

Feliz Navidad

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Close on a kid's hands twisting an oversized Christmas light into a light strand that adorns a window.

The same hands as they carefully arrange a tiny Baby Jesus doll in a homemade nativity scene.

The strand of lights is plugged into an extension cord.

The lights blaze on, blasting colored light into the warm South Texas night. They cover the front of a modest home.

In the yard, a kid stands admiring his handiwork.

This is LUIS, awkward, slightly chubby, about eleven. He's just finished decorating his house for Christmas.

In his arms he holds LARRY, a tiny orange kitten. Larry is painfully cute, a tiny elf hat propped atop his furry head.

The yard is filled with blow-up Christmas decorations, Santa, the Star of Bethlehem, a snowman.

A smile spreads across Luis' face. If Larry could smile, he would too.

EXT. MISS CRUMPLETON'S HOUSE, PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Next door, MISS CRUMPLETON, old, tattered, curlers in her hair, glares disapprovingly at the glowing lights on Luis' house.

She walks inside her home and CLOSES THE DOOR BEHIND HER WITH A THUD.

Seconds later, she jerks the blinds down in the window.

CUT TO:

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Inexplicably, from the shadows, A SINGLE ACCORDIONIST STRIKES UP A RENDITION OF FELIZ NAVIDAD.

The music fills the night.

From the street, Luis' house looks conspicuously illuminated next to the dark edifice of Miss Crumpleton's cold home.

Oblivious to the Accordionist, Luis carries Larry toward the front door of the house.

Luis and Larry enter the home. The front door closes behind them.

A wreath attached to the door fills the frame as the door closes. Inside the wreath, the film's title is constructed in garish greenery.

It reads, FELIZ NAVIDAD.

FADE OUT:

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LUIS' BEDROOM - MORNING

Luis lies in his bed sleeping. Larry ambles around beside him.

Luis' eyes slowly open.

They shift over to a small Christmas calendar that sits on the night stand beside the bed. The calendar looks like a cheerful little gingerbread house.

Luis reaches out and bends back one of the window shaped tabs to reveal the date. December 21st. Four days until Christmas.

Luis shifts his gaze to two pictures hanging on the wall.

The first is an impressionist painting of a French Sous Chef, bright red crawfish laid out on a cutting board in front of him.

The second, a photograph of Luis and his mother as they stand in front of a table laden with Christmas food, broad smiles on their faces.

CUT TO:

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, KITCHEN - MORNING

A cookbook being laid on the countertop. On it, a photo of Luis' mother. We recognize her from the photograph that hangs on his bedroom wall.

Under the photograph, in Spanish, the words "Mama's Recipes" appear.

Luis opens the cookbook to a page that reads "Chilaquiles". He looks at the recipe.

Luis heaps a spoonful of lard into a cast iron skillet. It bubbles and HISSES.

He shreds corn tortillas with his hands and drops them into the skillet to fry.

He pours green chile sauce into the skillet.

He drops cheese curds into the bubbling sauce.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, FATHER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

ARMANDO, Luis' father, lies in bed. He's burley, rough around the edges, a South Texas Patriarch with axle grease under his fingernails.

Armando opens his eyes.

Luis stands next to him holding a bowl of the freshly cooked chilaquiles. Luis is wearing a frilly cooking apron.

Armando sighs, immediately exhausted by the spectacle. He looks toward the wall in frustration. This isn't the first time he's been awakened this way.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Luis and Armando stand by the front door staring at each other.

Armando reaches out and jerks the apron from around Luis' neck.

Armando shoves a plastic bow and arrow into Luis' hands and points dramatically toward the front door.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Armando closes the cookbook. He looks longingly at the picture of his wife on the cover.

He crosses himself in the catholic tradition, then notices a note on the counter. He picks it up and reads it.

ANGLE ON THE NOTE

Luis' Christmas list: One kitchen mixer

BACK TO SCENE

Disgusted, Armando crumples up the note.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Armando puts the cookbook back on the bookshelf.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT YARD - DAY

Luis stands in the yard trying to launch the arrow from the bow.

Each time, it spins out of control, landing only a few feet away. He's not cut out for this sort of thing, and he knows it.

As Luis redoubles his efforts, JOSEPH, the neighborhood terror, walks by along the cracking sidewalk.

Joseph is skinny, early twenties, tattoos cover his face. His shaved head glistens in the the sun.

Luis looks at Joseph for a moment, then averts his eyes in terror.

Joseph watches Luis in disgust and keeps going.

EXT. MISS CRUMPLETON'S HOUSE, PORCH - CONTINUOUS

From her porch, Miss Crumpleton has also been watching. She's seen enough of Luis' inept sportsmanship.

She Goes inside.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Armando stands at the window holding the bowl of chilaquiles and watching Luis.

A look of ecstasy spreads across his face as he chews the cheesy, crunchy breakfast.

He doesn't want to admit it but, my god, the food is good. The boy's got talent.

Suddenly Armando is interrupted by A TINY, SQUEAKING MEOW.

Armando cuts his eyes toward Larry, who sits on the floor in his elf hat looking up at him with twinkling kitten eyes.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

THE FRONT DOOR CREEKS OPEN. Armando's hand reaches out from inside and sets Larry on the porch.

The door shuts.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT YARD - DAY

A LONG SHRILL NOTE FROM THE ACCORDIONIST. He launches into a whirling polka that spans the following montage.

BEGIN MONTAGE

In his bedroom, Luis bends back the next window shaped tab on the Christmas calendar. December 22nd.

Luis mixes dough with his hands in the kitchen, working the dough feverishly. Armando appears behind him, a frown on his face.

In the living room, Armando jerks the apron from around Luis' neck, hands him a BB Gun, and points toward the front door.

In the yard, THE ACCORDIONIST CONTINUES TO PLAY

In his bedroom Luis bends back the next window shaped tab on the Christmas calendar. December 23rd.

In the kitchen Luis, covered in flour, rolls out tortillas with a small wooden dowel. The kitchen is a wreck. Armando appears in the doorway scowling.

In the living room, Armando jerks the apron from around Luis' neck. He shoves a box of plastic army men in Luis' hands and points toward the front door.

THE ACCORDIONIST CONTINUES TO PLAY

Luis bends back the next window shaped tab on the Christmas calendar. December 24th.

Close on Luis' hands as he finishes whisking together a dark, rich mole. He pours the sauce over steaming enchiladas. Dirty pots and pans litter the kitchen. He holds the steaming enchiladas out toward Armando who stands in front of him. Armando's face turns red.

In the living room Armando jerks a tiny kitten-sized apron from around Larry's neck. Next he pulls the apron off Luis. He shoves a soccer ball in Luis' hands.

In the yard, THE ACCORDIONIST HITS HIS LAST NOTE AS THE MONTAGE ENDS.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT YARD - DAY

Luis stands in the yard trying unsuccessfully to juggle the soccer ball with his feet.

He loses control and the ball rolls away, stopping at Joseph's feet, who happens to be passing by at just the wrong moment.

Joseph gives Luis a stern look. Luis is frozen with fear.

Finally, after what seems like an eternity, Joseph kicks the ball back toward Luis.

Luis, panic stricken, turns and runs around the side of the house, tripping over the nativity as he goes.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, SIDE OF THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As Luis rounds the corner of the house, he's stopped in his tracks by the sight of Armando pouring the last of his flour into the trash.

Luis' lip begins to tremble. Tears well up in his eyes.

EXT. MISS CRUMPLETON'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

Luis' hand knocking on Miss Crumpleton's door.

THE DOOR CREAKS OPEN.

Miss Crumpleton eyes Luis. He stands on her porch holding the empty bag of flour and a measuring cup.

She shifts her gaze to Larry, who sits beside Luis wearing his elf's hat.

Miss Crumpleton's face twists into a forced, melodramatic smile.

She takes the measuring cup from Luis, then disappears into the house.

INT. MISS CRUMPLETON'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Miss Crumpleton stands in the kitchen filling the measuring cup with milk.

A bright red Kitchen Aid mixer sits on the kitchen counter next to her.

EXT. MISS CRUMPLETON'S HOUSE, PORCH - CONTINUOUS

The door opens again. Luis looks hopeful.

Suddenly, Miss Crumpleton dumps the milk from the measuring cup onto Luis' head. Her smile turns to a scowl.

Next, Miss Crumpleton upends a bag of flour over Luis.

Luis stands on the porch in shock.

Miss Crumpleton takes an lurching step toward Larry the kitten, sending him scurrying in terror.

EXT. MEXICAN BAKERY - DAY

Luis stands outside of a mexican bakery holding Larry in his arms.

He looks up at its sign. EMPANADAS, BUNUELOS, MEXICAN WEDDING COOKIES.

Luis puts Larry down on the sidewalk, motions for him to stay, then enters the front door of the bakery.

INT. MEXICAN BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

Luis walks toward the front counter, gazing at the heavenly desserts as he goes.

A woman stands at the counter eyeing his approach. This is FELINA. She's beautiful, early thirties maybe. Jet black hair. A hairstyle belonging more to the fifties than the present.

Felina smiles at Luis.

Luis nervously holds up his empty bag of flour.

EXT. MEXICAN BAKERY - DAY

Luis stands in front of the bakery clutching his new bag of flour and a bottle of milk.

A look of panic spreads across his face. Larry is gone.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Luis walks down the garbage strewn street frantically searching for Larry.

THE ACCORDIONIST FOLLOWS BEHIND HIM PLAYING A DOLEFUL TUNE.

Luis silently mouths the words Larry! Larry! Larry!

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Luis continues to search.

THE ACCORDIONIST'S TUNE BECOMES MORE HEARTBREAKING.

Torn plastic bags float through the air and hang in the craggily branches.

Wild street dogs prowl the overgrown sidewalks with hungry looks.

Larry is nowhere to be found.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT PORCH - EVENING

Luis pours milk from the glass bottle into a tiny saucer.

He sits beside the saucer of milk looking forlorn, waiting.

Finally, the door opens and Armando motions for Luis to come inside.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Luis and Armando sit silently in the room, a glum look on Luis' face. It's Christmas eve, and it's a sad one.

Finally, Luis picks up a pad of paper lying nearby on the coffee table and begins to write.

ANGLE ON THE NOTE

"List for Papa Noel: My kitten Larry and one kitchen mixer."

BACK TO SCENE

Luis slides the list slowly to Armando.

Armando looks at it. He looks at the words "one kitchen mixer".

He glares at Luis, shakes his head, then rips the sheet of paper in half.

He drops it into the nearby wastebasket.

Luis gets up and walks back toward his bedroom.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT YARD - NIGHT

One by one the lights are turned off in Luis' house.

Only the christmas lights remain on, framing the dark windows in colored light.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, FATHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Armando lies asleep in his bed, snoring in the darkness.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

The light comes on in the kitchen.

Close on the cookbook being opened to a page that reads "Christmas Cookies".

Close on Luis' hands as he mixes together cookie dough.

The oven opens and Luis pulls out freshly baked cookies.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Close on Luis' hands as he places the freshly baked cookies on the coffee table.

Beside the cookies he places a tall glass of milk.

He tapes together the Christmas list that Armando ripped apart and places it next to the cookies.

He flings his apron over the back of the couch, then heads off to bed.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LUIS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Luis lies in bed. He looks over at the picture on the wall. He looks at his mother.

He clicks the light off.

Darkness.

INT. MISS CRUMPLETON'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the darkness, another light clicks on.

It's a flashlight, and it's held by A THIEF in a ski-mask.

The Thief shines the flashlight onto Miss Crumpleton's face.

She's fast asleep in her bed, curlers in her hair, a green face creme on her face.

The Thief gasps at the site then regains his composure.

INT. MISS CRUMPLETON'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

The flashlight sweeps the kitchen before stopping on the Kitchen Aid mixer and a plate of homemade cookies.

The Thief reaches out and takes one of the cookies.

He bites it, chews for a moment, then spits the cookie back out in disgust.

He turns his attention to the mixer, loading it into his thief's bag.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT YARD - NIGHT

In the darkness, the Thief exits Miss Crumpleton's house through a front window.

He creeps across the lawns, carrying his bag of pilfered goods.

For a moment, he trips over Luis' tiny nativity scene, then regains his footing.

He makes his way to a window on the front of Luis' house.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The WINDOW CREEKS OPEN and the Thief climbs in.

He scans the room with his flashlight and stops on Luis' plate of cookies.

The Thief reaches out and takes a cookie. He takes a bite and chews. Heaven.

He takes another bite. Then another.

He sits down on the couch and takes a big sip of milk.

He pulls the ski mask up and takes another bite of cookie.

Now we see that the thief is Joseph, his tattoos a dim blue in the darkness.

He gobbles down the cookies, one after the other.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The cookies are gone, only crumbs remain on the plate. Joseph sits on the couch resting.

Something catches his eye, it's Luis' Christmas list. He picks it up and reads it.

ANGLE ON THE NOTE

"List for Papa Noel: My kitten Larry and one kitchen mixer."

CUT TO:

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LUIS' BEDROOM - MORNING

Luis opens his eyes.

He bends back the next tab on the Christmas calendar. It reveals the words "Christmas Day".

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Luis stands in the living room. Armando stands next to him.

They eye the empty cookie plate and the empty glass of milk.

They shift their gazes to Miss Crumpleton's bright red Kitchen Aid mixer. It sits on the coffee table next to the christmas list.

Armando looks at the mixer in amazement, then looks over at the open window.

He reaches out as if in a trance and grabs Luis' apron from the back of the couch. He slowly passes it to Luis. A smile spreads across Luis' face.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT PORCH - DAY

Close on a woman's hand examining Larry the kitten's collar tag. An address is clearly visible on the tag.

The same hand pressing the doorbell.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Luis opens the door. Outside, Felina stands holding Larry. Luis smiles as Felina hands him the kitten.

Felina's eyes shift past Luis to Armando. Felina and Armando's eyes meet. Love.

Behind Felina THE ACCORDIONIST STRIKES UP A ROUSING RENDITION OF FELIZ NAVIDAD.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Close on the paddles of the mixer spinning as they churn up cookie dough.

EXT. LUIS' HOUSE, FRONT YARD - DAY

THE ACCORDIONIST CONTINUES TO PLAY.

A card table has been set up in the front yard. It's covered with cookies and other baked goods.

Felina, Luis and Armando stand around the table eating cookies and drinking coffee. Larry ambles around their feet in his elf hat.

Miss Crumpleton slowly makes her way over from next door. When she arrives, Luis hands her a cookie. She bites it, chewing with delight.

Next, Joseph arrives. He's carrying a present. He hands it to Miss Crumpleton. She unwraps it. It's a new mixer and a cookbook.

Miss Crumpleton glares at Joseph. Joseph smiles.

All is right in the world.

INT. LUIS' HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Close on the Kitchen Aid mixer mixing dough. Credits appear.

FADE OUT: