

A Good Heart

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A Short Play

by

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*Lights up. It's nighttime inside a house, with barely a light on, maybe just a fake window candle or two. This is the type of house to have those types of lights. It's also the type of house to be barely maintained. Piles of trash are strewn about with the occasional dirty plate on the floor. There's a table in the middle, however, that seems cleaner in comparison. This is clearly not a clean house, but it is certainly one that is currently being lived in. A man in a ski mask walks in. His name is LEWIS. Everything about him screams "I am definitely here to ransack this place" from his attire to movement. He clumsily moves through the trash though. Thievery is definitely not his normal job. He examines the room.*

LEWIS

This is gross.

*He examines a dirty plate.*

Really gross.

*He tosses the plate carelessly, and picks up an open bag of chips off of the floor. He looks at it, reaches into the bag, and pulls out a handful of chips, looking at them like they're prized artifacts. Then eats them.*

And a bit stale.

*He drops the bag of chips and examines the room around him once more.*

Probably should have picked a better house to hit, but hey, here we are, so I might as well make the most of it.

*He begins to root through one of the trash piles. While he does so, an elderly figure enters, wearing a bathrobe and pajamas, and turns a light on. This is MARTHA.*

MARTHA

Hello?

*Lewis's hands rocket up.*

LEWIS

Oh God don't shoot.

If you have a gun, that is. If you have a gun, please don't kill me.

If you don't have a gun, still don't kill me.

...Can I turn around?

MARTHA

If you want to.

*Lewis does so.*

LEWIS

...Hi.

MARTHA

Hello.

LEWIS

Listen, I know what this looks like, and I'm really sorry, so if you could-

MARTHA

Where have you been?

LEWIS

I'm sorry?

MARTHA

Why are you sneaking out again so late? You know how much I hate that.

LEWIS

Is there something wrong? If, uh, if there's something wrong, I can just leave and-

MARTHA

No, no, no young man. You are not going anywhere. You are staying right here at home where you belong. It is far too late for you to be out, Harold.

LEWIS

...Harold? I'm sorry, you must be mistaken. My name's Lewis.

MARTHA

You must be joking again. Are you stopping in for a cup of tea, Harold?

LEWIS

I thought you just told me to go to bed?

MARTHA

Why? It's not your bedtime. Now sit down.

*Beat. Lewis is stunned. Martha repeats forcefully.*

I said sit down!

*Lewis quickly does so.*

What kind of tea do you care for?

LEWIS

*Starts to just go with it*  
...What did you have in mind?

MARTHA

I have your favorite. Constant Comment.

LEWIS

Then that, I guess.

MARTHA

Of course. Let me go put the kettle on.

*Martha leaves from whence she came. Lewis slowly stands up, making sure Martha is out of earshot, and attempts to creep towards the door out, until...*

MARTHA

YOU JUST GOT HERE, DON'T THINK YOU CAN WEASEL OUT AGAIN!

*Lewis freezes.*

And take that mask off! You look like you're going to rob someone!

*Lewis does so, and sits back down, defeatedly. Martha comes back into the room.*

It's good of you to visit your mother sometimes.

LEWIS

Yeah.

MARTHA

Come and stop by to talk, even at this hour.

LEWIS

Yeah.

MARTHA

It's been a long time since you've visited.

LEWIS

Uh-huh.

MARTHA

A *long* time.

LEWIS

Yeah it is.

MARTHA

It's been *years!*

LEWIS

Wonder why.

MARTHA

I'm sure you must have been travelling so much. But it's nice to just have you home, even for a little bit!

*She gives Lewis a tight hug. Lewis is definitely not into it. His attempts to talk are constricted by Martha.*

LEWIS

It certainly... feels that way.

MARTHA

It's just been so... lonely here.

LEWIS

Is that right?

MARTHA

Terribly!

LEWIS

I'm... sorry about that?

MARTHA

Don't be sorry! What matters is that you're here now! I hope you've been successful in... what was it that you were doing?

LEWIS

...Business endeavors?

MARTHA

Business endeavors! Oh, how nice. I wasn't sure how you'd fare, and I certainly wasn't sure about it when you left-

LEWIS

Uh-huh-

MARTHA

And took the car-

LEWIS

Uh-huh-

MARTHA

And my savings-

LEWIS

What?-

MARTHA

And pawned my jewelry-

LEWIS

Hold on now-

MARTHA

And stopped paying my heating bills,  
but seeing you home means that you must  
have had some degree of success, right?

LEWIS

*Is absolutely flummoxed.*

Um. Uh. Suuure. Have you been, uh,  
holding up okay, Mom?

MARTHA

Just fine! Just fine. I don't have the  
energy to clean up like I used to, but  
I'm holding together.

LEWIS

That's great.

MARTHA

If I were to die now, I'd be the best-  
looking corpse in the graveyard!

LEWIS

That's, that's wonderful, Mom.

*The sound of a tea kettle is  
heard.*

MARTHA

Oh! There's the tea. I'll be right back!

*Martha goes off. Lewis looks around at the mess of a room he's in, looks at the door he could exit from for a moment. He stands, and starts straightening the room up, clearing the trash on the floor into bags and stacking the dirty dishes on the table. Martha comes back in with two steaming mugs of tea.*

MARTHA

Oh, you didn't have to do that.

LEWIS

I, um. I thought you could have used the help.

MARTHA

*Genuinely touched.*

Well, aren't you just the sweetest!

*She kisses him on the cheek. It isn't a small peck. It's a moment where all the kind of gushy, mushy motherly love built up over several years is used up with the most drawn out "mwah" she can muster. Lewis is appropriately disgusted, doing a horrible job of hiding it.*

LEWIS

Are you home alone? Is uh... "Dad" here?

MARTHA

Is he?

LEWIS

I'm asking you.

MARTHA

Oh!

He's upstairs. He's planning your graduation party, remember?

LEWIS

Is he?

MARTHA

Why wouldn't he be? We've got so much to be proud of you for!

LEWIS

I think I should be going.

MARTHA

You haven't been here that long. Please, I never get to see you anymore.

LEWIS

...For real this time. Is "Dad" here?

MARTHA

...Oh, no, he isn't. He died a long time ago. Remember?

...of course not. I'm sorry. My mistake.

LEWIS

...Where have I been again? Where did I go?

MARTHA

You went off to college! And then you moved away! I missed you when you were gone. I missed having you around. Your children are only children for such a short time.

LEWIS

I'm sure.

MARTHA

So. What's going on? Is anything happening?

LEWIS

No. Not much.

MARTHA

Now don't try and hide it from me. I know when something's wrong. I can always tell.

LEWIS

No, there really isn't.

MARTHA

You don't have to lie. I'm here to listen. Just say whatever's on your mind.

LEWIS

Are you sure?

MARTHA

I won't judge. Promise.

LEWIS

*Actually serious.*

I... I don't know what I'm doing with my life. I used to work as an investor, but then my partner made some bad calls, accounts were overdrawn, and we went under. Then I tried looking for another job, and my interviews went nowhere. One guy actually told me, "Sorry, we don't accept failures". He actually said that to my face! Can you believe it?! And then when things got really bad, I just, I just didn't make any smart decisions. I thought I was too good to be a burger flipper, too proud to work a cash register. And then I... I did some things. Not great things. And I don't know what I'm doing anymore, or know where my life is going. The places that I do see it going just... scare me. I'm trash. I'm a garbage human being. That's what my life is. My life... I don't think it has any value anymore.

...Does it?

MARTHA

...It always does to me, honey. You may not realize it, but you're worth more than anything I could have asked for. Just keep going with your life, and never be afraid to look around you, and to look inside the people you meet, and eventually, you'll find it.

LEWIS

What?

MARTHA

A good heart. Doesn't matter if you look in the highest of highs or the lowest of lows. Not all hearts are good, but a good heart can come from anywhere. All it takes is a bit of searching. They're the ones that make living worth it. Whether you want to help them, or they want to help you... They're what we keep on living for. To just meet them for even a passing moment is worthwhile, and even if we don't fully remember them, we still feel it. They clean up our souls, make them a bit more inhabitable. There's a lot more to see out there. You just need to keep looking.

Does that answer your question?

LEWIS

...Yeah. Yeah it does.

MARTHA

I'm so happy to hear that.

LEWIS

...Thanks...

*Beat.*

...Mom.

MARTHA

You're welcome sweetheart.

*Lewis stands up to leave.*

Are you headed home?

LEWIS

Yeah. I need to get some sleep.

MARTHA

Oh, I suppose I should too.

LEWIS

Oh, lemme take the trash out for you.

*He picks up the trash bags.*

There's uh, there's nothing valuable in here, is there?

MARTHA

No. Why?

LEWIS

Oh, I just wanted to make sure nothing got thrown out.

MARTHA

Thank you, sweetheart. Well, you have a good night, Harold. Get home safely!

*Martha goes to leave.*

LEWIS

Mom?

MARTHA

Yes honey?

LEWIS

...Do I have a good heart?

MARTHA

...Of course, you do.

*Martha goes to leave again.*

LEWIS

Oh, and Mom?

MARTHA

What's that?

LEWIS

..Do you think I could come back for tea  
sometime?

MARTHA

Of course, you can. Anytime. You're always  
welcome here!

LEWIS

..Thanks. Goodnight.

*Lewis leaves. Martha looks around  
at her house, a bit cleaner, and a  
bit brighter than before. She  
picks up Lewis's ski mask, smiles,  
and folds it gingerly before  
looking in the direction he left  
from.*

MARTHA

A good heart can come from anywhere.

*END OF PLAY.*