

Good Tidings

by

Michael Bettencourt

67 Highwood Terrace #2, Weehawken NJ 07086
(201) 770-0550; 347-564-9998; m.bett@verizon.net
<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>
(Copyright © by Michael Bettencourt)

Good Tidings

DESCRIPTION

Domestic servants may not have much economic clout, but they are not necessarily powerless, as Roger finds out when, in response to a request for a gratuity at Christmastime, he snootily responds with high-handed arrogance. They show him that the servants oftentimes know more about the masters than the masters know about the servants.

CHARACTERS

- Roger
- Janine

SETTING

- Penthouse apartment

TIME

- Present

Good Tidings

A penthouse apartment, well-appointed with an elevator entrance. ROGER enters, laden with Christmas packages. On a small desk sits a largish white envelope marked with Christmas symbols. ROGER is exasperated. He puts things down, picks up the envelope, and opens it.

ROGER

What is it now?

ROGER pulls out a sheet of paper; several small envelopes pop out, falling to the floor.

ROGER

Shit! Janine! Janine! Where in the devil's name is she? "Dear Mr. Beitz: The staff of the Marmoset Arms would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your family the happiest of holiday seasons. The staff prides itself on the quality and dependability of its service, and we trust you have found your needs well met during the year. We hope you will recognize the dedication of the staff by a generous holiday contribution. Again, the best to you and yours, and a prosperous New Year. Sincerely, Kim Philby, Staff Supervisor."

ROGER Picks up the envelopes off the floor.

ROGER

Confianza. Esperanza. Caridad. Janine! Where the Christ is she? I'm not sure I like this...begging. It's one thing to take what you're offered, another to expect that you deserve something by virtue of the fact of doing your job. It would almost be like my getting paid simply for showing up at the office -- except, yes, of course, I do get paid for doing that, even when I don't go in some days. But, dammit, this is different! This is effrontery, this is insurrection! We've always been generous in the past with the help. I am not going to be arm-twisted into my philanthropy!

ROGER sits at the desk and takes a piece of paper from a drawer. He slips a fountain pen from his shirt pocket and speaks as he writes. The actor may ad lib to a small degree over the choice of certain words.

ROGER

"Dear Mr. Philby: While I appreciate the sincerity of your and your staff's best wishes for the welfare of me and my wife, I must protest against your impertinent prompting for 'recognition, as if I were not be capable of

knowing good service from bad and subsequently rewarding it with an adequate response. Therefore, I have decided to actually give less than what I had intended in order to make the point as emphatically as possible. In the future, please allow me the dignity to 'recognize' my obligations in my own way. Yours truly, Roger Beitz."

ROGER places the sheet, with the unfilled envelopes, into the original envelope, seals it, and writes "Kim Philby, Staff Supervisor" on it large capital letters. He is quite pleased with himself.

ROGER

There. Done. Janine! I shouldn't have sealed it up -- she should read it. Oh, well, I'll recite it to her -- she likes that sort of thing.

ROGER icks up the gifts and goes off stage, shouting "Janine!" There is a bit of transition music as the lights dim. The audience sees a man walk on stage with another white envelope and place it on the desk and take the other one away. When he has left, lights come up. Elevator door opens again. ROGER enters with even more presents.

ROGER

Janine! That woman --

ROGER pauses when he sees the white envelope on the desk.

ROGER

What is going on here?

ROGER drops the bags, picks up the envelope, and opens it. As he pulls what appear to be 8x10 prints out of the envelope, he looks absolutely shaken. There is a letter paper-clipped to one of them.

ROGER

"Dear. Mr. Beitz: On behalf of the staff I want to thank you for your forthright declaration; it is always good to know that people still live by a set of strong principles. And I am sure you will want to continue that tradition as you reconsider the staff's request, augmented as it is now by some new information you may find interesting."

ROGER looks at the photos dumbly. He reads.

ROGER

"We are sure that Mrs. Beitz would not want to see the somewhat compromising positions you have been dictating to your secretary, depicted in these somewhat grainy but highly effective photographs; we are sure you would not want her to be disturbed by them. If you look in the

envelope you will also see some other items: the charge slip you used to pay for the room, several slips from stores for gifts that most likely are not owned by your wife, even the fortune from the Chinese restaurant the two of you ate at: 'Good luck comes to those who wear an open face.'

ROGER looks in the envelope, blanches.

ROGER

"There is, however, a mutually beneficial way to avoid any unpleasantness. The three envelopes for Confianza, Esperanza, and Caridad are there. After consultation, and not wishing to unduly burden you, we felt that \$5000 in each of the envelopes would suffice. And lest you feel put out by that amount, it merely uses the money you have secreted in your safe behind the 18th-century armoire that you access by taking down the mirror at the back of the cabinet and sliding the cedar panel open. (Here is the combination in case you've forgotten it: 14-23-36-12.) And, by the way, you may keep the bicentennial quarter. We are also not interested in the porcelain claddagh ring you gave to your wife, inscribed with 'To My Emerald Isle.' You may wish to verify the amounts."

ROGER drops everything onto the desk and rushes offstage. The director, if desired, can play the waiting music from "Jeopardy." ROGER returns, looking, if possible, even more battered. He drops a quarter and ring onto the desk.

ROGER

"Mr. Beitz, no matter which choice you make, we hope you and Mrs. Beitz have a wonderful holiday season. Sincerely, Kim Philby, Staff Supervisor. P.S. -- It may be one of your principles that those of us who make our living taking care of those like you are simply peasants and rubes, but, as you can see, we have our ways. The slave always knows more than the master."

ROGER looks around him as if he is suddenly surrounded by wild beasts.

ROGER

Who knows? Do they all know? How can I ever look them -- ? The pictures!

ROGER frantically gathers everything and puts it into the envelope and rushes offstage. Just as he disappears, the elevator door opens and a smartly dressed woman, JANINE, walks in, her arms laden with gifts.

JANINE

Roger, are you home? Have I got some surprises for you!