

"Knives Out": A Christian Look

****Spoiler Alert: This document covers the plot and ending in a fair amount of detail.****

The detective comedy *Knives Out* features a dynamite all-star cast, an amusing (if improbable) plot, and something nerds have been waiting almost 70 years for: a crossover fight between Captain America and James Bond! (Okay, that one is a slight stretch).

In the movie, we see a wealthy mystery writer Harlan Thrombey (Christopher Plummer) dead from an apparent suicide with world-renowned detective Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig, also known as James Bond) hired to investigate the..., well, he doesn't know. But, as a professional paid in advance, he will investigate nonetheless.

As the plot unfolds, we see that Harlan was given an accidental and fatal overdose of morphine by his nurse, Marta Cabrera (Ana De Armas), after Harlan overturned a table with two medicine bottles on it. As Marta was his only friend, and despite her pleas to get medical help, he convinces her to leave while he takes his own life to fool the world into believing this was a suicide.

Benoit investigates with Marta close by his side, apparently oblivious to her attempts to destroy evidence that points to her. We learn that Marta (whose mother is an illegal alien) is the sole heir to Harlan's entire estate and the only way to negate this is to prove that Harlan was murdered by the beneficiary. The family, who were quite cold concerning Benoit's presence at first, now demand his full attention on the matter. Although they do not know about the medicine switch, they turn on Marta like a lynch mob. Except for Harlan's grandson, Hugh Drysdale (Chris Evans, also known as Captain America). He apparently comes to her rescue and speeds her away so they can figure out what happened and what to do about it.

As the movie proceeds through silly comedy, plot twists, the revealing of family secrets and the obligatory second murder, we finally come to the complete truth of the matter. Hugh, who learned of his grandfather's change of will, switched labels on the bottles and stole the morphine antidote in an effort to have Marta kill him. Then he anonymously hired Benoit to ensure the true cause of death would be found out, framing Marta as a murderess and thereby denying her the inheritance.

When Hugh kills Fran, the maid, to put even more pressure on Marta, Marta finally decides to confess to her unintended role in the death of Harlan. But Benoit suddenly comes alive, stops her and fingers Hugh as the real murderer. When the table was unexpectedly overturned, Marta picked out the correct bottles by sense of touch rather than by sight and actually gave Harlan the correct doses of each medication. It was only when she looked at the bottles as she put them back in the bag that she believed she mixed up the medication. Hugh, confident that there is no evidence to support this accusation, taunts Marta and Benoit. For the movie's final surprise, Marta tricks Hugh into confessing killing Fran in front of police, and nearly loses her life in the process.

I can't but help think of how much this actually plays out like the Gospels. Take Marta for instance. She could be any Christian serious about her faith. She is young: [Jesus] ... said "Amen I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3) She is obedient, so much so that all of her troubles come from it. But perhaps most of all, she is self-sacrificing: The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (1 John 3:16) But, being a good Christian also means she is in a confusing world

she cannot control and is tempted at all times.

Now let's look at the hero of the story. When we first see Benoit, he is quiet and in the shadows, very much like God the Son throughout the Old Testament. Even after being revealed, he likes to stand to the side and let things play out: out of our way but never completely out of sight or forgotten. He does not always give Marta the help she wants, but he is always there when needed. His questions are always simple, yet affect those he asks deeply. He is polite and welcoming to everyone, yet is uncompromising on the truth. In the end, Benoit tells Marta that if she had done what she knew to be right and not listen to the others, none of this would have happened. For I do not do the good that I want, but I do the evil I do not want (Romans 7:19) comes to mind.

Hugh, of course, is the Devil. Handsome, self-serving, manipulating, cunning and devious. He promises great things to get peoples' help (as he is otherwise quite helpless on his own) and then ruthlessly leaves them for destruction when they are no longer helpful. Hugh only has the power others give him, and he is quite content to use that power to destroy anyone and everyone. And in cosmic irony, it was his plan of destruction for Marta that brought about his own final downfall.

The family is the world. They think they are "good" because they treat each other with civility. Until something rocks their world. Then they are forced out of their carefully constructed lies and we see them for what they really are: lonely, miserable, helpless, pathetic and desperate. Too many Christians are comfortable with their "goodness" and less so with their "holiness." We need to let God construct our peace of mind, not ourselves.

The estate is heaven, which Marta could only have inherited by being pure. In it, she can finally let her fears (represented by the possibility of her mother being deported) go away (she would have the means to protect her mother). But by giving into the temptations of the others, she nearly lost her inheritance. It was only by admitting her guilt and trusting in Benoit (an allegory to the Sacrament of Reconciliation) that she regained it.

But I also think there is a lesson on what the final judgment might be. I find the movie parallels the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) quite well. In neither case was the family cut off from their inheritance because of the harm they caused, but rather for the good they did not do. In both cases, the family was allowed a certain period of time to correct this behavior, yet they never took advantage of it. In both cases, their benefactor decided enough was enough and looked for someone worthy of what they had to give.

While a full breakdown of what the judgment means is beyond the scope of this paper, let me propose for now that we are not judged by our faith in God: the Rich Man's faith in being a descendant of Abraham was just as misplaced as Harlan's family's faith in their inheritance. Both faiths fall tragically short. Of course, we cannot be judged on our good deeds either as we will all come up short just as Marta did. Marta, despite all her good deeds, nearly lost everything by one mistake and needed a savior in order to be redeemed. But let's turn our focus back on the families. I propose that the judgment in both stories was a decision that giving the family additional chances to do the right thing would be a waste. We will not be damned for the sins we committed; we will be damned for the sins we refuse to let go of.

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