

COLD

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ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

"BABY IT'S COLD OUTSIDE" by Dean Martin plays on a record player sitting on a wall unit in FRANK'S living room. Decorated for the holidays, he is on a Christmas Eve date with CONNIE, who is sitting comfortably on a couch.

Frank is playfully moving to the music as he approaches the couch with a bottle of wine. Connie, not amused, forces a smile as Frank pours them both a glass before sitting beside her. There is a Christmas tree in the corner with several GIFT BOXES at its base.

Frank nuzzles close. Connie grows visibly uncomfortable until...

CONNIE

I'm sorry, would you mind turning that off?

FRANK

What? The record?

CONNIE

Yes, please.

FRANK

Oh. Certainly.

Frank gets up and turns off the record.

CONNIE

Sorry, I'm not really big on Christmas music. And that one in particular gives me the serious ick-factor.

FRANK

Why's that?

CONNIE

Uh, 'cause it's about a kidnapping and potential date rape.

FRANK

Whoa, what?! Where are you getting that?

CONNIE

From the song.

FRANK

That song? It's a Christmas song -- about being cold outside.

CONNIE

It's about some poor woman who keeps trying to leave this guy's house but he won't let her. She's literally trapped.

FRANK

No, no, she's...He's just...He's being romantic. There's a blizzard. He wants to snuggle up, you know? Keep her warm. 'Cause it's...it's cold outside.

CONNIE

There's a part where she literally says, "What's in this drink?"

Frank takes a moment to consider
the lyrics silently playing in his
head...

FRANK

(realizing)

Holy crap, you're right! Dang, Dean Martin's a creepo!

Frank sits back down beside Connie.

FRANK

I must have heard that song, like, a million times and it never clicked. Yikes...

CONNIE

Sorry to ruin it for you.

FRANK

No, it's better to know these things. But if "Frosty the Snowman" is really about some coked-up tweaker, keep it to yourself, okay?

Connie sullenly attempts to fake a
laugh. Frank isn't convince.

FRANK

Everything alright? You've seemed kinda down all day.

CONNIE

No, I'm...It's...I'm fine.

FRANK

If you say so, but fair-warning: you're aiming to get visited by three ghosts later tonight.

CONNIE

I'm sorry, I-I can't. I can't do this...

Connie stands and grabs her coat to leave.

FRANK

What? Wait, hey, what happened? What I do?--

CONNIE

It's not you, Frank. Really--

FRANK

But we were--

CONNIE

I'm just going to go home, okay?

FRANK

Yeah, sure, I guess. But, I mean...Look, Connie, I'm not Dean Martin, you can leave anytime you want. But if I've offended you or-or misread the situation in some way--

CONNIE

No, Frank. You've been...These last two weeks, they've... They've been great, seriously. You're a really nice guy and I like you. I do...(sighs)...It's not just Christmas music. I hate the whole damn holiday. And if I told you why, you wouldn't want to see me again anyway, so--

FRANK

Well, now, hold on, I know the holidays can be rough sometimes--

CONNIE

No, you don't--

FRANK

No, I do. Really. Believe me, I've had terrible, terrible Christmases. Like you wouldn't believe--

CONNIE

Frank--

FRANK

Heck, I stopped celebrating years ago. But this year--

CONNIE

My friend died on Christmas Eve...

Frank is taken aback. An awkward beat.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

...She took her own life. And she took it...(faltering)... She took it because of me...

Connie breaks down. Frank takes her coat and places it aside before putting a comforting arm around her as he gently guides her back to the sofa.

FRANK

Hey, hey, it's okay. It's okay. Let's just sit for a minute and, you know, catch our breath...

Frank and Connie sit. Frank grabs a tissue from a box on the coffee table in front of them and hands it to Connie. She dabs her eyes.

FRANK

Here, take the edge off...

Frank hands Connie her glass of wine. She takes a swig. Frank considers what to say...

FRANK

To lose someone we care about, and to lose them like that -- and during the holidays...(shakes head)...It's terrible. Traumatizing. I know. I've lost people, too. I know that guilt, that survivor's guilt that makes us blame ourselves--

CONNIE

No...(shakes head solemnly)...No...

Connie stands and pours herself another glass of wine, taking a sip to help gather her courage.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

...Her name was Sophia. We were fifteen. She was new to our school. Her family just moved to town. I had my own little clique then, me and my two besties: Rhonda and Brianne. We were so...so goddamn full of ourselves. And Sophia, she-she just wanted friends. She was pretty. And she was kind...(realizing)...Maybe that was why...Maybe she was everything we thought we were...

FRANK

Why what? Did you, like, bully this girl? Pick on her?

CONNIE

So much worse...

(sits)

...We Brought her into the fold. Made her think she was one of us. And it wasn't easy, she was shy. So shy. Especially with boys. We were all at that age and she...she wanted a boyfriend more than anything. So, we made her one.

FRANK

Made her one?

CONNIE

Online. Before us, the only people she talked to were online. So, we created an account, invited her to chat...It went on from there...(takes a drink)...

FRANK

You made up a fake boyfriend?

CONNIE

(nodding)

For almost a year...(scoffs)...I think his name was Brendon. Or Brandon...A cyber-romance for the ages. Until we made plans to finally meet over the Christmas holiday.

FRANK

And she found out it was a lie.

CONNIE

No...Before break, we, uh...well, Brandon...or Brendon, got mad at Sophia over...something. I don't remember. We kept it vague. We lashed out at her, called her every name in the book, and broke up with her. Said we never wanted to see her again. Blocked her, deleted our account -- and we were gone forever.

FRANK

Wow. That's...That's, uh...

CONNIE

Yeah. Yeah, I know...(beat; drinks)...I thought...I thought I'd be her shoulder to cry on. And I'd be there for her. Console her. Tell her everything would be okay. And then -- then I'd have real power over her. The power of pity...I never thought...I never thought she'd...

Tears are falling from her eyes.
She takes a moment to compose.

CONNIE

Rhonda, Brianne; all three of us were arrested for involuntary manslaughter. Sentenced to 3 years. I got out in 9 months...(scoffs; bittersweet)...Just in time for Christmas...

Frank is speechless. Connie puts down her wine glass. She grabs a tissue and wipes her tears.

Frank takes Connie by the hand.

FRANK

It doesn't have to be Christmas. If you want to stay here, now -- it could be...(shrugs)...just another day...

A real smile appears on Connie's face as she nods. He hands Connie her glass of wine and raises his in a toast.

FRANK

To Sophia.

CONNIE

(raises glass)

Sophia...

Both take a drink. Connie finishes her wine and puts her empty glass down.

CONNIE

I shouldn't have piled all that on you like that.

FRANK

No, I'm glad you did. Who doesn't like a good trauma-bond? Plus, it's good to get these things out of our system, you know? Share our pain before they rot from within.

CONNIE

What about you? You said that you had some bad Christmas experiences, too. Did you want to talk about it?

FRANK

Absolutely...

Frank finishes his wine and puts his empty glass down.

FRANK

...But maybe we should take a break, huh? Lighten the mood. Getting a little too heavy in here...(considers; gets an idea)...Oh, do you like magic?

CONNIE

Magic?

FRANK

I know a magic trick. Only one. But it's a good one. Hold on...

Frank hurries over to the wall-unit where the record player sits and digs through a drawer.

FRANK

Ah, here we go...

Frank takes out a pair of HANDCUFFS.

CONNIE

(suspicious)

Handcuffs?

FRANK

I keep them for purely magical purposes only. Here... (Connie stands; approaches)...Check 'em out...

Frank hands the cuffs to Connie. She looks them over.

FRANK

Real right?

CONNIE

Look real to me.

FRANK

Tug on them a little. Make sure.

Connie tugs on the cuffs.

CONNIE

Yeah, pretty real.

Frank holds out his hands.

FRANK

Slap 'em on, chief... (re: Connie's hesitance)...It's okay. Go ahead.

Connie cuffs Frank's wrists.

FRANK

Little tighter... (Connie tightens them)...OW!...(Connie is startled)...Kidding! I'm fine. You did great. All right, ready?

CONNIE

Yeah.

Frank turns his back on Connie (and the audience) as he struggles with the cuffs.

FRANK

Abracadabara-alakazammo and...(turns around, free from the cuffs)...Ta-daa!

Frank hands the cuffs back to Connie.

CONNIE

Wow, nicely done, Houdini.

FRANK

(takes bow)

Thank you, thank you.

CONNIE

How'd you do it?

FRANK

Oh, a magician never reveals his secrets. But, eh, what the hell? Put them on.

Connie cuffs herself.

FRANK

Nice and tight?

CONNIE

I think so--

FRANK

Here, let me give them a look-see... (light tugs the cuffs; teasing)...Hey, you've done this before...

Connie throws Frank and incredulous but playful look.

FRANK

Kidding, kidding. Okay, now try to get out.

Connie begins fiddling with the cuffs.

FRANK

Come on, a little more showmanship. Turn around, give it a go.

Connie turns her back on Frank and struggles with the cuffs.

CONNIE

Avacado-baraccuda whatever...

Connie turns around, still cuffed.

CONNIE

...Nope. No good.

FRANK

Give up already?

CONNIE

Yeah, I don't have the magic touch, I guess.

FRANK

So, you want to know the secret?

CONNIE

Yeah.

Frank reaches into his pocket and pulls out a KEY.

FRANK

I have the key.

Connie playfully groans at the obvious answer.

CONNIE

Okay, I see. Very cute...

Connie reaches for the key. Frank pulls it away.

CONNIE

Oh, ha-ha...

Connie reaches again. Frank again pulls away. His face grows cold. Connie looks on in confusion as he puts it back in his pocket.

FRANK

Have a seat.

CONNIE

Frank, I'd--

FRANK

(dead serious)

Sit down.

Intimidated by Frank's sudden serious tone, Connie sits on the couch. She stares silently as an awkward silence settles in.

Frank refills his glass of wine and sits in the chair adjacent to the couch, blocking Connie's path to the door if she tries to leave. He sniffs the bouquet of the wine.

CONNIE

(confused)

Frank...

Frank raises a stern finger to signal Connie to be quiet. She obliges. Frank takes a sip of wine.

FRANK

You want to hear my Christmas story, yes?... (re: Connie nods)...Bit of a cliché', really. Grew up in an abusive home. Mentally. Physically. Sexually. My father...(scoffs) ...He was a real piece of work. The things he'd do to me and my sisters...(shakes his head; too horrible to mention)... And my mother? She liked to watch. Or at least I think she did. Might have been too hopped up on meth to do anything else.

Frank takes a swig of wine.

CONNIE

I'm...I'm so sorry that happened to you.

FRANK

And my little sisters. Don't forget them. I ever mention I had sisters? Twins. Elizabeth and Gertrude. I called them Liz and Gerty...

Frank smiles at the memory of them. His smile fades as the memory grows dark.

FRANK (CONT'D)

...One year, my father was laid off, so money was tighter than usual. I was 10, I think. The girls had to be three or four. Anyway, I was woken up in the middle of the night by a flash of headlights through my window. I looked out to see my old man pulling out of the driveway. I remember thinking it was strange that he'd be going somewhere that time of night. Especially with Liz in the backseat. Even stranger when he came back alone. Never saw Liz again. Ever. And when I asked about her, he knocked out three of my permanent teeth. I was her brother, I was her big brother and I couldn't...I couldn't...

Frank sits silently for a moment;
haunted by the memory.

CONNIE

You-You were only 10 years old. You were just a kid. There was nothing you could have done.

FRANK

(nods)

Thanks...Thanks, yeah, I needed to hear that.

CONNIE

Of course. Of course...You know, these cuffs, they're really starting to--

FRANK

Gerty became my priority after that. All I wanted was to keep her safe. Took a lot of beatings meant for her. But there was plenty to go around. Especially that last Christmas...I was 15? 16? My old man sucker punched me so hard I threw up. He thought it was funny as hell. Sometimes -- when it's quiet -- I can still hear him laughing...

Frank takes another swig of wine.

FRANK

I don't remember tackling him to the ground or beating my fists into his face, but once I realized it, I couldn't stop...Not until he wasn't moving anymore...

(looks to his hands)

Broke both my hands that night...And my mother? She just sat in her recliner...watching...always watching with those glossed over eyes....I wondered if I set the house on fire if she'd just sit there and watch it burn down around her... Of course, I couldn't take that chance. That's why I tied her to the chair before I lit it up...

Connie is visibly disturbed as
Frank finishes his wine.

FRANK

In the end, that particular Christmas earned me a reservation for a padded room at Mansfield State Hospital. And Gerty...She was adopted by a really nice family out in New York. We were separated, but she was safe. She was finally safe...

CONNIE

That's great. That's really great, Frank. I'm-I'm so glad you shared that with me...(stands)...And I know...(shows cuffs)...all this was to make sure I heard you, really heard you. And I did. I did. And I'm so glad I did. I-I feel so much closer to you right now. But...But it is getting late. I'm tired. And I'd like to--

Frank stands and puts his hands on Connie's shoulders, gently guiding her back down on the couch. He takes the empty wine glasses and bottle, carrying them over to the wall unit.

Connie shares glances between him and the door. Can she make it if she runs?

Frank places the glasses/bottle beside the record player.

FRANK

You won't make it.

CONNIE

What?

FRANK

To the door.

CONNIE

Oh, I-I wasn't--

Frank steps in front of his Christmas tree, looking it over.

FRANK

No, it's okay. You can try if you want, but it'll make things...awkward. And you'll miss the end of my story.

Connie sits back, deciding not to try. Frank begins adjusting ornaments on his tree.

FRANK

See, Gerty kept in touch over the years. Phone calls, letters, visits when she could. Especially on holidays. Until one Christmas -- she didn't show up. I waited. And waited. No call. No card. Nothing.

(turns to face Connie)

I figured maybe she got tired of her crazy big brother and wanted to get on with her life. Which I would've understood. But I had to be sure. I mean, I made plans to escape the hospital all the time just for shits and giggles. Never really thought I'd do it. But I had to find out what happened. I mean, as her big brother, I had to. Right?... (no answer)...Right?

CONNIE

Right! Yes! Yes, you did...

FRANK

Wasn't easy. I didn't know exactly where Gerty's new family lived, plus they moved since I last talked to her.

Frank stands next to Connie. Connie is too intimidated to look at him.

FRANK

What made it even harder was that, after she was adopted, Gerty changed her name -- to Sophia...

Connie instantly fills with dread as she slowly turns her head towards Frank, her eyes meeting his.

FRANK

She never liked the name Gertrude. Can't say I blame her. Sophia...Such a lovely name...More suiting, don't you think?

CONNIE

Frank... (swallows hard)...Frank, I-I--

FRANK

Obviously, when I found out she was... (can't bare to say the word)...And by her own hand...I mean, why? Why would she do that?

Frank slowly walks back towards his Christmas tree.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Did our traumatic childhood finally catch up to her? Was she being abused again? Was it her new parents? A boyfriend, a stalker or some hateful enemy? No...No, it was her friends ...(turns to Connie)...Her friends...

Frank picks up a GIFT BOX from
beneath the tree. Are those
bloodstains on the side?

FRANK

Rhonda...

Frank places the box on the coffee
table in front of Connie. Connie
stands in horror as he grabs a
second GIFT BOX and places it
beside the first.

FRANK (CONT'D)

...And Brianne...and you. She trusted you. All of you. With
her dreams, her wants, her insecurities. And you turned them
against her--

CONNIE

Please, Im...I--I told you how sorry I was, how it ruined my
life--

FRANK

Your life?

Frank slowly begins stalking
towards Connie as she backs away.

CONNIE

(panicked)

It was just a prank! A stupid prank! We were kids! I-I
didn't mean for it to happen! I'm sorry! I'm so, so sorry! I
would do anything -- anything to take it back!

Frank stops.

FRANK

Like what?

CONNIE

What?

FRANK

Anything, like what?

CONNIE

What do you want me to do?

FRANK

You tell me. You said anything, you tell me--

CONNIE
(flustered)

I-I...I...

FRANK
Relax, let's take a second here. Think about. 'Tis the season of miracles, right? So...(beat; considering)...
Hmm...(snaps fingers)...Can you raise the dead?

CONNIE
What?

FRANK
Can you raise the dead?

CONNIE
No...

FRANK
Dang...oh! How about time travel? Can you go back and make it so it never happened?

Connie, near tears, shakes her head.

FRANK
No to that, too, huh? Jeez...I mean, no offense, but this "anything" is starting to feel like a promise of diminishing returns...

CONNIE
Frank, please...please, just let me--

FRANK
In fact, now that I'm thinking about it, seems like there's really only one thing you could do.

CONNIE
What?

FRANK
Three years.

CONNIE
(confused)
I-I don't understand--

FRANK
That was your jail sentence, right? Involuntary manslaughter. I mean, three years seems a bit light to be honest, but it would have been something. Some sign of remorse or penance. But you couldn't even do that. Fought it
(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)
tooth and nail. At trial. At the parole board. Till you got out in...nine months, was it?

CONNIE
Frank--

FRANK
No, hey, you're the one promising anything. You would do anything, remember? That's what you said. But the one thing you could do -- the only thing -- you wouldn't. Makes question your sincerity...(re: boxes)...Just like I questioned theirs...

CONNIE
What we did...What I did was wrong. I know that. I know that--

FRANK
And does that absolve you?

Frank picks up a gift box.

CONNIE
Please--

FRANK
(to box)
What do you think, Brianne?--

CONNIE
--I want to go home!--

FRANK
(to box)
--Is all forgiven!

Connie screams as Frank throws the contents of the box at her: a deflated ball with a wig sewn on. It lands on the floor near Connie's feet. Connie stares at it in silent confusion.

A beat...

FRANK
What did you think? Somebody's head was in there?

Connie remains speechless as Frank takes the key from his pocket and calmly approaches Connie. He begins unlocking the cuffs.

FRANK

No fun is it? When someone plays with your emotions?... (no response)...Drive home safe.

Connie can only silently watch as Frank crosses the room and returns the handcuffs to their drawer.

Connie begins to say something, but decides against it. She grabs her coat and heads for the door. It's locked. She fiddles with the lock and tries to open it again. It won't.

CONNIE

I can't get out.

FRANK

(solemn)

I know.

Frank turns the record back on. "BABY IT'S COLD OUTSIDE" by Dean Martin plays, but it's slowed down; creepy.

Unsure what's going on, Connie keeps trying the door. She can't open it.

Frank opens a drawer and takes out a knife. He holds it lazily at his side as he casually crosses the room towards Connie. In a panic, Connie begins trying to use her body to force open the door. No use.

As Frank closes in, Connie cowers to the floor. He stands motionless, towering over Connie, staring coldly down upon her. Scared beyond belief, she looks forces herself to look up, meeting his glare, dreading what might come next. The record begins to skip, the voice getting slower and slower as they stare at each other...

RECORD

(slowing)

...Baby it's cold...it's cold...cold...cold...cold...

The lights go down, bringing the
stage to darkness...

RECORD

(slowing)

...coold...cooold...coooooold....

THE END