

OF THREADS & BUBBLES: A CHRISTMAS TALE

by

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ACT I

CHRISTMAS MUSIC PLAYS. We hear a familiar "Ho-ho-ho..." as LIGHTS GO UP on...

INT. CHURCH HALL - DAY

A holiday charity event held by the local church for TOYS 4 TOTS is in full swing. BARRY NICHOLS (50-60) is center stage in his role of "Santa" as he finishes engaging with a YOUNG BOY sitting on his lap. A chair where "Mrs. Claus" would sit is empty beside him.

FRANK (30's), an apathetic elf, stands off to BARRY'S left side; distracted by his phone. FATHER TOM (50-60) happily accepts donated toys from PATRONS, placing them in a labeled bin stage right.

BARRY

...Ho-ho-ho! Merry Christmas! Ho-ho-ho!

FRANK

(apathetic; on phone)

Look at the camera and say "Rudolph"!

Only BARRY looks forward and smiles for the FLASH of a camera. FRANK helps YOUNG BOY off BARRY's lap and ushers him quickly away.

BARRY

Ho-ho-ho-ho!

FRANK returns as FATHER TOM approaches.

FATHER TOM

There he is! Jolly 'Ol St. Nick!
Spreading holiday joy to all the good
girls and boys...

BARRY

(annoyed)

Oh, cut the shit, Tom. How the hell do
you talk me into this every year?

FATHER TOM

Mainly by asking your wife to bully
you into it.

BARRY

Oh, yeah...

FATHER TOM
Plus, the kids love you.

BARRY
Who are you kidding, man? It's like a ghost-town in here. Every year there's less and less kids.

FRANK
(on phone)
It's almost as if parents don't want pictures of their child sitting on a strange man's lap anymore.

Both FATHER TOM and BARRY stare at FRANK in annoyance. Frank notices.

FRANK
I'm gonna go over there...

FRANK steps off to the side, lost in his phone.

FATHER TOM
Seriously, though, thanks for doing this, Barry. I know Carol's been...Well, tell her she's in our prayers.

BARRY grows visibly sullen but forces a smile.

BARRY
Will do.

FATHER TOM pats Barry on the shoulder and leaves. FRANK returns with LUCY (7). Barry instantly gets back into character.

BARRY
Ho-ho-ho! And what's your name?

LUCY
Lucy.

BARRY
And have you been a good little girl this year, Lucy?

LUCY nods.

BARRY
Oh, I bet you have. I bet you have.

Ho-ho-ho...So, what can Santa bring you this year?

LUCY
I want my mom to feel better.

BARRY
Ho-ho....(confused)...What?

LUCY
I don't want my mom to be sick anymore.

BARRY
(flustered)
That's...That's a very sweet thing to ask for, Lucy. You're a very, very kind little girl.

LUCY
Then you'll help my mom?

BARRY stares at LUCY, unsure what to say.

BARRY
Well, Lucy, uh, it's not...You see, Santa...That's not really, uh...(re: Lucy's eyes)...You know what? I'll...I'll see what I can do.

LUCY
Thanks, Santa! I knew you would!

LUCY hugs BARRY.

FRANK
(apathetic; monotone)
Look at the camera and say "Frosty"!

LUCY keeps hugging BARRY as the camera FLASHES. Frank escorts Lucy away. LIGHTS GO BLACK save a single SPOTLIGHT ON BARRY; alone and solemn in his chair.

SPOTLIGHT OUT ON BARRY

LIGHTS UP ON

INT. BARRY'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

CAROL NICHOLS (50-60), chronically ill, is lying in bed. An unfinished ugly Christmas sweater she is knitting is beside

her. ROSA (30's), her home-health nurse, is checking her vitals. She monitors her watch as she takes CAROL's pulse.

CAROL

...And by that point we'd been married, oh, about maybe twelve years or so. He travelled for business before, but this was the first time I couldn't go with him. My music students had a recital around the same time--

ROSA

Can you sit up for me, hun?

CAROL sits up with effort as ROSA places a stethoscope on her back.

ROSA

Good breath in...(Carol inhales)...And out...(Carol exhales)...Good. Good.

ROSA makes a note on a clipboard as BARRY enters.

BARRY

Ho-ho-ho! Santa needs an Excedrin and double-shot of whisky!

BARRY takes off his beard and kisses his wife.

CAROL

Were your ears burning?

BARRY

Uh-oh...

He hangs the beard on the bedpost with his hat and takes off his Santa coat.

CAROL

I was telling Rosa about the time you had to go to New York for that business meeting. How it was the first time we'd ever really been apart.

BARRY

Oh, don't bore the poor girl--

ROSA

I think it's very sweet.

CAROL
 (to Rosa)
 He was gone three days--

BARRY
 Carol--

CAROL
 The very first night, I'm fast asleep
 in bed, and this ding-dong calls at
 three in the goddamn morning! Nearly
 gives me a heart attack--

BARRY
 I forgot about the time change.

CAROL
 There's no time change from here to
 New York.

BARRY
 That's what I forgot.

CAROL
 Oh, please...(to Rosa)...So, what was
 the big emergency, you're wondering?
 He can't sleep! I mean, thanks for
 inviting me to the party, ya goof...

BARRY waves her off with playful annoyance.

ROSA
 You two are adorable. If my husband
 left for three days, I'd probably
 change the locks...

ROSA hands CAROL three pills and a glass of water.

ROSA
 (re: pills)
 ...Okay, last round for today...

CAROL
 Ah, my nightcap. Lovely.

CAROL takes the pills. ROSA packs up and begins to leave.

ROSA
 I'm going to check on that blood
 pressure one more time before the
 procedure next week, but as of now I

don't think it'll be an issue. Until then, rest up. And enjoy your holiday.

CAROL
You too, Rosa...Oh! Barry, the thing...

BARRY
Right...

Barry opens a nearby drawer and takes out a CHRISTMAS CARD, handing it to Rosa.

BARRY
Merry Christmas.

CAROL
It's just a little something. For you and your family.

BARRY
It's a gift card for Red Lobster.

ROSA
Oh...That's so nice. Thank you. And Merry Christmas.

CAROL
Merry Christmas, dear.

BARRY
Goodnight.

ROSA leaves. BARRY begins to ready for bed, stripping to his T-shirt and Christmas boxers as Carol resumes work knitting the unfinished ugly sweater.

CAROL
So, how were things at the North Pole?

BARRY
You were missed. Tom said you're in his prayers.

CAROL
Well, that is his job.

BARRY
(re: sweater)
How's your masterpiece coming along?

CAROL
Stop peeking. It's your Christmas
present.

BARRY
Can't wait.

CAROL
My grandmother would be thrilled I
still remember how to do this...She
used to say we were all threads --
woven together by everything we say
and everything we do, tied and knotted
into one big tapestry of life...(stops
knitting; reflective)...But some
threads are shorter than others...

BARRY looks to CAROL with concern.

BARRY
You're tired. You should get some
sleep.

BARRY takes the sweater and places it atop a dresser.

CAROL
She also used to say that pain and
sorrow can sever your ties. Form a
bubble around you, till you float
away--all alone...

BARRY
Did she happen to start saying this
stuff after she took up day-drinking?

CAROL
I worry about that for you.

Barry crawls into bed beside Carol.

BARRY
I've never been a big drinker--

CAROL
You know what I mean.

BARRY
Please, don't talk like that.

CAROL
I think it's about time we did. Even

if the surgery's successful, it
doesn't--

BARRY

It gives us time, Carol. Real time.

CAROL reaches her hand. BARRY takes it.

CAROL

Eventually you have to tie off the
last thread...

A beat.

BARRY

I don't know how to do this -- without
you.

CAROL

That business trip to New York, when
you couldn't sleep...Do you remember
why?

BARRY

Of course I do.

CAROL

What did you say?

BARRY

You know what I said.

CAROL

I like to hear you say it.

BARRY lovingly caresses CAROL.

BARRY

Nothing can calm or sooth my eager
mind, except when I'm with you -- and
the sound of your heart beating beside
me...

BARRY rests his head on CAROL's chest. We HEAR HER BEATING
HEART AS THE LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM...

IN DARKNESS, THE HEART BEATS SLOWER, AND SLOWER, THEN
STOPS...

LIGHTS UP ON

INT. BARRY'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A year later. A sullen and morose BARRY is sitting up, but asleep on his couch. He is wearing one sock, boxers, and the unfinished Christmas sweater. An empty whiskey bottle is held in his hand.

A KNOCK at the door wakes him. He groggily sits up, noticing the empty bottle in his hand. The KNOCKING continues. He puts the bottle down and answers the door to find FATHER TOM and FRANK.

FRANK

Hey!

FATHER TOM

Merry Christmas!

FATHER TOM present BARRY with a bottle of wine with a bow on it. BARRY takes it and walks away, returning to the couch. FATHER TOM and FRANK enter.

FRANK

That's from both of us. Just an FYI...

BARRY opens the bottle and takes a swig.

FATHER TOM

It's St. Flora's annual Christmas dinner tonight. We were just headed over, thought we'd invite you to join us.

FRANK

It's a pretty sweet spread.

FATHER TOME

Roasted turkey, glazed ham, Sister Sophia's famous stuffing...

BARRY

My old lady made the pasta salad. She told me to tell everybody. If I don't, she'll know. She always knows.

BARRY

Well, that's, uh...Thanks, but I already ate.

FATHER TOM picks up the empty whisky bottle.

FATHER TOM

Yes, I see that...

FATHER TOM and FRANK exchange a concerned glance. FRANK shrugs. What can we do?

FATHER TOM

We're worried about you, Barry.

BARRY

Why?

BARRY takes a swig of wine.

FATHER TOM

It's been almost a year. Mourning has no timeframe, but this is not a burden you need to bare alone..."The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

BARRY

(annoyed)

Tommy, please...

FATHER TOM

I know you've never been a believer. But Carol was. It can be comfort to know she's in His temple.

BARRY

(dry)

Yep. Very comforting...(takes another swig)...

FATHER TOM

It may feel at times, in our sorrow, that we're lost and adrift. But God has not abandoned you. His good works are all around, if you're willing to see them.

FRANK

Yeah, that's true. Couple months back, we got this new guy at the post office, right? And I notice he's always giving off this weird smell, you know? Not B.O. but familiar. And it's driving me nuts 'cause I can't place it. Then suddenly --BAM! Pastrami And thousand-isle dressing! A

Rueben! The guy smells like a Rueben!
 Which ain't necessarily bad, just
 kinda weird to consistently smell like
 a Rueben sandwich, you know? So,
 eventually, we get to talking, and you
 know what his name is?
 Rueben!...(scoffs)...I mean, if that
 ain't evidence of the good Lord's
 work, I don't know what is...

FRANK looks to FATHER TOM, then to BARRY for a response. They
 merely stare at him in confusion. After a beat of
 awkwardness, FRANK checks his watch.

FRANK

Think I'll go warm up the car...Good
 to see you, bud.

FRANK leaves.

FATHER TOM

I've been your friend longer than I've
 been a priest. I understand why you'd
 be angry at God and blame him for what
 he's taken, but--

BARRY

Whoa, what? Angry? At God? Is that
 what you just said? No. No, Tom.
 You...You just don't get it.
 Carol...She's the one who saw
 connections, divine plans, and-and
 miracles...Me? I saw superstitions and
 blind 'ol luck of the draw--

FATHER TOM

Barry--

BARRY

I'm a realist, Tom. And this is
 reality. There's no divine plan.
 There's no reason for things to
 happen, they just happen. No one to
 thank and no one to blame, that's the
 truth of it. When doctors told us we
 couldn't have kids? Oh well, that's
 biology. When adoption agencies kept
 giving us the runaround? Politics.
 What can you do? When Carol got
 sick...We left it in the hands of
 modern medicine...

FATHER TOM

It doesn't--

BARRY

That last surgery? It had an 85 percent success rate. 85 percent. After I watched them wheel her away, I was walking back to the waiting room, and that's when I saw it...The hospital's chapel. And for the first time in my life -- I kneeled. And I prayed. Know what I said? One word. "Please."

FATHER TOM searches for something to say but finds nothing.

BARRY

I made a lot of promises in that one word...85 percent. I mean, those are damn good odds...(scoffs)...I wasn't even asking for a miracle...And then...(shrugs)...She never made it off the table...Mad at God? No. I'm mad myself for giving Him the time of day.

FATHER TOM, with no words left, turns and begins to leave.
BARRY softens.

BARRY

Tommy!

BARRY approaches FATHER TOM.

BARRY

You're my dear friend. Thank you. For everything.

FATHER TOM

Come with me. It's Christmas. Spend it with friends. Have a nice, warm meal--

BARRY

No, no, no I appreciate it, but...I do actually have plans. Really.

FATHER TOM

Okay, then...Merry Christmas, Barry.

BARRY

Merry Christmas, Tom.

They hug. BARRY sees FATHER TOM out and closes the door. Alone, BARRY sighs deeply as he stares at the door a moment before walking over to a record player, turning it on. Alvin and the Chipmunks "CHRISTMAS DON'T BE LATE" begins to play.

BARRY opens a drawer of a dresser and takes out a TACKLE BOX. He brings it over to the couch and sits, placing it on the coffee table in front of him. He opens it and takes out A REVOLVER. He loads it with bullets and place the barrel to his temple. He struggles to pull the trigger but can't bring himself to do it. He places the barrel under his chin. He closes his eyes, summoning the strength the end it when...

A KNOCK at the door distracts him. Another KNOCK. BARRY returns the gun to the box and stands to answer the door. Another round of KNOCKS...

BARRY

Okay! Okay!...

BARRY opens the door to reveal RAY BISHOP (30) his wife MYRA BISHOP (30) and their daughter LUCY who is holding a Christmas giftbag.

BARRY

(aggravated)

What?!

Both RAY and MYRA appear anxiously nervous.

RAY

Mr. Nichols? Mr. Barry Nichols?

BARRY

Yeah.

MYRA

We're sorry for dropping in on you like this--

RAY

We hope we're not interrupting anything--

MYRA

We were going to call--

RAY

Right. We were going to call--

MYRA

But we thought...Well--

RAY

We didn't want to bother you--

BARRY

Too late. What the hell do you want?

RAY

Right...uh, well...We're the Bishops.
I'm Ray. This is my wife Myra. And...
do you remember our daughter? Lucy?

BARRY

No.

RAY

Oh...uh...

MYRA

She was at St. Flora's church last
year. For Toys 4 Tots? You were
playing Santa.

BARRY

Oh, Jesus...Look, if I promised her
something that you didn't get, that's
not on me--

MYRA

No, no, no--

RAY

Quite the opposite, actually. May we
talk inside? We won't take much of
your time.

BARRY takes a moment to consider, reluctantly choosing to
allow them in.

BARRY plops down on his couch. LUCY sits on a chair to his
right, placing the giftbag on the floor beside her. RAY and
MYRA sit to his left. They look to each other, unsure how to
begin; visibly nervous.

RAY

Do you want me to...or?

MYRA

Maybe I should--

RAY
Yeah, I think...yeah...

MYRA
(to Barry)
Mr. Nichols, my name's Myra Bishop--

RAY
We said that.

MYRA
Oh, right...um...So, I was born with a congestive heart condition. It wasn't something that affected me, really or my quality of life...Well, until it did...

LUCY picks up the wine bottle, examining it. BARRY takes it from her and moves it out of reach.

RAY
She went into heart failure a few years ago. It was very serious.

MYRA
Initially, they were going to replace two of my valves.

RAY
They harvest them from pigs--

MYRA
Honey.

RAY
Sorry.

LUCY slides the tacklebox towards her, examining it. BARRY takes it from her and moves it out of reach.

MYRA
Before that could happen...Well, a closer look showed that things were much worse than anyone thought.

RAY
She needed a whole new heart.

MYRA
My name was put on the bottom of a very long transplant list--

RAY

We waited years. I mean, the clock was just ticking away and-and nothing! All the while Myra's health kept fading and she was...Well, eventually, we had to accept the reality that...(faltering)...that...

MYRA takes RAY'S hand to comfort him.

MYRA

Our last Christmas was spent in a hospital room...Machines were keeping me alive long enough to say my goodbyes...

RAY

That's when the hospital staff rushed in. A compatible donor just came through. A heart was available right then at the eleventh hour...Your wife's heart. Mrs. Carol Nichols...

BARRY is stunned; speechless.

MYRA

She saved my life. She gave me a life. With my husband. With my daughter...

RAY

It was a miracle. She was a miracle. We've...We've just been so grateful. We wanted to do something--

MYRA

We started a non-profit in her name. For young children with heart defects.

BARRY

(overwhelmed)

Oh...yeah, she...She would have liked that. Thank you.

RAY

We wanted to do a something for you as well--

MYRA

To show our appreciation for...for everything--

RAY

We racked our brains about what that
should be exactly--

MYRA

Lucy that came up with an idea...

LUCY places the giftbag on the coffee table in front of
Barry.

MYRA

...And we...Well, we thought it was
perfect...

BARRY takes out a WRAPPED GIFT BOX. He unwraps it and looks
inside, stunned by what he sees. He looks to his guests in
disbelief. He slowly reveals the gift inside -- a
STETHOSCOPE!

MYRA unbuttons the top of her blouse to expose her chest.
BARRY puts the stethoscope on and places the pad on her
chest...

WE HEAR THE STRONG, RHYTHMIC HEARTBEAT -- CAROL'S HEARTBEAT.

BARRY smiles; bittersweet, moved to tears of joy as he
listens...

LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM AS THE HEARTBEAT CONTINUES BEATING IN THE
DARK...

THE END