

a Christmas Visitor ❄️

'A CHRISTMAS VISITOR,' **BACKGROUND OF PERSIAN GULF WAR FAMILIAR GROUND TO FAMILIES**

Synopsis

In the medium-sized American town of New Chatham, the Boyajian family – father George (William Devane), mother Carol (Meredith Baxter) and daughter/sister Jean (Reagan Pasternak) have been consumed by the death of their son/brother John Boyajian, a Staff Sergeant/Medic in the Army Air Corps. John has the dubious distinction of being his hometown's only casualty of the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991).

The family has been so immersed in grief (since the news of John's death in 1991) that they haven't had the slightest inkling, nor remembrance of how special holidays are to families. The Boyajians have not celebrated Christmas, or any other special occasion, since the fateful Christmas Eve when an Army corporal and his Chaplain paid a visit to tell the family the horrific news that John had been killed.

Even the wreath that adorned their door in 1991 was laid at the grave of their son, who had been due to come home for a Christmas visit. They have not celebrated Christmas since.

George tries to take solace in the fact that his young 18-year-old son was a man, brought up to serve his country with a sense of righteous duty. John died sacrificing himself to provide fire cover for a wounded helicopter pilot trying to take off in a volley of crossfire. Posthumously, John Boyajian has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DCS), Combat Infantryman's Badge, Silver Star, Purple Heart, Air Medal, Gulf War Service Ribbon, Gulf War Campaign Ribbon and the National Defense Service Medal. As John's father laments, "We gave them John, and they gave us these in return."

Carol holds up some degree of blame to her husband for her son's death. Carol believes that George should have been more forceful in stopping their son. If so, he would not have gone into the service and, therefore, been alive today.

The family has yet to recover from the life-altering tragedy of 11 years ago, and now it faces another. Jean, John's sister and George and Carol's youngest child, has just had a biopsy for a possible breast malignancy. All in all, things are not looking good for the family. Jean openly questions whether she'll be around to see Christmas come and go in her future.

Following his daughter's test/surgery, George visits the War Memorial, which becomes a catalyst that sets off a flurry of miraculous recoveries for the entire family.

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While George 'talks' to a plaque bearing his son's name, he is unaware of an approaching gang. The three rough-talking young men harass George and imply they will damage the War Memorial. They also want to steal George's toolbox from the back of his pickup. As the gang approaches George, a dark, indistinct shadow of a stranger appears in the reflection. The stranger yells out, "Is there a problem here?"

The gang scatters and runs away. Back home, George tries to tell Carol of his run-in and how he is certain he heard "voices" at the Memorial. All of this makes Carol furious.

Carol reminds her husband that their son was buried next to her mom and dad – at the cemetery – not interred at the War Memorial. She concludes by telling George to get a hold of himself, that he sounds ridiculous talking about "voices" coming from the Memorial.

Though hurt by his wife's refusal to attempt to go on with life, George is convinced that it was his son who provided friendly cover at the Memorial that night.

Over Carol's objections, George goes about splitting logs for a Yule fire, looking through the attic for ancient holiday ornaments and remembering how much his children had loved the holidays – and how it brought them together as a family.

But George's lightness of step is tempered by Jean's dread that she has breast cancer and is going to die. Jean sleeps a lot, tired from her surgery and the medication. George feels compelled to do something to bring healing to his family.

Hearing his wife's admonishment that she does not want to be alone tonight, George tells her he must run out for a quick errand. Carol doesn't yet know that George has intentions of buying the family's first Christmas tree in 11 years!

Driving down Old Mill Road, George is suddenly startled by the appearance of a stranger on the road. George's pickup skids to avoid impact and ends up with the rear wheels in a ditch. At first, George is angry, but upon closer inspection, the young man in the road carries an Army bag, just like John's.

Casual conversation follows between the two men. George learns that Matthew (Dean McDermott) is hitchhiking presumably to join friends in the morning. George tells him that since he doesn't have any place to be in particular that he should join their family for Christmas Eve. On the way back to the house, George stops at Lester's Tree Stand, which looks to have slim pickings until Matthew discovers a showroom-type tree where none existed before.

Back at the Boyajian home, Jean breaks down and tells Carol that her life came to a grinding halt when her brother died, but unlike her parents, she didn't understand why the family stopped celebrating holidays. She felt that it must be because she wasn't as special or worthwhile as her brother. All of this is terrible news to Carol, who sets about in earnest to give her daughter an incredible Christmas. She puts on a turkey, finds the family's box of ornaments, including the tree-topping star with one corner broken off.

Prior to going into the house, George whispers to Matthew "maybe you could pretend you sort of knew my son.... it would make my wife feel better."

George and Matthew make introductions to the rest of the family as they bring in the beautiful tree. While Carol makes eggnog, the family is amazed as Matthew brings

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out the star – which he has now fixed. As he extends it to Jean to put atop the tree, she tells him "maybe we need the stepladder." But Matthew extends both hands to form a stirrup and glides her effortlessly up until the star is on the tree. The family is taken back because, when John and Jean were both young, John had tried to lift his sister up to the tree, only to become unbalanced and drop her, which broke the star to begin with.

Matthew tells the family he has had brief encounters with John. George smiles knowingly. But George's smile fades when the simple, non-descript traits he whispered to Matthew about John before entering the house come out as precise stories the family knows to be true only of John. George is concerned. He's let a con artist into the house!

George leads Matthew out to the barn on the pretext of showing him John's medals. Once in the barn, however, George's curiosity turns to rage and he pins Matthew against a wall, screaming, "what kind of a game are you playing? I never told you those details about my son."

Matthew succeeds in convincing George that it was all lucky guesses. George's lingering doubts turn into gratitude for everything this night is turning out to be.

Inside, Carol shows Matthew one of John's favorite things – a snow globe. She tells him that once John wished for snow and before the flakes could settle in the glass ball, the snow was falling down outside. Matthew asks Carol if she wishes for snow, and he shakes the globe. Outside, large flakes begin to drift from the sky.

In the dark of John's room, Matthew goes from corner to corner, reliving John's biggest accomplishment – the state baseball championship – as he takes hold of a bat in the corner of the room. Later, Matthew takes off his shirt to prepare for bed. We see his body is a mass of purplish scars and shrapnel wounds. Could this really be John?

In the middle of the night, Jean wakes from a feverish sleep. She blindly stumbles out onto the front lawn where a light snow is falling. Almost as a reflex, she opens her nightgown to the place where bandages and stitches remain from her surgery. She removes the bandage and lets one snowflake after another fall onto her skin. Miraculously, the stitches and scar all disappear.

Carol and George hear noises and run outside to see Jean's healing. The family is grateful beyond measure. George hears a voice say "Merry Christmas!" He replies, "Merry Christmas, son!" But when George turns around, no one is there. "Believe in miracles, George," says Carol. "That's all you have to do."

The next morning, the family is loath to lose Matthew, but he convinces George he must move on and get to the interstate where he has promised to meet some friends. Before they ever get to the interstate, Matthew tells George to just pull over and let him out by the side of the road. As he walks into the wind, snow begins to swirl around him. The snow swirls and swirls. George is astonished to find there's no one there. "Merry Christmas, son," George cries.

"A Christmas Visitor" concludes with the family celebrating the day in church with their neighbors and friends, something they have not done since Christmas Eve, 1991.

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