

Male Order

by Reggie Morrissey



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The stubble-chinned Josiah McCoy sat up and adjusted his pillows when an aide brought the mail and a housekeeper scurried with mop and pail into the adjacent bathroom.

Josiah's weathered hands - the hands of a lifelong sportsman - flipped through a golf magazine and a fishing magazine. Next, he opened a bulky holiday catalogue of gifts, household aids and health aids and studied each page.

"As for a gift for my son ... hmm," he said. "So hard to pick."

Josiah nodded at the sturdy Hose Holder that "neatly stores, contracting a hose right on the water spigot" and paused at the fact-filled bathroom book, *What Did We Use Before Toilet Paper?* He continued the search, growing cranky. "When Josiah II makes his grand appearance on the 25th, will I just get the same old grunt for my troubles?"

He shook his head. "And Josiah III, head down and fingers tapping on some phone game."

He stared into space. "That boy barely looks up when he says, "Nah, Grandpa."

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by Reggie Morrisey
(Word count: 1,330)

Josiah peered at the gift of a fleece ear band that "covers your ears and forehead" and slips over a baseball cap visor. "Hmm, he wears a baseball cap - even in winter."

But he shook his head. "He wears the cap backwards," Josiah said. "Better to get the left-hander's sweatshirt that says, 'I may be left-handed but I'm always right.'"

He rubbed his chin. "Is he left-handed, or is that his mother?"

Leaning forward, he continued to study the gifts and page after page of "doctor tested and recommended" apparatus: There was the sciatica saddle for chronic back pain, and the plantar fasciitis foot wrap for arches and soles and the anti-arthritis gloves. He flexed his toes until they poked at his blanket, a triumphant look on his face.

Josiah winced at the ad for the gift book on page 12 with the puppy on the cover and the title, "*Will See You in Heaven*." He sighed as he gazed at the bed-stand photo, "My last golden" and resumed the shopping expedition.

The magnetic puzzle map of the U.S.A. on page 13 seemed like "A swell gift" but Josiah shook his head, "My grandson is probably too old for that."

He smiled at the locomotive play tent on the same page. "Talk about your winning gifts back in the day," he said with a slap to his knee. "What child wouldn't like that?"

The housekeeper stopped mopping and came into Josiah's view. "You want something, Mister McCoy?"

"How old are your kids?" Josiah asked.

"I've got a daughter. She's 11."

"She like geography?"

"She likes boys."

"Already?"

"Kids these days."

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"Well, I'd like to get her this magnetic puzzle map of the USA," Josiah said, holding up the catalogue.

"Very nice," the housekeeper said, backing up with her mop and muttering. "A dollar for every time I heard something like that here, and I wouldn't be bent over this floor."

"What's that?"

"Good day, now," the housekeeper said as she disappeared into the hall.

Josiah's eyes settled on the magazine's Daughter-in-Law afghan, liking it though he whispered,

"Is that technically inaccurate?" as it read, "You've added to our family a warm and charming touch. We know you as a daughter now and love you very much."

Josiah frowned: "What's wrong with the "our" and "we?"

The answer eluded him as he shrugged. "Josiah II's wife *is* a stickler for grammar."

He circled a housewares' ad for a batter dispenser that measures and pours the perfect amount for pancakes and crepes - without drips or splatters.

"Three down," Josiah said, counting gifts for his grandson and the housekeeper's daughter.

Josiah scrunched his face, still iffy about his son's gift until he got to the ad for *Have a Blast! Butt Putt* - a "tushy-shaped putting practice device that lets loose one of six wind-breaking flatulent sound effects" and has an auto-return chute.

"That's it!" he cried, reaching for the bedside phone and saying aloud, "My wife will skin me alive for this."

Josiah, assured by a robotic voice that his call was important, waited for the voice of a human operator, again leafing through the catalogue's gift pages and saying, "What about me? What do I want?"

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He eyed teared with the verse on the *Merry Christmas from Heaven* ornament that read, "I love you all dearly. Now don't shed a tear. I'm spending my Christmas with Jesus this year," but, looking around the room, he shrugged. "Couldn't a fit a pine tree in here."

So, as a jolly operator boomed, "Holiday greetings to you!" Josiah ordered a book for himself *Civil War Sweetheart Stories*.

Cheery customer and order taker exchanged pleasantries over the miles, compared the cold fronts headed for the North and South, and then Josiah recited the item numbers for his gifts.

"That Butt Putt's a hoot, isn't it?" he chuckled, and the two men veered into talking about superior golf courses in the North and South.

They settled down and arrived at the credit and address details for the order. Josiah's voice faltered as he shuffled through the drawer of his bed stand - crammed as it was with magazines and Father's Day and Thanksgiving cards - in search of his credit card and current address.

"Sir," the operator said, "Are you the Josiah McCoy in Florida or Louisiana?"

"I'm the Florida one, and my son is the one in Louisiana," he said. "Why?"

"Well, I'm just looking at a note cross-referencing accounts, and it seems there may be a hold on your credit. Could that be right?"

"A hold!"

"If you can talk to your son, maybe he can straighten that out."

"A hold?"

"I'll keep your order open for 24 hours, exactly as you placed it."

"A hold."

"Could be a mistake."

"I suppose."

"If your son will call us with his okay, we'll be back in business."

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"Do you see my son's phone number there?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I'm not supposed to give client numbers, so maybe there's someone at your place who has it."

"Do you know ... my place. I mean, where it is?"

"You could look at the address on the catalogue cover."

"It says I live in a nursing home."

"Well, hang up and dial zero, so you can talk to someone there, or wait for someone to stop by."

"I guess."

"Happy Holidays, Mr. McCoy."

Josiah stuffed the catalogue into the bed stand. He aimed a remote at the overhead television and clicked to a shopping network. Still shaking his head, he leaned back to watch models twirl under a chandelier in a formal dress segment. "Wow," he said at the sparkly red gown, slinky green gown and shimmering gold gown.

"I can see my sweetheart in those," he whispered. "She gets dolled up for me."

Josiah picked up the phone and dialed the number on the shopping network screen, following the command to, "Listen closely because our menu has changed," humming absently with the holiday music, nodding for each new tune until a melodious voice came on the line with a welcoming, "Good morning!"

"And a good morning to you," Josiah replied, "Don't you love Christmas music?"

"Oh, we do, sir, and we love customers like you."

"Good to hear," Josiah said. "Can't remember the last time someone said they loved me."

"Oh. It can't be that bad," the representative said.

"I guess it isn't that bad if you count my friendly visitor."

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“See!”

“And my wife always said it.”

“I knew it,” the representative said. “I bet that’s why you called with our Evening in Paradise program on the air.”

“My wife was a beauty,” Josiah said. “Long black hair down to her waist.”

“You’re a lucky man.”

"Yes, so I'd like to place a holiday dress order. "

“Okay, let me get to the Paradise screen.”

“Make that all three dresses.”

“Three it is, sir.”

“Now, where did I put that credit card?”

END

* Pastel painting “27° 46' N - 82° 80' W” by Vincent Mancuso