

PRESENTS

by
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FADE IN

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Autumn leaves float down past defeated CONSTRUCTION WORKERS glaring into a deep trench of road pavement. A backhoe arm is broken with hydraulic fluid bursting thru a jackhammer.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER 1

There goes our bonus.

Construction Worker 2 scratches his head contemplating the ominous, gloomy snow-clouds.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER 2

Ol'Lady is gonna kill me. Another
piss-poor Christmas.

The disappointed Construction Workers disperse. BOB stomps mud off his heavy boots on the pavement.

Bob (22), a burly, tangled hair brute goes to the bed of his rusted, century-old Ford pick-up. He reaches his dirt-smudged, harden-arms into the bed. Sweat-stains are encrusted under his arms.

He lifts an ancient gas powered jackhammer out from the bed.

He strenuously carries and drops it by the hole.

Back at the line of Construction Worker's vehicles, Workers stare at interest at Bob.

Bob jumps into the back hoe and reverses it out. The broken hydraulic hammer drags like a broken leg along the pavement.

Bob brakes and jumps out of the back hoe.

He lifts the jackhammer upright and yanks the gas starter.

The hammer GROWLS and spews black smoke.

Bob pierces the pavement with his hammer. -- Suddenly, debris explodes from the broken pavement.

His muscles strain under the power of the hammer.

The Construction Workers reappear carrying shovels and picks.

EXT. VETERINARIAN CLINIC - DUSK

A VET ASSISTANT (TAYLOR 22) helps an ELDERLY CUSTOMER put three pampered poodles in the passenger seat of her Corvette. Taylor exhibits a wholesome and tidy appearance in an ironed medical smock. Some rude folks about this small town would say he is "pretty."

He hands her a bag of medication.

TAYLOR

I wrote it down. Chico gets half a blue pill for breakfast and dinner. Harpo gets the pink once a day. And Groucho the yellow twice a day. Not at once. -- Breakfast, dinner.

CUSTOMER

You are so nice to the Marx Brothers.

She enters and revs the engine like a NASCAR racer.

CUSTOMER (CONT'D)

I don't trust them with anyone, you know. Next month, dogsitting?

TAYLOR

Yes. New Years weekend. Going to...

CUSTOMER

Visiting...

TAYLOR AND CUSTOMER

Paris.

She blows him a kiss as she drives away at a turtles pace.

TAYLOR

(sighing to himself)
I'll be here.

Bob's pickup slowly drives past Taylor. Bob fixes his gaze upon the clinic.

Taylor is leery of the stalking truck as it rolls past.

INT. BOB'S TRUCK - DUSK

Bob drives, creeping past the clinic. He is more than scummy, having worked earlier in the day. A half-eaten bag of fast food rides shotgun.

Once the clinic is out of sight he accelerates faster.

EXT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

Bob drives onto the gravel and weed grown driveway.

A 1970's single wide trailer sits on an acre of crab-grass dotted by numerous Oak stumps. A weather-worn, broken rocking horse is the only lawn ornament.

Bob tiredly climbs the rusted porch with an envelope clenched in one hand and the fast food bag in the other.

INT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

Bob enters the darkened small quarters and lays the envelope and fast food bag on a miniature kitchen counter.

DOG WHIMPER (O.S.)

Bob flips on a light and a bulky old mutt, BRUTUS painfully tries to get to his feet. Brutus WHIMPERS from the painful aging of arthritis. His fur is like a warm charcoal-colored, wool blanket. Though in pain, his playful pecan eyes excitedly greet Bob.

BOB

Hey Brutus, hold on there boy.

Brutus finally stands with a loving greeting of a painful wagging tail.

Bob kneels down face-to-face with a welcoming, lapping Brutus kiss. A smile engulfs Bob's otherwise stone face as he scratches Brutus's ears.

BOB (CONT'D)

Sorry I'm late. Bet you need to go out.

Bob runs his hand across the worn bedspread blanket which Brutus comfortably sleeps on.

BOB (CONT'D)

No leaks.

Brutus bow-legs a painful step to the door.

BOB (CONT'D)

Let me help.

EXT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

Bob slams the door open with his boot.

His arms cradle Brutus like a farmer's prized calf. He manages the porch stairs and bends down, safely helping Brutus to the yard.

Brutus sniffs the weeds and releases a streaming, days worth of pee.

Truck lights grow and shine on the trailer. A tricked-out 4x4 Pickup drives next to his.

His EX-GIRLFRIEND (22) drops out of the passenger seat of the pick-up. A MAN is in the shadows of the driver's side.

Brutus sniffs for a location to take a dump.

EX-GIRLFRIEND

Hey Brutus.

She pats Brutus head and then sniffs her hand.

EX-GIRLFRIEND (CONT'D)

Damn Bob. -- Either put that dog down or give it a bath. Did you get my message?

Bob nods.

BOB

Where's Carrie?

EX-GIRLFRIEND

At Moms.

BOB

When can I see her?

EX-GIRLFRIEND

Do you have the child support? -- Money?

BOB

It's on the counter. White envelope.

His Ex enters the trailer.

Bob stares into the headlights of the pick-up and finds only a shadow of a MAN behind the steering wheel.

BOB (CONT'D)
 (yells)
 Is he treating you well?

His Ex exits the trailer counting the money from the envelope.

EX-GIRLFRIEND
 Barry? Yeah. We have real, adult conversations. He can at least put two sentences together. He's taking us down to his folks. Maybe Six Flags. -- I'm taking January's support too.

BOB
 What about Christmas?

EX-GIRLFRIEND
 I'll buy her a gift, wrap it up and say it's from you. She's three and still too young to know. Anyway it'll keep you from buying her a fishin pole.

BOB
 How bout New Years?

The Ex stares at his lack of enthusiasm. She hands back the empty white envelope.

EX-GIRLFRIEND
 (nodding)
 We'll see. -- I'll try.

She passes poor Brutus with a shaking of her head.

BOB
 Hey?!

She spins back.

BOB (CONT'D)
 Does your mom have any more of them pills left over? Brutus is almost out and they really help him.

EX-GIRLFRIEND
 I'll see. (she examines Brutus) But I don't think pills are what that dog needs. (she spins back and talks over her shoulder) Have a Merry Christmas.

She climbs into the truck and it backs out of the yard.

Bob pets Brutus and sniffs his hand.

BOB
You smell like a dog. Nothin a-
matter with that, huh boy? -- Got
you a burger.

He bends down and carefully lifts up Brutus in his arms.

INT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

Bob and Brutus eat off TV trays from the couch. They watch football on the TV.

Bob points at a pill next to Brutus's burger.

BOB
Eat your pill.

Brutus laps up the pill.

TIME DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

Bob and Brutus sleep with the glow of the TV.

Bob wakes and feels something uncomfortable. He lays his hand under Brutus and sniffs it.

BOB
Another accident Brute ol'boy?

INT. MOBILE HOME - MORNING

Bob gives Brutus a dog-bath in the telephone booth size shower. Bob, dressed only in his boxers, stands in ankle-high soapy water.

BOB
Brute, you're fat-ass is on the
drain again.

INT. MOBILE HOME - MORNING

Bob blow dries Brutus's wet fur. Brutus shakes his ears annoyed by the siren of air.

BOB
 Little longer Boy. -- Can't allow
 you to catch a cold.

EXT. MAIN STREET STORE WINDOW - MORNING

STORE WORKERS wrap decorations about a Christmas tree and set phoney presents in the store front window display.

Taylor walks past heading to work. He stops and watches Worker 1 set a pajama-dressed child mannequin next to the tree.

Taylor stares with far-away eyes until he notices the Workers are staring back at him.

Off-guarded, Taylor quickly nods and moves on.

Worker 2 shakes his head at the other Worker.

WORKER 1
 I think he was nodding at you. You
 ARE the pretty one.

WORKER 2
 Fuck you.

INT. BOB'S TRUCK - MORNING

Bob and Brutus drive thru town.

He turns a corner and slowly drives at a snails pace by the Veterinarian Clinic.

Taylor walks to the entrance. -- He notices Bob's truck stalking, slowly by and stop across the street.

Inside the truck, Bob massages Brutus's hip.

BOB
 How much you think those pills
 cost?

Taylor can only see Bob in the front seat.

Bob is looking past Taylor at the clinic.

BOB (CONT'D)
 What you say? (he studies Brutus's
 sad eyes) RUFF. You'd rather go
 fishin? -- Ya read my mind Brutus.
 You always have a habit of that.

He accelerates down the road.

Taylor tries to read the license plate.

TAYLOR
Five-Eight something.

He nervously takes out the clinic keys while watching the truck fade away, out of sight.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

On the dreary gray day, Bob casts his fishing line into the lake. He nuzzles down next to Brutus on the bank.

Bob lovingly nudges his head next to Brutus and scratches behind the dog's ear.

Brutus watches with dog-interest at the ducks swim by.

WOOF! -- He lets out a tired and worn bark.

He tries to rise to his feet and lets out a sad whimper.

Bob keeps him seated with his calloused hand.

BOB
Damn Brutus. A few years back,
you'd had them waddling for their
lives. -- Hell, you had them flyin
out of the lake. Ducks always
messin with our fishin.

Bob chucks a nearby stick at them.

Brutus cocks his head with an interest to play fetch as the ducks leisurely waddle on.

BOB (CONT'D)
Fetchin days are long gone.

He massages Brutus hip and rests his hand lovingly around the big dog's shoulders.

TIME DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. LAKE - AFTERNOON

Bob carries Brutus and lays him in the passenger seat of the pick-up.

He tosses his fishing pole and a couple of fish into the bed of the truck.

EXT. VETERINARIAN CLINIC - DUSK

The VETERINARIAN exits the clinic as Taylor picks up poop in the front.

VETERINARIAN
Don't mix the Whot with the
Shepherd. -- Keep'em apart now.
Those two don't take well together.

TAYLOR
Got'em under control.

VETERINARIAN
Have a good night.

TAYLOR
You too.

The Veterinarian leaves in her mini-van.

Taylor uses his pooper-scooper to pickup another fly-infested pile.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Damn Whot. Shit as big as a Micky-
Dees Big Mac.

Taylor glances up and watches Bob's truck come into view down the road.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Again?

He grips the pooper-scooper like a menacing ax.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
This has gotta stop.

The truck measuredly stalks toward the clinic.

Taylor goes to the curb with his mighty pooper-scooper.

He can see Bob in the driver's seat. -- Brutus must be hiding again.

The truck slows further down in front of the clinic.

Taylor, the brave, jumps in front of the truck.

TIRES SCREECH as the truck brakes to a halt a whisper from Taylor's smock.

Taylor yields his pooper-scooper as a medieval ax.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Why are you harassing me?

Taylor and Bob stare at each other for a long moment.

Taylor carefully walks around to the passenger side of the truck.

The window is rolled down.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Why do you...

He trails off his accusation upon witnessing poor Brutus.

Taylor gradually glances up at Bob.

They stare at each other, trying to measure the situation.

Suddenly, the fortress which Bob constructed, begins to crack. -- The walls fissure. His stone face begins to crumble as tears streams down his face.

Taylor witnesses this brute of strength collapse in pain and sorrow in a matter of a quick, couple seconds.

Bob cries in chest-heaving anguish.

Taylor's eyes began to tear, but his strength of occupation takes over.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Let's get him in. -- What's his name?

Bob sobs while wiping the lingering snot from his nose.

BOB
Bru-tus.

INT. VETERINARIAN CLINIC - PATIENT ROOM - DUSK

Brutus lays on a blanket on the floor. His massive head rests on Bob's upper thigh. Bob caresses the dogs fur with one hand and cuddles him with his other hand.

Bob still has tears in his eyes as Taylor checks the dog's breathing and massages the hip.

BOB
You the Vet?

Taylor shows him his name tag.

TAYLOR
I'm the Vet-tech. Completing my
internship here to become a Vet. --
How old is Brutus?

Bob shakes his head.

BOB
Got'm as a pup after Harvest
Festival when I was about eight.
Near fifteen I guess. Been my buddy
most of my life.

Taylor sadly studies Bob as he bends his head next to Brutus.

TAYLOR
Did you want x-rays?

BOB
I don't have much money. -- I know
it's killin him.

TAYLOR
You want to...

Bob nods with more tears streaming down his cheeks.

BOB
It's best. -- Poor boy. (to Brutus)
I'm being selfish to keep you
hurtin like this. I need to let you
go boy. Let you get your legs back
and give them ducks fits. (to
Taylor) I don't want to hurt him
more. -- It don't hurt?

Taylor rises and gets a syringe with a bottle of medication.

TAYLOR
No. -- I'll make sure of it.

BOB
What is the cost?

Taylor sadly shakes his head.

TAYLOR
I'll take care of it. -- Tell'em I
dropped a bottle. No worry.

Taylor gets on his knees with the syringe and pets the big dog.

BOB

(to Brutus)

You going to be a good dog up there? I bet they feed you better than I did. Steak and eggs for breakfast. Slim Jims for dessert. You love your Slim Jims. You seen me get a whippin for givin you those.

Taylor moves the syringe closer to Brutus's leg.

TAYLOR

(whispering)

There may be a slight twitchin of the muscles, don't be scared.

BOB

After every whippin, after every pain and heartbreak. After every one of my cryins, you were there boy. Weren't you ol'boy. Always lickin up my tears.

Brutus licks his arm which opens a flood-gate of emotions and tears.

BOB (CONT'D)

You were the only one I could talk to you. -- You didn't hate. You never yelled at me. I love you.

Brutus's eye glass over and stay open.

Bob sobs and looks to Taylor.

TAYLOR

I'm sorry.

Bob closes the dog's eyes and hugs him tight.

BOB

You always loved me.

EXT. VETERINARIAN CLINIC - NIGHT

Taylor holds the door open as Bob exits carrying Brutus wrapped in the blanket.

Bob lays Brutus in the passenger seat one last time.

He closes the door and slowly walks to the driver's side.
He glances up to Taylor who is still watches from the door.
Bob nods a sincere "thank you."
Bob starts the pick-up and drives down the road.
Taylor watches the tail lights trail away.

EXT. LAKE - NEXT MORNING

A freshly dug grave overlooks the lake. Ducks swim by quacking.

EXT. MOBILE HOME - MORNING

Bob's pickup rests in front of the drive. A few far-away birds chirp.

EXT. VETERINARIAN CLINIC - MORNING

Taylor stands on the curb side of the road. He glances up and down the silent, unoccupied pavement.

He turns to unlock the clinic.

INT. VETERINARIAN CLINIC - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Bob lays on the blanket in the middle of the floor, just as Brutus laid dying a day before. He stares up to the ceiling.

Taylor enters carrying a syringe and a bottle of medication.

Taylor kneels next to Bob and takes his arm.

TAYLOR

(whispering)

There may be a slight twitchin of the muscles, don't be scared. You won't feel anything after a few seconds. A numbness at first and then there will be nothing. No sorrow, no pain.

He sticks the needle into Bob's muscled arm.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

Bob, fully dressed, wakes from a terrified adrenaline rush. He checks his arm and rises to a lonely room. A dog barks in the distant.

BOB
Brutus?!

He gets his bearings as he views the empty couch and the vacant dog bed.

He opens the front door to a faint dog bark.

He grabs his truck keys and bounds to his pick-up.

EXT. MAIN STREET STORE WINDOW - NIGHT

Taylor sits on a sidewalk bench facing the completed window display of a child's Christmas. The mannequin boy kneels before wrapped gifts under a decorated tree.

The window glass reflects Taylor's deep melancholy.

INT. BOB'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Bob throws back a beer while driving down Main St. Four beers remain from the six pack on the passenger side.

He notices Taylor sitting alone gazing in the store display.

He pulls the truck to the side of the road with a half-drunk curb bump.

Bob carries the remaining six pack as he joins Taylor.

Taylor studies him in the window reflection.

BOB
Had a dream about you...

Taylor focuses straight on Bob as he sits beside him.

BOB (CONT'D)
...more of a nightmare.

They indirectly talk to each other in the window reflection.

TAYLOR
Did I threatened you with a pooper-scooper?

Bob chuckles and offers Taylor a beer which he accepts.

BOB

You were menacing. - What were you expectin to do with that?

TAYLOR

You scared the shit out of me. Coming from this town, I thought you were a gay-basher.

BOB

Really? Honestly, that shit still happens?

TAYLOR

It's instinct. I was naturally born with suspicion.

Bob nods with a swig. He cocks his head to the window display.

BOB

You euthanized me.

Taylor meets reflective eye contact with Bob in the store window. Taylor pops the beer can top open and takes a sip of beer.

TAYLOR

How are you?

BOB

Numb. Uncomfortably numb.

TAYLOR

It takes awhile for the injection to work.

Bob smirks.

BOB

You made a funny.

TAYLOR

Sorry. -- Instinct. Another defense mechanism. I am sorry about Brutus.

BOB

You were good to him.

Taylor nods to the Christmas display.

TAYLOR

My fondest memory of Christmas was sleeping with my dog, Miner, under the tree waiting for Santa to appear.

BOB

Miner?

TAYLOR

He was a coon hound who loved to dig.

BOB

He made you want to be a Vet?

TAYLOR

Pets aren't judgmental. They don't criticize you. They don't ridicule you. They aren't sarcastic and demeaning. AND they aren't people.

BOB

I wish people had the capacity to love as Brutus did. At times... I wish I had the capacity to love as my dog did.

Taylor and Bob gaze in the store window. The multi-colored Christmas lights from the tree shine bright on their reflections.

TAYLOR

It's a cruel rite of passage into adulthood when you lose your last living thread of being a child.

Bob breathes deep and takes another swig.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Not much we can do, but accept what gifts are left to be opened.

BOB

That shitty Santa knit sweater from my aunt Grady.

Taylor smirks with a nod while shaking off the seriousness.

TAYLOR

Yes, even that shitty Santa sweater.

BOB
Made me look like the Abominable
Snowman. (raises his hands like
monster claws) Grrrr...

A full smile engulfs Taylor's face.

BOB (CONT'D)
We can fish.

Taylor cocks his head questioning Bob.

BOB (CONT'D)
Fish? -- Do you want to go fishin?

Taylor glances around the darkness and the desolate Main
Street.

BOB (CONT'D)
I'll show you our favorite fishin
spot.

Bob rises and walks toward the truck as Taylor cautiously
follows.

BOB (CONT'D)
Does your work keep you from baiten
worms? Hookin Catfish? How are you
at barkin at ducks?

TAYLOR
Barking at ducks?

Bob enters the driver's side and Taylor takes Brutus's place,
riding shotgun.

BOB
Nasty varmints them ducks. Damn
quackerin all the time scaring the
fish.

TAYLOR
Just so you know. -- I'm not a dog.
I'm not even man's best friend.

Bob smiles at Taylor and playfully scratches Taylor's head.

BOB
I don't need you to replace Brutus.
-- I need you to replace a friend.

Together, Bob and Taylor, drive down a deserted Main St.

In the store window, the lifeless child mannequin waits for Santa Claus under the decorated Christmas tree. Pretty wrapped presents surround him waiting to be opened.

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END.