

THE RETURN OF MELISSA

Written by

Jacklyn A. Lo

Jacklyn A. Lo
jacklyn_lo@yahoo.com
Cell: + 358 4563 21163
Skype: FRG Worldwide Oy

OVER BLACK

A SCREECHING and THUMPING sound can be hear. A man's voice mutters...

NATHAN (V.O.)

The light of God surrounds us.
The love of God enfolds us.
The power of God protects us.
The presence of God watches over us. Wherever we are, God is, and where God is, all is well.

FADE IN:

INT. NATHAN'S HOME - UTILITY CLOSET - NIGHT

A dark room. A pile of chairs barricades the door. The SCREECHING comes from the other side. THUMPING against the door.

Something, or someone, is desperate to get in.

NATHAN, early 30s, is sitting with his back to the barricade, clutching a book of prayers in his hands. Eyes closed. Sweating.

The door shakes with each THUMP.

Nathan mutters to himself.

NATHAN

As a Father, guard and protect me from all evil.

THUMP!

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Grant me protection. Grant, O Lord, Thy protection. And in protection, strength, and in strength, understanding.

THUMP.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

And in understanding, knowledge. And in knowledge, the knowledge of justice. And in the knowledge of justice, the love of it.

THUMP... Silence.

Nathan opens his eyes. He listens. The room is still. He takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLORADO HIGHWAY - DAY

A lone car winds it's way down the highway. It's a beautiful, sunny day.

INT. NATHAN'S CAR - DAY

A bouquet of pink roses in the passenger seat. A case of wine in the back.

Nathan drives, wearing a blue suit and big smile. He's excited about something.

He presses the "CALL" button on the car's steering wheel.

NATHAN

Call Melissa.

AUDIO SYSTEM (V.O.)

Calling Melissa.

The phone RINGS.

Then:

MELISSA (V.O.)

Hello?

NATHAN

Hey Mel, it's me. I just wanted to tell you I'm on my way home.

INT. NATHAN'S HOME, BATHROOM - DAY

A phone, on speakers, is on the bathroom counter. MELISSA, 30s, a beautiful brunette in a long red dress, looks at her reflecting, applying lipstick.

INTERCUT AS NEEDED:

NATHAN

Is there anything you need me to pick up?

MELISSA

I don't think so! We're all set.

NATHAN
Great! See you soon.

MELISSA
Love you.

NATHAN
Love you too.

Nathan ends the call.

EXT. NATHAN'S HOME - DAY

Nathan's car pulls up to a beautiful home surrounded by a vast forest. He gathers the roses and wine and heads inside.

A "WELCOME TO M&N ANNIVERSARY" banner hangs over the front door.

INT. NATHAN'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Colorful balloons, candles and party streamers decorate the room. There is a white piano in the corner. Leather sofas, a large framed painting, "L'Appel de la Nuit" by Paul Delvaux, above one of them, and a wide screen TV screen furnish the room.

A banner reading "NATHAN + MELISSA = 10 YEARS OF LOVE" hangs on the wall.

Melissa sits by the window, reading a book. A gold engraving on it reads "PRAYERS."

Nathan enters carrying the roses and wine. He spots Melissa and stops in awe.

NATHAN
Mel... you look amazing.

Melissa closes her book and smiles at him.

MELISSA
Do I?

Nathan puts the bottle of wine on a table set with finger food and champagne. He walks over to Melissa.

NATHAN
Yes, you do.

Nathan hands her the roses.

MELISSA
Pink! My favorite.

NATHAN
Of course.

Melissa smells the roses.

MELISSA
They are gorgeous!

NATHAN
As are you, my dear wife.

MELISSA
(winks)
You're not bad yourself.

NATHAN
But... the roses are not the only
present I have for you today.

MELISSA
Oh! Really?

Nathan reaches inside his jacket and pulls out a small velvet box. He gives it to Melissa.

NATHAN
For you, Mel.

MELISSA
What is it?

NATHAN
(whispers)
Just open it.

Melissa opens the box. Inside is a golden medallion in the shape of a heart, adorned with diamonds on one side and rubies on the other.

MELISSA
Oh Nathan! It's beautiful.

NATHAN
Would you like to try it on?

MELISSA
Yes, please.

Nathan removes the locket from the box.

NATHAN
Which side would you prefer?

MELISSA
The diamond one, please.

NATHAN
Good choice.

Nathan places the chain around Melissa's neck and adjusts the medallion. Melissa admires her reflection in a big mirror on the wall.

Nathan stands behind her, smiling.

MELISSA
It's beautiful! Thank you, Nat!

NATHAN
Happy anniversary, darling!

Melissa gives him a light a kiss on the lips. Then, they kiss deeper and holding each other in a long embrace.

MELISSA
(whispering)
Happy Anniversary, my dear husband!

NATHAN
The medallion goes perfectly with your dress.

MELISSA
Yes, it does.

Melissa whispers in his ear.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
I also have a present for you.

NATHAN
Oh, really? The best present for me is you, Mel.

MELISSA
I know, but still...

NATHAN
Okay. What is it?

MELISSA
You'll see. I'll reveal it in front of all the guests.

NATHAN
Sounds good.

Melissa smiles. She picks up the bouquet of roses.

MELISSA
Nat, could you get the big vase
from the cupboard, please?

Nathan goes to the cupboard and opens it. He pulls out the
biggest vase.

NATHAN
This one?

MELISSA
Yes! And some water, please.

Melissa begins to trim the extra leaves off the roses.

NATHAN
Sure, my princess.

Nathan leaves the living room. A Cell Phone RINGS in the
hall.

PHONE (V.O.)
Mom!

NATHAN (O.S.)
Thank you, Mom. Yes, in half an
hour. Thanks! We'll miss you too,
Mom.

Nathan enters the living room with the vase full of water,
the cell against his ear. He mouths the word "Mom" to
Melissa.

She nods.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
You too! And a good recovery for
John. Sure, I will.

Nathan ends the call and looks at his cell with a gentle
smile.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Mom sends congratulations to us
from her and John's side and wishes
she could be here.

Nathan conveys the vase to Melissa.

MELISSA

That's nice. How is John?

NATHAN

He is better, but you know, after the stroke... She doesn't want to leave him alone.

Melissa puts the roses into the vase.

MELISSA

That's understandable. John needs to be taken care of right now.

Nathan and Melissa keep a silence for a while.

NATHAN

And how many of us are going to celebrate this anniversary?

The DOORBELL RINGS.

MELISSA

(with wink)

Let's count!

Melissa takes Nathan's hand with a smile. They head to the front door.

INT. NATHAN'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - LATER

JAZZ MUSIC plays. The party has begun. The GUESTS are dressed up. They gather around a big buffet table with drinks and snacks.

Nathan speaks with JACK, 36, Melissa's brother, a sun-tanned energetic man, dressed in a dark-green suit with a turquoise shirt.

JACK

Are you re-doing your vows tonight? Mel was telling me she was trying to convince you to awhile back.

NATHAN

We decided not to. If we're being honest... I don't like the idea of a priest in my home.

JACK

Still?

Nathan shrugs.

NATHAN

Why do we need God to validate our marriage?

JACK

Well, it's more about the gesture...

NATHAN

I know, I know. Priests... they just make me uncomfortable. They use people.

(beat)

I believe in Mother Nature and the power of human kind. Popes have invented a business idea which gives them power and wealth, but they are deaf to the people. I don't want to be part of it.

Jack laughs and puts his hand on Nathan's shoulder.

JACK

To each their own, I suppose!

MARK BROWN, a middle aged man, bald, with a black beard and large glasses, raises his glass.

His date, GERA, 25, a slim woman with a dyed dirty-green bob, also raises her glass.

MARK BROWN

Happy Anniversary!

GERA

Happy Anniversary, Mel and Nat!

ALL GUESTS

Happy Anniversary!

Everyone drinks their champagne.

MELISSA

Now, as a gift to my husband for our 10th Anniversary, I would like to play an original piano composition.

The guests CLAP.

NATHAN

Wait a minute! Let me switch off the jazz.

The music in the background STOPS.

Melissa walks over to the piano. She elegantly sits down on the stool.

MELISSA

It's named "My Love Forever Yours."

The guests listen.

Melissa concentrates on the MUSIC. She raises her dainty, but manicured, fingers. They gracefully descend on the piano keys, emitting a moving a beautiful composition.

Melissa finishes the song. The guests CLAP once more. Nathan gets on one knee, takes Melissa's hand and kisses it.

The guests CLAP louder.

JACK

Bravo, Mel! Could you play Vivaldi for us? Please? Something from Four Seasons, perhaps?

MELISSA

If our guests are not too hungry...

GUESTS

(clapping)
Please, Vivaldi!

MELISSA

I will play you the etude from Four Seasons called Spring.

Melissa smiles and begins to play once more.

INT. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MARGARET CLARK, 55, her grey hair pinned up, dressed in white blouse and skirt chats with Gera, staring at the painting on the wall.

MARGARET CLARK

Interesting painting, isn't it?

GERA

(sipping her drink)
Pretty weird!

MARGARET CLARK

The painting's name is L'Appel de la Nuit.

GERA

Sorry?

MARGARET CLARK

The L'Appel de la Nuit means The Call of the Night. The painter was from Belgium, and the original name of the art was in French.

GERA

(looking at the painting)
I see. Is this an original?

MARGARET CLARK

No, absolutely not. The original is in the National Gallery of Scotland, if I remember correctly. But, this is an excellent reproduction.

GERA

How do you know all this?

MARGARET CLARK

Well, I studied Modern Art in college, now I'm a teacher in the same school as Mel. And you?

GERA

(with a sigh)
Well, I work at the university's lab. I'm Mark's assistant.

Gera nods in Mark Brown's direction.

MARGARET CLARK

What do you like the most about this painting?

GERA

Well, the hair, perhaps...

MARGARET CLARK

Yes, there is a very rich vegetation on their hair. And the color... it's the same as yours, isn't it?

GERA

Yes, well spotted!

Melissa and MONICA, 33, a plump redhead with false eyelashes, approach the table to refill their glasses.

MELISSA
 (to Margaret and Gera)
 How is everything, ladies?

MARGARET CLARK
 Everything is fine! And thanks for
 the lovely composition!

GERA
 (to Melissa)
 It was beautiful, indeed! Are you a
 musician?

MELISSA
 Not by profession, but by heart.

MARGARET CLARK
 Perhaps, your passion is not only
 music, but Art in general. Is this
 painting your choice or Nathan's?

Margaret nods towards The Call of the Night.

MELISSA
 Mine. I love mystery and this
 painting is my favorite of Paul
 Delvaux.

Margaret Clark shifts her attention to the other side of the
 table.

MARGARET CLARK
 (leaving)
 Excuse me, ladies.

INT. NATHAN'S LAB - LATER

Nathan and Mark each with a glass of brandy, walk around the
 basement laboratory.

MARK BROWN
 Not bad. It's a good space. Lots of
 room.

NATHAN
 At the moment yes, but I'm looking
 to expand. It's one of the reasons
 we bought this house, actually.
 There is a second basement, under
 us.

MARK BROWN
 A second basement? Interesting.

Nathan gestures to a dimple on the floor.

NATHAN

Yes, look. It's a gate to the lower floor.

MARK BROWN

That's pretty unusual.

NATHAN

I was surprised when the real estate agent introduced the concept to me. The original owners were farmers and they built a cellar to keep their products fresh.

MARK BROWN

Oh, I see.

NATHAN

Look.

Mark approaches. Nathan puts his glass on the table and pulls the dimple. The gate CREAKS, but resists.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Stuck. I have never used it.

Nathan pulls again. The gate remains closed.

MARK BROWN

Let me try.

Mark, keeping the glass in one hand, pulls up the dimple by another hand and the door to the cellar opens.

MARK BROWN (CONT'D)

Careful.

The men stare at the black hollow ground beneath them. Mark slaps Nathan on the shoulder.

MARK BROWN (CONT'D)

Cool. I believe you now.

Mark closes the gate and looks around. He sees an aviary full of mice.

MARK BROWN (CONT'D)

So, what are you working on these days?

NATHAN
Currently I am doing a research on
the influence of the
electromagnetic waves on various
bioforms.

Mark approaches the operational table. He touches a massive
device above the table.

MARK BROWN
Transmitter?

NATHAN
Yup.

MARK BROWN
(frowning)
Expensive?

NATHAN
Good value for the price.

Mark sighs.

MARK BROWN
I guess your competitive advantage
is not in the hardware.

NATHAN
(laughs)
How would you know?

MARK BROWN
(seriously)
Why do you do this?

NATHAN
What?

Mark flops into a chair and runs his fingers through his
beard.

MARK BROWN
Well, you have PhD. With your
brains you could easily write a
couple of books in your field and
gain a fancy Professor label. You
could enjoy an endless cash flow
for the rest of your life.

NATHAN
I have enough money.

MARK BROWN

But, no stability. If your investors lose interest in your project tomorrow, you would be left with nothing.

NATHAN

Well, who knows what tomorrow will bring?

MARK BROWN

That's true. But still, why do you do this?

NATHAN

What? My research?

MARK BROWN

Yes, research, maintaining your lab, taking risks, all that.

NATHAN

Well...

Nathan sighs and sips his drink.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

When I was in high school, I went to Africa to learn about the local flora and fauna. The nature in jungles was amazing, but the people lived in extreme poverty. In addition, it was a harvest failure in that year, and people were starving to death. Without food or water, they were just... dying. It was awful.

MARK BROWN

(sipping from his glass)
Yeah, life is tough sometimes.

NATHAN

Yes, but I want to change that. I want to improve the survival of bioforms, be that plants or animals, for the good of people.

MARK BROWN

Sounds cool, but that's a lot of work.

NATHAN

Oh, yes.

MARK BROWN

Well, if you ever need any assistance, let me know.

Mark holds out his fist. Nathan bumps it.

NATHAN

Okay.

EXT. NATHAN'S HOME - NIGHT

Melissa and Nathan stand outside their home, waving goodbye to the guests, his arm around her waist.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

A cozy room with a king-size bed illuminated by candles. Nathan and Melissa lie in the bed.

MELISSA

Did you like the party?

NATHAN

Yes. Especially your performance!

(serious)

It was beautiful, Mel. I love you more and more every passing day.

Melissa snuggles up to Nathan.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I love your skin, your smell, your sugar-white teeth. I want to kiss all 32 of them, one by one.

MELISSA

Be careful, honey. Sugar can melt away.

NATHAN

I will be careful, my sweet.

Melissa laughs and presses her body against Nathan's. Nathan kisses her and they passionately make love.

LATER

Melissa and Nathan finish and snuggle up next to each other. Melissa strokes Nathan's hair.

MELISSA

Do you have that annual conference next week?

NATHAN

I do. I have to leave early Monday morning.

MELISSA

What suit are you going to wear?

NATHAN

The dark blue one that you like.

Melissa puts her hand on Nathan's chest and smiles.

MELISSA

I do love that one. I'd love to see you in it during your presentation.

NATHAN

Are you sure you can't join me, Mel?

MELISSA

Not this time, sweetie. Final exams are coming up and every day counts.

NATHAN

Too bad. I will send you a selfie from the conference. Me in the dark blue suit.

MELISSA

In the dark blue suit, with the light blue shirt and the dark red tie with dark blue cucumbers!

Nathan laughs.

NATHAN

Yes, of course, m'lady! I will put all my effort into looking amazing!

MELISSA

Please, do. You have to look appealing, at least for your investors.

NATHAN

Sure, babe.

One by one, Nathan extinguishes the candles on shelf behind their bed.

Next to the candles, there are some framed photographs: Nathan holding Melissa in her wedding dress; Nathan, Melissa and Jack in a forest with big rucksacks; Young Nathan with his Mom; sun-tanned Nathan and Melissa with a sign across them reading "Regards from Florida".

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Nathan lies sleeping in bed. He tosses and turns.

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - MORNING [FLASHBACK]

Light filters into the church through large stained glass windows. A crucified Jesus hangs on the wall, the Virgin Mary is next to him. There is a confession booth on the right side of the church.

Close to the booth is a YOUNG NATHAN, 12, combed blond hair, blue eyes, dressed in black suit and NATHAN'S MOTHER, 42, slim, simple hair cut, wearing a brown dress and flats.

Nathan's mom adjusts Nathan's jacket and collar.

NATHAN'S MOM

Don't be scared, Nathan. I know the first confession is always stressful, but just be yourself, okay?

NATHAN

Okay, Mom.

NATHAN'S MOM

Go, Nathan. Go!

Nathan walks into the confession booth.

INT. CONFESSION BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

A crucifix hangs over the grille, which separates Nathan from the CONFESSION PRIEST. Nathan makes the sign of the Cross.

NATHAN

Bless me, Father.

CONFESSION PRIEST

When was your last confession, son?

NATHAN

This is the my first one, Father.

CONFESSION PRIEST
Congratulations, son. Now, confess
all the mortal sins you have
committed.

NATHAN
I haven't done any, Father.

The Confession Priest clears his throat.

CONFESSION PRIEST
Now, my son, confess all the venial
sins you wish to mention and ask
for forgiveness.

NATHAN
I am guiltless, Father.

CONFESSION PRIEST
My son. It is my duty to pass a
sentence upon your guilt or
innocence. Your duty is to tell me
the truth regarding your sins.

Nathan is silent.

CONFESSION PRIEST (CONT'D)
All people sin, my son. And I can
help you release yours.

NATHAN
I have been grieving over the loss
of my father.

CONFESSION PRIEST
What happened to him?

NATHAN
He became ill and died, Padre.

CONFESSION PRIEST
That is a will of God, my son.

Nathan is silent once more.

CONFESSION PRIEST (CONT'D)
Do you understand that?

NATHAN
Yes, I understand.

CONFESSION PRIEST
Do you have anything else to add?

NATHAN

Yes, can I ask a question?

CONFESSION PRIEST

Only I have the right to ask questions in confession. It's your obligation to answer them.

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - LATER

A red-faced Nathan leaves the confession booth. Nathan's mother waits at the bench close by. She sees Nathan and takes his hand as they go to Communion.

PEOPLE stand in a queue leading to a PRIEST, 53, dressed in a white tunic.

MOMENTS LATER

Nathan's mother bows in front of the Priest. He places a white wafer in her mouth. Nathan watches.

NATHAN'S MOM

Amen.

She walks away.

Nathan steps up and bows. The Priest takes another wafer from the plate.

PRIEST

(to Nathan)

Open up, son.

Nathan looks at his Mother. She urges him on.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Don't be afraid. Open up.

Nathan shakes his head. He runs out of the church.

BACK TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Nathan wakes with a start. Heart pounding. Melissa is still asleep, her book of Prayers on her bedside table.

Nathan rubs his face and gets out of bed. He looks at the Melissa's book, frowns in disgust and picks it up by two fingers.