

THE GIFT OF GIVING

by

John Staats

FADE IN:

EXT: BUNGALOW - NIGHT

A modest but charming small home with detached garage. A wreath is on the front door and a small Christmas tree twinkles in the front window.

The neighboring homes are similar bungalows except they have elaborate decorations, lawn ornaments, and lights.

The night sky is clear with a bright full moon.

INT: BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - SAME

An old Golden Retriever with a gray muzzle (SAM) is asleep on a throw rug between an easy chair and the fireplace as a fire crackles. Bing Crosby's 'White Christmas' plays softly.

The stairs CREAK as CHARLEY (83) walks slowly downstairs with a small box in one hand. He wears a well-worn ugly Christmas sweater, green corduroy trousers, and slippers.

Sam wakes and wags his tail.

CHARLEY

Never fear, Sam. I found it.

Charley shuffles over to his easy chair and sits down with an "OOF".

Sam sits up, puts his chin on Charley's knee, and stares longingly up at his owner as he rubs his ears.

CHARLEY

Oh, Sam. I guess we're both getting a little long in the tooth.

(looks at watch)

What do you say we get this party started, hmm?

Charley opens the box, looks inside, and gives the box a little shake.

The doorbell rings. It gives both Charley and Sam a start.

JUNE (O.S.)

Charley? Can you get that?

Charley smiles and turns to the kitchen.

CHARLEY

I got it, June.

(to Sam)

Who could it be, huh?

He gives Sam's head another rub and gets up for the door. Sam is full of energy and runs circles around Charley's legs as he walks.

With hand on the doorknob, Charley asks in a falsetto woman's voice-

CHARLEY

Who is it?

BILL (O.S.)

Aw, come on, Dad. It's cold out here!

Charley opens the door to reveal his son, BILL (40), daughter-in-law, MARY (36), and grandson, PHILLIP (4). Bill holds a present in one hand and they're all covered in snow.

CHARLEY

Come in, come in. We weren't sure you were going to make it, with the storm and all.

BILL

Geez, Dad. That sweater is hideous.

CHARLEY

Yuppers. Just had to have it.

The family comes in, stomp their feet, and shake the snow from their jackets.

Mary gives Charley a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

MARY

Hi, Dad. Sorry about the mess.

CHARLEY

Don't worry about it. Kick off your boots and let me take your coats.

Charley feels a tug on his pant leg. He looks down and feigns confusion.

CHARLEY

Who...? Is that Phillip?

PHILLIP

Hi, Gampa! Merry ex-mass!

Charley picks him up and gives him a big hug.

CHARLEY

You're getting so big! And it's Christmas, Phillip, not X-mas.

MARY

Now, we can't stay long. Those roads are getting worse by the minute.

June (72) enters from the kitchen. She wears a Christmas themed apron and oven mitts.

JUNE

Hi, kids! I'm so glad you could swing by to pick us up. How bad are the roads?

Bill gives his mother a hug and a kiss.

BILL

Bah, not too bad.

(to Mary)

Why don't you give Mom a hand in the kitchen. I want to talk to Dad for a moment.

MARY

What can I do to help, Mom?

JUNE

I just took everything out of the oven to cool a bit. Why don't you and Phillip grab some hot chocolate and a cookie while I do a quick clean up?

The conversation fades as they return to the kitchen.

Bill, Charley, and Sam go to the living room. Bill hands Charley the present.

BILL

Here, Dad. A little something from my last business trip.

CHARLEY

From Romania?

BILL

Yeah, go ahead and open it.

Charley unwraps and opens the box. He lifts out a crystal ball ornament and studies it closely as the contents begin to swirl in a fluid-like motion.

CHARLEY

I've never seen anything like it.

BILL

I bought it from an old gypsy lady on the street. She barely spoke any english and said something about the gift of giving memory or something like that. I don't know. I just thought it looked cool.

CHARLEY

It's mesmerizing. Thank you so much. On the tree it goes.

Charley places the ornament front and center on the tree. They step back to admire it.

After a moment...

BILL

Okay, so, I hate to say it but we did a some shopping on the way over to pick you up and, well, we don't have enough room for you, Mom, and Sam. Sorry, but you're gonna have to follow us in your car to our house.

CHARLEY

That's okay. It'll save you a trip back here tomorrow after Christmas dinner. Mother can ride with you and I'll take Sam with me.

BILL

Perfect. I just hate to-

Phillip runs up to Bill and crashes into his legs with a two-armed bear hug. June and Mary follow with casserole dishes and Tupperware containers.

PHILLIP

We had cocoa and cookies!

BILL

Lucky you! Now, go get your coat on.

CHARLEY

June, you're going to ride with Bill. I'll just be a few minutes behind you.

JUNE

Are you going to be all right? It looks pretty nasty out there.

Charley brushes a lock of hair from her face and gives her a kiss on the forehead.

CHARLEY

I'll be fine. Sam will keep me company.

June pokes Charley playfully in the chest.

JUNE

Well, don't you dilly-dally. We've eggnog to drink, mister.

CHARLEY

You just make sure Bill minds the road. I'll see you all shortly.

Charley opens the door to a gust of wind and snow. He has second thoughts.

CHARLEY

Bill? Are you sure you wouldn't rather spend the night here?

BILL

We'll be okay, Dad. Besides, all the presents are at our house.

CHARLEY

Well, alright. Just take it slow.

Charley holds the door as everyone files past. He waves goodbye and shuts the door.

CHARLEY

Okay, Sam. Go grab your dish.

Sam jumps in circles and darts to the kitchen.

He puts on his coat and galoshes. He turns to the kitchen.

CHARLEY

Come on, Sam. Let's go.

Sam returns slowly and walks with a little hitch in his gait. Charley expresses concern.

CHARLEY

What is it, boy?

Sam whimpers when he gets to his side.

CHARLEY

Come on, it's not that cold out.

He opens the door and looks towards the street. It's not snowing, nor is there any sign that it ever was snowing.

Charley looks to the easy chair and SIGHS.

INT: BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS MORNING

Charley is in his easy chair. The box in his limp hand. The fire is dead and cold.

Sam trots into the room and sits in front of Charley. He whimpers a couple times before he places his muzzle between Charley's legs.

Charley doesn't move.

Sam pokes him in the crotch.

CHARLEY

Yowza!

Charley wakes with a start and he loses his grip on the box. It gets bobbled between his hands and he catches it before it hits the floor.

CHARLEY

Phew. That was close, Sam. Come here, boy.

Sam comes over slowly with his head held low. Charley rubs his ears.

CHARLEY

It's okay, Sam.

He lifts the crystal ball ornament gently from the box and swirls the fluid-like contents.

CHARLEY

(sighs)

Maybe next year we can join them.

FADE TO BLACK