

MRS. CHRISTMAS

by

Brad M. Bucklin

Brad Bucklin
231 E. Palm Ave.
Burbank, CA 91502

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(213)610-2797

(Scene 1)

(Alice and Jennifer are in their new neighbor Mary Herman's living room. There is a door stage left to the kitchen and the front door upstage right. A couch and two chairs surround a low coffee table in the middle of the room. Alice and Jennifer are dressed alike in suburban casual white pants, colored shirts and sweaters tied around their shoulders. Mary wears a simple but tasteful summer dress.)

MARY

It was a pleasure to meet you both. I never dreamed that I would be welcomed so quickly into your little community.

ALICE

We are the unofficial welcome wagon here in Holyfield.

MARY

I haven't even met my neighbors yet. Like the woman next door. I have seen her come and go. Her house is so nicely kept. I am looking forward to getting to know her. Perhaps we could all....

(Alice and Jennifer fidget looking at each other in dismay.)

ALICE

That's nice, but you have no idea who that is. Besides there are rules. Right Jennifer?

MARY

Rules about socializing with neighbors?

JENNIFER

That's Mrs. Christmas.
(with weight)

MARY

She is my neighbor and seems very pleasant.

ALICE

Pleasant now, but....

JENNIFER

She is Mrs. Christmas.
(with more weight)

MARY

Yes, I know who she is.

ALICE

We'll just have to bring out the trusty book.

(Jennifer produces it.)

JENNIFER

Here ya go Alice.

ALICE

Thank you Jennifer, There are rules to who we, as members of our little community here in Holyfield, can associate with.

MARY

You have to be kidding.

JENNIFER

(quoting from the book without looking at it)
 "In order to maintain the socially acceptable and proper decorum, we shall not associate with anyone we deem inappropriate, including....". Helen...Mrs. Christmas.

MARY

She is my neighbor, she seems very nice, and I can spend time with anyone I please.

(Alice and Jennifer shake their heads sternly)

ALICE

You are new, and we don't expect you to know all the rules yet...or who is acceptable to converse, be seen, or associate with....

JENNIFER

You will get a list.

ALICE

Jennifer and I, on the other hand have lived in this community for many, many, many years.

JENNIFER

Many years.

ALICE

Take it from us, all you need to know is that you stay clear of Helen...Mrs. Christmas.

JENNIFER

She is not who she seems to be.

MARY

Then who is she?

ALICE

The Hell Cat of Holyfield

MARY

But she seemed so nice.

JENNIFER

Nice now but...

ALICE

But back in grade school...

(Alice and Jennifer look at each other knowingly.)

MARY

Grade school?

ALICE

You see, Mrs. Christmas used to be Helen Grudgen. She was the daughter of Hank Grudgen a mean and nasty man. Her mother Betty left when she was little. While her home environment may have been partly responsible for making her so mean...I also think she was born bad, born with it in her blood.

JENNIFER

Some people said that she was a natural beauty underneath all that anger.

(Alice shoots Jennifer a look)
but I couldn't detect any sense of comeliness. Do you have anything to drink?

MARY

Oh, yes, I'm sorry. Would you like tea or coffee?

ALICE

Something stronger...anything will do, scotch, vodka, tequila.

MARY

Oh! Yes of course...Sorry...

(Mary goes to the cabinet and brings out three glasses and a half bottle of scotch, pours some in the glasses, motions for them to sit, then puts the bottle and the glasses in front of Alice and Jennifer. Alice and Jennifer immediately swig their drinks and pour another.)

ALICE

You see Helen knew that she could never be as beautiful or as talented as Jennifer and I so she would physically and verbally abuse us.

JENNIFER

I don't believe that a bad home environment necessarily means a person turns out bad...

ALICE

...I told you, her father was a mean, nasty man.

JENNIFER

Nasty and rough and mean.

ALICE

So, without the least provocation she would attack us.

JENNIFER

She would take my special edition barbie and hang it from a tree branch, naked for everyone to see.

ALICE

And she would take my \$200 guichie bag, fill it with dirt and worms and intentionally scuff my patent leather shoes..

MARY

That sounds....annoying...

(Alice and Jennifer glare at her)

....I mean terrible, not at all like the person she seems to be now.

ALICE

It would be appropriate to offer some food at this point and more to drink.

(she holds up the scotch bottle which is empty)

JENNIFER

(drunkenly perky)

More booze.

MARY

I think I have some bunt cake.

JENNIFER

Ooo, bunt cake and booze.

(Mary goes to get the refreshments)

MARY

So all this must have happened, what twenty five, thirty years ago?

JENNIFER

Then when we were seventeen her father died, they said it was of ill-will because he was such a nasty man.

(In confidence)

It was rumored that his heart could not take the burden of one more mean, malicious act and just refused to keep beating. It was then that Helen really became the B word.

MARY

B word?

ALICE

Bitch...Jennifer doesn't like to say Bitch.

(Mary returns with the cake and booze. Jennifer immediately takes the bottle and pours a drink.)

JENNIFER

Helen inherited a pretty good size fortune.

ALICE

She lived for five or six years like Boo Radley just a few doors away, hardly anyone ever saw her and when they did she would hiss at them and make obscene gestures.

MARY

So, she was an orphan.

ALICE

I suppose she was. I never thought about her that way. All I can remember is her knocking me down and taking my new book bag.

MARY

That seems like it was soo long ago...

ALICE

It's in the book.

JENNIFER

Once it's in the book, it stays in the book.

MARY

Well, she never did anything to me.

ALICE

But then she married wealthy Mr. Christmas and that is how she got to live in that nice house...and have all those beautiful things.

JENNIFER

He was a pillar of the community. He had been Mayor, sat on the town council and was beloved for his kindness. Helen was 40 years his junior when they first met...

ALICE

The story goes that she was chasing a neighbors cat with a meat cleaver and nearly knocked Mr. Christmas down. He stopped her, took the meat cleaver away and smiled. She proceeded to give him a black eye and resumed chasing the cat.

JENNIFER

But he went after her. He saw something, something inside her, a quality he could nurture. I always thought that was so romantic.

ALICE

Oh please...

MARY

People can change...I really believe that with the right influence....

(Alice looks at Jennifer, they are loosing their new convert.)

ALICE

No! Not the Hell Cat of Holyfield.

JENNIFER

Personally, I never had anything against her. She never did anything to me.

(more)

JENNIFER (cont'd)

(Alice makes a snorting sound of disgust.)
Well, she didn't. It was directed towards my Barbie doll, Bernice.

ALICE

Can we get back to the story.

JENNIFER

I will tell it.

ALICE

Fine, since you are such good friends with Mrs. Christmas, you go ahead and tell the story.
(Jennifer hesitates as Alice gives her the eye.)

JENNIFER

Well, Mr. Christmas was a patient man, with him she discovered kindness and changed into a different person. They married a year later and she moved into his big house. The one that used to stand in that empty field next door.

ALICE

Yeah, but then he died...

JENNIFER

He didn't just die.

ALICE

I'm just trying to hurry things along. Mary will be snoozing in her chair the way you tell it.

JENNIFER

It's a very romantic story.

ALICE

You already said that, it's enough to make me sick.

MARY

Oh, I like romances, and I am very interested to hear about Mr. Christmas.

JENNIFER

(Jennifer continues enthusiastically, Alice sulks.)
He called Helen Twinkle...isn't that just the most precious...

ALICE

Sickening.

JENNIFER

(Not paying any attention to Alice)
"Twinkle" he would say, "I am grateful to you for the life you have put back into these old bones." Every year around the holidays Mr. Christmas would go to the hospital and deliver toys to the children.

(more)

JENNIFER (cont'd)

She accompanied him for years, until one day he asked her to take his place because he had grown old and frail.

ALICE

Yeah, and she refused.
(getting joy out of interjecting the negative)

MARY

Why?

ALICE

She said she only went with him because he wanted her to. She thought the whole idea was a waste of time. So you see, she hadn't changed all that much.

JENNIFER

Yes, but then she told him that she would do it because she loved him...so romantic.
(She sighs)

ALICE

Yeah, romantic....Here's the kicker.
(She motions to Jennifer to continue)

JENNIFER

Mr. Christmas died.

MARY

That is so sad.

JENNIFER

She was grief stricken...

ALICE

She killed him...

MARY

She killed him?

ALICE

She poisoned him and then went out back to the tool shed, got a can of gasoline and burned the place to the ground with old Mr. Christmas inside to cover up her crime.

MARY

She burned the house down? That's a very gruesome story but how do you know all those details?

JENNIFER

She made it up.

ALICE

You made it up.

(mockingly)

"you put life into my old bones." Anyway, the house burned down, they covered up the fact that she set the fire. Personally, I think her killing Mr. Christmas put her over the edge and one day she will go shopping at the Price Chopper, take out an uzi and mow down everyone in sight.

MARY

Why would you make up such a horrible story?

ALICE

I didn't make it up, it's true and that is why you should stay away from Mrs. Christmas.

MARY

If you were so sure she did it, why wasn't she arrested and put in jail.

JENNIFER

There wasn't any proof.

MARY

Well then...

ALICE

Mrs. Christmas is as cunning as she is dangerous.

MARY

I don't believe it.

ALICE

What would you know, you just got here? We have lived here a long time.

JENNIFER

So, you believe people can change, right Mary?

MARY

Oh, yes, I think we all change to a certain degree. I think it's a tragedy to hold onto things from the past.

ALICE

We are talking about fundamental change here, about human nature. You can't change basic human nature.

JENNIFER

Mr. Christmas did.

ALICE

He tamed it, not changed it.

MARY

I for one am curious. Let's go over and invite her for tea.

(Alice and Jennifer look at each other horrified. Jennifer starts back peddling)

JENNIFER

That's not possible.

MARY

You were just convinced that she had changed, so what would be the harm? And Alice, why don't you face your fears.

ALICE

I am not afraid of her. There are just certain people I don't wish to be associated with.

MARY

Jennifer?

JENNIFER

It is getting late....

ALICE

We could introduce you to Charlotte Meeks, I am sure you would like her.

MARY

I'm afraid you have done too good of a job telling me about Mrs. Christmas. Besides she seemed very pleasant.

(Mary rises from her seat and starts to gather her sweater.)

JENNIFER

But...you will upset everything.

ALICE

There is a certain balance to our community. If you go over there you will be tipping the scales in the wrong direction. We have to be very careful about that.

MARY

I don't have the faintest idea what you are talking about. You said yourself she has changed...

JENNIFER

We don't know for sure, that's the truth of it.

ALICE

By going over there you could put her over the edge.

MARY

I don't see how.

ALICE

She doesn't like new people.

MARY

That's not the impression I got. She may not like either of you...but.

ALICE

She doesn't like anyone.

JENNIFER

Not a single soul.

MARY

I've heard enough. It sounds to me like all you have are rumors and hearsay. I like to see things for myself. I have decided, I am going over there.

ALICE

You can't.

MARY

(Not listening to Alice)

I suppose I should bring her something.

(She goes off and rummages around, coming back in holding a dusty bottle of wine.)

This should do.

ALICE

She doesn't drink.

MARY

Well, I could bring her some flowers from my back yard.

JENNIFER

She has terrible allergies.

MARY

(incredulous)

Is that so? Let me see.

(She goes back into her kitchen.)

ALICE

(Tugging Jennifer to her, whispering)

This is just terrible, terrible. She won't be stopped.

JENNIFER

What are we going to do?

ALICE

We have to stop her.

(Alice pulls out a small silver pistol from her purse.)

JENNIFER

Oh, Alice, I don't...

ALICE

Shhh.

(Mary comes back in carrying a large Bundt cake. Alice points the gun at her awkwardly. Mary freezes.)

MARY

What do you think you are doing?

ALICE

It's for your own good. We can't let you go over there, we just can't.

MARY

This is outrageous. I am shocked and would like you both to leave this instant.

(Mary holds the bundt cake out towards them threateningly.)

ALICE

We have to have your word that you won't go over there.

(Jennifer cowers behind Alice.)

MARY

Or what? You are going to shoot me?

JENNIFER

You don't understand, she is the Hell of Holyfield.

MARY

You know what I think, I think you two are the Hells' of Holyfield. You are jealous because she had a man who loved her, cared for her, that saw a good in her that made you envious.

ALICE

We are your friends, we saw you first.

MARY

Friends don't pull guns on each other.

ALICE

(Putting the gun away.)

I'm sorry, but we are at our wits end. We are trying to show you how dangerous it would be for you to go over there.

JENNIFER

It would be a terrible mistake.

(Mary goes to the door. Alice holds the gun. Jennifer cowers behind her. They do a little dance to get the upper hand, there is a struggle for the gun. In Slow Motion the bundt cake flies and as Mary and Alice struggle the gun goes off shooting Jennifer. Mary ends up with the gun and points it at Alice. They see that Jennifer has been shot.)

Oh dear. MARY

You shot her! ALICE

YOU shot her. MARY

What are we going to do? ALICE
Jennifer has been shot.

We didn't have a choice. MARY

She wouldn't listen. ALICE & MARY

(Pause. They look at each other, then
they look towards Mrs. Christmas'
house.)

Mrs. Christmas! ALICE

Get the book. MARY

(The lights fade to black. The End.)