

# The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

By Chrono Eclipse

2023

I stood on the snowy front step, outside the two-story New England home brightly lit with Christmas lights and festive decorations. My girlfriend of 6-months, Clara, had invited me to come spend the holidays with her and her family in the house she had grown up in.

It all felt very intimidating. I had never had this big suburban family Christmas growing up. My family had been very small and dysfunctional. This felt like something out of a Hallmark movie. I was a little nervous about what I was getting into... but I was planning on proposing to Clara at New Years in a little over a week so I figured it would be a good time to meet her family and get their approval. I just hoped that they all liked me!

“Jack?” My girlfriend Clara calls my name beside me to get my attention. “Don’t be nervous. This is going to be great!” She reassures me as she clings excitedly to my arm.

I look at her pretty face. The cold air makes her smooth cheeks even rosier and her long silky blonde hair is peaking out from her raspberry red winter hat looked like golden tinsel. We had met the very last week before college graduation and I had fallen completely head over heels for her. She was the most beautiful, funny, brilliant girl that I had ever met.

“You promise they’re going to like me?” I asked her with a nervous smile.

She reached up with a dainty hand and fixed my hair.

“They’re going to love you!... Because \*I\* love you... and because all of my other boyfriends were a lot older than me. So mom is going to be so relieved that I’m bringing home a guy that’s the same age as me for once!” Clara said with a giggle.

I stared at her dumbly for a moment, not knowing how to respond to that new bit of information. Clara laughed even harder but when the front door finally swung open we both turned and put on big happy smiles for whoever was greeting us.

“Merry Christmas!” We both declared, even though it was still technically a few days away.

In the doorway stood Clara’s mom Angela. I continued to smile as I looked at my girlfriends mother. She was a kind-looking woman of 53-years with fading blonde hair and a pear-shaped figure. I could kind of see under the lines on her face and the double chin that she was probably as hot as her daughter, back when she was young. Now she looked like a very sweet jolly matron as she quickly pulled the two of us into a hug and shut the door.

“Oh my goodness! Welcome! Come in! Come in! Were you out there long? You must be freezing! I didn’t hear the door ring over all this chaos!” Angela exclaimed as she took our coats.

Gawking at us from the hallway were Clara’s two younger sister, Brianna and Madison. Brianna was a 19-year-old college sophomore and varsity volleyball player. She was attractive and athletic with short light brown hair and freckles. Madison was a geek-shiek high school girl with dirty blonde hair pulled back into a pony-tail.

“See! I told you he was real!” Madison whispered to her older sister as she continued to stare at me with puppy-dog eyes.

“Chhh, Maddie’s been stalking your boyfriend on Instagram for weeks now.” Brianna teased, jostling her younger sister playfully.

“OMG Bri - quit it!” Madison squealed, flailing her arms to defend herself from her older sisters man-handling.

Angela rubbed her pasty face and looked over at her two teenage daughters.

“Girls! Come on! Behave. We have a guest!” Their middle-aged mom chided them, looking exhausted.

“Wow, can you guys like wait a whole 5 seconds before embarrassing me in front of my boyfriend?” Clara looked equally annoyed at her younger sisters.

“Sorry Clara...” Madison responded, blushing. I thought for a moment that she was the shyest and most introverted of the sisters but a moment later she was standing directly in front of me, beaming from ear to ear up at me in greeting.

“Hi uh, you must be Madison. I’m Jack.” I say to the high school girl with a smile as I hold out my hand to greet her.

Madison giggled.

“Uh yeah I know! I saw on Insta that you’re a gamer. What do you play? I’ve been playing through Balders Gate 3. It’s so lit! Have you played it? What did you study at school? Were you a psych major like my sister? Have you ever been out of the country? I want to go to Japan. I might try to do a study abroad program next year that would let me spend a month there but mom says that I have to wait until I’m 18! What kind of music do you listen to? Do you really like my sister?” The geeky teen asked excitedly, nervously biting her lip as she bombarded me with questions.

Clara stepped in and gently moved her baby sister back away from me.

“Ooookay... she’s just excited because no one ever brings significant others home... and now we all know why...” Clara smirked at me.

A little girl suddenly ran into the room, her face messy from something chocolate she ate.

“Aunty Cwawa! I wanna meet your special fwen!” The 4-year-old announced with nearly as much enthusiasm as Madison.

I kneel down and wave at the little girl.

“Hi I’m Jack. What’s your name?” I ask her.

The little girl smiles revealing a mouth full of babyteeth and then quickly hides behind Clara’s legs.

“Awww she’s being shy - but she’s totally a ham! Come on, Harper. Tell Jack your name.” Clara coaxed the girl.

The 4-year-old peaked out from behind my girlfriend silky legs and looked at me shyly.

“Hawpaw...” The little girl said with her toddler lisp.

“Hi Harper. And how old are you?” I asked her.

She held up 4 fingers across both hands.

“Wow. You’re a big girl then, huh? Practically an adult.” I humored the little girl.

Harper nodded proudly.

“Wanna go pway?” She asked me holding out a little hand.

“Nuh-uh! You, little lady, need to go take a bath before dinner!” Angela said in a no-nonsense voice.

The matriarch looked around the hall and up the stairwell.

“Where’s your mom? I told her to be ready by the time Clara and her boyfriend got here...” Angela asked the little girl.

“I’ll go find her - c’mon squirt!” Brianna said, scooping Harper up with one arm as the little girl squealed and squirmed playfully.

“Who-?” I begin to ask, confused as to who they are talking about.

“My older sister Amanda... Harpers mom. She’s... well... you’ll meet her in a bit. I just hope she’s not a ton of drama this year...” Clara groans in bewilderment.

“You two go make yourselves comfortable. Dinner will be ready in a bit... oh Jack! I’m so happy you’re joining us this year!” Angela cooed happily and pulled me into another big hug.

I felt her soft saggy bosom under her Christmas sweater cushioning me as she held me in a tight hug for a moment and kissed my cheek.

“Mom...” Clara prompted, rolling her eyes.

“Sorry - sorry! I just have to do the ‘mom’ thing! I’m just so thrilled at what a polite, handsome young man you’re dating!” Angela beamed before sighing and waddling back toward the kitchen.

“Oh my god... this has already been WAY too embarrassing. Can we just go now and like... drive to California or something...” My girlfriend groaned, blushing with embarrassment at her family.

I hug her and lean in giving her a kiss, enjoying the taste of her strawberry lip gloss.

“Your family is great! They’re all super nice.” I assure her.

“Well, well, well... who is this handsome fellow?” I hear a shaky old voice rattle behind me.

I turn around to see a little old lady with wispy thinning white hair leaning on a cane in the doorway. Her turkey waddle neck dangles as does most of her skin as she hobbled closer to me, peering in examination through thick bifocals.

“This is my boyfriend Jack, Aunt Lillian.” Clara said loud enough for her 91-year-old great aunt to hear her.

“Nice catch dearie!... With this place so full of women it’ll be nice to have a man around for a change!” The old woman said with a toothless grin and then cackled and hobbled out to the living room.

Clara and I decided to sneak upstairs to her old bedroom for a bit before dinner. We sat on her bed and looked around at the old posters on the wall from the stuff she had been into when she had been in highschool back in like 2016/2017.

“I wasn’t allowed to bring boys up here when I was in high school...” She said as she kicked off her shoes and peeled her socks off, playfully rubbing my crotch with her smooth danty foor before jumping up to exchange her jeans for some pajama pants.

“Oh yeah? Your mom doesn’t seem like she’d be that strict...” I replied as I watched my 23-year-old girlfriend wiggle her round, panty-clad behind at me.

“From what I understand, my mom was kind of a hot mess when she was a teen and so was my older sister... so she just kind of figured I’d be like that too. But I was a good girl! Like Maddie.” Clara explained as she slipped her comfy yoga pants on and hopped up into my lap.

“Well... any fantasies you’ve been harboring that you might want to play out now that you’re allowed to have a boy in here?” I asked with a grin.

Clara bit her lip and tucked some of her silky blonde hair back.

“Yeah can you pretend that you’re my lab partner and we’re working on a project together but our ‘chemistry’ is just so strong that we end up jumping each others bones?” Clara purred as she leaned in to kiss my neck.

I look at her in surprise and then smirk as we both burst into giggles.

“That’s good! Very elaborate. I like the chemistry double meaning...” I applauded her. See? I told you she was both sexy and clever...

“It’s good right?” She giggled. “Or I could have gone with anatomy. Like you look down at your text book and I’m like ‘Let me show you some anatomy...’” Clara joked and then pulled her shirt up and flashed me her perky breasts.

I grinned at the sight of her pink nipples and bouncy C-cups. I couldn’t resist the chance to squeeze on in my hand. But as I put my palm around my girlfriends boob the door opened.

“Hey mom wants to know if - OMG! Sorry!” Madison began to ask and then went beat red, blushing as she witnessed me getting to second base.

“MADDIE! Knock before you just burst in!” Clara screamed, pulling her shirt back down quickly over my hand to preserve her modesty.

“Whatever... it’s not like you guys were even doing anything that bad!” Madison insisted.

I pulled my hand out from between Clara’s shirt and boob quickly and my girlfriend smirked at her younger sister.

“Oh? What’s something ‘bad’ that you could have caught us doing?” Clara asked.

“You know...” Madison squirmed, not wanting to describe anything especially steamy in front of me.

“Like what? Like sex? You think that me and Jack might have just been passionately fucking here in my childhood bedroom before dinner?” Clara asked her sister with a giggle.

Madison’s face turned a reddish purple from embarrassment. It was clear that the 16-year-old didn’t have a lot of experience yet.

“No... whatever! You were just doing ‘boob stuff’ that’s nothing I haven’t done with my boyfriend!” Madison insisted.

Clara looked at her younger sibling and burst out laughing. I also had to stifle a chuckle, there was something incredibly sweet and innocent to how Madison viewed dating and sex since she was still so young and inexperienced.

“Awww you do ‘boob stuff’ with your boyfriend? You let him honk your little mosquito bites Maddie? That’s adorable? Who is this stud? One of your little classmates?” My 23-year-old girlfriend asked her sister with a patronizing smile.

“OMG! I can’t believe you! Why do you and Bri always have to make fun of me!? It’s just a guy I met in the FFXIV community! All right!?” Madison snapped in frustration and then stormed out of the room.

I looked over at Clara, wrapping my hands around her waist.

“Don’t you think you were being a little mean to your sister? She’s really sweet...” I suggested gently.

Clara smirked and rolled her eyes at me.

“Mom totally shelters her, which is why she’s in here drooling over you and bragging about sexting with some dorky online boyfriend. At least when I tease her, I do it with love!” Clara explained before pulling me into another make-out session.

“Well... judging by that One Direction poster you have rolled up in the corner over there it wasn’t like you were the coolest most bad-ass girl when you were 16...” I teased as I gently sucked on her lip and moved my hands around her plump ass.

The door opens again.

“Oh my god Maddie!! What?” Clara shouted.

But the woman in the doorway wasn’t Madison. It was Clara’s older sister Amanda who looked pale and strung out with dyed black hair and her blonde roots starting to show. She had tattoos on her hands and arms and even her



fingers. Her nose, eyebrow and several parts of her ears were pierced and adorned with piercings. She looked to be about 30 and living a rock and roll party life-style. She was wearing a leather jacket over a faded tank top and jeans with a chain for a belt.

“Hey Clare-bear. It’s me, not the little goober. I watched her spy on you for a few minutes from the door crack though... Mom needs to let me take that girl down to NYC and away from her computer.” Amanda explained. Her voice had a bit of a rasp to it like Natasha Lyon as she spoke.

“God. Mandy, you can’t even take responsibility over the kid you HAVE. I don’t think mom’s going to let you take our kid sister down to New York so you can show her the seedy side of Soho...” Clara smirked at her older sister.

Amanda seemed to take the comment in stride, shrugging it off and smiling.

“Hey it’s free around the clock baby sitting. My apartments got lead paint and shit. When I get my employment situation all straight then I’ll buy a nice house and take Harper off of moms hands... anyway sorry to interrupt your cannoodling or whatever you crazy kids were doing but I wanted to see if you had anything I could smoke. I’ve been here for two hours already and I really need something to take the edge off...” The 30-year-old punk girl explained, shifting from one foot to the other a bit anxiously.

Clara rolled her eyes and shook her head.

“God. Do I look like I smoke? Go down to the 7/11 or something!” My girlfriend replied to her older sister in an annoyed voice.

“I wasn’t looking for ciggy’s there, Princess. I was hoping that now that you’re a college grad you might carry some good shit on you... I would check with Bree but she’s so fucking straight... well, you know, not *straight*... but she doesn’t smoke pot. ‘They do drug testing before every practice’... Like, marijuana isn’t a drug, it’s a weed. It’s just a weed that if you happen to light it on fire and smoke it really calms you the fuck down. Which is what I need right now.” Amanda ranted.

“Oh sure - why don't you like... take a hit off of the BONG I keep in my purse...” Clara replied sarcastically.

“Actually, I've got some.” I interjected, taking out some rolled joints out of my back pocket.

Clara gasped and watched as I handed one over to her older sister. I was nervous that she'd be mad but by the amazed smile on her face I could tell that she was actually impressed and a little turned on.

“Wow, boyfriend for the win. Hey cutie, I didn't catch your name. But thanks for this! You're a life saver!” Amanda nodded to me as I lit the joint between her lips.

“It's uh, Jack. Cool to meet you, I guess!” I replied, a bit nervously.

Amanda took a deep drag, blowing smoke out of her nostrils and then pinched the joint between her finger and thumb and waved it in my direction.

“This one's a keeper.” She told Clara, giving me her seal of approval for whatever it was worth and then turning around and disappearing out the door.

Clara looked at me for several moment's with her jaw hanging open.

“You brought pot.... To my mom's house?” She asked trying to sound like she going to be mad but I knew she was impressed.

I shrugged and smirked.

“I figured that there might be a time over the week here that you and I might want to relax and feel chill so...” I explain.

“Ooo how did you know that I have a thing for bad-boys?” She purred, pulling me into another kiss.

“It was the One Direction poster in the corner that gave it away...” I joked.

Dinner was surprisingly fun. Despite all of the teasing and taunting and in-fighting among Clara and her sisters they all seemed to really love each other and have fun in each others company. They reminisced about past Christmas' together:

“Remember when mom took us all caroling around the neighborhood and you ran into that strangers home in the middle of ‘Oh Come All Ye Faithful because you had to use the bathroom so bad?’ Clara asked Brianna with a laugh.

They made plans for the week:

“It’s supposed to snow a LOT on Wednesday so I think we should all take Harper up to Admirals hill and go sledding!” Madison suggested, clapping her hands in excitement.

They teased their mom:

“Oh my goodness. Girls, don’t let me have more than one slice of this pie this week! If I keep eating it I’m going to get fat!” Angela groaned as she took a bite of the store-bought pie from Madison’s plate.

“Too late mom!” The girls all called back with a laugh.

Things got a bit awkward and quiet when their father was mentioned.

“Who wants to help me trim the tree after dinner?” Angela asked everyone.

“Meeeeeee!!!” Harper called out enthusiastically raising her hand.

“Mom, I saw you only brought up 8 stockings. We need 9 so that Jack can have one!” Madison pointed out.

“Wait, did I miscount? Me, Aunt Lilly, you four girls, the baby and Jack makes eight... I figured he could have the blue one.” Angela explained.

An uncomfortable silence fell over the table as everyone looked to Amanda.

“The blue one is dad’s stocking.” The oldest sister replied in a quiet voice.

Clara had mentioned to me that her father had back when she was a kid in a car accident. I saw a picture of him with the rest of the family from back in the early 2000s before he had passed away but beyond that there wasn’t many reminders of him around the house.

“Okay... My mistake. I just forgot all right? It’s been a long time and I forgot. We’ll get Jack a new one. I have plenty down in the storage in the basement.” Angela said tossing her hands up in the air, prepared for this to become some big fight.

“We hang one every year for him. So excuse me if it seems wild to me that you just ‘forgot’...” Amanda growled back through gritted teeth.

“Well excuse me, Amanda, maybe I have a lot going on right now - like raising another child in my 50s with no support and- and- don’t think I can’t smell that pot smoke on you young lady! I was young once too you know! Part of your rehab agreement is that you stay off of ALL drugs...” Angela began to shout.

Clara quickly picked up Harper from her chair.

“Ooookay... let’s go check out that Christmas tree!” My girlfriend suggested in a sing-songy voice as she quickly carried the little girl out of the room to avoid her seeing her mother and grandmother fighting.

“I’ll clear the plates!” Briana said jumping up quickly and gathering up the dirty dishes.

“I’ll help!” Madison chimed in, taking the butter dish and sparkling water.

I looked around wondering what I should be doing. I didn’t want to be left at the table awkwardly with Angela and Amanda tensely glaring at one another. I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned to see the wizened face of Clara’s old Aunt Lillian smiling at me.

“Excuse me, dear. I was wondering if you could help me fix something in the other room...” The old woman asked me in a rattling voice.

Happy for an excuse to leave the table, I nodded and hopped up, following the nonagenarian out of the room.

“I’ve had this old place for ages now. I must have been younger than you when my husband bought it for me... god rest his soul... It’s a good house but I’ve never been able to get this clock working above the fireplace...” Lillian explained as she slowly lead me into the living room.

I looked and saw a digital clock embedded into the wall just above the mantle. The numbers on it read ‘**2023**’.

“It looks like it’s working to me! That’s the right year!” I said with a polite smile.

“Yes but - that’s all it ever does... would you mind taking a look at it for me and seeing if you can figure it out?” Lillian insisted, pointing a gnarled hand up at the clock.

I shrugged. It was something to do and seemed to make the old woman happy.

“Uh sure. I’ll see what I can do!” I offered with a shrug.

Lillian smiled at me warmly and nodded her head. Tapping my shoulder affectionately she began to shuffle away.

“Good boy. I knew you wouldn’t let me down.” She said with a wink of her old sunken eye.

I smiled back and then turned to examine the digital clock. It was set pretty tightly into the wall. I couldn’t easily pop it out, so I went onto the porch to find some tools. I came back with a couple screwdrivers and found that Clara was leading her niece and younger sisters in trimming the tree.

“Whatcha up to? Aunt Lillian put you to work on something?” Clara asked with a giggle.

“Yeah she wanted me to check out this old clock. What do you know about it?” I asked as I began to unscrew the casing.

“Oh that thing? It’s been broken my whole life – probably my moms whole life! I don’t even notice it anymore.” Clara explained.

“Yeah but... its showing the correct year. So it must update at least once every year right?” I asked in confusion. Was this even supposed to do anything more? I couldn’t see any other part of the screen that would show the month or the day or even the current time.

“Yeah... weird right? Like who needs to know what the year is? It’s only ever helpful ONE day a year!” Clara giggled.

I managed to pull the device completely out of the wall. It was attached with wires snaking inside the house itself. I couldn’t see any obvious switches or ways to change what was on the display except for one small nob on the bottom. I attempted to move it with my fingers but it felt pretty stiff and jammed. I decided to go get a pair of needle-nose pliers to try again.

As I left the room the reading of the clock changed and now read ‘2019’.

**To be continued...**