

NAUGHTY OR NICE

By

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FADE IN:

INT OFFICE - EVENING

The Christmas decorated, glass enclosed expanse of a successful CEO.

Through the door comes COOKIE ENGLISH, 40, attractive, accomplished, assured. Fresh from the Christmas party, she sways slightly as she slides behind her desk.

FRANK (O.C.)  
Merry Christmas.

She turns to the couch where FRANK, 50, in wrinkled suit, lounges. Tired, Frank's at the end of a long slog.

COOKIE  
Who are you? Wait, I don't care who you are. Get out before I call security.

FRANK  
Not much Christmas cheer in that.

COOKIE  
I don't care what you're selling or why you think it's OK to break into my office. Just leave.

FRANK  
Before you hear what I have to say?

COOKIE  
Way before that. You have ten seconds.

FRANK  
I've begun badly. Let me start over. You're my assignment.

COOKIE  
That's it.

She grabs her phone and starts to dial then stops.

FRANK  
It doesn't work.

She replaces the receiver and pulls out her cell.

FRANK

That either.

She doesn't believe him and tries to dial. No dice. Frowning, she lays aside her cell and starts for the door.

FRANK

It won't open.

She tries the door anyway. Won't open.

COOKIE

(facing him)

Unlock the door before I scream

FRANK

Why is this always so difficult?  
Scream all you want. No one will hear.

She SCREAMS "HELP" and pounds the door. He shakes his head.

FRANK

Wouldn't it be easier to listen? I  
mean, this is for your benefit.

She turns from the door, marches to the desk, picks up her chair, and hurls it at the window.

It bounces off.

FRANK

Please, what next? Gonna punch  
through with your spiked heels?

She rights her chair and sits, facing him.

FRANK

Ahhh, foreplay over. Let's hitch the  
reindeer to the sleigh. I'm an elf.

COOKIE

Elf? You can't do better than that?

FRANK

No one ever believes. Why is that?

COOKIE

Could it be because you look as elfish as a pregnant polar bear?

FRANK

It's the ears. Everyone wants pointy ears.

COOKIE

And curled shoes with bells

FRANK

We don't wear those any more, at least not on assignment.

COOKIE

What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be at the North Pole making toys?

FRANK

Santa got out of the toy business a long time ago.

COOKIE

Oh?

FRANK

In the beginning, it was the naughty-nice thing. Since there were a whole lot more naughtys, it was an easy gig. You could get a ton of coal for a song. Then, parents got involved. They couldn't let their little naughty go without Christmas, so they replaced the coal with presents and blamed Santa. How can the fat guy get around that?

COOKIE

I wasn't aware he was trying to get around anything.

FRANK

Yeah, well, since the kid thing tanked, he's moved on. Now, he does the naughty-nice thing with adults.

COOKIE

And you're his special elf.

FRANK

One of the non-polar squad. It's an out-reach thing.

COOKIE

Right, why is the big guy interested in me?

FRANK

Because you're a no-list.

COOKIE

No list?

FRANK

Not on the nice list, not on the naughty list. Most people are easy. They're either mostly bad or mostly good. But some people fall between. The fat man thought intervention would push those people onto the nice list.

COOKIE

That's me?

FRANK

You got it. Take that little bear you put in the church manger. Yeah, I know you made sure the corporate logo showed, but it was still a nice gesture. On the other hand, what you're planning to do with Lance from the mail room is downright naughty.

Cookie is floored.

COOKIE

I don't know what you're talking about.

FRANK

Of course you don't. No one ever does.

She studies him a moment.

COOKIE

You're stalking me, aren't you.

FRANK

We prefer to call it an investigation

COOKIE

You've been following me, and what, you have me bugged?

FRANK

I can't very well investigate without following now can I. And you forget Elves have special powers. If I don't want you to see me, you won't.

COOKIE

This is crazy. I must have lost my mind. What was in that punch?

FRANK

Look, it's Christmas Eve. You're the last name on my list. I've done some surveillance, and I like you. I like your silly husband Joel and your willful daughter Audrey. I like that you slipped an extra hundred into the envelope for that store manager, and that your secretary's bonus is five percent larger than what you told the board. You have good instincts. I'd like to see something good happen for you like it happened for the Andersons.

COOKIE

John and Laura?

FRANK

The big promotion, the remission, yeah, those Andersons.

COOKIE

Santa did that?

FRANK

That's what he does, what he likes to do.

COOKIE

You're serious.

Frank shakes his head and smiles.

FRANK

I might be, or I could be a drunk playing with your head.

COOKIE

Don't think for a minute I believe you.

FRANK

When I first took this job, I thought that if I just talked to people, they would change. Do some good, get a reward. A senior elf told me to lose the hero cape. If people didn't believe, they weren't going to change. It didn't matter what I could tell them. It didn't matter what happened to their neighbors. Santa was just some red-cheeked dude on a Coca-Cola can. So, no, I don't expect you to believe me or forego your plans with Lance. There is no Santa Claus, Cookie. And even if there were, what difference would it make to you?

COOKIE

You're not much fun, are you?

He laughs again.

COOKIE

I tell you what, Mr. Elf.

FRANK

Frank.

COOKIE

Early tomorrow morning my security team will sweep my office and my house and remove all those nasty electronic

gizmos you installed. Then, they're going to go through the surveillance tapes and identify your face. When they do, they'll find your employer and I'll bleed you dry. When I'm done with you, you won't have enough spare change for a long-distance call to the north pole, south pole, barber pole or wherever your boss lives.

FRANK

(laughing)

Like I've never heard that speech before. The truth is that I'm an elf, but no one ever believes the truth.

(stretches)

I don't have much time.

COOKIE

You're wasting mine.

FRANK

I'm trying to keep you off the naughty list.

COOKIE

I'm afraid you're too late. I plan to be very naughty.

FRANK

You don't have to, you know. You can call it off.

COOKIE

Why would I do that?

FRANK

I could tell you that I have a bet with the reindeer elves. Winner gets an extra week in the Bahamas.

COOKIE

You're not funny.

FRANK

Remember the Mercers?

COOKIE

Tom and Gloria.

FRANK

Remember what happened to them?

COOKIE

Their son had a car accident. He's in a wheelchair. The accident caused a divorce. Tom went west, and Gloria moved downtown to be close to her son.

FRANK

Tom died in prison in Nevada. Seems the other inmates didn't appreciate a child molester. Gloria went on a binge a year ago and disappeared. We know where she is, but, well, we're like confessors, we don't tell. Tom junior hates his wheelchair, his tiny room in the nursing home, and his care givers. He'd like to join his father.

COOKIE

Why are you telling me this?

FRANK

They were on the naughty list.

Cookie laughs.

COOKIE

Santa?

FRANK

Tom junior's car hit a patch of ice on a night when there was no precipitation. How do you think that happened?

COOKIE

It wasn't some elf, I can tell you that.

He stares at her.

COOKIE

Oh, come on. It's switches and coal,  
isn't it?

FRANK

Back in the toy days, not any more.

COOKIE

So, if I get on the naughty list, bad  
things will happen to me?

FRANK

Ever read fairy tales? Ever wonder  
why children get eaten and people die?  
Bad things happen, Cookie.

COOKIE

You're worse than boring. You're  
nonsensical. There is no Santa, no  
naughty list, no elf hosing down the  
pavement on a cold night. What is it  
you want? Because this is getting  
old.

FRANK

I don't need much. Just tell me you  
believe in Santa, and that you'll skip  
Lance.

Cookie laughs.

COOKIE

And then what, the Easter Bunny shows  
up and demands allegiance to dyed  
eggs?

(stands)

Your time is up, Mr. Elf. Get out.

Frank stands and brushes the wrinkles on his suit.

FRANK

I'm tired. I should leave you to stew  
in your chosen juices. But one last  
time, how can I get you to believe?

She regards him a second.

COOKIE

I have to say I believe?

FRANK

And dump Lance.

COOKIE

Well, if that's all...I believe in the  
Fat Man, Santa, Kris Kringle, or  
whatever his name.

FRANK

And Lance?

COOKIE

No Lance.

FRANK

Mean it?

COOKIE

Lance is a pretty face, nothing more.  
Nothing lost.

Frank smiles, walks over, and holds out his hand.

COOKIE

What no contract written in blood?

FRANK

If you backslide, he'll know.

Cookie shakes his hand.

FRANK

Be nice, Cookie. It'll pay off.

The phone on the desk rings.

FRANK

(turning away) )

You'll want to answer that.

She grabs the phone.

COOKIE

What? When? Where? Damn! I'll be  
right there.

She replaces the phone and looks around.

No Frank.

COOKIE  
Frank? Frank?

No answer. She grabs her coat from a closet and heads for the door.

COOKIE  
I said I believed.

INT HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

In the bed, AUDREY, 14, attached to various drips and machines, lies unconscious, one leg in traction. Next to the bed, Cookie and her husband, JOEL, 40's, someone who often acts 15.

JOEL  
According to her friends, she was close to the edge when another skier cut her off, and she hit a tree.

COOKIE  
Oh my god.

JOEL  
It's not so bad.

COOKIE  
Not so bad? Look at her.

JOEL  
I know, I know, the broken leg, the shoulder separation. Yeah, that's bad, but look on the bright side.

COOKIE  
Bright side?

JOEL  
When they did a scan, they discovered a mass in her chest.

COOKIE  
What?

JOEL

They're doing a biopsy, but they're pretty sure, it's cancer.

COOKIE

Oh my god, cancer?

JOEL

Probably treatable and localized. They caught it early. All because of the crash. Without the crash, we wouldn't know.

Cookie looks from Joel to Audrey.

COOKIE

That's a good thing, isn't it?

JOEL

A Christmas gift.

COOKIE

(taking Audrey's hand)

A very nice gift, a very nice gift.

FADE OUT.