

"Frankincense & Myrrh"

by
Chi Laughlin

Chi Laughlin
121 Fairhome Ave
Clyde, OH USA 43410
+1 (419) 603-6797
walkerright@hotmail.com
chilaughlin.com

TITLE CARD: *Frankincense & Myrrh*

Over black.

BETSY (V.O.)
Okay. You guys be good for your
dad. Behave.

TED/JERRY (V.O.)
Okay, mom.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

A vast distance separates two cars, parked and left running in an otherwise deserted parking lot. Both cars have their driver's side doors open. Just outside the one, a well-kept recent model sedan, is BETSY BEMIS (35); beside the other, a rusty, sputtering hatchback, stands ARCHIE BEMIS (35).

Two boys bundled up in winter clothes, TED (9) and JERRY (7), march like prisoners of war from Betsy's car to Archie's. Jerry carries a small dog, Mrs. Bojangles.

ARCHIE
Hey, look at these guys! Alright!

TED/JERRY
Hey, dad.

BETSY
Hey, Archie. Can I talk to you a
minute?

ARCHIE
Guys, get in the car.

The boys get into Archie's car. Archie crosses the lot to Betsy's car, while she opens the trunk and takes out two brown paper bags full of groceries.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Yeah. What's up?

BETSY
Mrs. Bojangles is housebroken, but
the boys have to take her outside.
They get lazy, so you're gonna have
to keep on 'em. Here.

She hands him the grocery bags.

BETSY (CONT'D)

There's some cereal, some dog food,
hamburger helper...

ARCHIE

I'm working now, Bets. I don't
need handouts.

BETSY

I know, and, listen, I felt kinda
weird about this, but there's some
presents in there for the boys.
It's a toy they want. Adam
Smasher.

ARCHIE

A toy.

BETSY

Tell 'em they're from Santa if you
want.

ARCHIE

From Santa. Right. Okay.

BETSY

Look, I know how you get when
things aren't perfect, and I don't
want my boys waking up on Christmas
morning without anything under the
tree...Jesus, tell me you have a
tree.

ARCHIE

Yeah, alright? Yes. I have a tree.
I've been a dad for awhile, okay?

Archie turns and walks to his car.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Have a nice vacation.

BETSY

Merry Christmas, Archie.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

ON TELEVISION

A commercial for the Adam Smasher action figure, a toy more
fun than any toy could realistically hope to be. Adam
Smasher battles villains, flies in a jet pack, rescues a
girl, etc.

The apartment is a sparsely decorated working class bachelor's apartment, with sad, unadorned walls, dirty carpet, and beat-up second-hand furniture.

Ted stands before the tv set, mesmerized.

Behind him, Jerry stands next to an undecorated Christmas tree, feebly clutching a single branch with one hand. The tree wobbles precariously and we hear the intermittent sounds of Archie struggling. Two blue-jean covered legs poke out from beneath the tree like those of a mechanic working under a car.

ARCHIE

Mmm... This damned thing. Hold it steady. Are you holding it?

JERRY

I am. Ted's not.

ARCHIE

Ted! Help your brother hold the tree.

TED

Hold on! I'm trying to watch a show.

On television, Adam Smasher breaks up a witches' mass.

TED (CONT'D)

Whoa!

Jerry lets go of the tree and rushes over to join his brother in front of the television.

ARCHIE

Aargh! Hold the goddamn tree!

Jerry quickly rushes back to his spot at the tree.

TED

Fine!

Ted crosses over to the tree and grabs hold of a single branch after the manner of his brother. Both boys continue staring in the direction of the television. Mrs. Bojangles darts anxiously back and forth.

ARCHIE

Okay. There we go. Let go of it.

The boys let go of the tree and it remains steady.

Archie's legs flail as he struggles to extract himself from beneath the tree.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Mmmm...goddammit.

Archie stands up, his hair disheveled, his face slightly scratched up, and his red flannel shirt covered in nettles from the tree. He dusts the nettles from his shirt and looks proudly at the tree.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Now is that a Christmas tree or what?

The boys examine the tree, their arms folded across their chests. They're not impressed.

JERRY
There's something wrong with it.

ARCHIE
What are you talking about? That's a perfectly good tree.

TED
Yeah, dad. Look, it's too close to the ground. See?

Ted and Jerry kneel down, pressing their faces to the floor to see under the tree. They're right. The tree stands just inches from the floor.

ARCHIE
Nah, the trunk's a little stout, that's all.

TED
How are we gonna get any presents under there?

ARCHIE
You let me and Santa worry about presents.

Mrs. Bojangles runs beneath the tree. The lower branches rustle as she moves about underneath.

JERRY
Mrs. Bojangles likes it.

ARCHIE
See, Mrs. Bojangles likes it. Help me get some of these bulbs up.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Archie and the boys have just finished putting the icing on a variety of different shaped Christmas cookies. They sit around a messy kitchen table, each with a glass of milk and a plate.

ARCHIE

Alright, alright, alright. What do we got? There you go, bud.

Archie puts a cookie in front of Ted.

Ted eyes the cookie reluctantly.

TED

What is it?

INSERT: The cookie is vaguely phallic.

ARCHIE

I dunno. A candle.

TED

That's okay. I'll take a candy cane.

Ted takes a candy cane-shaped cookie from the plate of cookies.

ARCHIE

Fine, Jerry'll eat this one.

Archie puts the cookie on Jerry's plate.

JERRY

No, I want a candy cane, too.

ARCHIE

What's the matter with this one?

JERRY

It looks like a weiner.

TED

Yeah, dad. It looks like a weiner and balls.

JERRY

Yeah, a weiner and balls.

ARCHIE

(to Ted)

You see what happens when he hears
you talk like that.

Archie takes the cookie.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

What? You guys afraid somebody's
gonna laugh at you? You think
you're not gonna look cool? Well,
they can laugh at me all they want.
I don't care what people think
about me. That's a perfectly good
cookie.

He starts eating the cookie, really playing up how good it
is.

The boys stare on.

TED

Look, dad's eating a weiner.

JERRY

Yeah, a weiner and balls. Ha!

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

A plate of weiner-shaped Christmas cookies sits on the floor
next to Mrs. Bojangles's water dish. Mrs. Bojangles doesn't
care what people think of her either, and she happily munches
away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Ted and Jerry sit on a ratty couch, dressed in pyjamas and
wrapped up in ragged blankets. They slurp away at bowls of
cereal and stare like zombies at a cartoon playing on the tv.
Mrs. Bojangles sits on the couch beside them.

Archie walks in and out of the room behind them. He's
dressed in a work shirt and a winter coat, and carries a
thermos.

ARCHIE

Have you guys seen my work boots?

The boys remain silently entranced.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I'm talking to you guys. They didn't just get up and walk out on their own.

Archie kneels down and peers under the Christmas tree.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Goddammit!

He gets up and crosses over to his recliner, where he sees his boots, right next to where the boys have been sitting all this time.

TED

Your boots are over there, dad.

ARCHIE

There's dog shit under the tree.

The boys giggle. Archie sits and puts his boots on, lacing them up while he speaks.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

It's not funny. I'm gonna say this once, and I'm not gonna say it again: Clean it up.

TED

What?

ARCHIE

Clean it up. You guys got all day to dick around and watch cartoons. Take five minutes and clean up that mess.

Archie rises and crosses to exit. The boys don't stop watching their cartoon.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Ted, you're in charge while I'm gone. I'll see you guys this afternoon.

TED/JERRY

Bye, dad.

Archie exits.

The boys stare for a long time at the tv before Ted turns to his brother.

TED

Clean up that dog shit.

JERRY

I'm not cleaning it up.

TED

Dad said I was in charge.

JERRY

I don't care. It's your dog.

TED

Butthole. I'll give you five dollars.

JERRY

Where'd you get five dollars?

Ted is distracted by something on the tv.

TED

Whoa!

They both stare at the television, eating their cereal, while the ADAM SMASHER commercial plays.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Archie sits at the kitchen table with Jerry. Through a doorway , Ted can be seen sitting in front of the tv in the living room.

ARCHIE

So what's the big deal? It's still just a toy, right?

JERRY

Dad!

ARCHIE

Alright, alright. Take it easy. I get it. It's not just a toy. Did you tell Santa you wanted it?

JERRY

I told mom.

ARCHIE

What?! That's not gonna do you any good. You gotta write a letter and tell Santa.

JERRY
Are you serious?

TED
(shouting to Archie)
Dad, Charlie Brown's not on Channel
Three.

ARCHIE
(to Ted)
Try five.

TED
I tried five.

ARCHIE
(to Jerry)
How else is he gonna know if you
don't tell him?

JERRY
How's he gonna get the letter?

ARCHIE
I'll take it down to the post
office and send it out tomorrow.
First class.

JERRY
And you won't read it?

ARCHIE
What kind of question is that? Of
course I won't read it.

JERRY
You promise?

TED
(shouting to Archie)
Where's the TV Guide?

ARCHIE
(to Ted)
I don't get the TV Guide. If it's
not on, I don't know what to tell
you. Maybe we missed it.
(to Jerry)
Come on, it's a federal offense to
read somebody else's mail. You
think I wanna go to prison?

JERRY
So you promise?

ARCHIE
I promise, I promise.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jerry sits at a small desk, writing a letter with different colored crayons and markers.

JERRY (V.O.)
Dear Santa, for Christmas, I would like an Adam Smasher action figure with Dynamo jetpack. If you don't want to make it yourself, you can buy it at Murphy's Mart. That's probably better. It costs \$5.99, but I think there's tax.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Jerry's voice over continues as Archie, sitting alone in his easy chair, drinks a beer and reads Jerry's letter.

JERRY (V.O.)
I have been good all year and haven't sinned like my brother Ted, who stole five dollars from my dad's wallet and didn't get caught. Sincerely, your friend, Jerry Bemis.

ARCHIE
Goddammit!

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Archie and the boys get dressed to leave. All three wear horrendously ugly wool Christmas sweaters, patterned variously with snowmen, reindeer, and Santa Claus.

TED
Who's all gonna be there?

ARCHIE
Your grandma. Aunt Gertie. Just those two, I guess.

JERRY
Is Aunt Gertie our aunt?

ARCHIE
No.

TED

Is she your aunt?

ARCHIE

No.

JERRY

Who is she then?

Archie thinks about this as he puts on his jacket.

ARCHIE

I'm not real sure.

I/E. CAR - AFTERNOON

Archie drives, with Ted in the front seat and Jerry in back.

ARCHIE

Listen, I don't want you guys to expect a whole lot from your grandma. Be happy with whatever she gives you.

TED/JERRY

Okay.

ARCHIE

Let me tell you, what we want and what we get are usually about a hundred miles apart in this life. Maybe Santa brings you what you want, and maybe he doesn't. You've still got a lot to be thankful for.

TED

We know.

ARCHIE

Good.

TED

Besides, if Santa can't get it for us, mom can.

Archie looks over at Ted in disbelief, staring for as long as he can before he has to look back to the road.

INT. GRANDMA'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

A set of toes wiggles in a white cotton athletic sock.

GRANDMA (O.S.)

Now those look snug and cozy, don't they?

The room is a museum, filled with bizarre knickknacks, embroidered wall decorations, and old photographs. It doesn't seem to have changed in twenty years. Hanging on the wall are portraits of Jesus and John F. Kennedy.

Ted and Jerry sit on an old davenport, flanking their father. Both boys are showing off new pairs of white athletic socks. In front of them is a cluttered coffee table with four bottles of beer on it. Three are empty. Archie takes a deep drink from the fourth. The boys each hold a package of socks with a ribbon on them.

Sitting across from them, in matched reclining chairs, are GRANDMA and AUNT GERTIE. They are both very old, but Aunt Gertie is an absolute fossil. She beams, but never utters a word during the entire scene.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

It said sport socks, but I don't think...well, you can wear them just about anytime. I don't think it has to be sports.

ARCHIE

Yeah, those are great socks.

GRANDMA

It says one size fits all, so if you don't like the color, you can trade each other.

ARCHIE

Those are the same socks Magic Johnson wears.

TED

Really?

GRANDMA

I just want to make sure you guys are taken care of.

ARCHIE

(to Ted)

No joke. What do you guys say?

TED/JERRY

Thanks, Grandma.

GRANDMA

Those are from Aunt Gertie, too.

The boys look to Archie, as if for approval, and he nods.

TED/JERRY

Thanks, Aunt Gertie.

GRANDMA

(to Ted and Jerry)

What's your mother doing for Christmas?

ARCHIE

She went on vacation.

TED

She went to Mexico with Eric.

JERRY

He's gonna be our other dad.

ARCHIE

Hey, we're having a great time, though, huh? Got to watch some Monday Night Football...

GRANDMA

(ignoring Archie)

Is he good to you?

ARCHIE

...played some Uno...

TED

(ignoring Archie)

Yeah, he's really cool. He took us to a car show, and next summer he's gonna take us out on his boat.

ARCHIE

...what else did we do?

JERRY

We made cookies.

ARCHIE

Yeah, we made cookies. We used to make cookies all the time, didn't we, ma?

GRANDMA

I made cookies. The only thing you ever made was a mess.

JERRY

Grandma, is it true that when my dad was little, Grandpa stuck his head in a toilet?

GRANDMA

Ha! Where did you hear that?

ARCHIE

We don't need to go into this.

GRANDMA

(to Archie)

You weren't so little.

ARCHIE

I was seven.

GRANDMA

(to Ted and Jerry)

Your dad kept forgetting to flush the toilet. I don't what he was thinking, but every time we'd go in there after him, we'd have to look at his mess. Oh my goodness, it was awful. Well, your grandpa warned him, but he went and did it again.

She finds the story more and more amusing as she tells it.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

So your grandpa took him back in there and put his head in the bowl. I wish I had a picture. Your dad was so angry! I don't think I ever saw him so mad.

TED

(laughing, to Archie)

Grandpa gave you a swirly.

Grandma and the boys laugh.

ARCHIE

I don't remember it being all that funny.

GRANDMA

Take it easy. We're all just having some fun.

ARCHIE

Yeah? Well I really wish you'd
leave my kids out of it.

(to Ted and Jerry)

Give your grandmother and Aunt
Gertie a kiss. We gotta go.

GRANDMA

Archie.

Archie rises and puts on his jacket.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Don't be that way on Christmas.

He goes to the door.

ARCHIE

Come on. Let's go.

The boys cross the room and give their grandmother hugs and
kisses.

TED

Merry Christmas, grandma.

GRANDMA

Merry Christmas, honey.

JERRY

Merry Christmas, grandma.

Ted stops directly in front of Aunt Gertie and turns back to
his father.

TED

I'm not gonna kiss Aunt Gertie,
dad.

(to Aunt Gertie)

Merry Christmas, though.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Archie and the boys get out of the car without saying a word,
and trudge up the steps into the apartment, while a group of
carolers pass by.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Archie sits in his easy chair, drinking a beer and staring at
the television.

Through a doorway behind him, we can see Jerry, speaking on a telephone.

JERRY
(shouting to Archie)
Mom says Merry Christmas, dad.

Archie takes a deep drink of his beer.

ARCHIE
(quietly, to himself)
Merry Christmas.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Archie is putting the boys to bed. Both boys sleep in a single bed, side by side, with Mrs. Bojangles ath their feet. Archie sits on the edge of the bed.

ARCHIE
Listen. I never wanted things to be like this, you know? I wanted us to be what a family is supposed to be, together, and happy, and nice to each other. I just, I wanted that to mean something to you guys. But somehow... For chrissake, I'm your dad. Am I making any kind of impression on you guys at all?

The boys don't answer.

Archie lets it go, and kisses them each on the forehead.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Merry Christmas.

Archie rises to leave.

TED
Dad?

ARCHIE
Yeah, bud?

TED
Does Magic Johnson really wear those socks?

ARCHIE
No. I just thought it might make your grandma feel good.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Archie throws Betsy's grocery bags onto the kitchen table, reaches inside and takes out two immaculately wrapped gifts.

On the table are several beer bottles and a plate of cookies. Archie leans back against the kitchen counter, staring at the two gifts. He eats one of the cookies and washes it down with beer.

He picks up the two presents and carries them into

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Archie kneels in front of the Christmas tree and, bending down to put Betsy's presents underneath, he sees the piles of dog shit there.

ARCHIE
Goddammit!

INT. LIVING ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

We hear the clamor of the boys waking up.

Archie sits in his easy chair, unshaven, stern-faced, still wearing the same Christmas sweater from the previous scene. He reads a newspaper, a cup of coffee steaming on a stand beside him.

A rumble of footsteps announces the boys's approach.

Archie doesn't look up as Ted, Jerry, and Mrs. Bojangles run past him and dive, head first, to the foot of the tree and press their faces to the floor to see beneath.

Under the tree are several piles of dog shit, each adorned with a bright red Christmas ribbon.

Archie snaps his newspaper.

ARCHIE
Did everybody get what they wanted?

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Archie and Betsy are parked as before in the same vacant parking lot from the first scene.

ARCHIE
Alright. Listen, I love you guys.

TED/JERRY

Love you, dad.

The boys march once again between the two cars, each holding an action figure. Jerry struggles to carry Mrs. Bojangles, as well.

Archie waves at Betsy, gets back into his car and starts the engine.

BETSY

Hey! Looks like Santa got you guys
Adam Smasher dolls!

JERRY

Santa got us dog poop.

TED

Yeah. These are from dad!

Archie's hatchback pulls away and sputters out of the lot.

FADE TO BLACK.