

FRUITCAKE

Written by

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Very faint SLEIGH BELLS, which quickly concede to a HOWLING WIND and a FACTORY WHISTLE, immediately followed by depressing, deafening MACHINERY.

FADE IN:

EXT. WINTER SKY - DREARY DAY

Duller than gray. Maybe this is night... there's no sun to be found.

Several tall smokestacks push up from the bottom of the screen. Suddenly they belch dark, ugly smoke.

Atop adjacent buildings, giant digital signs blink through the darkness and smoke:

One counts down 6:23:59:47, WORK, 6:23:59:45, WORK, 6:23:59:43, WORK, etc.

The other blinks December 17, -18 F, -27 C.

OVERLAP SFX: HUNDREDS OF RELUCTANT, MUFFLED FOOTFALLS

INT. NARROW CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

A long line of the tops of bowed, wizened heads, covered in battered, ill-fitting hard hats pass beneath a series of signs:

20 HOUR WORKDAYS TFN

ALL SICK DAYS CANCELLED

UNIONS LIE

NO HUMMING, NO WHISTLING, NO SINGING

0 DAYS WITHOUT A WORK ACCIDENT

EXT. OPPRESSIVE INDUSTRIAL SKYLINE - DREARY DAY

A drab multi-story building snuggled in deep snow. The scene, the whole piece in fact, may be in black and white: it's hard to tell.

Snow begins to fall... Just a few flakes at first and then harder and harder until the only things we can make out are the blinking digital signs. Finally, the screen becomes a white field...

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Face red from the cold, DOCTOR FROST, (55), aristocratic-bundled in scarf, hat, gloves, overcoat-brushes snow from his coat.

He towers over TINY, (40s) a small, hard woman sans gloves, coat, hat or expression. Tiny wears a black, floor-length robe.

They make their way along an airless, narrow concrete block wall with peeling paint.

TINY
I need one good day.

DOCTOR
(shaking head)
More bad days than good. Never a totally good day.

TINY
Twenty-four hours. I'm not asking much.

DOCTOR
Yes. You are.

Tiny dismisses the Doctor's concern, changes subject.

TINY
Has he lost more weight?

An OLD MAN, about Tiny's size, with a miner's face, hunched back, and sooted clothes hobbles toward them.

Tiny motions for the Doctor to be quiet until the Old Man Passes.

TINY (CONT'D)
Whistle was twenty minutes ago.

MINER
Overslept, ma'am.

Miner squints at Doctor, not recognizing him.

TINY
Sleep in January!

Doctor waits for Miner to move out of earshot before continuing.

DOCTOR
Down fifteen pounds since October.

TINY
He could eat a whole turkey in one sitting and top it off with a dozen chocolate chip cookies.

DOCTOR
Peppermint sticks. About the only thing we can get him to eat.

TINY
Will he know me?

DOCTOR
At first he asked for you...

TINY
(defensively)
No time for sick visits. Someone has to run the operation.

DOCTOR
Now he doesn't know anyone consistently.

TINY
Get me through this week, that's all I ask.

DOCTOR
The old Kris is gone.

Tiny hesitates, then regains her footing.

TINY
Get him back!

Tiny walks away. The doctor watches, shrugs helplessly.

INT. AIRY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Chairs and lounges are spaced throughout the room, like a visiting area in a hospital. Muted light streams through a row of windows at the back.

Maybe this is a sanitarium, but then we notice...

A festive holiday backdrop and a braided fancy rope that leads to the throne-like chair, which sits atop a foot-high platform: the setup you've seen at every mall in the country each December.

KRIS (60s or older), a thin, wide-eyed man in pajamas and boots, sits on the overstuffed chair. He has long, unkempt silver hair and needs a shave.

From across the room, Tiny and the Doctor study Kris, who seems oblivious. A peppermint candy cane protrudes from his mouth, cigarette-style.

Tiny can't hide her shock at Kris' appearance.

Tiny surveys the area: lots of empty couches, chairs.

TINY

Where are the caretakers?

Doctor points to a camera in corner of ceiling.

DOCTOR

Twenty-four seven surveillance.

SURVEILLANCE CAMERA POV

Tiny looks into camera, then she and the Doctor approach Kris' huge chair.

Doctor and Tiny arrive before Kris' platform.

BACK TO SCENE

Kris considers them.

KRIS

(slow, deep voice)

Don't be shy. Who'll go first?

You, little girl?

TINY

Captain?

KRIS

Tell me what you want. A Donny Osmond record?

TINY

I want.. *need* you to command the ship. We have less than a week.

Confused, Kris rises, walks off platform.

KRIS

(regular voice)

My lap is sore.

DOCTOR
Your lap?

KRIS
(rubbing legs)
They tell me it's an occupational
hazard. Do I play the spoons?

Kris frowns, turns, twitches his fingers impatiently.

KRIS (CONT'D)
Where is my list?

DOCTOR
What's on your list?

KRIS
(struggling)
Names?

TINY
That's right!

Doctor shoots Tiny a quieting look.

KRIS
(to Doctor)
Who are you?

DOCTOR
Dr. Frost. We've met...

KRIS
(to Tiny)
Who are you again?

TINY
Tiny. First Mate.

KRIS
You're too little to work for me.

DOCTOR
What do you do, Kris?

KRIS
I... fly. I feed.. horses.
(suddenly confident)
I breed miniature horses. Where's
my wife?

Tiny and Doctor exchange a meaningful glance.

DOCTOR
Do you have a wife?

KRIS
Of course I have a wife.
Chocolate..... Cookies. Where is
she?

DOCTOR
Your wife died, Kris.

Kris takes it in, tears up, nods pitifully, walks toward
window.

KRIS
I train horses. I got that much
right.

Kris snaps an imaginary whip.

KRIS (CONT'D)
Giddy up!

Doctor and Tiny watch Kris as he trots in a wide circle.

TINY
What's wrong with him?

DOCTOR
If he were human, I'd say dementia,
Alzheimer's.

TINY
Last year the good woke up to
switches. The bad, double gifted.
Imagine what's going to happen next
week.

DOCTOR
How did he react to losing...
(checking his notes)
Jessica?

TINY
(correcting)
"The Missus."

DOCTOR
The Missus then.

TINY
Never the same. We came back into
port and his beard was ice from the
tears.

Kris suddenly appears behind them.

KRIS

I remember children. Lots of children.

DOCTOR

I could do more tests, but the results may be meaningless.

TINY

Less than a week out, we need a miracle.

DOCTOR

Fresh out. Can you run the operation without him?

TINY

(insulted)

I've *been* running the operation without him... Only a handful of us know how bad...

Confused, Kris listens intently.

DOCTOR

Is there a backup... a substitute?

TINY

We're not delivering the mail here.

DOCTOR

You can transfer him. Mayo? John Hopkins? Vanderbilt?

Tiny studies Kris, who beats on the window.

KRIS

(screaming)

And to all a good night!

TINY

No use.

DOCTOR

Then I offer no further benefit.

Doctor walks to Kris.

Tiny studies Kris, mumbles to herself:

TINY

They say no man is indispensable.

DOCTOR

When I was eight, you brought me a chemistry set.

KRIS

A vintage Gilbert set with the acids and the microscope.

DOCTOR

(amazed)

It was a Gilbert!

KRIS

Your mother wanted you to have Lincoln Logs.

Kris winks at Doctor, hands him a piece of candy from somewhere.

Astonished, Doctor heads toward door.

He turns back, notices Tiny's SHOE protruding from under her robe: curled toe. They are bright red and green striped (and we thought this story was black and white).

She notices his stare, quickly hides her foot under the robe.

Tiny shoots Doctor a cold, challenging stare, returning us to black and white. He exits.

Tiny goes to Kris, who has returned to his chair.

Tiny looks after the doctor, then checks the surveillance camera.

SURVEILLANCE CAMERA POV

Tiny bends to Kris, smiling, patting his head lovingly.

TINY

Actually, you're just a crazy old man with brain cancer. How magical is that?

KRIS

Children!

TINY

We hate children.

KRIS

No!

(as the traditional Ho, Ho,
Ho, involuntarily)

No-No-No!

TINY

One day a year you love children—as
they're nestled in beds with sugar
plums dancing in their heads. The
rest of the time you're up here
with three thousand miles of ice
between you and the nearest child.
No wonder parents want to be you!

JIFFY, (50s) older and even smaller than Tiny, also in a
long, black robe, appears. He holds a cup of hot chocolate.

JIFFY

That's enough!

BACK TO SCENE

Startled, Tiny moves away from Kris.

Jiffy moves to Kris and hands him the hot chocolate. He
scoffs it down.

JIFFY (CONT'D)

Careful. It's hot.

Kris smacks his lips with the last sip of the chocolate.

KRIS

Peppermint!

TINY

How can he remember peppermint and
not one of us?

JIFFY

(pointedly)

Maybe we remember what gave us
pleasure and forget what didn't. A
peculiar defense of the brain.

TINY

We do all the work and he gets all
the credit. And look at him.

Kris tries to lick more chocolate from the bottom of the
empty cup.

TINY (CONT'D)

The most popular man in the world
is a fruit cake.

JIFFY

You are what you eat.

Tiny and Jiffy laugh, just a little at first but then full
and deep. Dumbfounded, Kris stares at the pair.

KRIS

No toys this year?

Suddenly Tiny and Jiffy stop laughing, look at each other and
go to Kris.

TINY

What about toys?

JIFFY

The workshop?

KRIS

Tiny, shouldn't you be at the
workshop? Where's the morning
report?

JIFFY

Seven days 'til we set sail, Sir.

KRIS

It's always down to the deadline.
Tell the Missus to bake an extra
batch of cookies.

Tiny signals Jiffy to play along.

JIFFY

I'll tell her, Captain.

KRIS

Do you have my list?

JIFFY

Aye, Captain. The boys and girls
have been extra good this year.

KRIS

How many children do I have?

Jiffy and Tiny look at each other before Tiny answers.

TINY

Two sons in Norway.

JIFFY
No one can know that!

KRIS
The Missus, she doesn't know?

JIFFY
No, Captain. She never knew.

KRIS
Let's not tell her then. Wouldn't
want those cookies to stop, now
would we?
(sniffing)
She must have a batch in the oven.

TINY
Could one of the sons take his
place?

JIFFY
Of course not.

TINY
We run the workshop. The first mate
navigates and the crew distributes.

JIFFY
You're leaving the part out about
him being magic!

TINY
Magic won't save the operation.

JIFFY
Even if the sons are magical, even
if one is willing, what do we do
with him?

Jiffy and Tiny look at Kris, who stares back defiantly.

KRIS
You two are naughty! And small.

TINY
Stick him in a nursing home. That's
how they discard people in America.

KRIS
Fun memories in Norway.

JIFFY
What about this year?

TINY
For one year, we fake it.

JIFFY
Will the team obey anyone but him?

Tiny ponders the question before answering.

TINY
Stuff two of us in a red suit,
they'll never be the wiser.

Jiffy begins to buy into the plan.

JIFFY
O'Clary has a way with the team.

KRIS
On Dancer! On Prancer! On...
Blutto. And Popeye!

TINY
(nodding)
Get O'Clary in the stables ASAP.

JIFFY
That's a lot of trouble for the
incorrigible ingrates. They've
been terrible this year, if you
want the truth.

TINY
Truth, Jiffy? It's never been about
the kids.

JIFFY
Even you know that, right Kris?

KRIS
Can't stand them. Never have. How
many kids do I have again?

TINY
Millions and millions. The world
over.

KRIS
Millions? And they're counting on
me.

JIFFY
They're counting on you.

KRIS
For what... exactly?

JIFFY
One morning of magic.

KRIS
Magic.
(sadly)
I'd forgotten all about that.

TINY
The operation is ours, Jiffy.
Maybe in a few years we phase him
out altogether.

JIFFY
Happy Holidays, Tiny!

Jiffy and Tiny hug, look at Kris for a beat before exiting.

KRIS
Merry Christmas...

Kris sits in his chair.

Doctor enters from a door near the surveillance camera, sits
on edge of the platform.

KRIS (CONT'D)
Stay here a hundred years, you'll
never get used to the cold, Doc.

Doctor nods. They sit quietly for a beat.

Kris realizes he sits on something. He picks up a small
sleigh bell and gives it a shake.

He holds it to his ear and shakes it again. A sad smile.

INT. STABLES - AFTERNOON

Stalls line the left and right of the screen. Bales of hay
are strewn along the edge of the aisle that runs through the
center. Large bridles and horseshoes line the walls.

Several piles of crap, some fresh and steaming, litter the
floor.

At the far end, the door rocks back and forth in the biting
wind.

Through that far door, we hear a WHIP SNAPPING.

O'CLARY (O.S.)
(Irish brogue)
Aft! Aft! That's Port!

A loud snort, frosty breath rising from one of the stalls.

Antlers protrude from another of the stalls.

O'CLARY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Daft brute. Aft! Damn yer!

SLOW FADEOUT