

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, CHRISTMAS BERNII

WRITTEN BY DARREN BREALEY

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY, CHRISTMAS BERNIE

Bernadette was born on December 25th and this year is celebrating her 13th birthday. Like each and every year she suffers the injustice of celebrating her birthday on Christmas day at the family Christmas gathering. Tradition has moulded her dreary celebration into cutting of the cake on the patio and then delving into the Christmas celebrations with her extended family; Aunts, Uncles and cousins. At today's party her mother has asked her to collect her Aunt and Uncle from inside the house to cut the cake on the patio. Bernadette learns too much about her impotent, over-achieving Uncle and overbearing, champagne intolerant Aunt. For Bernadette, this year seems to show a little promise of some enjoyment.

<i>Bernadette</i>	<i>13 Year Old Girl</i>
<i>Chris</i>	<i>Uncle to Bernadette</i>
<i>Janice</i>	<i>Aunty to Bernadette</i>

Chris lays the final decoration on a symmetrically decorated Christmas tree. He measures the decorations to ensure they are aligned. The lights on the tree are blinding. He sits down to a fresh block of family sized chocolate, ready to complete his chore of breaking up the block into individual pieces. He checks the chore of decorating the Christmas tree off his list. Next to him is a champagne flute and an opened bottle of champagne.

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CHRIS stands at the Christmas tree with a measuring tape and his final piece of decoration. He ensures each decoration is sitting symmetrically. He measures distances between decorations and lights. He places the final decoration on the tree and stands back to look the tree over.

CHRIS: Perfect. It looks great.

Chris pulls a note pad and pencil out of his pocket.

CHRIS: Another chore finished off. Chocolate. Right. God I love Christmas family gatherings. Fiona loves them too, but she's not here. No. No. No. I got to remember, that's not my fault. She made the decision. And as your therapist said, Chris, you can't change the choices others make. Once they've made up their mind, that's their responsibility. Just remember that. It's up to them. Damned Honeymoon.

He ticks the chore off his note pad and returns it and the pencil to his pocket. He sits down to the family chocolate block, unwraps it and commences to break it up, careful to make each piece equal. BERNADETTE enters, carrying a magnifying glass and a hand full of dead bugs. She is unnoticed by Chris and hides in a dark corner. Chris talks to the chocolate.

CHRIS: I don't understand why you can't love me anymore. I'm not impossible to live with. I may like things a certain way, but I'm not impossible. Look at this Christmas tree. Now there's a tree you'd be proud of. I massage your toes with my nose after we make magical love. That's what you like. I give you what you want. What's the matter with you, woman? The problem must be with you. I'm a caring husband. Any reasonable woman would want me.

BERNADETTE: Uncle Chris, how is Aunty Fiona? I notice she isn't here. Everyone gives me a Birthday and Christmas kiss.

CHRIS: She asked me to pass it on to you.

CHRIS approaches Bernadette to kiss her. BERNADETTE backs deeper into her corner.

BERNADETTE: Is she not well Uncle Chris? Is she sick?

CHRIS: She couldn't make it.

BERNADETTE: Why not?

CHRIS: She's...

BERNADETTE: It's true what I heard mother telling Grandma Dot. It's true, isn't it? After spending two weeks on your six-week island paradise honeymoon she sent you home with your bags packed and she stayed. What you do, bore her to death?

CHRIS: We're getting a bloody divorce. OK. Are you happy now? She wants a divorce because I don't make her happy. I don't know why. I do everything she asks me to. I do it perfectly, otherwise I get, 'Chris, this isn't how it's supposed to be'. 'What are you doing with the lid off the bin, why isn't it on'. 'So much for lasting the distance'. 'Is that it?' She wants out and all I can do is try my best. I've tried my best. What more can she ask of me, huh? I've done my best to be the best husband a man can be and it's still not good enough.

BERNADETTE: Nothing lasts forever, Uncle Chris. It's doomed from the beginning. You all will be dead one day. It's destined to end, eventually.

CHRIS: Come on – turn them on.

BERNADETTE: You love tradition, don't you. Same crap every year.

Bernadette turns on the Christmas tree lights. They both shield their eyes from the glaring light.

CHRIS: She says I'm not the man she thought she married. Told me I was a different person when we were engaged. I've changed. How different could I be?

JANICE enters holding an empty champagne flute.

JANICE: There you are.

CHRIS: Hello, Janice.

JANICE: Oh, my eyes.

CHRIS: You don't like the Christmas tree?

JANICE: They'll be able to see that from the International Space Station. We'll have the aliens landing.

CHRIS: They're symmetrically aligned and blink in equal parts, like in...

JANICE: ...A dreadful cacophony. Cynthia is setting up Bernii's birthday cake and wants everyone outside.

CHRIS: I've gotta break up the chocolate for the children. Good project management.

JANICE: Are you measuring the pieces, as well?

CHRIS: Equal share...

JANICE: It's just chocolate.

CHRIS: Tell that to a ten year old.

JANICE: You take everything so seriously.

CHRIS: I don't want to disappoint anyone.

Bernadette plays with the Christmas tree lights. The lights go out. There is a complete momentary BLACK OUT. The domestic lights resume, except for the Christmas tree lights.

BERNADETTE: Life is full of disappointments, Uncle Chris. It's about time the ten year olds of this world learnt this lesson.

CHRIS: The lights. Bernadette.

JANICE: C'mon, I'm not going out there without you; Cynthia will not be happy. And we can't upset Cynthia.

Janice picks up an opened bottle of champagne.

JANICE: Don't mind if I do.

CHRIS: They took me forever to get right.

JANICE: What a fabulously wonderful drink. Thank God for those French monks. It's a shame I can't have too much of this wonderful aperitif; makes me gassy.

CHRIS: After your last champagne binge, you said some things...

JANICE: I do know my limits, Chris.

CHRIS: You don't want to upset Cynthia.

BERNADETTE: Nobody wants to upset mother.

Janice gives Chris a stare then drinks her champagne quickly.

JANICE: It will make this more bearable.

CHRIS: So much pressure. I just want to finish the chocolate.

BERNADETTE: Look what I've been doing Aunty Janice.

JANICE: What delightful game have you been playing, Bernii?

BERNADETTE: I call it, a ray of sunshine.

Bernadette holds out her hand filled with the dead bugs.

JANICE: What are they?

BERNADETTE: Fried bugs.

Janice jumps back.

JANICE: Oh, that's dreadful. It was *that* holiday at Mornington that scared this child, Chris. She saw Grandfather Trevor in the all-together and she's never been quite the same.

BERNADETTE: Not much to look forward to, Uncle Chris.

Janice finishes off her glass of champagne and pours herself another glass.

JANICE: Oh, Bernadette.

Janice takes a swig at the champagne bottle.

CHRIS: You happy to be celebrating another birthday with your aunts, uncles and cousins? I loved having my family around me for my Birthday.

JANCIE: You enjoying yourself Bernii?

BERNADETTE: No.

CHRIS: Maybe you'll start enjoying yourself once we've had cake. Happy Birthday, Christmas Bernii.

JANICE: Yes, Happy Birthday, Christmas Bernii.

BERNADETTE: My name is Bernadette. It's not Bernii. It's *Bern-a-dette*. I'm not a Bernii, a Bunny or a Bern. I may look like a boy to you, act like a boy, but I am thirteen year old girl with her life ahead of her. Not like you two, who will die long before I even get to your age. Old. Decrepit. Wrinkled.

Janice reels back in horror.

JANICE: I am not wrinkled.

CHRIS: Bernadette.

JANICE: Saint Bernadette Salubrious, more like it. The visionary and messenger of the death knoll. Does Cynthia still take you to church?

BERNADETTE: No.

JANICE: I thought not.

BERNADETTE: Aunty Janice, would you like another glass of champagne? I'm sure you would like another glass of champagne. It is my Birthday and it's Christmas day after all and why shouldn't you have another glass of champagne.

JANICE: I think I've had my limit young lady. You know what happens if I drink too much.

BERNADETTE: Mother tells me to be a good hostess. I should encourage you to have another glass. Go on, you're amongst family.

BERNADETTE hands Janice the bottle of champagne. She tops up her glass.

***** Truncated *****

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