

Miracles from Strangers

By Jim Gustafson

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Miracles from Strangers

- 2 -

STORY OF THE PLAY

In 1933 the Depression had taken the merriment from the holidays. On Christmas Eve, a gangster, two thespians, and an out-of-town couple wind up in a small diner just to get out of the cold and warm up with a hot cup of coffee. But when an inept robber takes them hostage, these strangers find a Christmas Miracle. This heart-warming holiday comedy tells an offbeat story of down-and-out strangers discovering the joy of Christmas at gunpoint.

Miracles from Strangers

- 3 -

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 m, 4 w.)

JOLENE: Owner of the diner. 50-60.

MABEL: Waitress. 25-40.

PUG D'MARCO: A gangster. 50-60.

LAWRENCE BOLIVIER: English-born actor. Mid-50s-60s.

ADELE BOLIVIER: Actress. Mid-to-late 40's.

HARLEY DUNBAR: A retired man visiting from Florida. 60s.

IRMA DUNBAR: His wife. 60s.

STANLEY RYAN: Robber. Early 30s.

COP: Male police officer. Age flexible.

Miracles from Strangers

- 4 -

SETTING

The Coffee Drop, a diner, in New York. 1933. There are a few tables and a counter with stools.

PROPS

Reversible "Open" / "Closed" sign
Assorted dishes – plates, cups, silverware
Coffee cups
Large ham on a platter
Bottles of bootleg booze
Gun
Valuables – including jewelry, a \$10-dollar bill and a ring
Bag
Dinner roll
Police nightstick
Money belt

SFX

Phone

Miracles from Strangers

(AT RISE: Lights up on The Coffee Drop diner. MABEL is by the door turning the "Open" sign to the "Closed" side. JOLENE is bringing dishes out from the kitchen. As a couple approach, Mabel opens the door to talk to them.)

MABEL: Sorry, we're closed for a private Christmas Eve party... No, not tomorrow... We have Christmas off, but we'll be open on Thursday as usual... Sorry... Thank you. Merry Christmas to you, too. *(SHE closes the door and turns to JOLENE.)* Wow, I hate turning people away on Christmas Eve.

JOLENE: If you remember your Bible you're not the first to turn someone away tonight, Mabel.

MABEL: What??? *(Pause.)* Oh, I get it... You know, Jolene, you'd think everybody would be home with their families tonight.

JOLENE: These are funny times, toots. Since the crash not many people have much to be merry about, and the holidays just remind them how bad it is. Street looks pretty empty, though, so I guess most people are sharing what little Christmas spirit they still have at home.

(SFX: Phone rings. JOLENE answers it.)

JOLENE: *(Cont'd.)* Hello, The Coffee Drop... Oh hi, Colin. We're all ready for your family... Got everything all cooked up and now it's just simmering... What?... *(Pause.)* No, no! No, I'm not angry... I understand... If my dear mother, God rest her soul, were here she'd no doubt feel the same way... No, no... You don't have to do that... I wouldn't think of it. Besides, the streets are full of hungry people. We've turned away dozens since we put up the "Closed" sign... Now you just forget it and have a Merry Christmas... Give my holiday wish to Molly and kids for me, would ya? Thank you for calling, Colin... Merry Christmas to you, too and God bless ya.

Miracles from Strangers

- 6 -

MABEL: What was that all about?

JOLENE: Looks like we won't be having a party here tonight.

MABEL: What?

JOLENE: Yup, Colin and Molly planned on surprising the family by bringing them all here for Christmas Eve dinner but Grandma O'Banion had a conniption when she got wind of it. She pretty much hung ol' Colin out to dry for not honoring the baby Jesus at home and eatin' from their hearth... He just canceled.

MABEL: He can't cancel.

JOLENE: Oh yes he can, and I can't fault the man's wisdom. I sure wouldn't want to feel the wrath of Glynnis O'Banion... That woman never forgets... She'd be a curse on them 'til the day she dies, and that woman will outlive Satan himself.

MABEL: So, what do we do?

JOLENE: Well, you can go home. I'll just leave the door open for stragglers for a while... Then I'll pack up the food and bring it over to St. Matthews so the orphans have something extra with their Christmas dinner tomorrow. Now scoot... Shoo... It's Christmas Eve... I felt guilty enough having you work tonight anyway.

MABEL: What do I have to go home for? Bill finally got that WPA job in Tennessee and he couldn't afford train fare home. Even if he could, at his age he's afraid to take time off for fear of some young fella jumpin' into his job while he's gone. We've had plenty of Christmases together. The kids can't afford to come in so it's just me. I'd rather be here with you than home listening to the Rudy Vallee Christmas Show on the radio.

JOLENE: Don't be silly... If you won't go home, then... Here... Here's fifty cents... Go to the picture show... If you can't spend the night with your Billy spend it with Clark Gable. I can handle it here by myself. Grab your coat and skedaddle... I'll be all right.

MABEL: That's it... No more talk... Besides, the movie house is closed tonight. I'm staying here with ya, Jolene. Neither of us should be alone for Christmas Eve.

End of Freeview

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