Acting Edition

The Night Shift Before Christmas

by Isaac Gómez

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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THE NIGHT SHIFT BEFORE CHRISTMAS was commissioned and developed by the Alley Theatre (Rob Melrose, Artistic Director; Dean R. Gladden, Managing Director) in Houston, Texas, with dramaturgical support from Elizabeth Frankel. The play received its world premiere at the Alley Theatre on December 8, 2024. It was directed by KJ Sanchez, with dramaturgy by Bradley Michalakis, scenic and lighting design by Kevin Rigdon, costume design by David Arevalo, sound design by Kathy Ruvuna, music direction by Jack Beetle, and voice and dialect coaching by Micha Espinosa. The production stage manager was Kaylee Sarton McCray. The cast was as follows:

MARGOT . . . . . Briana J. Resa
VOICES . . . . . Orlando Arriaga
MARGOT UNDERSTUDY . . . . . Elissa Cuellar

CHARACTERS

MARGOT – A Scrooge. Born Margarita Adelina Maydenita Chihuahuita Adelante Sabado Gigante Muñoz. But that's only for family. To everyone else, she goes by Margot.

When possessed by spirits, she also plays:

JACKIE – a Jacob Marley, of sorts

CLYDE – in the realm of Christmas Past

RICO – in the realm of Christmas Lost; a Tiny Tim left behind

GRACIE – in the realm of Christmas Present

DOLORES – a warning akin to a Christmas Yet to Come

The voices of **ROBOTIC SANTA**, **BOOMING VOICE**, **RAÚL**, and **CUSTOMER** should be prerecorded and incorporated as part of the sound design.

MARGOT should be our sole live actor onstage.

SETTING

Happy Burger.

A small but mighty family-owned, local fast food burger joint in Houston, Texas.

Though it could honestly feel like any local family-owned fast food joint anywhere in these here United States.

A warm and happy place.

TIME

Present day.

Just before midnight.

Christmas Eve.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A Note on Casting
The actor playing Margot should identify as Latina. All identities within the Latina diaspora are welcome, with priority consideration for Black, Brown, and Indigenous Latinas.

A Note on Music
"Away in a Manger" and "Noche de Paz" are performed a cappella using traditional melodies and lyrics. Both songs are in the public domain.

"Christmas, Just Like" is an original song written and composed by Isaac Gómez, with arrangements by Jack Beetle. A lead sheet will be delivered digitally upon approval of a performance license.

A Note from the Playwright
This is a play about people who work on or around Christmas – people who find magic in the mundane, comedy in the tragic, and light in the dark. It's a play about a woman who chooses to be lonely even though she isn't alone, and her journey to discovering why that is, what she's avoiding, and what might be the alternative.

This is a play about Texas. And family-owned fast food joints. And the holidays. And so many collisions of life, love, heartbreak, joy, messiness – and everything the crevices of the human existence can't quite contain. It's at once hilarious as it is scary as it is sad, and everything in between. Lean into the moments of tone shifts. The audience will hunger for them.

Oh – and the possessions in this play? They're less *The Exorcist* and more *Scary Movie* franchise. It's so scary it's funny. Or so funny it's terrifying.

Lastly, push against sentimentality at all costs. Until it's earned.

For Liz Frankel.
Who always plans ahead.

And for Dolores.
Wherever I go…you won't be too far.

"Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it – every, every minute?"

– Emily, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder

"It was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge."

– *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

(The inside of a Texas-bred and beloved, blessed and highly favored, mom-and-pop, family-owned burger bar in Houston, Texas. Across the street is a Catholic Church, next door is a family home from the 1940s, and behind is a crematorium. Near midnight.)

(Christmas decorations are scattered throughout the restaurant. A small, sad, little Christmas tree with several Texas-themed ornaments stands proudly by the register counter. There's also a sad blue cardigan, hanging on the back of a plastic chair, seemingly unimportant until it is.)

(Light Christmas music plays from the radio overhead [something like Mariah Carey's "Christmas, Baby Please Come Home"]. A small "ding" is heard as a car pulls up to the drive-thru window.)*

(Beat. A moment. Then –)

(A pre-recorded voice is heard from just outside the drive-thru window – something that automatically plays whenever a car pulls up.)

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*A license to produce *The Night Shift Before Christmas* does not include a performance license for "Christmas, Baby Please Come Home." The publisher and author suggest that the licensee contact ASCAP or BMI to ascertain the music publisher and contact such music publisher to license or acquire permission for performance of the song. If a license or permission is unattainable, the licensee may not use the song in *The Night Shift Before Christmas* but should create an original composition in a similar style or use a similar song in the public domain. For further information, please see the Music and Third-Party Materials Use Note on page iii.

RAÚL. *(Voice-over. Too cheerful.)* Howdy! Hola! Bonjour! Welcome to Happy Burger! This is Raúl speaking, founder and President of Joy, bringing you Crispy Cheer with every bite since 1979. Hang tight – someone will be with you shortly. Ciao!

(The sound of a car humming, waiting impatiently can be heard. A moment. Then –)

(The car outside honks once.)

(Nothing.)

(Then, it honks again.)

(Nothing.)

(Then, it honks and it honks and it honks and it honks –)

MARGOT. *(Offstage; running in.)* I'm comin', I'm comin'!

*(***MARGOT** *bursts in from the back room – drenched in sweat – carrying three stacks of large cardboard boxes labelled, "Secret Happy Sauce" It's heavy.)*

(Mumbling; to herself.) Everyone always wants somethin' from me, sheesh.

(Honk, honk, honk, honk –)

I said I'm comin'!

*(***MARGOT** *swings the boxes around the counter to place them down but knocks over the small Christmas tree in the process; a few plastic ornaments come crashing down with it, scattering everywhere.)*

(More than peeved.) Of course. Story of my stupid life.

(The car keeps honking. She'll deal with the mess later.)

*(***MARGOT** *walks over to a wall with a headset, puts it on, clears her throat.)*

(Into the headset; not Happy.) Welcome to Happy Burger, proud home of the Happy Burger, where the burgers are hot and the holiday spirit is Happy-sized. Would you like to try our Merry & Bright Happy Burger Combo today? It comes with a side of cheer.

(Mumbling heard from the headset à la Charlie Brown's teacher.)

(Into the headset.) No, okay.

So what can I get you.

(More mumbling.)

(Into the headset.) Uh huh.

(More mumbling.)

*(***MARGOT** *looks over into the kitchen.)*

(Into the headset.) It'll be five minutes for the Onion Thrills, that okay with you?

(Beat. A moment. She peeks into the kitchen again. More mumbling.)

(Into the headset.) No Texas Twirls tonight but we *do* have Family Frites. You want those?

(More mumbling.)

(Into the headset; typing into the register.) Okay.

Okay.

Okay…

So. That'll be a Jalapeño with Cheese Happy Burger, Happy-sized with a Dr. Pepper, also Happy-sized. And a Double Happy Smiley Melt, also Happy-sized with a Happy-sized Coke.

(Mumbling from the other side.)

(Into the headset.) Coke <u>Zero</u>, okay.

(More mumbling.)

(Into the headset.) You *do* want the Onion Thrills, okay sure.

(More mumbling. Then:)

(Into the headset; eye-roll.) Your total's gonna be $25.82, please pull up to the second window.

(She's about to put the headset down when:)

(More mumbling.)

(Into the headset.) Well. Maybe not ninety nifty seconds *guaranteed*, but –

(More mumbling.)

(Into the headset.) Right, I'm aware that's our thing. But I'm the only one working tonight, so –

(More mumbling.)

(Into the headset.) Because it's Christmas Eve.

(More mumbling.)

(Into the headset.) That's what the sign on the door says, yes.

(More mumbling.)

(Into the headset.) And that's the phone number to the feedback hotline, yes.

(Beat. A moment.)

(More mumbling as **MARGOT** *looks towards the kitchen. Can she do this? She can do this.)*

(Into the headset.) You know what?

That won't be necessary.

(Beat.)

(À la "challenge accepted.") You want ninety nifty seconds? I'll give you ninety *nifty* seconds. Guaranteed.

*(***MARGOT** *quickly throws off the headset as she jumps over the counter into the kitchen space. Speed. Racer. Mode.)*

(She tosses frozen Onion Thrills into the fryer, pulls out patties like they were on fire, condiments go flying…)

(The car pulls up to the drive-thru window. **MARGOT** *pauses, hops over the kitchen counter to the register, opens the drive-thru window.)*

$25.82.

(She reaches for a debit card, takes it, swipes that VISA like she's Swiper the Swiper, pulls the receipt out as it prints, and tosses it carelessly into the car.)

There you go!

(She hops back over the kitchen counter. Beeping from the fryer, she lifts the gate and dumps the Onion Thrills into the metal salt thing.)

(She tops each sandwich/burger with their appropriate bun, wraps them in their matching wrapper, and tosses them into an already opened to-go bag like she were Kobe [Rest in Power].)

(She scoops Texas Twirls and Onion Thrills, tosses those as well, closes the bag, grabs the drinks, hops over the counter once more, and makes it <u>just</u> in the nick of time.)

(Sweaty; breathless.) Here you go, sir. Ninety *<u>nifty</u>* seconds. Guaranteed. Just an FYI you'll probably wanna pop those Onion Thrills in the microwave for like three minutes 'cause they might still be a little frozen. Okay, thank you so much, have a Very Merry Happy Burger Christmas, goodbye!

(And just like that, **MARGOT** *closes the window to the drive thru and the car drives off.)*

(Sweet, pure relief.) Woo! Take *that* Dodge charger.

(The tree and fallen ornaments twinkle.)

Oh right. Almost forgot about you.

*(***MARGOT** *heads to the back room, grabs a broom, and sweeps.)*

It never ends.

(Maybe a minute of this, watching her sweep…)

(Grabbing the dustpan…)

(Sweeping the mess into the dustpan when something outside catches her eye.)

Not *this* guy again.

(Shouting towards the door:) Hey! HEY!

*(**MARGOT** unlocks and opens the door to the outside world.)*

(Yelling outside.)

This is private property, you can't just leave your stuff here – I don't care how cold it is! If you don't get up and out, I'll have to call the cops! That's right, you BETTER walk away! MERRY CHRISTMAS!

(She slams the door shut, locks it.)

(To herself.) God these homeless are like friggin cockroaches!

*(**MARGOT** grabs the dustpan from earlier, empties the broken ornament pieces in the trashcan.)*

(There's a **ROBOTIC GRUMPY SANTA CLAUS** *toy close by. It turns on, unprompted. Scares the shit out of* **MARGOT***:)*

ROBOTIC SANTA. "Back off! / It's been a *rough* year for Santa!"

MARGOT. *Waaah!* You scared me!

(She walks towards it – hesitant. She squeezes his hand, trying to get him to talk again. Nothing.)

(Frustrated.) Aw come on –

(She grabs **SANTA**. *Shakes him.)*

(Then:)

ROBOTIC SANTA. "I'm always watching you!"

MARGOT. *(To* **SANTA**.*)* God, you're so old. Rode hard and put away wet.

(She sets him back down on the counter.)

ROBOTIC SANTA. "Bah Humbug!"

MARGOT. *(Chuckles.)* Right back atcha Grumpy.

*(***MARGOT***'s phone vibrates. She checks the text on her phone. Heavy sigh.)*

(To **SANTA**.*)* You got a cousin? No? Just you and Mrs. Claus and a couple of ugly elves?

(Her phone vibrates again. Another text. She motions her cell phone.)

(To **SANTA**.*)* I got a cousin. Letty. Every year she throws this *huge* Christmas Eve party full of people I don't even know.

(Then:)

She has a lot of friends. Me? Not so much.

(Texting back via voice dictation.) "Sorry, can't make it (period). Working (period). Merry Xmas (period). Sad face."

(She sends her text.)

(Beat. A moment.)

(Another vibration, indicating a response.)

*(***MARGOT** *reads it.)*

(To **SANTA**.*)* Damn she got conchas from El Bolillo.

(Then, another vibration. **MARGOT** *reads it.)*

(Reading.) "I never see you anymore."

(To **SANTA**.*)* Seriously? It's not like I don't *wanna* be there, I'm just working.

(Beat. Side eye from **SANTA**.*)*

(Texting back via voice dictation.) "Yeah (comma), sorry (period) Got lots on my plate right now (dot dot dot)..."

(She hits send. Anxiously waits for a response.)

(Phone notification.)

(Her face says it all.)

(Reading.) "Your mom would want you to be here."

(Beat.)

(Texting back via voice dictation.) "Funny coming from someone who barely saw her (exclamation mark)!"

(She hits send. Then:)

(To **SANTA**.*)* Oh she's typing.

(Waits anxiously.)

(To **SANTA**.*)* Still typing...

(Waits some more. Then:)

(To **SANTA**.*)* She stopped.

No response.

Wow. Okay.

(She puts away her phone.)

(To **SANTA**.*)* It's one dinner. With people who *literally* only see each other once a year. And their ugly kids. And their sad sweaters.

(The "ding" sound of a car pulling up to the drive-thru window is heard and then –)

RAÚL. *(Voice-over. Too cheerful.)* Howdy! Hola! Bonjour! Welcome to Happy Burger! This is Raúl speaking, founder and President of Joy, bringing you Crispy Cheer with every bite since –

*(***MARGOT** *gets to the headset and hits the intercom button before the recording finishes. Annoyed:)*

MARGOT. *(Into the headset; not Happy.)* Welcome to Happy Burger, proud home of the Happy Burger, where the burgers are hot and the holiday spirit is Happy-sized, would you like to try our Merry & Bright Happy Burger Combo today?

(Beat. A moment. Nothing.)

Is the intercom broken?

(She tries again.)

(Into the headset; more UnHappy.) Welcome to Happy Burger, can I take your order?

(A moment. Nothing.)

(She tries again.)

(Into the headset.) Hello?

Hello, hello?

(She leans over the drive-thru window to see if there's anyone there. There isn't.)

Mother trucker must've drove off.

(She takes off her headset and heads back to the cardboard boxes. Begins unpacking.)

(Then, the "ding" sound of the drive thru is heard again.)

(To herself.) What the heck?!

RAÚL. *(Voice-over. Too cheerful.)* Howdy! Hola! Bonjour! Welcome to –

*(**MARGOT** hits the intercom –)*

MARGOT. *(Into the headset; not Happy.)* Welcome to Happy Burger, proud home of the Happy Burger –

(The sound of the drive-thru "ding" cuts her off.)

Okay this isn't funny –

(Ding, ding, ding, ding –)

(She opens the drive-thru window, leans over it again – there's no one there.)

Huh?

(Ding, ding, ding, ding – it's incessant and won't stop as if cars are driving through it in rapid succession.)

(Into the headset.) Hello hello hello –

(Ding, ding, ding, ding –)

(Then –)

(The power goes out, pitch black.)

Oh hell no.

(Schum! The red bulbs of the Christmas light decorations turn on, an ominous red glow like a Christmas hellscape.)

(Then, a **BOOMING CHOLA VOICE** *bursts from the headset into the ether, bouncing against the walls:)*

JACKIE/BOOMING VOICE. MARGOT!!!!!

*(***MARGOT** *screams.)*

MARGOT. Who's there?!

*(***MARGOT** *jumps behind the counter, hiding. But from what?)*

JACKIE/BOOMING VOICE. MARGOT!!!!

*(***MARGOT** *is in shock.)*

MARGOT. What is going on?!

JACKIE/BOOMING VOICE. MARGARITA ADELINA MAYDENITA CHIHUAHUITA ADELANTE SABADO GIGANTE MUÑOZ! ALSO KNOWN AS ***MARRRGGGOOOOTTTT***!

MARGOT. Who are you?! What do you want?!

JACKIE/BOOMING VOICE. YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE ME?!

(Beat.)

MARGOT. *(Obvious:)* No!

(Then, **MARGOT** *is thrust to her feet as the spirit of* **JACKIE/THE BOOMING VOICE** *is thrust into her through her belly button, making her way through* **MARGOT***'s body, veins, pores.)*

(She is possessed.)

(She takes a moment, looks around.)

(As **JACKIE***: late teens, hood as fuck, big hoops, witty with a potty mouth and doesn't give a fuck what you think.)*

JACKIE. *(As if she saw her at a party.)* Hey bitch! Did you miss me?

(Beat. A moment. She belches. A shift back into **MARGOT***.)*

MARGOT. Jackie?! Oh my god! What the – but how can you –

(Another shift.)

JACKIE. Remember that time after work (?) I took you to see *The Exorcist* with me at Hermann Park?

MARGOT. How could I forget? I had nightmares for like a week.

JACKIE. So this is a lot like that *PERO*...without the vomit.

(Beat. A moment.)

MARGOT. So I'm possessed?

JACKIE. Yah huh.

MARGOT. Right now?

JACKIE. Yeah.

MARGOT. But... How?

JACKIE. Bitch! You ask too many questions. Besides, where's the fun without a little mystery?

MARGOT. You know I don't like mysteries.

JACKIE. But you *love* surprises...

MARGOT. Not like this! This feels...different. Weird. Like. I have all this...energy all of a sudden.

JACKIE. Well yeah bitch. I'm seventeen and you old as fuck.

MARGOT. *(Worries she's old.)* I'm not old!

JACKIE. You old to me.

MARGOT. I can't believe I'm talking to you right now. Well, kind of. You know what I –

JACKIE. Yeah.

MARGOT. Because you're –

JACKIE. Yeah, no yeah.

MARGOT. And I'm –

JACKIE. Yeah, for sure, yeah –

MARGOT. Yeah! But, like…*why* are you here?

JACKIE. What is this, the Spanish Inquisition? Can't a bitch visit her Happy Burger work wifey without the third degree, fuck!

MARGOT. No of course, you can, I'm really glad you're here, actually. It's just…don't spirits come with, like, an intention or something? A message, or whatever?

JACKIE. Bitch! You watch way too much *Hollywood Medium*. You need to chillax. Here.

*(***JACKIE** *pulls out a blunt from her pocket.)*

MARGOT. Jackie! You know we're not supposed to be doing that! Where did you get this?

JACKIE. *(While licking the joint.)* Shhhh, just a little. To take the edge off.

MARGOT. No no no no I don't do that anymore, not since you –

*(***JACKIE** *lights the joint, inhales a puff.)*

Died.

(It's too late. Relaxed now. A moment. Then:)

You're right. I do feel better.

(They laugh hysterically. The kind of laugh you laugh when you are high kind of laugh.)

Can I ask you something?

JACKIE. Duh bitch.

MARGOT. Did it…hurt? When it happened.

(Beat. A moment. Then:)

JACKIE. You know, it didn't hurt as bad as I looked. The whole thing was just tragic.

MARGOT. You saw the campaign that came out of it right?

JACKIE. I *did* see it. That was real nice. "Look Left. Look Right. Look Alive." Clever.

MARGOT. It's still a mess, though.

JACKIE. Whoever thought putting a light rail at street level is stupid as fuck. Period.

MARGOT. I'm surprised they let you drop F-bombs in heaven. Or, you know, wherever you are.

JACKIE. Why wouldn't they?

MARGOT. Well, there's gotta be a lot of pretty important people up there.

JACKIE. *(Annoyed.)* Uh huh.

MARGOT. So I just thought there might be like, rules or decorum or something.

JACKIE. On how to talk?

MARGOT. Exactly.

JACKIE. But why would you think that?

MARGOT. Because *some* people may find your use of profanity as lazy, and boring, and only vaguely amusing. I don't. But some people might.

(Beat.)

*(**JACKIE** takes another hit.)*

JACKIE. Shakespeare cussed.

MARGOT. Since when do you read Shakespeare?

JACKIE. I don't. But we kick it every now and then. You know. In "heaven."

MARGOT. I have a really hard time believing that.

JACKIE. He doesn't use the same words as me, but he definitely talks shit. You see, Margot. Some people – people like *you* – limit your ways of thinking. Because when you think about it, like really, really, *really* think about it? The way I talk *is* Shakespearean, bitch. It's heightened. It has a flow to it, a rhythm to it, a musicality to it, the way it rolls off the tongue. So when I call you a "bitch ass hoe," that means I really think you a muthafuckin bitch ass hoe. I say what I mean, and I mean what I say. You know what I mean? Very Shakespeare.

(Beat. A moment. Then:)

Fuck dude, you got my blood pressure all up and shit.

(She takes another hit.)

MARGOT. I'm sorry, Jackie. I didn't mean to upset you.

JACKIE. Yeah well you did. Which is weird given all the shit we been through. I mean, I'm the one who trained ya ass for fuck's sake. We really had somethin', Margot. We were tight. We did everything together. *(Nodding.)* Working together by the fryers, trying not to burn my hair extensions... Helping me at the register when I'd get a new set of acrylics... Shit, I even taught you how to clean the grease trap without crying, and *that's* something only the *family* knows, which means I really fucking loved you, bitch.

(Beat. A moment. Then:)

MARGOT. You ever think about how things might've been different for us? You know, if you were still here?

JACKIE. All the time. We'd practically be running this place.

MARGOT. Yeah. Maybe.

JACKIE. Raúl wouldn't know what to do with us.

MARGOT. Yeah, it's not like he knew what to do with me from the start, so.

(Beat. A moment. Something deeper there.)

JACKIE. Margot. I know the year we worked together was tough. With your mom in and out of the hospital and shit?

MARGOT. Are we really talking about my mom right now?

JACKIE. You're the one who brought it up.

MARGOT. No. I didn't.

JACKIE. Then maybe we should.

Cancer's an ugly disease, Margot.

MARGOT. I know, I had a front row seat to it.

JACKIE. Then you should also know that when she died of it, and when you pushed everyone away *because* of it, that that's part of the ugliness too. It was like working with a total stranger all of a sudden, even after a whole year of us being work wifeys. And then *I* died, and well – talk about buzz kill, am I right?

MARGOT. What are you saying?

JACKIE. I'm *saying* that I thought you would've moved on by now, that's all.

MARGOT. Says the girl who's back from the dead.

JACKIE. I might be the one who's dead, but at least I knew how to *live*. Don't you wanna live, bitch? Drive a Ferrari, drink some Bacardi, act like you Cardi? Don't you think it's time to, like…I dunno. Let someone *else* work the night shift before Christmas, you dumb bitch? I mean, no one likes working this shift but you, Margot. And truth be told, even *before* I died, I always thought that was a little sad. Even Crackhead Carlos called in sick tonight, and that's saying a lot.

(Beat. A moment. Then:)

You know I love you, right?

MARGOT. *(A little sad.)* Yeah…

JACKIE. Okay good. 'Cause this is the part of the story where I tell you why I'm *actually* here and I don't want you to be mad at me for it. Okay?

MARGOT. Okay…

JACKIE. Somebody on the other side said, "visit Margot, she needs a wake up call" so here I am, and here it is: Tonight, you're going to be visited by four spirits, and the first is me bitch. (Obviously.) And I just came by to tell you that I'm just the first but won't be the last and it's about to be Freaky Friday up in this bitch.

(Beat.)

Okay byeeeeeeeeee.

MARGOT. Wait don't go!

(Beat. A moment.)

Who sent you here? Who else is coming?

JACKIE. I can't tell you that!

MARGOT. So I'm just supposed to sit around and wait for whoever, *when*ever they decide to show up?! I can't do that! I have a *job*. You know I can't be worrying about this.

JACKIE. Well you're gonna have to. And the longer it takes for you to accept that, the bumpier the ride this night shift is gonna be.

(Beat. A moment. As if she were about to leave –)

Oh, one last thing. She wanted me to tell you that she's coming for you.

So you better be ready for it, like *Game of Thrones* because Winter is coming for you, Margot. She's coming. She is.

(Beat.)

Bitch.

(Then, **MARGOT** *belches and* **JACKIE** *is released back into the wind. The restaurant goes back to normal.)*

*(***MARGOT** *desperately gasps for air.)*

MARGOT. Oh my god I think I'm gonna be sick.

(Beat. A moment. Then, like she were chasing her spirit –)

Jackie? Jackie come back. Who's coming for me? Who's coming?!

*(***SANTA** *comes to life.)*

ROBOTIC SANTA. *"Get your own free stuff!"*

MARGOT. *(Startled.)* Ah!

*(***SANTA** *starts laughing in the robotic way it does, begging for her attention.)*

Yeah, screw this!

(She throws herself over the counter, grabs her tote bag. **SANTA** *keeps laughing maniacally. The "ding" from the drive-thru window can be heard.)*

(Then, the voice recording of Raúl. But this time the voice sounds distorted, demonic, horrifying:)

RAÚL. *(Voice-over.) Welcome to Happy Burger, bringing you Crispy Cheer with every bite since 1979!!!*

MARGOT. Get me outta here!

(She throws herself back over the counter and is almost at the exit when an invisible force pulls her back into the restaurant, her tote bag thrown across the room.)

Not again!

(Then, **MARGOT** *starts convulsing. Seizure-like. It's horrific, like in a movie, until it slowly turns into a hula-hoop interpretative dance. Then it's hysterical. Completely unreal.)*

(She's possessed.)

(A moment.)

(Then –)

(As **CLYDE***: mid-fifties. Member of the Choir at Immaculate Heart of Mary. An introverted extrovert who loves performing but hates audiences. He's got a Texas drawl to him.)*

CLYDE. *(Singing; country-style.)*
AWAY IN A MANGER, NO CRIB FOR A BED.

(He coughs, clears his throat.)

Sorry wrong key. I started too low.

(He clears his throat, starts again.)

AWAY IN A MANGER, NO CRIB FOR A BED.
THE LITTLE LORD JESUS LAID DOWN HIS SWEET HEAD.
THE STARS IN THE SKY LOOK DOWN WHERE HE LAY.
THE LITTLE LORD JESUS ASLEEP ON THE HAY.

(Beat. A moment.)

Howdy Miss Margot.

MARGOT. Who the heck are you?!

CLYDE. Woah there Nelly, you talk to your mother with that attitude?

MARGOT. She's dead so no. I don't.

CLYDE. *(Realizes he made a mistake.)* Oh no. Oh my big ol' mouth, I'm so sorry about that Miss.

MARGOT. No Miss. Just Margot.

CLYDE. Margot. That's a funny name. I like it.

(He wipes his hand clean, extends it for a handshake.)

Name's Clyde. Howdy.

MARGOT. Hi.

*(***CLYDE** *makes himself comfortable.)*

CLYDE. Oooh, it's cozy in here. Nice, and warm… little cold right by your chest, though. Splash a warm whiskey always melts a cold heart…

MARGOT. I don't drink.

CLYDE. I'm sorry. For a second there, I thought you said you don't drink.

MARGOT. That is correct.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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