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A Christmas Story 2

By Jean Shepherd

A subtitle by
There it is,
our house on good old Cleveland Street.
A few winters had passed, and yet
another one had come screaming...
...over Lake Michigan
in the middle of the night.
It had been years since the old man's lamp
stood proudly in our front window.
The legendary battle of the lamp
that locked my parents in mortal combat...
...would forever be etched into my psyche.
This is X-5. I've located the plans
for the moon base.
For my kid brother,
it was all but a distant memory.
I'm going in.
Randy was a fledgling
Buck Rogers fanatic...
...who had his own way of braving
life's little conflicts...
...in this world or any other.
Take that, you Neptunian swine.
Randy, get inside, you lunkhead.
It's freezing out.
And there I am.
With that same dumb, round face...
...and the same penetrating
20-90 vision.
I had, however, discovered the wonders...
...of a miracle elixir called Vitalis.
- Another close call.
- Space is like that, sweetheart.
Now go get dressed for school.
Careful with those,
Zurg's minions are everywhere.
- Oh.
- You just can't trust that son of a bitch.
Excuse me?
Keep it up, young man,
and you're gonna bite the bar.
Oh, yes, don't test me. I mean it.
Oh!
I will not have that in my house.

Did you hear what your brother said?
Where on earth do you boys
pick up language like that?
Son of a bitch!
Gotcha, you bugger! Huzzah!
Oh, I knew that cry.
The most feared furnace fighter...
...in northern Indiana had once again
sampled the sweet nectar of triumph.
We may now begin our day.
Ralphie.
Aside from my sudden
and profound interest in hair...
...things hadn't changed that much.
The old man maintained
his well-deserved status...
...as the White Sox's number-one fan.
Morons.
Another utility infielder.
What about a pitcher who can
make it to the second inning?
I'm telling you, boys, if I owned that team,
things would be a whole lot different.
Yes, sirree, Bob.
Utility infielder.
My mother still hoarded bacon fat
like it was gold dust.
Oh, that's good.
And my brother still left the house...
...wrapped for transport
like he was a Ming vase.
For Pete's sake, Ma.
- I heard you snuffle.
- I can't breathe.
You wanna be sick
when Santa comes?
Oh, how right she was.
For in two weeks, it would be Christmas.
Most guys my age wouldn't admit it...
...but when it came to Christmas,
I still felt like a little kid.
Son of a bitch.
You are pulling my chain.
Rita Hayworth?

See for yourself,
it's playing at the Majestic.
I sat through it three times.
- How naked?
- Thirty percent.
- She pulls off her gloves.
- No.
And then she takes off her necklace.
And then she turns around
and she says, uh:
"I'm not very good with zippers,
but maybe if I had some help."
Oh, my God.
Holy moly.
She's beautiful.
Eh.
Is that a 6?
- Fireball Straight 8.
Overhead valves.
Two-speed Hydra-Matic.
Yeah, so what?
There are a ton of Buicks around.
Show some respect. This is a Roadmaster.
Flick, Schwartz and I
were months away from turning 16.
The sacred moment in each boy's life...
...when he crosses the Rubicon
into manhood...
...and receives that most
cherished of documents...
...known as a driver's license.
Now you're just gonna give it
a little gas, gonna pop that...
Few rites of passage were marked
with such fevered anticipation.
Preparations had been ongoing for months.
Hey, ease up.
You wanna drive the 500,
Indy's right down Route 6.
Don't take the corner in third.
Who's gonna pay for a new transmission?
You're letting this joker cut in?
It's dog-eat-dog out here.
Stake your claim.

Son of a bitch!
But through it all,
the old man remained positive...
...and steadfast in his encouragement.
Stop sign!
Stop sign.
Formal education had to wait.
Being not quite 16
meant that every discussion...
...revolved around only one of two topics.
There were cars, of course.
And then... Oh, yes,
and then there were them.
Drucilla Gootrad.
My sweet Drucilla. Beauty incarnate.
The hands-down heartthrob
of Hohman High.
I didn't stand a chance with her.
No one did.
Unless you were a quarterback
by the name of Todd Chapin...
...a feat which would require developing
strikingly chiseled features...
...and then beating Elkhart Lutheran
on the final play with a 60-yard bomb.
The rest of us, those wretched souls...
...who couldn't throw or catch
or leap or shoot...
...would have to settle for
being with her in our dreams.
Now, then, you will share with us...
...the location of the resistance fighters?
Perhaps I could help
to refresh your memory.
Go ahead, frulein. Kick and scream.
But your American boyfriends
aren't going to rescue you today.
I ain't her boyfriend.
Not yet, anyway.
Don't try anything fancy, soldier boy.
Oh, yeah? How's this?
You saved me from a fate worse than death.
Just doing my job, ma'am.
Oh, Private Ralphie Parker.

You will forever have
my undying love and affection.

Ditto.

Schweinehund.

My father picked me up from school
that afternoon.

The tired pistons on his beloved Olds...

...were slowly sputtering
into that good night...

...and the time had come for a change.

Any pea-brain can go out
and buy a new car.

But landing a good used one?

You gotta be on your toes.

- That's it. Yeah.

- Okay?

Just remember, treat the
gas like your wife.

Treat the clutch like your mother-in-law.

Huh? Boom!

The old man lived for
the thrill of the hunt.

And there was no one he loved having
in his sights more than Hank Catenhauser.

I had been going with him
to Hank's World of Wheels...

...for as long as I could remember.

Hank drove an ambulance in World War I.

Legend had it he backed over a land mine...

...and still had a piece of shrapnel
the size of a walnut lodged in his brain.

Good to see you!

Hank liked to tell his customers it was
the part of the brain that made deals.

I like you, Parker.

You're an Oldsmobile man.

- Guilty as charged.

- Well, it's a fine automobile.

But you can't drive a great car
till you drive...

- ...a great bargain.

- That's true.

- I got two words for you.

- Olds 88.

- Actually, that's a word and a number.
- Ha! You slay me.
- He's a card. Let's take a sneak peek.
- All right.

Unbeknownst to Hank, my father
and I had perfected a routine...

...carefully orchestrated,
to augment our bargaining power.
Push button radio, white wall tires.
Automatic choke.

Well, why don't you
hop in the back there, sonny?
Just wanna see if that seat's roomy enough
for you and your brother.
Sure thing, Dad.

Hm.

So how is it back there?

Uh, it's okay. I mean...

Ah. A little tight.

Ah, tight. He says it's tight back there.

These kids, they grow like weeds.

Heh. It's certainly a factor.

Well, I guess I'm gonna have to give you...

- ...a heck of a price on it, won't I?

- Well, how about that?

Oh, there she was.

In all her gleaming, second-hand glory.

A 1939 Mercury Model-Eight Convertible.

The top was frayed,
the tires were almost shot.

As if any of this mattered.

For I was in the presence
of the greatest machine...

...ever to glide off an assembly line.

The apex of automobilia.

Holy jeez.

Phase two of the old man's scheme
was always the same.

He'd tell Hank it was time
to go home and think it over...

...let him sweat for a week or two.

And then, like jaguars
circling their hapless prey...

...we'd close in for the kill.

He's over-barrel this time, Ralphie boy.
We got him good.
Oh, you bet, Dad.
The Parker boys strike again.
Hey, you know what they say:
The acorn doesn't fall
far from the tree. Huh?
Huh?
Oh, the old man
was a veritable cliché repository...
...never hesitating to haul out
one of life's tired truisms...
...for our edification.
You know what they say:
If you don't ask, you don't dance.
You know what they say:
Every dog has his day.
You know what they say:
If anything can go wrong, it will.
And one that I begged to differ with:
Lightning never strikes
the same place twice.
Fortunately, I had
the advantage of experience.
I already knew that planting seeds
into one's subconscious...
...was a delicate operation indeed.
You know, I heard that 31 percent
of American households...
...had second cars.
Careful. Don't tip your hand.
Not that we need one.
I just thought it was interesting.
Well, we are living
in prosperous times, I guess.
Oh, yeah, country's on a roll.
Sky's the limit. Ha-ha-ha.
Coach caught Mikey Witlin
eating his boogers in gym.
Still, when Dad's got a
road game in bowling
league or Aunt Clara and
uncle Bill are in town...
Randy, mouth closed when you chew.

Go on.

Heh. Nothing.

I just think it might be nice
to have some extra wheels around.

And maybe you could even get
your driver's license.

Oh, well done.

You know,

that is something to consider.

- What's that?

- Well, what Ralphie just said.

I mean, he is almost 16, right?

And we could...

Wait.

Wait.

Listen.

No. Not now. Anytime but now.

Aah!

It's a clinker!

Aha!

You are mine!

I guess we'll talk about it
some other time.

As the old man would say,
close, but no cigar.

Oh, how I loved band practice.

For 45 minutes, twice a week...

...Drucilla and I could be together.

Not face-to-face, but still close enough...

...to smell her

lavender-scented shampoo.

Someday, my beauty,

there'll be a veil upon that hair.

And I'll lift it, so our lips can meet...

...as they pronounce us man and wife.

A little less holiday spirit, Mr. Parker.

From the top, people.

One, two, one, two.

At least there was one beauty

I had a chance of winning.

One look at my magnificent Merc...

...and the guys would surely be able

to fathom my pangs of longing.

And here's the beauty part.

It's the most gorgeous ride
on the lot, and nobody cares.
Nobody?
No one's paying attention.
She's gathering dust.
I could pick it up for a song, I know it.
Uh, green, right?
Yes. I'm calling her Emerald Express.
Yeah, who wouldn't want that beauty?
But it was in the garage. It was dirty.
Uh, guess he washed it.
Must have a hose somewhere.
Uh, maybe you can borrow it
to hang yourself.
There it was. Taunting me.
Deal of the day
could only mean one thing.
At any moment, hundreds of buyers
would stampede down Hohman Avenue...
...begging to be the first one
to hurl a checkbook at Hank.
Pay to the order of "ruin my life."
Hate to break it to you, chief...
...but wanting and owning
are two different things.
I'd say he had got
a better chance with Drucilla.
- You think it's open?
- Why?
I wanna see what it's like
behind the wheel. Just once.
You kidding? The guy's inside,
you'll get in trouble.
Hey, my dad's like royalty here.
He just sent us a calendar.
Take them. Come on, Schwartz,
take them.
Oh, fine.
Split-bench leather seat...
...Quadra-Coil suspension,
hydraulic brakes.
No. No sense torturing myself.
It was time to say my goodbyes.
So long, old girl.

Got something here, just came in.
Ralph. Ralph.
Absolute mint condition.
Oh. uh...
Hal, this Merc's
got your name written all over it.
Sweet jeepers,
just took it in on the tray.
Hi, kids. How's it going?
Great, take it somewhere else.
Cross my heart.
A grandmother from Muncie.
I guarantee she never took it over 20.
- Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! Oh, my God!
Unh. Unh!
Oh!
Whoa! Move out!
Oh!
Is he all right?
My first test drive.
How'd I do?
Oh...
...fudge!
Yeah, actually it's been
a pretty good year.
Well, until the Three Stooges turned up.
Yeah, ha-ha-ha. You too.
It's only because I go back with your
father I'm not bringing the cops into this.
I could help you close a deal with him
on that Olds. I mean, he really wants it.
We were just trying
to soften you up a little.
Oh, the people you'll stab in the back...
...when you're trying to save
your own skin.
What, you don't think I know that?
"Back seat's a little tight, Dad."
You two have been
trying to pull that since you could walk.
Eighty-five bucks. Cash.
What?
- That's what a new top costs.
- They can have it here next week.

- I can't get \$85 by then.
- Well, when do you think you can get it?
- Well, 1970 seems realistic.
- Okay, that's it, I'm calling.
- No!
I will have it. All of it.
No, you won't. You'll never get that much.
You don't say that in front of him.
My friends underestimate the depth of
my resolve and my resourcefulness.
I like this kid.
Determination.
That's what gets things done.
So you get this done by Christmas Eve...
...or the only thing coming down
your chimney this year will be the cops.
It was times like this when you found out
who your friends were.
The treaty that formed NATO
hadn't even been thought of yet.
But on that day,
three young men from Indiana...
...had already formulated
its founding principle:
An attack on one is an attack on all.
This is X-5 to base.
I'm initiating reconnaissance
of General Kotar's evil lair.
Over and out.
Nineteen dollars and six cents.
Well, that's peachy.
- I put in 10, Schwartz. How about you?
- An entire roll of nickels.
That's two bucks, Rockefeller.
Why you barking at me?
I'm not the one that wrecked a car.
Only part of it.
And I wasn't even driving.
So what? You still owe the guy, don't you?
What's most important, Ralph,
is that we...
We are all...
- And come on in, Randy.
- Oh!

Ralphie wrecked a car? Neat-o!
I swear, you rat him out, I will show you
what you look like on the inside.
I swear, if you tell Mom and Dad, I will...
uh, nobody's ratting out nobody.
But he's right.
Someone's gotta pay Hank.
Oh, no. Uh-uh.
I know where this is going.
You gotta tell him.
- No, I don't.
- What, tell who?
His old man.
Give me two minutes,
I want a running start. Ha-ha-ha.
Forget it, Flick. Last week,
I dropped a bottle of Dr. Pepper...
...and he almost took my head off
for blowing the deposit.
- You want me to ask him for 85 bucks?
- Why not?
Jingle bells.
Listen to him. He's all jingly.
Jingle all the way.
- Ha!
- Yeah, chin up, buddy.
We're right here with you.
Yeah, great.
He'll take your heads off too.
Uh, maybe we shouldn't
get involved.
- You know, it's a family matter and all.
- There's no choice, Ralph.
There's tons of choices.
I could, uh...
I could lay low at your house
for a couple of months.
Or I can, uh... Hey, we'll join the Navy.
I could join the Navy.
Or I can... I can change my name
and grow a beard.
Maybe not now, but soon.
Or I can, uh... I can...
- I can't feel my legs.

- Whoa.
That's it. Easy.
So long, kid.
Are you sorry for your sins in your life...
...and do you wish for absolution, my son?
Dead kid walking.
Go out like a man!
No.
No.
No! No, please!
Please, please!
No!
Over the fields we go
Ha, ha, ha, laughing all the way.
Hey, how's it going?
Okay, I guess.
Won't know till we plug them in.
If one of these bulbs is bad,
it makes the whole strand worthless.
Heh. Well, you know what they say:
One bad apple, right?
Yeah, that's a good one, Dad.
A perennial.
I was thinking
maybe we could sort of talk.
You can always talk to me,
Ralph, you know that.
Good.
Could I help you with anything?
Hold the ladder? Mow the lawn?
Uh-oh. I know what that means.
- You do?
- Sure.
It means you need a little extra dough
for Christmas, right?
Sure do.
Well, you're lucky.
I'm feeling extravagant tonight.
Yeah. Why don't you get
something nice for your mother?
Huh? Like perfume or a scarf.
From you and Randy.
I'll give you a buck.
I'll give you 2! Huh? Heh, heh.

Thanks, Dad. That's swell.
Could I have 83 more?
Why?
What?
No way.
No way on God's green earth.
But, Dad, he wants to put me in jail.
Please, I will pay you back double.
Well, you're not gonna have to.
Because there's no way
you're getting it from me!
I could give you the money,
but what would that teach you?
- How generous you are.
- No, no, no.
No kid of mine is growing up thinking...
...that he can get somebody else
to buy his way out of a scrape.
You need some money?
You figure out a way
to come up with some.
Hey, you know what they say:
You give a man a fish
and he'll eat for a day.
Teach a man to fish, he'll eat...
...forever.
Well, just so you know...
...I'm pretty sure any prison stretch
would be minimal.
And if you got on a chain gang...
...you wouldn't have to sit
in your cell all day. Heh-heh-heh.
Wouldn't hurt to ask.
Wait a second.
It's Christmas, right?
Higbee's will hire anybody on Christmas.
We'll go tomorrow.
That's the ticket, guys. Getting jobs.
We'll work our butts off,
12 hours a day.
- Twelve hours a day? I can't wait!
- Yes!
Hank was right.
Determination got things done.

I'd be the kind of part-time holiday help
that legends are made of.

My fellow Americans...

...we are here today to honor
an exceptional young man.

Ralph Parker, once again,
you have set the gold standard...

...for your thousands
of fellow workers to follow.

Please accept this token
of your country's esteem...

...and my personal congratulations.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Drucilla.

Oh!

Bravo!

No! Don't you dare.

Is everything all right, dear?

In the words of boxing great

Jack Dempsey...

...a champion is someone who gets up...

...even when he can't.

Oh, honey.

What am I doing looking for another car?

When what really needs

to be tossed onto the junk heap...

...is that worthless hunk of iron

in the basement!

Friggin'...

Yep. Thing's pretty much on its last legs.

Looks like it came with the house.

It was here when dinosaurs

roamed the Earth.

- The house came later.

- Ha-ha-ha.

So, what'd you have in mind?

We got a sale

on the new forced-air models.

- Ooh.

- Some pretty good prices.

All right. I'm listening.

And good day to you, sir.

If you change your mind, sir,

we're in the book.

Ow!

Would you forget about the furnace?

Hiya, Mrs. Parker.

That time of year again, huh?

I know someone who's pretty excited.

Ha, ha. Been tasting it since October,
has he? Ha, ha.

Well, I saved a special one for you,
nice and plump.

Hang on.

Three-hundred ninety dollars
for a furnace.

What kind of mutton-headed chump
does he take me for?

- He seemed pretty honest to me.

- He's a quack-salver.

Telling me about furnaces.

He doesn't think I know about furnaces?

- I know about furnaces.

- You know how to swear at them.

Yeah, and I know how to
buy them too, okay?

Here's your Christmas turkey, Mr. Parker.

Ha, ha.

- You folks enjoy now.

- Thank you.

If I can pick up a good used car, I can
certainly pick up a good used furnace...
...and you can take that to the...

I'm sorry, what is this?

A serial number or something?

No, no. That's the price.

No, that's a mistake. It has to be.

Uh, no, sir, 40 cents a pound.

We can go now, dear.

- Oh, but... But that's ours.

- No.

That was ours.

Now that's somebody else's.

- We're not paying for that.

- But you love turkey.

You dream about turkey.

Forty cents a pound? Hell, why not 50?

Why not a whole dollar?

Huh? Why not I just open up my wallet
and dump it out on the floor?
How about a nice pot roast?
Yeah? What's that gonna set me back?
A couple of house payments? No, thank you.
Sorry, George.
Cheapskate.
Wait... Listen to me.
We do this once a year. Once.
- The drumsticks, the giblets.
- Forty.
- Four, zero.
- We use it in sandwiches.
We make turkey salad, chili, soup.
It never stops giving.
Oh, honey, it's Christmas. Let it go.
I can't. No.
There is no way this family is getting
suckered by this meat packer!
All right, then. What are we supposed to
eat on Christmas Eve? Tell me that.
- Ice fishing? Ice fishing?
- It's gonna save us a fortune.
- Fish for Christmas.
- Well, why not?
The folks up the street
have fish every year.
- The Ragos are Italian.
- Hohman Lake is crawling with perch.
Christ, they're practically gonna
leap through the hole all on their own...
...and drive you home to boot. Heh.
Hey, little buddy. What do you say
this year, we go out...
...and we catch us
our Christmas dinner, huh?
How about that for some holiday fun?
This couldn't possibly end well.
Every Christmas,
downtown Hohman was transformed...
...into a sea of humanity.
Motley hordes of blue-jowled
foundry workers...
...and gray-faced refinery men...

...trudging through wildly
pulsing department stores...
...trailed by millions of leatherette-jacketed,
high-topped, muffled kids...
...each with a gnawing hunger
to get it all.
And there we were,
in the heart of the action.
We landed on the beachhead
known as the Personnel Department.
And there were three bowties
with our names on them.
- Now, follow me.
- We were drafted...
...and consigned uniforms
without benefit of a physical.
Fresh reinforcements
in the trenches of retaildom...
...doing our part to grease
the wheels of commerce.
It was an honor to serve.
So you pull it out, like so.
You take the width, you
double it, add half.
- Got it?
- Um...
Of course you do. Ha, ha!
You're a natural.
All together now.
Take the width, double it, and add half.
Yes. Ha, ha. Bingo.
Well, good luck. Heh.
Did she just leave us?
She left us.
I thought we were going shopping.
Just one quick stop.
I went through those old newspapers
out in the garage.
- Mm-hm.
- Old real estate listings.
A lot of people remodel after they buy.
Soup to nuts.
Wanna know who the future belongs to?
People with information.

You just missed out. Yeah, they hauled the old one away last week. See? You hear that? What'd I tell you? Aw, she was a beaut too. A vintage Jackman-Henderson. Yeah, they put in one of those new central systems. Heats and cools. Don't we have a Jackman-Henderson? He can't stand ours.

- He throws his tools at it.
- It's still a reliable brand, dear.

I don't see why we can't get a new one. You were so frustrated yesterday. But he thinks he can fix anything. Last year, he thought he could fix the fuse box.

- We didn't have electricity for three days.
- That's enough, dear.

We had to throw out everything in the fridge. If you come across another, maybe you can give a holler.

- I'll keep you in mind, okay?
- Thanks.

We can go now, dear. Did I say something wrong? You didn't have to tell him every detail. By the way, you didn't have to throw everything out. The condiments kept fine. He dragged her to two more houses that afternoon. And five the next. Please? Wait, Schwartz, double it twice, right? No, you idiot. Double it then add half. All right, next. I want to know where my tea set is. Uh, ma'am, please, be patient. You try being patient with a 10-week-old. Mommy's here, pumpkin.

- I've been waiting for 10 minutes.
- Yes.

How could she just ditch us?
Where the heck is she?
Heh, heh. Peace on Earth.
- Where are my...?
- It's the wrong package.
Please, everyone, we are doing our best.
My baby! Where's my baby?
Oh...
You wrapped her daughter?
I put a pink bow on it.
Follow me.
Observe.
Excuse me, miss.
Care to sample our new fragrance?
Mm-hm. Mm.
You think you can manage that?
Ooh.
Miss, would you care to sample
our new fragrance?
- Mm.
- Oh!
Definitely not.
Oh...
- Sample, ma'am?
- Yes, please. Thank you.
One second.
- Sure.
- Jammed.
- Ooh!
- Oh!
Aah!
Oh, I'm so sorry. Here, here.
Here we go.
Um... Hmm.
You better run!
So you owe us for the mannequin...
...a refund for that baby's mother,
of course.
Oh, the broken stemware upstairs.
You really hit the jackpot on that one.
What you've earned is in this column...
...what you owe is over here.
Well, at least we didn't get canned.
You're not kidding. Talk about a break.

Because he felt sorry for us.
If you ask me, being pitied...
...is a pretty good way to go through life.
Hey! Parker!
Hey, you'll get your money.
We all got jobs,
and our first day was today.
So far we're at minus \$12.
What are you blabbing your mouth for?
Now, just stamp both copies...
...file the yellow one in the tray...
...and send the pink one off to shipping.
You think you can handle that?
Not inspiring confidence.
Oh, the old man prepared for ice fishing...
...the same way Attila the Hun
got ready to plunder the Balkans.
There would be no prisoners
on Hohman Lake this Christmas.
Six inches, not a whit more.
Don't wanna tip them off
they got company, right?
These walleye are crafty bastards.
How come we're the only ones
out here?
Well, maybe because
everybody else is a sucker...
...who doesn't mind spending 40 cents
a pound for a bird that can't even fly.
- But not us, right, pal?
- Sure, Dad.
All right, now let's
catch us a big fish. Hm?
Can we go now?
We just started.
- It's so cold.
- It's not cold.
It's crisp.
Fishing is all about patience, son.
Buck up.
The sun's coming out, huh?
Gonna be a great day.
This is why my brother Randy
still lives in Fort Lauderdale.

I knew it.
It's my jigging.
Technique's all wrong.
Gotta move the pole more. Right?
Raise and drop...
...raise and drop...
...raise and drop.
That's how you get them
to come up to the top.
Tomorrow is the day, little angler.
We'll get out there bright and early, huh?
Help me.
Parkers. It's your dime.
Why, yes.
I am indeed. Let me get a pen.
Sweetheart, you should be honored
your father lets you go with him.
Ralphie didn't get to go fishing
till he was well past puberty.
Ralphie has all the luck.
Absolutely.
I certainly will. Yes, and thank you.
Ha-ha-ha. What'd I tell you?
That was the contractor we met.
I told him to call me...
...if he came across any decent furnaces.
Well, is this decent enough for you?
He's got a 9-year-old Oil-O-Matic.
Mint condition, 180 bucks.
He'll even throw in free installation,
and he'll bring it by in the morning.
Doesn't 9 years old mean used?
What difference does it make?
It's an Oil-O-Matic.
The kind Gene Autry sings about
on the ads.
Oil-O-Matic.
My, oh, my.
Kiss furnace-nursing
Bye, goodbye.
Excuse me.
Go ahead, live it up!
It's your last night on earth!
Okay, Mike. Fire it up.

My God.
Listen to that.
Please don't make me go back there.
I'm begging you.
Oh, honey, a good space cadet
follows orders.
Play your cards right,
he might let you hold the pole today.
Who cares?
He's never gonna catch a fish.
What's with him?
Oh, he's just excited.
So have they finished?
Listen. Huh? It hums.
I don't hear anything.
It's there. Trust me.
You don't hear it
because you don't hear it.
Six months later...
...he'd have these two
in small claims court.
But no matter.
It was time to savor the moment.
You're right. I can hear it.
- No, no, no. Don't patronize me.
- I can.
- There's a hum.
- You're darn right there is.
It's the hum of success.
Heh, heh. Let's roll, Randy boy.
Time to hit the hole.
- What is it? What did you do?
- My tooth.
Ow!
- Uh-oh, you broke a filling.
- My tooth.
Honey, can you go it alone today?
I don't think there's a choice, I guess.
I'm sorry. I'll bring you some soup later.
But right now I need to get
Randy to Dr. Strassen.
Dr. Strassen? No, no, no.
I'm fine. I'm great.
- Let's go fishing.

- All right. Let's go fishing.
- Come here.
- No! No, I don't wanna go.
Dad needs me.
I don't wanna go with you.
- Fishing is a rite of manhood. No!
- No!
No, not Dr. Strassen!
Randy!
- The boy wants to go fishing!
This is green. We don't do green.
- Wait, what's the problem?
- Yellow tray, pink ship.
He never said nothing about green.
You know what this means, right?
We gotta close the store.
Say it ain't so, Schwartzie, not the green!
All right, calm down.
We'll go find out.
Well, you know what they say:
Those who cannot remember the past
are condemned to repeat it.
Not again.
You three, come with me.
- Quickly.
- Huh?
There's been a bit of an incident
at the North Pole.
- We've lost the elves.
- But our tubes.
Nuts to your tubes. Come on.
Ho, ho, ho!
And what do you want under the tree
this Christmas morning?
Bobby wants a new swing set?
Well, isn't that nice.
You know what Santa wants?
A wife who doesn't hike up her skirt
every time a salesman comes calling.
And neither of us
are getting what we want.
Go on, get out of here. Next.
Ho, ho, ho! Come on up.
Now, just get them on his lap

and get them off.

What happened to the real elves?

They tried to start a union.

Now go on, keep that line moving.

Go, go, go!

Extra! Extra!

I don't wanna go!

No! Stop, he's evil!

He's a wonderful dentist.

- Randy!

- No!

Gunter Strassen, DDS.

The most feared name in Lake County...

...known to every kid in Hohman

as the Butcher of Berwyn Avenue.

- Somebody help! No!

- Oh, Randy!

The Butcher had a drill

he pedaled with his foot.

The Butcher had little use

for such newfangled novelties as Novocain.

Ah.

Ah.

Sweet, isn't it?

Ho, ho, ho.

All right. Look over there, genius.

That's the ticket.

What's your story?

What do you want?

Can I get a Slinky?

- A Slinky?

- Mm-hm.

You mean to say you waited two hours

in line to ask for a bed spring?

That's it?

Ha! Come on, kid, dream big.

Next.

There now. It wasn't so bad, was it?

Okay, yeah, it was a nightmare.

I don't know how you did it.

Very brave. My little soldier.

Oh!

A little further.

Ho, ho, ho.

Up here. Unh.
Come on, Eisenstaedt. Do your thing.
All right, what can Santa
get for you, sport?
Welcome to the wax museum.
Come on, spill it.
It's okay, buddy.
Just tell Santa what you want.
Could you bring me a tire?
A tire?
You mean like a bicycle tire?
A car tire.
A car tire?
What the heck are you gonna do
with a car tire?
That's just weird. Get him out of here.
Hey, knock-knees, come here.
What was that all about?
I just think you could go
a little easier on them, that's all.
Excuse me.
I've been delighting children for 19 years.
Don't you step on my turf.
No. We should hold Santa
to a higher standard.
- I mean, you're taking the spirit out of it.
- You want dispirited?
Come spend the day at my house.
"Get off your lard ass
and make some money."
Yeah, so she can spend it
on punchboards and cheap gin.
That's dispirited.
- I wanna see him now!
- Me too, fat stuff!
Come on, Ralph, this guy's hopeless.
Uh, let's keep it moving.
Ralphie's entitled to his opinion.
He has more Christmas spirit than this bum.
- I'm sitting right here.
- And you shouldn't be.
You're a disgrace to that uniform.
And you know what?
- No more kids for you.

- What?
Everyone, you can all go home.
- What?
- No more Santa for you.
He is not worth it.
No Santa? What?
Oh, you tell them, chief.
Are you crazy? You see this line?
It keeps going with the curve of the Earth.
Now, be a good elf
and get some more kids.
Did you just hit me?
No, I pushed you. There's a difference.
Uh, guys.
You mean like this versus this?
Oh-ho! Here we go, elf fight.
Oh, yeah.
Guy... uh, guys, guys. No, no, no.
Ah, bringing out the weapons.
Swing! Oh, yeah!
Guys, are you crazy?
- You're gonna get us fired, man. Aah!
- Oh!
You see that, boys and girls?
That's me and Mrs. Claus
every single night. Ha, ha!
Time to slide down through the chimney...
...of Mickey's Tavern and tie one on.
Ho, ho, ho! I quit!
- That'll learn you.
- Aah!
Yoo-hoo!
Hey there.
Brought you a little something. Oh.
Made you some soup.
Ooh. Randy needed a new filling.
- He's lying down for a bit.
- I don't get it.
I'm jigging my keister off here.
Here, have some of this, it's still warm.
I'm raising, I'm dropping, I'm raising,
I'm dropping. What the heck do they want?
Why don't I give it a try?
- Well, your arm must be aching.

- Heh.

Why not? Go to town.

No, no, no. They go for the bright ones.

They don't seem to go for
much of anything, actually.

Excuse me?

I'm just saying

maybe you need a prettier one.

They don't think like that, dear.

That's it. Now, just remember,
raise and drop, raise and drop.

That's it.

Oh, this is good.

- Oh!

- Whoa!

Hey, whoa! I got it!

- Hang on! I got it.

- I'm trying.

Whoa! That's a monster.

Oh! It's prehistoric. Get the net.

Get the net. Get it, get everything. Oh!

- Is this the net?

- Yes.

Oh, Lord!

This thing has got to be...

Whoa!

- It looks like your hole may be a little too...

- I know what it looks like. Hold this.

Come here, you.

Come here. Come on!

Come on!

Two days I've been out here.

Now give in, you stupid, big fat...

I'm fine.

Give me that. I'm not finished.

Sorry. Just trying to help.

Heh-heh-heh. Haven't you done
enough of that already?

You know, I'm not quite sure
what you mean.

That means that you jinxed it!

That's what it means.

Means that everything was going great
till you showed up.

Really? Well, good.

Because I never wanna set foot
out here again.

- Good.

- Trying to get Christmas dinner...
...through a little hole in the ice.
This has to be the stupidest thing
I've ever heard.

And for what?

So you wouldn't have to
part with another \$3.

Oh, so now it's a crime
to wanna save a little money.

A little?

All you do is skimp.

You skimp on the furnace
and skimp on the turkey...

...and skimp on the car.

You wouldn't even help out
your own son when he needed it.

You talking about Ralph?

You ever hear of setting an example?

Oh, yes, job well done there.

I was being a good parent.

You were being a cheap son of a bit...!

My mother had not uttered
an obscenity in 30 years.

Ever since she was a teenager,
and lost her job at Kreski's Market...

...for telling a hostile customer
to "go to heck."

Jig all you want.

- I'm going caroling.

- Fine with me.

And thanks for the delicious snack!

Oh!

Our own employment picture
grew dimmer that evening...

...when I lost the first and only job
I'd ever had.

Deck the halls

With boughs of holly.

Fa la la la la La la la la.

By now, I knew I'd probably

never experience a Christmas...
...quite like this one.
And I wasn't alone.
My mother realized that in a sense,
she too...
...was about to be relieved of a job.
That one day soon,
it would be time to let go of a son.
Ancient yuletide carol.
Fa la la la la La la la la
I would be on my own, out in the world.
Into it, I would bring all
that I had learned...
...from her and the old man,
forging my own tentative path.
And coming to terms with the fact
that it can be a lonely place...
...even during the most joyful of seasons.

Mom?

- Mom?

- Downstairs.

I was trying to find
our Christmas stockings.
So many little things this time of year.

- Here, I could help you.

- Oh, it's okay.

I have to get used to doing this
without you boys sooner or later, right?

- Mom...

- It's fine.

Go on. Shoo.

Hey, that's it.

An Oil-O-Matic.

My, oh, my. Ha, ha.

Hey, where is Dad?

Oh, he's still out on the lake.

Hopefully shivering
and unable to feel his toes.

- I think I'm gonna go out there.

- Well, do not bring him a blanket.

Apparently he doesn't
appreciate anything nice...

...people try to do for him.

Ralphie?

That you?

Hey, Dad. How you doing?

Heh. Hey.

- Come on over, pull up a chair.

- Heh.

I thought I'd take a ride
and stretch my legs.

Seems like a pretty nice night.

It's 10 degrees out.

- Yeah, okay.

- Ha, ha.

Uh, I actually
kind of wanted to talk.

Well, sure, let's talk.

How's it going at work?

God, it seems like only yesterday, I was
watching your mother change your diapers.

And here I am asking you,

"How's it going at work?"

uh, that's sort of what I wanted to, uh...

Look at you, huh?

Getting that job downtown, not giving in.

You and me, kid, we are two of a kind.

A couple of stubborn sons of bitches,
plain and simple.

We're finishers. We hang tough.

MacArthur. He didn't pull out of Bataan
till they held a gun to his head.

Dugout Doug, they called him.

You know what they say:

Sometimes it's the last key in the bunch...

...that opens the lock.

To tell you the truth...

...I'm not even sure

if I know what that one means.

I do.

I know just what that means.

Well, good.

That makes one of us.

Here, hold this.

I have got to get some soup.

We sat there shivering

and telling tall tales to each other.

After I left,

he stayed three more hours...
...and never caught a thing.
I didn't find that out
until many years later, of course...
...and it was a secret
that I'm glad was kept.
Sir, may I have a word with you?
Uh... Sir, please, wait!
Don't come any closer.
I want another chance.
I distinctly remember
telling you and your friends...
...that you would be physically removed...
...if you ever entered
this establishment again.
I hardly knew those guys.
It is just me now.
I'll do whatever you want, no slip-ups.
Please. It's Christmas.
- Security!
- No!
I am not going anywhere.
I'm a stubborn son of a bitch,
just like he is.
Like who?
Never mind. um...
Sir, if you give me one more shot...
...you will not regret it.
Very well.
Oh, I wish I wasn't such a softie.
- Thank you.
- You don't mind working outside, do you?
No. No, no, anywhere. Not at all.
Ding, ding, ding.
Ding, ding.
Not her. Anyone but her.
If she sees me dressed like this,
I might as well move to the North Pole.
I'll die alone on some ice floe,
the world's only virgin reindeer.
Please. No.
One glimpse of me and I'll go right from
"she doesn't know I'm alive"...
...to "stay away from me, you."

Oh, you again, eh?

Get out of here!

Whoa!

You lousy cotton-tailed klutz.

I spent all day getting that.

Sorry. I'll pick it up.

You bet your butt you will,
every dime.

Yes, sir.

- I'll get it.

- Hey!

Hey, get back here.

Sir?

Sir, uh, that 5, um, it's not yours.

Guy on the corner's collecting money.

Oh, yeah? Well, you tell him

I said job well done.

- Come on, sir. It's for charity.

- Take a hike, Bambi.

- I don't know what you're talking about.

- Actually, you do.

Well, that would make me
a liar then, wouldn't it?

Yes?

All those faces floating over me...

...and the only one I could see was hers.

It was over. Why bother getting up?

Why bother going back home...

...or back to school or back to anything?

Why bother having dreams at all?

Eighty-four dollars and twelve cents.

That's it.

Oh, that's so close.

But you're still going to prison, pal.

Hey, uh, we can send you some
girly magazines to bribe the screws with.

I'm not going to jail.

Did you ever get that 5 bucks
your sister owes you?

Um, no, she used it

to buy a winter coat for my grandma.

Well, that was stupid.

Yeah? You want my grandma to freeze?

Did you just push me?

Um, no. This is a push, Nancy Drew.
- Do it again, I double-dog dare you.
- Wait, I got it!
I'll put some of my things in hock.
Look around. I got all kinds
of valuable stuff.
Yeah, because what pawnshop
wouldn't want...
...an old Augie Galan mitt
or an Orphan Annie decoder?
I just need a dollar.
One lousy dollar.
We're tapped out, pal. All of us.
We've been picked clean.
We've lifted every sofa cushion,
raided every sock drawer we could find.
And every cent we got
is right there on that bed.
What's in the pocket, Schwartz?
Nothing.
Schwartzie.
You can't have my lucky buck.
- Your what?
- My lucky buck.
I got it from Grandpa Maury.
And I still remember the look on his face
when he gave it to me.
Who cares? Your best friend
is gonna do time.
You don't understand.
This buck turned everything around for me.
That first time that I
held it in my hand...
...I knew that I'd always come out on top.
If I lose it...
...my whole world would fall apart.
You're right. Forget it.
It's not worth it.
Not if it means that much to him.
Wait a minute.
I've never seen it before.
Uh, when exactly did you get it?
The second night of Hanukkah.
What year?

Last Tuesday. I got this tie too.
Guys, stop. Guys.
- Guys, guys, that tickles.
- Let go, Schwartz!
No, no! Not my lucky buck!
Say uncle! Say uncle!
Aah, aah.
- Eighty-five! Uncle!
Eighty-five indeed.
I had pulled it off, against all odds.
Stop the presses, sound the trumpets.
Victory was mine.
This time, I had beaten the furnace.
I changed the tire in four minutes flat.
I bowled the 271.
That's another way we were the same,
the old man and I.
I knew how it felt...
...to sample the sweet nectar of triumph.
Lesson learned, all right.
Determination was the key.
No matter what,
stay the course, never falter.
Always keep your eyes on the prize.
Really coming down, isn't it?
Looks like a white Christmas tomorrow.
Well, that's the way it should be, right?
Yes, sir, it is.
Merry Christmas.
Being teenagers meant
that we were often capable...
...of perpetrating
reckless irrational acts.
Such deeds tended to involve items...
...like raw eggs or rolls of toilet paper.
There were usually simple
and understandable explanations...
...for such behavior.
We were either young
or careless or stupid.
Or in my case, all three.
And then there were times,
every once in a blue moon...
...when we did things

we couldn't explain at all.
Ha-ha-ha! That's it.
Sorry. Long day.
He's here.
Oh, good. Let's eat.
Eat what? What are we having?
Right.
Well, as you know, I... I thought...
...we would try something a little
different for Christmas dinner this year.
Yeah, that was a laugh riot.
Well, I was trying to be frugal.
But as it turns out,
what I was really being was...
Okay, everyone...
...look at the dinner
your father caught just for us.
Shazam.
My brother never heard
what really happened...
- ...and hasn't to this day.
- You're amazing.
Some acts of glaring deceit
are best kept hidden away forever.
Who's calling on Christmas Eve?
These bill collectors
will not leave you alone.
I think that's for me.
Eat your vegetable.
Parker residence. Ralph speaking.
There he is. My test driver.
I was starting to think
you'd forgotten about me.
I know.
I'm very sorry, sir.
You don't have it, do you?
- No, sir. Not all of it.
- I should've known.
But I tried, I really did.
And we all got jobs, and I earned
most of the money, but...
Those people needed the tire...
...and I tried to get them to order the family
special, but they all wanted la carte.

- You know how that adds up...
- Whoa, whoa, whoa.
You are one weird kid.
I've heard that, sir.
Ninety, 91, 92...
...93, 94.
Thirty-nine dollars and ninety-four cents.
- Is that it?
- I'll have the rest next month.
And if not, you can break my legs.
Or maybe one leg.
Skip it. You're done.
- I am?
- Yeah, merry "ho, ho," and all that.
You know? Spirit of the season.
- Thank you.
- I just sold that Merc, anyway.
Made out like a bandit.
The sucker never knew what hit him.
The thing is, you never let up.
And what did I tell you
about determination, huh?
It gets things done.
And it'll pay off big
for you one day, you'll see.
Now go on home, son.
And enjoy your family tomorrow.
Thank you, Mr. Catenhauser.
And merry Christmas.
Merry Christmas.
Made out like a bandit!
My car was gone.
I had nothing in my pocket but a hole.
And somehow, as I walked home
on that bone-chilling silent night...
...all was right with the world.
Yes!
Yes. A Martian police ship...
...form the Buck Rogers
Interplanetary Space Fleet!
Thank you, thank you!
I told you he'd like it.
And you wanted to get him socks.
Oh, boys, boys. Let's wait.

Let's do this right.

- Who wants to play Santa?

- Me! Me! I do! I do!

No. You did it last time
and you stank at it.

- Did not!

- Did too.

- Did not!

- Okay, okay, boys. Stop.

I'll play Santa. Shoo!

Go. Okay. Who goes first?

- Come on, Mom. Uh... Oh.

- Here, honey, this is for you.

- Me? Oh.

Oh-ho!

Oh.

I thought we could go back out.

You know what they say:

Lightning always strikes twice
in the same place.

They say that, do they?

- Thank you. Ha, ha.

- Let's see. Who's next? Oh.

Ralph, this is for you from Aunt Clara.

Oh, no.

"Oh, no" was right.

It was time for the annual
Aunt Clara humiliation fest.

Lord knows what sort
of degrading polyester nightmare...
...was in store for me this year.

Well, go on, open it.

She always gets you the nicest things.

- It's not funny, Randy.

- Yes, it is.

Oh, it's a sailor suit.

Is that just the cutest thing?

Good Lord.

Sweet Jesus.

Forget it, Mom.

I am not kidding,

I will join the foreign legion.

He's almost 16. Is she that deranged?

Oh, wait a minute.

This isn't for Ralphie.
Randy, she sent this to you.
No! No! No!
- Sailor boy!
- No! No.
No. No!
Boys. Boys.
- Ha-ha-ha.
- You're gonna look so good.
No.
That is too adorable for words.
I can think of a few.
- Where's the camera, honey?
- No. No!
- Wait! These get around school.
- Ralphie, no!
Big smile.
Ah, another one come and gone, huh?
Not too shabby.
Nope. You guys get
everything you wanted?
I'd say so.
Pretty good haul, huh?
Hey, I think I just saw a rat
in the kitchen.
Okay, I'll call the exterminator.
Are you insane?
Do you know what they charge
on a holiday?
I smell a rat, all right.
Whoa.
- This is a Martian police ship.
- Oh.
Which holds an entire battalion
of tiger...
My God. It's risen from the grave.
Isn't it beautiful?
It's beautiful.
This is the greatest Christmas in history.
You see what Santa gave me?
Yeah, I'd like to thank him personally.
Look at her face.
Somebody take a photo.
Yeah, you know what, that's a good idea.

Why don't we all take a picture, huh?
Yeah. Everybody,
the three of you by the tree.
- Uh, Dad...
- Honey, I'm not dressed.
You look fine. One for the scrapbook.
Line up. Mom, you in the middle.
Come on, get in there.
That's it. Now, Ralphie,
move in a little bit.
A little more.
A little more.
Yes!
Thank you! Thank you!
That's the last we'll be seeing
of him for a while.
But, hey, you'll always
have me to bark at.
No fair, Ralphie got a car.
I want a real rocket ship.
Well, learn from this, Randy.
If you're as determined as Ralphie,
maybe one day you'll get one.
I guess that means no.
- That's right.
- Polish your leather...
...and polish your interior! Oh, my God!
This is the best Christmas ever!
The odometer read 132,000 miles.
Oil burned and valves leaked at will.
There were more rattles
than an Irish nursery.
It was the best car I ever owned.
In 43 days, I would turn
16 and be liberated.
No longer bound by gravity,
but free, fluid...
...at one with the wind and the sun.
Preceding that joyous emancipation...
...I would fail the
driver's test four times.
Uh...
I'll hold it.
You go set the brake.

Go!

You should really leave the car in gear when it's parked.

My dad says that.

Good advice.

Well, are you gonna say anything?

So you just out looking for runaway cars?

Ha, ha.

Actually, I came to see you.

I got your address from the Flicks.

His mom and my mom volunteer at the hospital.

Do you remember the other day, in front of Higbee's?

Antlers, sleigh bells?

Uh, yeah.

- Look, I can explain.

- You don't have to.

I saw what you did.

It takes a lot of guts to stand up to a jark like that.

You don't see that very often.

I guess I just wanted you to know that.

Here.

We're big on fruitcake at the Gootrad house.

Eat them, use them as paperweight.

Ha, ha. Up to you.

Thanks.

Should you be...?

I mean, are you and, um...?

- Ha-ha-ha.

- You know.

- Todd?

- Yeah.

We talked the other day and sort of decided to go our separate ways.

Well, I decided.

Oh. I didn't know that.

How could you?

We've been out of school.

And I've just been puttering around the kitchen all week.

- Baking paperweights.

- Thousands of them.
You have no idea how good
it feels to be outdoors.
Well, I'm glad.
I mean, I'm...
I'm glad that you picked here...
...to be outdoors at.
Oh. Oh, boy, that came out stupid.
No.
It came out great.
- So is this your car?
- Yeah.
'39 Mercury Eight.
Wow, what a wonderful Christmas present.
Please? Please?
Once.
Once around the block.
When I was 9...
...I pulled the wrapping
off the present of my dreams...
...and knew, right then and there,
no Christmas would ever be the same.
And none were.
Until today.