Harry!

CARL
It's Carl Grandpa, Carl.

GRANDPA
Right, right, I remember. How's
your wife?

CARL
Girlfriend? She's fine.

GRANDPA
And your job at the factory?

CARL
The furniture store you mean.

GRANDPA

Right. Don't know who I was thinking of.

ZUZU, 6, comes down the stairs.

GRANDPA (CONT'D)

Sulu!

ZUZU

It's Zuzu, Grandpa.

GRANDPA

Actually, sweetheart, I was talking to him.

A REPAIR MAN looking remarkably like George Takei emerges from a back room in a green jumpsuit.

REPAIR MAN

I've fixed your heater for now, Joe, but you really ought to think about getting it replaced.

JOE

Thanks, Allen. And thanks for seeing us today, during the holiday week.

ALLEN

Absolutely! No problem at all! Oh, and here's my bill...with overtime...and holiday fees...Merry Christmas, Joe!

Allen hands Joe a bill that rivals a CVS receipt in length.

JOE

(Dumbfounded by cost)
Yes...Merry Christmas.

ALLEN exits. There is a momentary silence.

CARL

We should go into the dining room. Smells like Mom's been hard at work again.

GRANDPA

Maybe we should just keep that to ourselves, Carl.

CARL
 (confused)
 Um...right.

INT. MILLER HOUSE (LATER)

Carl, Emma, and Grandpa, with Zuzu in his arms, head out of the family room and into the foyer. They sleepily shuffle towards the stairs.

ZUZU
 Do I have to go to bed?

GRANDPA
 I'm afraid so.

ZUZU
 You'll help me fix my bike tomorrow, right, Grandpa?

GRANDPA
 Of course! I can't think of a single thing I'd rather do!

ZUZU
 Okay. Goodnight Grandpa!

GRANDPA
 Goodnight, sweetheart.

Grandpa puts Zuzu down and Emma takes her by the hand. All three kids head up the stairs to bed.

CARL
 Goodnight, Grandpa

EMMA
 Night, Grandpa.

GRANDPA
 Goodnight, Emma, goodnight, Harry.

CARL
 Carl!

GRANDPA
 Whatever.

As Grandpa stands at the bottom of the stairs, he hears voices from the kitchen. He decides it's a good time to eavesdrop.

INT. MILLER KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Betty puts leftovers into a casserole dish, Joe washes dishes.

BETTY

But tomorrow is Christmas eve,
dear.

JOE

I know, I know, I'll just go in for
the morning.

BETTY

Do you really think anyone is going
to be applying for a loan on
Christmas eve?

JOE

Probably not. But If someone does
and I'm not there...well, it's just
the opportunity Potter is looking
for.

Grandpa slides forward just a bit and makes the floor squeak.
Joe looks up from the dishes, but thinks nothing of it.

BETTY

I hate to see you so stressed all
the time. If Potter isn't going to
leave anytime soon, maybe you
should!

Joe pauses, working up courage.

JOE

Actually, Betty. I've been thinking
about that for some time. I'm
devoting every spare moment and
then some to this bank, a place I
never wanted to end up at in the
first place. I want to get out of
here! I want to see the world! What
do you say? Just you and me,
international jet setters.

Betty turns to face Joe. She speaks sincerely and for the
first time, relaxed, without the 50's housewife composure.

BETTY

That sounds wonderful!

JOE
(surprised by her
response)
Really?

BETTY
Of course, Joe! I thought you'd
never ask!

JOE
Oh, well-

BETTY
Grandpa can watch the kids for a
while. Let me just throw a few
things in a suitcase and we can
leave tonight!

JOE
Actually, I never thought you'd say
yes. I mean, I can't just leave the
bank.

BETTY
Oh.

JOE
That would just be crazy!

Betty returns to her 50's housewife composure.

BETTY
Well, that's all right, darling. I
have a bunt cake to make in the
morning anyway.

JOE
No one makes bunt cake quite like
you, dear.

BETTY
Thank you, Joe.

Grandpa wanders away from the door, shaking his head.

JOE
Good night, Betty.

BETTY
Goodnight, dear.

Betty smiles sweetly and watches Joe leave the kitchen.

BETTY (CONT'D)

(Still smiling)

That man can be a real asshole
sometimes.