

A Visit to the In-Laws, or Christmas Day
By Christian Lengkeek

Cast

Aunt Harriet: a little hard of hearing, a slight bit crazy and quiet

Aunt Dorothy: bossy, self-righteous

Grandma: wants everyone to have a fun time, but is unable to achieve it

Grandpa: A likable older man, but too much like Grandma

Mary Mueller: an indifferent teenaged girl

Madeline Mueller: another

Mother Mueller: always worried she won't be liked by her parents or aunts

Father Mueller: the slightest bit sensible

Props:

Living room: Table, Chairs, presents, Uno cards, Christmas tree, Christmas decorations, Cameras.

Play

Setting:

Living Room.

Mother, Madeline, and Mary off to the side. The Aunts and Grandparents sitting in chairs in the living room. Father on the center of the stage.

Father

Isn't it odd how every Christmas a man puts up with his in laws. How he does it, I've never figured out. Every year, year after year, he has to greet them with the same enthusiasm, and pretend that Christmas day is the highlight of his year, when it is really quite the opposite. Every year he must say he likes the mash potatoes they served for dinner although he detests them. Every year he gets bossed around by innumerable Great Aunts and is supposed say he enjoys it. Every year he has walk through the front door with the same fake smile and says the same Merry Christmas, through gritted teeth. And why, oh why do in laws have to be the most impossible people in the world. They treat you like you don't belong to the family, but then turn around and expect you to act like part of the family. But there's no escaping these things. They are some of the trials and tribulations we all must bear, until at death we are freed from them. My name in case you didn't know is Joseph Mueller. And I like most other men have to spend part of Christmas day at my in laws. I want to quickly introduce you to my in laws. Let me see now. This woman over here, who looks like Dracula, is just my Aunt Dorothy. She the type of Aunt you kind of want to throttle during Christmas dinner, but are too afraid to try. This little old lady right here is my Aunt Harriet. A much easier woman to get along with, but she is deaf and maybe

a bit crazy, which makes it hard to hold a conversation with her. This is my Mother in law. She wouldn't be too bad if she weren't such a bad cook. Also if she wasn't always trying to get us to have fun we might actually have some. And here's my Father in law. Not a bad chap, but he always treats me like a little boy. Anyway I think the time has come to begin. I see my family walking up the path to the front door. Now I understand what Donne felt meant when he wrote: For whom the Bell doth toll, it tolls for they. Any way it's only a couple hours of torment. Don't worry about me. I'll make it.

Mother, Father, Mary and Madeline all arrive at their grandparent's house for Christmas.

Mother

Please try to be nice to the family this year, Joe

Father

It's like trying to be nice to a herd of wildebeests, but I'll do my best.

Mother

Oh Joe! And girls please try to be nice to your Aunts. I know it's hard, but remember we only see them at Christmas.

Mother knocks on the door

Grandma and Grandpa, who have been sitting in the living room, rush to the door.

Grandma

Merry Christmas.

Grandpa

Merry Christmas.

Mother

Merry Christmas Mom and Dad.

They both hug mother their daughter.

Grandpa

How's my favorite son in law.

Grandma

How are my favorite little granddaughters?

They both hug Father and the girls much to their discomfort.

They all walk into the living room while mother and Grandma talk.

Grandma

Now, I just put the string bean casserole into the oven, and I cooked the tuna casserole yesterday so I wouldn't have to make it today. Oh, and yes, the order of mash potatoes just arrived.

Father

Order of mash potatoes?

Grandma

Yes, take out mash potatoes.

Father

I didn't know there was such a thing as take out mash potatoes.

Grandma

Oh yes, they come pre-boxed and everything. It really cuts down on all the work.

Father

Yes, it must be quite hard to mash potatoes with a spoon. Who knows it might take you fifteen minutes.

Grandma

What did you say?

Father

Oh nothing.

They arrive in the living room. Aunt Dorothy and Aunt Harriet putting up Christmas decorations.

Harriet

(to grandmother) Do you have another pair of scissors, these are so dull they won't cut.

Grandma

Harriet, you have them the wrong way.

Harriet

No, I tell you they're dull.

Grandma

(yelling) You're holding the scissors upside down.

Harriet

Oh, why didn't you tell me before.

Grandma

Harriet, Dorothy, your niece and nephew are here with their kids.

Harriet

(to Dorothy) What's she saying?

Dorothy

(yelling into Harriet's ear trumpet) Our nephew and niece are here.

Harriet

The thin one with the fat husband, or the fat one with the fat husband.

Dorothy

The thin one although she has gained some weight.

Harriet

Which Husband did she bring with her? The one with the dimples or the one who looks like Adolf Hitler?

Dorothy

She only has one Husband.

Harriet

Oh, that's funny. I could have sworn she had two.

Father

Now hold on a second.

Mother

How are you doing Aunt Harriet. How are you doing Aunt Dorothy.

Dorothy

Quite well thank you Caroline.

Harriet

Oh it's so good to see you Jennifer.

Dorothy

Jennifer?

Harriet

You said the thin one, that's Jennifer.

Dorothy

No, this is Caroline, the younger one.

Harriet

Oh, you meant the fat one. If I remember right she also has big ears.

Dorothy

Now, Harriet, those are things that only you and I can talk about when Caroline's not here, no matter how true they are. (*Staring at Caroline through her spectacles*)

There is a long awkward pause.

Grandma

(*trying to restore piece to the situation*) Dorothy, Harriet, Mary and Madeline are here as well.

Dorothy

How are you my dears?

Mary

Very good Aunt Dorothy.

Dorothy

Now Mary, I don't think that was very nice. Talking and not letting your younger sister say anything.

Mary

But I only said Vey good. She could of—

Dorothy

It doesn't matter. You must look out for your younger sister. Madeline dear, say what you wanted to. You don't have to worry about your sister talking over you.

Madeline

I didn't want to say anything.

Dorothy

Oh yes you did. I know you're scared your sister will talk over you again. Aren't you?

Madeline

No.

Dorothy

Madeline Mueller, I demand you tell me what you wanted to say.

Grandma

(trying to calm things down) Come now, why don't we play a game together or something?

Grandpa

How about monopoly?

Grandma

Oh I don't like that game. People get overly competitive and get hurt

Grandpa

Oh, yes I forgot about last year. How's your eye Joe?

Father

Oh it healed up nicely.

Mary

Was that the time Aunt Harriet got mad and threw the thimble and it hit Daddy in the eye?

Mother

Shh, yes Mary.

Grandpa

What about gin rummy.

Dorothy

I am surprised at you? Suggesting we play cards, especially with the children here.

Father

Aunt Dorothy gin rummy isn't exactly cards.

Dorothy

What do you use to play it?

Father

Playing cards.

Dorothy

See, see, even you admit it.

Father

Admit what?

Dorothy

That it's a sinful, wicked game.

Grandpa

What about Parcheesi?

Dorothy

Never liked those foreign games. What do you think Harriet?

Harriet shakes her head.

Harriet

Sacrilege!

Dorothy

No, no Harriet foreign games.

Harriet

Yes indeed Dorothy.

Dorothy

No, no Harriet, Parcheesi.

Harriet

Yes, shameful.

Grandpa

How about Sorry?

Dorothy

I don't think that game is very friendly. Some many people saying sorry and not meaning it.

Harriet

Yes, times have changed.

Father

what about Uno?

Dorothy

That might be fun.

Harriet

I like that game.

Father

Wow, we can actually all agree on a game, a true miracle.

Mary

I don't really like Uno.

Father

Well you're going to play it because you're my daughter, whether you like it or not.

The whole family gathers around to play.

Father begins to shuffle.

Harriet

Dorothy, is this that Spanish game?

Dorothy

I think so.

Harriet

What's he doing?

Dorothy

Shuffling.

Harriet

Shuffling?

Dorothy

It's a bazaar heathen Spanish ritual.

Father finishes shuffling.

Grandma

Madeline can go first since she is the youngest.

They begin to play.

Aunt Harriet plays a card.

Father

Aunt Harriet, you can't play a blue skip on top of a red 4.

Harriet

Yes, I know, I thought it was a very good move myself.

Father

I said you can't play that card.

Harriet

What, it wasn't my turn?

Father

Aunt Dorothy, you tell her.

Dorothy

Harriet the colors red.

Harriet

Whose dead?

Dorothy

Red Dorothy, Red!

Harriet

Oh, I could have sworn the color was green.

Dorothy

Harriet, remind me to get a new prescription for your glasses.

They continue to play.

Mother

The Christmas Decorations look nice.

Grandma

Ah yes, I thought so myself, although I would of preferred construction paper. You know how construction paper is: the perfect combination of toughness and agility. Now only the other day I was at my friend Janet's house and the brand of construction paper she used for her decorations, was the most superb stuff I've ever felt. So I went over to Walgreens, but they said they didn't carry construction paper. Can you believe that? So I went to Costco and they had some but they didn't have the brand my friend Janet had, so I tried CVS. CVS had some stuff—

Everyone stops playing and looks at her.

Father

Excuse me Grandma, I hate to interrupt this most interesting narrative, but it's your turn.

Grandma

Oh, sorry.

Mother

How's your garden Dad?

Grandpa

Oh, same as ever, still trying to fight that invasive Virginia creeper. You wouldn't believe how tuff that little plant is to destroy. I've tried every poison on the face of the earth, but not a single one has destroyed it. Now, the other day I was tried a new miracle chemical, called, uh, well the name doesn't matter. Now, this chemical is supposed to work wonders, at least that's what the bottle said. So far nothing's happened, but who knows, right?

Father

I hate to keep interrupting people, but it's your turn Grandpa.

They continue to play.

Grandma

And how are you children doing in your school.

Mary

Pretty good. Daniel took me to the prom. That made Julie jealous. So me and Julie had a fight. Then we made up. Our football teams quarterback got injured last week, so we had to have that little kid Rayn Dolton play quarter back. He's really terrible.

Grandma

I meant academics.

Mary

Oh there good.

Grandma

Just good.

Mary

Yes.

Dorothy

When I was a girl, school was all academics. None of this gallivanting around with boys or watching football. We were lucky if we got socks at Christmas.

Harriet

Oh, those were the day.

They continue to play.

Dorothy

Joe, stop looking at my cards.

Father

But I wasn't.

Dorothy

Don't deny it, I saw you.

Father

How could I see your cards when I am three seats away from you?

Dorothy

You always were a cheater Joe, you know that.

Father

(whispers to mother) Why does she always think I cheat every single year?

Dorothy

What are you whispering about Joe. You know how much I detest whispering.

Father

Its none of your business what I talk about with my wife.

Dorothy

Your wife! She's my niece. And trust me young man I understand her a lot better than you do.

They continue to play.

Mary

Draw four Dad.

Dorothy

Aha, A cheater can never escape his just punishment.

Father

Now wait a second.

Harriet

And the judgment will fall upon the unjust. That's what the Holy book says.

Father

(whispers to mother) When are we living?

Mother

(whispers) We just got hear Joe. Think of the kids. they have a lot of fun.

Father

(whispers) Do they?

Both kids look rather depressed.

Aunt Harriet

Juno!

Father

What?

Aunt Harriet

I got Juno, I was the first.

Father

I think you mean Uno.

Aunt Dorothy

Uno, Dorothy .

Harriet

Ahh, Uno. I thought Juno didn't sound right.

Grandpa

Somebody better try to stop her from winning.

Grandma

I can change the color.

Dorothy

Change it to blue. I know she doesn't have blue

Father

How come you're so sure?

Dorothy

Cause I know these things.

Father

Oh I was worried you might have accidently seen.

Dorothy

Joe, The very thought of it.

Grandma

I'll change the color to blue.

Dorothy

That will stop her. I positive she doesn't have blue.

Aunt Harriet just sits there smiling.

She plays her last card.

Harriet

I won. Uno. Uno.

Father

Well done Harriet.

Grandpa

Great job.

Harriet

It's the first time I ever won, and to think Dorothy thought I had blue the whole time.

Dorothy

I never thought you had blue.

Grandma

Now Dorothy, you did tell me to change the color to blue.

Dorothy

You must be mistaken. I never did such a thing.

Father

Yes you did.

Dorothy

No I did not Joe, and don't you dare for one moment suggest I am lying.

Grandma

Let's forget the game and open some presents.

Grandpa goes to the kitchen and gets the presents.

Every one sits around the living room on chairs.

Mary

(whispers to Madeline) How much money would you bet that the Aunts got us socks again this year.

Madeline

All I have.

Mary

What do you think Grandma will give us?

Madeline

You know its Grandpa's gift as well?

Mary

I know, but it quite obvious he doesn't choose them because he knows what we like.

Madeline

That's true.

Mary

Why is it that Adults don't understand what things kids like?

Madeline

Oh, I think they could if they remembered what it was like to be young. They just don't try.

Mother walks over.

Mother

Remember to act very excited about whatever you get. You know how hard your Grandmother tries.

Grandpa walks in with the presents

He passes them out.

Grandma

I think you'll really like what we got you this year, you might call it educational.

Mary

(to Madeline) See.

Dorothy

Madeline my Dear, come over here. I have something for you.

Madeline walks over

She opens it.

It's a pair of socks.

Madeline

Oh thank, you Aunt Dorothy, just what I wanted.

Dorothy

A very practical present, something I think you will be able to use.

Harriet

What a coincidence Dorothy, I happened to get Madeline the same thing.

Dorothy

You did. Why I am so happy. I wasn't sure if one pair was going to be enough.

Madeline opens the second pair of socks.

Madeline

Thank you Aunt Harriet.

Harriet

Try them on Madeline.

Madeline takes off her shoes and tries them on.

Dorothy

Oh, they fit perfectly.

Harriet

Come over closer child so I can take a better look at them.

She grabs Madeline foot to get a better look.

Harriet

A perfect fit. I have never seen a pair of socks fit better. Those dollar store socks are the best quality wise.

Aunt Dorothy

Mary I also have a present for you.

Aunt Harriet

So do I.

Mary opens both the presents.

More socks.

Mary

Thank you so much.

Aunt Dorothy

Please look your Aunt in the eye when you speak to her. It almost seems like you were disappointed. Now, I call that ingratitude. Along time ago people didn't even have socks. You know that. If you studied history like I have, you'd know many things.

Harriet

Yes, A good knowledge of crocheting has always been valued in society.

Aunt Dorothy

To be quite frank I haven't seen the pair of socks I gave you last year. Do you still have them?

Mary

Yes.

Aunt Dorothy

Why don't you wear them?

Mary

Well, uh, I, er,

Aunt Dorothy

Well child, answer me truthfully. The truth is always the best.

Mary

Well—

Father

Go ahead, tell your Aunt.

Mary

I don't like the type of socks you buy me.

Aunt Dorothy

Ungrateful wretch. Here I am buying a present for you out of my own generosity and you have the insolence to say you don't even like it.

Father

You did ask her to tell you the truth.

Aunt Dorothy

You know what type of truth I meant. Not the rude ungrateful truth.

Father

I didn't know there were different kinds of truth.

Aunt Dorothy

Joseph Mueller, there are a lot of things you don't know. Mary I demand an apology.

Mary

I don't think its fair Aunt Dorothy. First you ask me what I think then you tell me to apologize.

Mother

Shh Mary. Don't talk to your Aunt like that.

Grandma

Why don't we give you our present now, Mary and Madeline? It's the one with the pink ribbon.

Grandma hands them a large box.

Mary

(whispers to Madeline) What do you think, microscope?

Madeline

Maybe it's a telescope.

Mary

No we got that two years ago.

They open it and it is a Chemistry set.

Grandma

I knew you'd like it. When I was young I just loved Chemistry. That's why I got you this Chemistry set. You know girls, you're lucky, 100 years ago girls weren't allowed to practice chemistry.

Mary

They weren't? How lucky.

Grandma

What did you say Mary.

Madeline

I was saying its lucky us woman are allowed to do such fun things like chemistry.

Grandma

Yes Madeline, can you believe that 200 years ago you wouldn't have been allowed to work.

Madeline

Oh that must have been a great trial.

Grandma

Yes it was.

Father

It sounds quite nice to me.

Grandma

What does?

Father

Not having to work. Why if I didn't have to work think of all the things I could do.

Grandma

Now Joe, I was in the middle of teaching your daughters a serious lesson. Please refrain from the silly flippantness you seem to find so funny. Women's rights are very serious.

Father

Oh, I didn't mean to joke about something so sacred. It's just I've never understood what's the big deal about going to work every day. What could be fun about eating the same old greasy pizza in the office cafeteria? What's the fun of heading off to a dull office block to stare at the same old computer screen day after day? What's the big deal about sitting in an office with hundreds of dull, unintelligent, money hungry, idiots, for hours on end? As far as I know God cursed Adam with having to provide for a family. Why does Eve now want to curse herself. Wasn't the pain of child bearing enough?

Grandma, Aunt Dorothy

Joe!!!

Mother

Shh, Joe

Grandma

Don't let me hear you say such things in front of my Grandchildren again.

Aunt Dorothy

Caroline I told you not marry him all those years ago.

Aunt Harriet

Yes Dorothy, A glass of ice cold ginger ale would taste nice.

There is a long awkward pause

Grandma

Why don't we have dinner now?

Father walks forward to talks to the audience

Father

Now I really don't want to show you guys anymore of the evening. I am definitely skipping the dinner because that is something I have no desire to remember. Let me see. After dinner I went upstairs and took a shower. Why did I take a shower? Oh, well let's just say Aunt Harriet tried to pass the bowl of mash potatoes over me and wasn't *necessarily* successful. And to crown it all, Aunt Dorothy said it was my fault for always bobbing my head around while I ate. Well, after that I was pretty much ready to leave. I am sure some of you in the audience know how I felt. I finally got a bit of peace in the shower when Aunt Dorothy started banging on the door to tell me she needed to reapply her makeup and could I hurry up and get out. I was going to tell her that her makeup didn't make her look any better, but I thought better of it and hurried up and finished my shower like a good Nephew in law. Anyway, I was about to try to direct my wife and daughters out the door, but my plans to leave quickly were foiled by an ancient family ritual. I think most of you celebrate it in your family, and I can't see how any of you enjoy it. The custom I am referring to is that of taking family pictures. I don't know who invented it, but if I ever met the man, I think I'd have a good mind to throttle him. Every year it's the same thing. Joe, please don't slouch. Joe, please look at the camera. Joe, stop blinking. Joe, try to look a bit more cheerful. And all the while I stand there with aching limbs, a strained smile, and a dangerously frayed temper. Oh, I see Aunt Dorothy's got her camera out.

Camera Scene

Grandma

Time to take the Family picture.

Every one lines up on the stage.

Grandma

Grandpa's going to turn the delayed action on his camera. That way he can run around front and we can all be in the picture together.

Grandpa

Now Joe, you'd mind moving over next to Harriet. Alright Dorothy, slide to the left. My dear, can you put your arm on Mary's shoulder. That's right. All right everybody, smile!

He presses the button and runs.

He trips and falls.

He recovers and gets and runs into the picture pushing people out of his way.

Grandpa

I think I made it let me take a look.

He goes around the camera.

Grandpa

Nope, you can only see me running across the screen. We'll try again. Three, two, one, smile!

He rushes around.

Grandpa

I made it that time.

He walks back to the camera

Grandpa

That's funny.

Grandma

What is dear?

Grandpa

Well I'll be—I must have forgotten to push the button when I ran around. We'll have to try again.

Alright everybody, smile!

He races around.

The pictures taken and he takes a look at it.

Grandpa

Oh good, everything looks okay. Wait a sec, where's Aunt Harriet?

Grandma

She's standing right here behind Mary.

Grandpa

I can't see her at all in the picture. I guess we'll have to take another.

Father

We don't have time. We have a bus to catch in five minutes.

Aunt Dorothy

Nonsense, you came by car.

Father

I meant if we did have a bus to catch it would be leaving in five minutes.

Aunt Dorothy

I don't think one more picture will hurt you.

Grandpa

Oh no, It looks like I am all out of film.

Father

Oh yes,

Everyone looks at him.

Father

I mean oh no, guess that means no more pictures.

Aunt Dorothy

Nonsense, we all have phones.

Grandma

I'll take the pictures.

Father

You can use my phone; it's got a pretty good camera.

Grandma walks out in front to take picture.

Grandma

Smile every one

There is a long pause

Grandma

Which button do I hit to take the picture?

Grandpa

The white one.

Grandma

Which white one?

Grandpa

There is only one white one.

Grandma

Oh, I see it now. Oh, no, I pressed it and the screen went back.

Father

You probably pushed the off button.

Grandma

Why don't these things ever work? You'd think they'd try to make them a little easier to use.

Grandpa

There I turned it back on for you. Why don't I take the picture and you be in it.

Grandma steps back into the picture

Grandpa

One two three, smile!

He takes the picture.

Father

At last, thank you every one for a wonderful evening. It was so nice to see you. But now I am afraid we have to go home.

Grandma

But we haven't even started taking pictures yet. What about a shot of your family.

The Mueller family stands for a photograph.

The Grandparents and the Aunts stand and take pictures.

Aunt Dorothy

Joe, turn your head a bit to the left, there that's it, and slouch in your stomach so you don't look so fat.

Grandma

Joe, can smile just a little more.

Grandpa

Joe, can you move a little to the right.

They snap some pictures.

Dorothy

Harriet, you're facing the wrong way. The Mueller's are standing that way.

Aunt Harriet, who has been facing the audience, turns around.

Harriet

Ah, that's better; I felt something wasn't quite right.

Father

Alright that's enough. We have to go.

Mother

Oh Joe, can we take one on my phone.

Father

If you wish.

They take one on mother's phone

Father

Ok, we really must go.

Aunt Dorothy

One with the grandparents. Mary, square your shoulders. Madeline, look at me. Caroline, don't blink. Joe, don't bend your knees. Turn your head to the left a little. Alright, one, two, three, cheese. And one more, one, two, three, cheese.

Father

Alright, we have to go now. Has everyone got the picture they wanted? Oh good.

Mother

Merry Christmas, it was so nice to see all of you.

Father

Yes there's nothing I look forward to with more anticipation.

Every one exchanges a merry Christmas.

Grandma

Thank you for coming.

Grandpa

(slaps Father on the back) Good to see you pal.

Aunt Dorothy

Now I want to see you girls wearing your socks.

Father

it was nice to see you Aunt Harriet

Aunt Harriet

Yes, the French open is played on Clay.

Everyone Exchanges another Merry Christmas.

Father

We really must leave now.

Grandma

Bye, We'll miss you so much.

She begins to cry.

Father

So will I.

The Mueller family walks towards the side of the stage. Their relatives walk towards the other.

Father steps out and talks to the audience.

Father

Phew, I can finally go home. Well, it not over yet. I still have the two hour ride home with an overly tired wife and two teenage daughters. Who made up that lie about Christmas day being a day of good will and cheer? It might be the only day that doesn't have a chance at achieving that. Well, anyway, Merry Christmas to every fellow sufferer in the audience, may you to drive home safely, and may you be protected from your in-laws, especially your Aunts. Thank you!