

PROTECTING THE INNOCENT

by

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SETTING

A living room. Presents -- some wrapped, others not -- are scattered everywhere.

CAST

DERRICK

Thirties, early forties

LAURA

Thirties, early forties

(Setting: A living room. Wrapped presents are everywhere.)

DERRICK and LAURA, thirties, are wrapping presents for their child. They both look exhausted.

DERRICK is trying to wrap a present, but he discovers he hasn't cut enough wrapping paper.)

DERRICK

I can't..it's too -- it's too --

(In his frustration, DERRICK rips off all the wrapping paper, tearing it up.)

LAURA

What was that?

DERRICK

I miscalculated. I...I can't think anymore. I'm exhausted.

LAURA

So am I. Let's just get this done.

(They continue wrapping.)

DERRICK

Do you think she'll sleep in tomorrow? Is there the slightest chance she'll --

LAURA

No, she'll be up at 4:30 and --

(LAURA suddenly stops. Listens.)

DERRICK

What?

LAURA

What was that?

DERRICK

What?

LAURA

SHHHHHHH!

(pause)

You hear that?

DERRICK

Hear what?

Footsteps...

LAURA

You gotta be kidding me...

DERRICK

SHHHHHH!

LAURA

(Pause. They both try to listen.)

DERRICK

I don't hear anything!

LAURA

I do -- what if she comes down? She'll see the presents!

DERRICK

Head her off! I'll get the rest of these done!

(LAURA starts to dart out of the room.)

DERRICK

Tackle her!

(LAURA exits. DERRICK runs over and picks up another present. It's a very odd, large shape, not providing an obvious answer of how it should actually be wrapped.)

DERRICK takes some wrapping paper and tries a few false starts, realizing none of them will work.

LAURA re-enters.)

LAURA

I sent her back upstairs. But I'm just afraid she'll come down again --

DERRICK

Then we've gotta block that staircase!

LAURA

How?

DERRICK

Let's put up the doggy gate -- the one from when Gilly was a puppy!

LAURA

She can easily climb over that!

DERRICK

Then I'll superglue some thumbtacks to the top of it!

LAURA

NO!

DERRICK

Why not?

LAURA

Because our daughter will impale herself!

DERRICK

Then I'll use pushpins! I'll use multi-colored pushpins! She can't fail to see them -- they'll warn her of danger!

LAURA

No, Derrick!

DERRICK

Okay, okay -- should we give her some whiskey?

LAURA

Why?

DERRICK

To knock her out! To make her go to sleep!

LAURA

How about we just chloroform her?

DERRICK

Don't be ridiculous!...We don't have any!
(slight pause)

Do we?

LAURA

No!

DERRICK

It's just a question!

LAURA

You would want to chloroform our daughter --

DERRICK

No! Absolutely not. I wouldn't want to --

LAURA

I'm going to report you to social services.

DERRICK

Well if --

LAURA
 (looking towards ceiling)
 SHHHH!

(Beat.)

DERRICK
 I don't hear anything --

LAURA
 I do. She's walking around again.

DERRICK
 What do you have? Bat sonar?

LAURA
 She's coming back down the stairs.

DERRICK
 (shouting)
 OH, NO! THERE'S A GHOST! THERE'S A TERRIFYING GHOST DOWN
 HERE! I'M SO SCARED! OF THE...HORRIBLE GHOST!

(Beat.)

LAURA
 What the hell was that?!?

DERRICK
 I'm scaring her away!

(LAURA shakes her head angrily and dashes out.

DERRICK hurries back to the large, oddly-shaped present and actually tries to wrap it this time. It's doesn't work at all. In the end, he just has a weird, misshapen lump that's not covered all the way around.

He stands back and looks at it. It's a really horrible job.

LAURA re-enters.)

LAURA
 She's hysterical now! She thinks the house is haunted!

DERRICK
 Good -- then she won't come back down!

LAURA

No -- not good! Not good! She was hiding in her closet, trembling and weeping! She was holding her baton to use as a weapon to fight off the ghost!

DERRICK

How do you fight off a ghost with a baton?

LAURA

What?

DERRICK

A metal baton isn't going to fight off a ghost! It'll go right through it!

LAURA

That's not the point! The point is -- when I opened the closet door, she clocked me in the shins with it! I can't get her out now! She says she wants her daddy! She's scared the ghost is eating you!

DERRICK

"Eating me"? How would a ghost eat me?

LAURA

I don't know, Derrick! She's a child! She has an active imagination!

DERRICK

I understand that -- I'm just a little taken aback that our daughter doesn't seem to understand the basic properties of a ghost --

LAURA

Who cares?!?

DERRICK

I'm just surprised! She's ostensibly a smart kid.

LAURA

Go upstairs and talk to her!

(DERRICK dashes out. LAURA walks over to the odd lump of wrapping paper that doesn't cover the present, totally baffled by it.

She rips the wrapping off the present and tries again, but is baffled herself as to how to do it.

She eventually just grabs a bow and plops it onto the present, sticking it in the "finished" pile.

DERRICK re-enters.)

LAURA

Is she okay?

DERRICK

Yeah, I told her we were playing a game called "scary ghost" and that seemed to...to calm her down...more or less...

LAURA

What does that mean?-- "More or less"?

DERRICK

Nothing --

LAURA

Did you tell her anything else?

DERRICK

Not really --

LAURA

"Not really"? What did you say?

DERRICK

I -- I told her there was no ghost downstairs.

LAURA

And?

(Slight pause.)

DERRICK

I told her that there was, however, a -- a monster...which is different from a ghost -- I told her the basic properties of a ghost, which I think she now grasps --

LAURA

Not the issue!

DERRICK

Okay! And I told her that this monster was just here for tonight, and that it would never come back again -- as long as she stayed in bed.

LAURA

And if she didn't?

(Slight pause.)

DERRICK
It...doesn't matter...

LAURA
And if she didn't?

DERRICK
Let's wrap up these presents...

LAURA
DERRICK!

(Slight pause.)

DERRICK
I said...that the monster...would eat her...and us...and also
Gilly....and all...all her friends at school...

(Beat. LAURA slowly claps.)

DERRICK
I feel like that clapping is sarcastic in nature.

(LAURA stops.)

LAURA
You figured that out?

DERRICK
That also seems sarcastic.

LAURA
She's going to have nightmares for months!

DERRICK
In the morning I'll tell her I was just kidding! Or that she
just dreamed it all and never happened. I'll deny everything.
I think years from now, she'll look back on it and laugh.

LAURA
I think that last parental transgression ensures that "Father
Of The Year" is out.

DERRICK
Well, the year's almost over, anyway. I'll start fresh in
January.

LAURA
Why the hell would you tell her that --

DERRICK

Because I didn't want her to find out, okay? Because she's young and innocent and believes in things like Santa and ghosts and monsters and magic and I want to keep it that way for as long as we can! I don't want her coming down and discovering otherwise. I don't want her to change and to stop believing in that stuff -- and...and I can tell it's all about to change with her, okay? I mean maybe not now, but soon -- sooner than I want, anyway...And...if I can do something to prevent that...

(Slight pause.)

LAURA

I hear what you're saying. But she's going to find out sometime.

DERRICK

Well, it doesn't have to be tonight!

LAURA

We can't scare her into not growing up. I think that's bad parenting.

(Beat.)

DERRICK

So what do we do? If we hear footsteps again?

LAURA

Maybe we just let whatever happens...happen...

(Beat.)

DERRICK

Really?

LAURA

I think so.

(Beat. Pause. DERRICK nods to himself. They go back to wrapping presents. DERRICK suddenly stops, looking towards the ceiling.)

DERRICK

Do you hear something?

LAURA

No...

(Slight pause.)

Good. DERRICK

(LAURA and DERRICK go back to wrapping presents.)

Good.... DERRICK
(under his breath)

(As they keep wrapping, the LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE TO BLACK.)

THE END