

Humble Pie

by
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A tiny kitchen in a trailer. Madeleine wears a pretty Christmas dress and holly in her hair, and is a little drunk. She and her husband Jeff are staring, horrified, at a pie.

MADDY

We are *done* with the humane traps.

JEFF

Look at that. It's perfectly centered, like he meant it...

MADDY

This pie... This pie was our redemption.

JEFF

Maybe we can...

MADDY

What? What can we? A rat turd in your pie, that's unsalvagable. There's nothing to be done. Nothing. I'm just the family lame-o. Not even the lame-o that even though she failed at the rest of Christmas can at least pull a perfect lemon merengue pie out of her lame-o ass. Boy, this dinner is going down in Christmas history.

JEFF

Who knew they'd be so freaked out by fresh food.

MADDY

They want their green bean casserole. They want Jell-O salad with cottage cheese and walnuts.

JEFF

Cottage cheese?!

MADDY

Oh, hell yeah, and *celery*. They want stuffing from a bag! I baked bread for them! I dried the cubes. Jesus! I even grew the Herbs. And then Mom wants to be helpful, "You know Maddy, you can't go wrong with Stouffer's."

JEFF

Yeah, that was classy.

MADDY

But the pie! The pie was unscornable. If I ever find the rat that did this, he is dead, dead, dead!

She throws a little tantrum and kicks the cupboard or trash can.

Something scurries by their feet. (NOTE - this can be accomplished simply with their movement or a fake critter can be rigged on a string and tugged across the floor.)

They both scream and dance around.

JEFF

Rat! Rat! Rat!

MADDY

(pointing)

There! Jeff! There!

JEFF

Where?!

MADDY

There!

Jeff grabs a rolling pin.

JEFF

I see him! Oh, you are so trapped. You are so dead.

MADDY

Get him, Honey!

Jeff approaches, murder in his eye.

JEFF

Don't tell anyone I screamed.

MADDY

I won't.

He grabs a bag of pretzels.

JEFF

Use this to block his exit.

MADDY

His exit?

JEFF

His escape route! So he can't escape! So I can- Don't just stand there! Pretzels! Pretzels! Block! Block!

The rat scurries out the escape route and into a new hiding place. Maddy screams again and dances around trying to keep her feet clear.

JEFF
Maddy!

MADDY
What!

JEFF
A little help would have been good!

MADDY
Well, you were yelling and... It happened really fast.

JEFF
Maybe if you weren't completely sauced you'd have some reflexes.

MADDY
It's rough out there. I had a few glasses of wine.

JEFF
More than a few.

MADDY
Well maybe if you were a better hunter, you wouldn't have to blame your failures on me!

JEFF
What? I can hunt.

MADDY
Oh, yeah. Like how you hunt for a job?

A beat. That stung.

JEFF
Just work the pretzels next time.

Jeff grabs a flashlight and peers into the rat's new hiding place.

MADDY
Oh, what does it matter. There's no pleasing my family.

Maddy gets a bottle of tequila from a cupboard and pours herself a shot.

JEFF
I see him.

MADDY
One more comment about the potted rosemary- "That's no Christmas tree. That's a shrub." Whatta they think, trees grow on trees?

Maddy laughs at her joke, tosses the shot back, winces.

MADDY

Oh, just get me a gun. I'll take the tequila and a gun out in the woods and-

JEFF

Maddy...

MADDY

Your right. I can't leave you behind. You shoot me first and then-

JEFF

Maddy, get the broom.

MADDY

(Dryly)

But I was so ready to work the pretzels.

Maddy gets the broom. He arranges a few things to create a trap.

JEFF

Poke that corner. Flush him this way. Go!

Maddy pokes.

JEFF

Come on, you little... Yes! Hah!

Garth, Maddie's brother, enters.

GARTH

How's that pie comin'? Dad's gettin' surly.

Maddie and Jeff turn at the sound of his voice and the rat sees it's chance, jumps the barrier. Maddie and Jeff jump back and it scurries toward Garth who screams and dances around.

GARTH

Rat! Rat! Rat!

JEFF

He jumped! Did you see that? I didn't know rats could jump.

GARTH

Christmas in squalor.

A dirty look from Maddy.

GARTH

I'm sorry, did I say squalor? Nature. I meant Christmas in nature. I must not be thinking clearly due to the malnutrition. Aunt Jenny and I were wondering, where did you even find a turkey that small?

JEFF

There was plenty of food, you just-

GARTH

You call that food? Gram almost broke her dentures on that *whole grain* stuffing. Shit, Gramps almost *swallowed* his when you thanked the "Universal Spirit" for all the-

MADDY

Well, why not a little gratitude and mindfulness? Instead of all the whining and grouching and-

GARTH

Oh, yeah, let's have an "in-the-moment" Christmas. And why is it that poor people always go on about gratitude?

MADDY

We're not poor! We live simply. That's-

GARTH

Oh, let's just serve the pie!

JEFF

Sorry, but the rat had an accident on your precious pie.

A long pause and then Garth takes a cautious look at the pie.

GARTH

Jesus!

MADDY

Maybe we could all go on a nice walk by the creek.

GARTH

This family doesn't walk on Christmas! We eat, open presents, eat, watch tv, eat and then we have PIE. That's what we do!

JEFF

Is it maybe a little psychotic to bank your whole happiness, your whole Christmas, on pie?

GARTH AND MADDY

No!

JEFF

Please don't say that Christmas is about pie.

GARTH

Christmas is about traditions that a family develops over years and years. Traditions like *green bean casserole*!

MADDY

Aaaaaagh! The fucking casserole.

GARTH

Would it have killed you? A trip to the frozen foods, some mushroom soup. Equilibrium restored. The universe ordered.

MADDY

I grew the green beans, I got excited! I didn't want to smother them in soup. What would it have cost you to eat the fucking fruit of your sisters labor, on Chr-

GARTH

How did this family ever produce such a loser!

MADDY

Shut up, Garth!

JEFF

There he is!

Jeff spots the rat and goes for it. He spends the next moments getting it cornered.

GARTH

You have got to be adopted!

Maddy scoops a handful of pie and wings it at Garth hitting him square in the chest.

GARTH

Gross! You wanna give me hantavirus?! You are toast.

There is a brief chase and Garth gets Maddie in a headlock. She swings wildly, but can't get free. Garth takes a scoop of pie and mashes it into her hair, LAUGHING at her.

MADDY

Aaaaaaaah! My hair! You asshole! Lemme go!

JEFF

When you two get done screwing around I could use a hand.

GARTH

You got him?

MADDY

Got who? Who do you- You got the rat?!

JEFF

Get me a bowl. Big. The salad one.

GARTH

Where?

MADDY

Let me go, you cretin! I'll get it-

Garth let's Maddy go. She slugs him in the arm, gets a clear glass bowl, hands it to Jeff and he puts the bowl over the rat. They all peer at it.

MADDY

What's that on his mouth?

GARTH

Probably rabid.

JEFF

It's merengue. Can we not get hysterical?

Jeff stands, weapon raised, other hand ready to whisk away the bowl.

MADDY

Okay, Babe, you got a clear shot? Make sure you get him. Don't let him get away again.

JEFF

Um...

GARTH

Time to kill the vermin now, Jeffrey.

(beat)

Bombs away.

(beat)

Seriously.

MADDY

C'mon, Great Hunter! That's the rat that stole Christmas!

JEFF

He's just so, I don't know... not what I expected.

MADDY

What're you-

(Maddy looks more closely)

Oh. You're right. He's so... clean or something.

GARTH

Oh, come on!

MADDY

He's so Fluffy. Hi, Fluffy. Hi, little Fluffy boy. Aw, look at his whiskers!

GARTH

Give me that rolling pin, sissy boy.

He grabs for the rolling pin. An awkward scuffle ensues with Jeff managing to keep it away and Garth getting red in the face.

GARTH

Give it! Give it! Give it!

JEFF

Fuck off you rude fuck! Maddy named him. You can't kill a thing if it has a name.

GARTH

You are protecting a rabid rat that shat on your pie! No wonder you guys are in this sorry state!

Dad enters. Everything stops.

DAD

Who's palm do I have to grease to get some pie?

JEFF

What is it with this family and pie?!

DAD

You got somethin' against pie?

MADDY

There's no pie! Okay? There. Is. No. Pie.

DAD

Well then what's that in your hair? Can you explain to me, Madeleine, why my pie is in your hair?

MADDY

Because Garth called me adopted which maybe I am since I married for love instead of money and live in a world where the rats are too cute to kill and the green beans are too fresh and there's no pie!

DAD

Are you being huffy with me?

MADDY

...Maybe.

DAD

Madeleine you demanded that we have Christmas at your home this year.

(silencing her objection)

Djt, djt, djt! And you refused to take money from me so that we could enjoy ourselves properly. Right? Well, to my mind that relieves you of the right to deny us our dissatisfaction. Now, go get cleaned up. Garth, tell everyone we're going to Denny's.

Garth exits. Dad starts after.

MADDY

Denny's, Dad? Denny's?!!

DAD

What! There's pie at Denny's.

MADDY

Fine! Go! I just want to be clear that I tried my ass off to make a great Christmas and you all act like that's nothing!

DAD

(Exasperated)

Maddy, dammit, we're your family! It's our job to love you! But you cannot expect us to go without pie on Christmas! Now you're a grown woman and I can't force you to go to Denny's, but your mother and I would be pleased to see you there.

Dad exits. Maddy crumples.

JEFF

Okay, so now we know. Christmas really is about pie.

MADDY

"It's our JOB to love you?" Who are these people?

JEFF

Well, maybe, it's their job to love you, but I'm a free agent. I know who you are and I choose you.

MADDY

I want *them* to choose me.

JEFF

Oh, really? You do? Well, Then let's go to Denny's.

MADDY

What?! We are not- Who's side are you on?!

JEFF

(getting frustrated)

Yours, you big dummy! I mean, I'm surprised you even made a pie. Why not just serve bran muffins for dessert if you want them to choose you so much? Why not throw a few more obstacles in their way so that it reeeeeeally means something when they choose you.

MADDY

Oh.

JEFF

Yeah.

MADDY

You would have loved the pie. I made it with fresh lemons.

JEFF

Well, how else would you make a lemon mer-

MADDY

Seriously. You can get anything in a box. God, Jeff. I encouraged you to bludgeon a woodland creature.

JEFF

Yeah. Our Christmas spirit flagged a bit there.

They look at Fluffy, smiling.

MADDY

I think we owe it to Fluffy to go to Denny's. I mean, after all he went through to teach us what Christmas is truly about.

JEFF

What is Christmas truly about?

MADDY

Well... Not pie.

JEFF

Oh, what a monumental relief. Christmas is not about pie!

MADDY

I think Fluffy is telling us that Christmas is about feeling charitably toward those who crap on your pie.

JEFF

That's... Wow. I'm gonna have to sit with that. Thank you Fluffy.

MADDY

Thank you, Fluffy.