See Jane Crack

by Julie Howe

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### EXT. A SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Cookie-cutter, ranch house lawns are adored with holiday decor. A relentless breeze sways the tall palms and knocks over a few of Santa's little helpers. Southern California just doesn't conjure the Christmas spirit of, say, Wisconsin or Nebraska.

We pass a frustrated man on a ladder who wrestles with an unruly tangle of lights, his staple gun hangs from his worn leather tool belt.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The personification of the middle-class American family: Oak cabinets, ceramic tile, folk art tchotchkes. A flannel-clad JANE BELOFSKY, 40, sips her coffee and half-listens to the mindless banter of the morning newscasters.

FEMALE NEWSCASTER (O.S.) Well folks, it's black Friday and that means the holiday shopping season is officially underway. For those brave souls out there willing to battle the crowds we say good luck and don't forget your steel-toed boots.

MALE NEWSCASTER (O.S.) Good advice, Heather. How about that riot over at Nick's discount toys...

The newscasters unnaturally cheery voices fade into the background as Jane's son, DEREK, 15, stalks into the room. The typical surly, awkward teen; backward baseball cap, slumped shoulders and headphones. He tosses a single sheet of paper in front of Jane and heads for the door.

Jane takes the sheet and scans it.

**JANE** 

(calling to Derek)
What's an X-Factor Mega Station?

Derek doesn't bother to turn around.

DEREK

You can find it online. And don't forget the game.

The door slams behind him.

Into the kitchen and in a hurry comes Jane's husband TOM, 40s. He pecks Jane on the cheek while he ties his tie and rushes toward the door.

JANE

Want some coffee?

ТОМ

Can't. I'm already late. Listen, babe, don't forget to pick up a little Christmas gift for Ruthie. Every year she gets me a hideous tie so I'm obligated to get her something. It's not like I don't pay her enough, for Christ's sake. Hey, how about one of those Chia thing?

**JANE** 

You mean a Chia pet?

TOM

Yeah, that.

**JANE** 

Don't you think that's a little... cheap?

MOT

She loves plants. Trust me.

Another peck and he's out the door.

#### INT. JANE'S GARAGE

Jane stares up at a daunting mountain of boxes marked X-MAS. Next to her is a tall step ladder. She steps up slowly toward the upper boxes. One false move could mean a tsunami of holiday cheer and she takes no chances.

# INT. JANE'S LIVING ROOM

Janes arms are piled so high with boxes we can only see her bottom half. Her feet feel their way into the room. With every step the top boxes threaten to abandon ship.

#### INT. JANE'S GARAGE

And now comes the tree. We see only the tail end of an enormous oblong box being manhandled through the narrow door into the house. Marked on the end is "Made in China." Jane's heavy breathing and the slow scrape of tortured cardboard are the only sounds we hear.

### INT. JANE'S LIVING ROOM

We see Jane's blue-jeaned ass as she enters the room backward pulling the giant tree box. One last tug and she's reached her corner destination. Mission accomplished as she takes a deep breath and loosens the meticulously tied rope that holds the box closed. Twelve months of being trussed in cheap Chinese cardboard is enough to piss off even the inanimate. With one tug of the string, the tree pops out the sides of the box. Jane watches as the spewing monster settles itself on the living room floor with one final HISS.

**JANE** 

(to herself)

Hmmm. That's more branches than I remember.

She fishes around in the plastic sprawl for the instruction manual, pulls is free, skims over it then tosses it aside.

DISSOLVE TO:

# INT. JANE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Something has clearly gone wrong. The bottom branches look shorter than the middle ones. Jane, a puzzled look on her face finds the discarded instructions and starts again.

DISSOLVE TO:

## INT. JANE'S LIVING ROOM

Jane stands back and admires her symmetrical handiwork as the phone rings. She navigates her way through the maze of boxes, tripping at the last moment as she lunges for the phone.

JANE (breathless) Hello?

We hear an AUTOMATED VOICE on the other end.

AUTOMATED VOICE

"We're calling about your current credit card account. There's no problem with your card but we have good news!"

Jane tries to interrupt.

JANE

I'm really not interested. Can you please---

The voice just keeps on going.

AUTOMATED VOICE

Your credit limit has been raised to \$35,000. And even better yet, the normal 25% interest rate will be waived for the first 6---

Jane sighs and hangs up the phone and returns to the task at hand. She digs into a large box, reaches in and tugs at an enormous, tightly wound ball of lights. She plug in the giant orb. Nothing. Not one twinkle.

**JANE** 

Damn these things.

EXT. FREEWAY EXIT RAMP - DAY

The line of cars is a mile long. Up ahead we see the sprawl of a shopping mall with more of the same as if every human in southern California with a car has shown up en masse.

INT. JANE'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Jane has made it into the parking lot. As she creeps long, a car gets ready to pull out of a spot. Jane is beside herself with joy. 'Tis the season, after all.

**JANE** 

YES.

She put on her turn signal, smiles and waves to the guy as he pulls out. Her happiness is short-lived as a tiny foreign car coming the other way whips into the space. A cocky teenager jumps from the car, smirks and trots toward the mall entrance. Mild manner, even-tempered Jane stares after the little asshole for a long moment.

She can't believe people can be so rude. She's snapped back to reality by the blare of the horn behind her. She waves to the impatient shopper in her rear-view mirror.

JANE (CONT'D) Okay, okay. Sorry.

EXT. MALL PARKING LOT - DAY

We see a sign that says More Parking with a large red arrow.

EXT. LARGE OPEN FIELD

Rent-a-cops with day-glo vests direct the stream of cars into neat, dusty rows. Shoppers trudge toward the awaiting shuttle busses.

INT. SHUTTLE BUS - DAY

Jane is sandwiched between an overweight man in a Santa hat and an OBNOXIOUS KID of about 14 who verbally beats her PLEADING MOTHER into submission.

OBNOXIOUS KID

You told me I could have whatever I wanted for Christmas if I made head cheerleader.

The poor woman looks around, embarrassed, and tries to get the spoiled brat to keep it down.

PLEADING MOTHER

But a plasma TV? It's too expensive, Tiffany. We just can't afford---

OBNOXIOUS KID

You said anything I wanted and this is what I want. Everybody I know has one in their room.

PLEADING MOTHER

(under her breath)

Can we talk about this later?

The brat crosses her arms over her chest in a huff.

OBNOXIOUS KID

You are, like, sooo lame.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

The place is a zoo. Jane maneuvers her big orange cart, filled with tree lights, into the electronics section. She pulls the crumpled paper from her purse and tries to get the attention of an ANGRY SALES GIRL with a pierced lip and spiked black hair.

**JANE** 

Excuse me.

The girl ignores her.

JANE (CONT'D)

Excuse me do you have....

Jane consults the paper one more time.

JANE (CONT'D)

The X-Factor Mega Station?

The girl points to a long line waiting at the counter.

ANGRY SALES GIRL

Just came in. First come, first served. You'll have to get in line like everybody else.

Jane takes her place at the end of the line just as a scuffle breaks out between two MEN we can't see at the front of the line.

MAN #1 (O.S.)

What do you think you're doin', asshole? I was here first.

MAN #2

Like hell you were. I been standin' here since 8.

MAN #1

Bullshit. This one's mine.

The line stays intact despite the obvious shoving match up ahead. The determined shoppers hold their ground. Jane looks over at the angry sales girl who smirks and barks into her walkie-talkie.

ANGRY SALES GIRL

Security in electronics. X-Factor brawl.

The angry girl walks away singing at the top of lungs.

ANGRY SALES GIRL (CONT'D) "Sing we joyous, all together. Fa la la la la, la la la la."

### INT. DEPARTMENT STORE CHECK-OUT

Jane waits patiently for her turn to fork over the plastic. The X-Factor Mega Station sits triumphantly in her cart along with Ruthie's gift: a Chia Pet in the shape of a porcupine. A fashion magazine headline catches Jane's eye: Holidays Driving You Insane? The latest in Anti-depressants.

### EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Jane emerges from her dark, mass-merchandise cavern into the bright sunshine of the outside world. We hear the tinkling of a Salvation Army bell-ringer. Jane rummages in her purse for a bill or two.

As she stuff the money into the red pot, the RINGER, a woman of about 50, looks up and offers Jane a genuine smile.

RINGER

How kind. Thank you.

Jane is almost taken aback by the ringers appreciation. She returns the smile, her faith in the inherent goodness of people restored for now.

### EXT. LARGE OPEN FIELD - DAY

Jane hauls her purchases off the shuttle bus and drags them to her car.

## EXT. JANE'S CAR - DAY

Jane arrives at her car spent and out of breath. In crude capital letters in the grit covering her back window, someone has written: FUCK. Jane calmly removes a tissue from her purse and erases the offending sentiment.

We rise high into the perfect blue Southern California sky, where it never snows, not even on Christmas and back down again on the familiar suburban street where Jane lives.

The toppled decorations from before have still not been righted.

SUPER: CHRISTMAS DAY

INT. JANE'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The tree is spectacular. Gold and silver balls shimmer against the glow of tiny white lights. On the coffee table are perfectly decorated gingerbread men sitting atop an etched glass place. Meticulously wrapped gifts in red and green foil spread from beneath Jane's masterpiece.

Tom pads in, bleary-eyed.

MOT

Coffee?

JANE

Fresh and hot. Where's Derek?

Tom shuffles off toward the kitchen.

MOT

Still asleep.

Tom returns with his cup and plops down on the sofa next to Jane.

JANE

What do you think?

TOM

About what?

**JANE** 

The tree, silly.

TOM

Oh. Nice, hon. Really nice.

JANE

Why don't you go wake Derek.

Tom groans.

JANE (CONT'D)

Come on, Tom. It's Christmas day. We won't have him around that much longer.

MOT

(sarcastic)

We don't have him around now.

JANE

He's a typical teenager. Now please wake him up.

Tom drags himself off the sofa and returns with a crabby Derek.

JANE (CONT'D)

Hi, honey. Merry Christmas.

DEREK

Hey.

Jane tries to rally the troops.

JANE

Okay, I'll play Santa. Everybody sit down.

Jane crawls under the tree and starts pulling out gifts.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - MORNING

RUTHIE, 30, Tom's assistant, and her boyfriend JEFF, 30, rummage under their own tree for presents. Jeff hands Ruthie a small square box, beautifully wrapped in red foil with an elaborate bow.

**JEFF** 

It's from your boss.

Ruthie takes it excitedly and tears into it. She stares at the porcupine.

RUTHIE

That cheap fuck. I get him a great tie and he gets me a planter that grows mold?

INT. JANE'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Jane stares blankly at the tall box in front of her. Emblazoned on the outside is: Treasure Finder Super-Scanner Metal Detector.

MOT

Isn't it great? You can find all kinds of stuff on the beach that people lose like jewelry and money. What do you think. Cool, huh?

Jane is speechless.

Tom pulls out a very loud tie from a long flat box:

TOM (CONT'D)

See. What did I tell you? It's the same every year.

He tosses it aside.

Jane takes her metal detector and sets it as far away from her as possible. She plasters on a smile and reaches for the final box and hands it to Derek.

**JANE** 

I hope it's right.

Derek rips open the paper and finds his X-Factor Mega Station. Ho hum. It's what he asked for.

JANE (CONT'D)

Well?

**DEREK** 

Yeah. This is the one. Thanks, mom.

MOT

Does if come with an NFL game?

DEREK

No.

MOT

Tiger Woods golf?

DEREK

No.

MOT

What the hell good is it?

Jane gives Derek the last package to open. He stares silently at the game inside. Jane's smile fades.

JANE

Is it the wrong one?

DEREK

Uh... I wanted Urban Assault.

JANE

Well, it said urban something.

DEREK

This one's Urban Sniper.

**JANE** 

Oh.

**DEREK** 

It's cool. This one's fine.

He gets up and kisses his mom on the cheek.

DEREK (CONT'D)

Thanks. I'm gonna go back and sleep for a while.

**JANE** 

What do you think of the tree?

DEREK

The what?

**JANE** 

The tree.

Derek turns around and looks as if he's just now seeing it.

DEREK

Oh, yeah. It's cool.

TOM

Hey, buddy. Maybe we'll go down to the beach later and try out your mom's new toy. How about it?

DEREK

Yeah, maybe.

Derek goes back to his room and Jane does her best to stay cheerful. Tom still hasn't opened his gift. She retrieves a small green package with a giant red bow from beneath the tree and hands it to Tom.

JANE

I hope you like it.

Tom opens it. Inside is a watch box.

MOT

Wow.

JANE

I noticed your old one was getting pretty scratched up.

TOM

It's great. I love it.

He reaches over and kisses Jane then looks at the watch. It sure does keep great time.

TOM (CONT'D)

Oh, man. The game is starting.

He spring from the couch leaving Jane stunned once again.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I've just got to watch this game. You understand, don't you, hon?

Jane always understands. It's what makes her Jane.

**JANE** 

Sure. I understand.

Tom talks as he sidesteps toward the den.

MOT

Great job on everything. Really. The tree looks... it looks amazing.

Jane sits alone on the couch. The twinkle of white lights reflect in her sad eyes. But her sadness is short lived as we see a diabolical smile tickle the corners of her mouth.

EXT. JANE'S PATIO - DAY

Through the open patio door, Jane drags the unyielding tree base first. Silver and gold balls crackle and break as the branches are forced through the small opening. All the lights are pulled off by the time she gets the tree to the center of the patio.

She looks down at the destroyed plastic, satisfied.

**JANE** 

Okay, then.

She disappears for a moment. All that's left is a pile of shattered colors and eerie silence. Until... a clear steam of liquid douses the mess. We see Jane, tongue out in concentration, soaking the pile with lighter fluid. She stops when the can is empty.

JANE (CONT'D)

That should do it.

She holds up a long fireplace lighter, the kind that looks like a giant match, and flips the switch.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JANE'S PATIO - EVENING

A smoldering pile of rubble is all that's left of the Belofsky Christmas tree. Jane sits calmly on a lawn chair and munches the head off a gingerbread man as the she watches the last few determined flames die out.

Tom appears by her side. He stares down at the pile.

MOT

I guess this is better than watching the poor thing die in the living room.

**JANE** 

It was artificial.

Tom takes a bite of his own gingerbread man.

MOT

You could have fooled me.

Derek shuffles out and joins them. He, too, is nonplussed by the charred remains of the tree.

DEREK

When's dinner?

**JANE** 

Seven.

TOM

What are we having?

**JANE** 

Lamb chops.

ТОМ

With mint jelly?

JANE

Uh-huh.

Tom reaches over and hugs Jane tight.

ТОМ

You're the best, hon.

Tom looks at his new watch.

TOM (CONT'D)

We've still got time to check out the Super Scanner. What do you say, guys?

Derek looks at Jane. Jane shrugs.

JANE

Sounds good.

Jane tosses the last of her gingerbread man onto the smoking heap.

And off they go, harmony restored. Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.

FADE TO BLACK.