

How To Survive Your Family At Christmas

A holiday comedy by
William Missouri Downs

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

LORETTA NUTT

(Jerry and Rosy's daughter - A Harvard student- 20s)

JERRY NUTT

(A stern, hot-headed hat salesman - middle aged)

ROSY NUTT

(A sweetly-nutty housewife - middle aged)

LANGDON KENNEDY

(A handsome Harvard law student - Late 20s)

FATHER RAMONA

(A young priest with a limp. He walks with a cane - 30)

&

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

Decked out in Charles Dickens A Christmas Carol outfits if possible. If necessary the Carolers can be recorded and off stage but it's better if they are on.

TIME & PLACE

Christmas 1975-ish, Chicago

Act One - Christmas eve eve

Act Two - Christmas eve

SETTING

There are three playing areas but they are inner connected. (1) Jerry and Rosy's living room is represented by two easy chairs, a hat rack, and a Christmas tree. (2) Jerry's hat shop has a display counter with hat-covered mannequins. (3) A confessional in Saint Hyacinth Basilica. These locations should flow into each other just as the scenes flow without pause or blackout. In the back is an area for the Christmas Carolers.

Synopsis: It's Christmas, that wonderful time of year when families deck the halls, don their gay apparel, and pretend they don't hate each other.

College student Loretta hasn't been home in two years mostly because she has nothing in common with her blue-collar parents. When she left to attend Harvard, she thought she'd never return, but then she fell in love with a cultivated Cambridge law student, and he wants to meet her parents.

The difference between Loretta's law student and her parents couldn't be more profound. He loves yachting, while her parents never let her near water - growing up Loretta's mother told her chlorine caused skepticism. He reads Tennyson, while her parents read Jonathan Livingston Seagull - not the book, the Cliffs Notes.

How to Survive Your Family At Christmas is a crowd-pleasing comedy about family, love and the one thing we all need to survive the holidays, forgiveness.

"The idea that there is a Family somewhere who functions is an odd concept. In my youth I was running from my family to try to find out who I was - their influence distracted me. Now I see what a powerful hold they have, no matter what."

- Novelist Susan Minot

How To Survive Your Family At Christmas

(ACT I)

PROLOGUE

(The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS - decked out in Charles Dickens-like A Christmas Carol outfits stroll through singing.)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

(Delightfully in tune)

WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS WE WISH YOU A
MERRY CHRISTMAS WE WISH YOU A MERRY
CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR
GOOD TIDINGS WE BRING TO YOU AND YOUR KIN
WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

(The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS exit.)

(Lights up on LORETTA - A brainy college student wearing a Harvard T-shirt. On each side stand her working class parents JERRY and ROSY. He's an abrupt man in a bowtie. She's a sweet stay-at-home screwball.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

My parents are nuts!

JERRY

(To the audience)

My daughter is nuts!

ROSY

(To the audience)

Let's face it, families, in general, if you think about it, are kinda nuts.

LORETTA

And if you disagree it's because you're not part of the Nutt family of Chicago Illinois. You heard me, our last name is Nutt.

JERRY

N.U.T.T. Good name. Solid name. Easy to remember.

LORETTA

That's my father, Jerry. If he had to describe himself using only three words he'd say:

JERRY

Hat-salesman. Hard-worker. Professional-Grinch.

LORETTA

Okay that's six words, but who's counting. And this is my mother Rosy. If she had to describe herself using only three words she'd say...

ROSY

(Delighted to meet the audience)

First, thank you for coming. You know it'll soon be Christmas. That wonderful time of year when families deck the halls, don gay apparel, and pretend they don't hate each other to the very depths of their souls.

LORETTA

Mama, three words.

ROSY

Oh. Loving, house, wife.

LORETTA

That's only two.

ROSY

(Counting)

Loving, house, wife.

LORETTA

"Housewife" is one word. Unless you are describing yourself as a "house."

ROSY

(Sweetly at first)

Oh, in that case add "mother." Loving, housewife and mother - of a wonderful, precious, delightful, sarcastic daughter who can't seem to find time to come home for Christmas for two years now.

LORETTA

(To the audience)

The day I left for Harvard, my mother said:

ROSY

Stay in Chicago, marry the boy next door, okay-so one of his arms is shorter than the other, who notices?

LORETTA

My father...

JERRY

(Pissed)

If you go to Harvard you'll come back a communist, or pregnant or one of those weirdos who wears socks and sandals in the middle of winter!

ROSY

Hold on! You didn't describe yourself.

JERRY

Yes, three words!

LORETTA

Summa Cum Laude.

ROSY

What does that mean?

LORETTA

It's Latin, it means//

JERRY

You don't think I know Latin? I'm fully acquainted with Latin. It means too smart for your own breeches.

LORETTA

(To the audience)

Growing up I thought my family was normal, we all make that mistake.

(MORE)

But one day it'll occur to you that your family is absolutely nuts. For me that moment happened on a Christmas eve, eve when my Grinch-father went to confession.

(JERRY enters the confessional with FATHER RAMONA.)

LORETTA

The year was 1975. A gallon of gas cost 44 cents, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was under 1000. And the inflation rate was 9.2 percent.

(LORETTA watches the following scene from the side.)

(There are no blackouts, the action should flow from scene to scene without interruption.)

(JERRY and FATHER RAMONA in a confessional.)

(Please note, FATHER RAMONA walks with a cain.)

JERRY

(Trying to get comfortable)

Okay, this is claustrophobic don't you know.

FATHER RAMONA

Mr. Nuts//

JERRY

It's Nutt. Not Nuts.

FATHER RAMONA

So sorry. Mr. Nutt.

JERRY

Father, is that what I'm supposed to call ya son, "Father?"

FATHER RAMONA

(Holding on to a secret)

If it makes you comfortable.

JERRY

You know, you and me gotta lot in common.

FATHER RAMONA

Do we?

JERRY

I've been married twenty-five years; I'm not getting any either. *(He thinks that pretty darn funny)* Just a little celibacy humor to break the ice. As you might've guessed, I'm not a member of your flock. But I think us professional scrooges and you holy types can get along.

FATHER RAMONA

(Struggling to say it)

Mr. Nutt, ah...

JERRY

No! Ya gotta say it as if you mean it or people think it's a mistake. *(Proud) Nutt!*

FATHER RAMONA

Mr. Nutt!

JERRY

Better, not perfect. *(Abrupt)* So you're the new guy.

FATHER RAMONA

Yes. First week on the job//

JERRY

(Cutting him off)

Enough small talk let's get down to business. As you know I sell hats. And so when you called my intellectual-logic informed me that you need some hats. I can get anything, nun hats, big tall pope hats, you name it.

FATHER RAMONA

Mr. Nutt, I didn't ask you here to talk hats.

JERRY

Got another bidder? Whatever he's offering, take two percent off and that's my final offer.

FATHER RAMONA

Please... I need to talk about Charlie.

JERRY

(That stops him)

...What's this now?

LORETTA

(To the audience)

Charlie was my younger brother. He passed away three years earlier on Christmas eve.

FATHER RAMONA

(This isn't easy)

Your son Charlie, I don't know how to say this...

JERRY

(A painful memory)

Just say it.

FATHER RAMONA

I was the last person to see him... alive.

JERRY

(Beat, taken aback)

What?

FATHER RAMONA

I understand this must be difficult.

JERRY

I'm befuddled here. What are you saying?

FATHER RAMONA

I just wanted you to know that he... expired quickly. That he felt no pain and that he was in extremis.

JERRY

Extremis?

FATHER RAMONA

It comes from the Latin meaning "in the furthest reaches//"

JERRY

(Defensive)

You don't think I know Latin? I'm fully acquainted with Latin. What's important here is, did you see the person in the other car? The hoodlum who left the scene of the accident?

FATHER RAMONA

(Trying to find the right words)

When I arrived at the scene, three years ago, I didn't know what to do. I panicked. It was a spur of the moment thing... I meant to give him last rites, but I was nervous.

(MORE)

I was just out of seminary. And I was young and confused... Little did I know that years later I would be assigned to this same parish.

JERRY

Your point?

FATHER RAMONA

Before your son died... I baptized him.

JERRY

(Stunned)

Are you saying that my son died... a Catholic?

FATHER RAMONA

...Well sort of.

(JERRY is stunned. Lights out.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

My father was a Lutheran, my mother a Catholic. My father conservative, my mother liberal. My father ate meat, my mother lettuce. So my younger brother Charlie was raised a conservative Lutheran who ate hamburgers and I a lettuce-eating liberal Catholic. I asked my mother why they couldn't compromise. Why couldn't we children be raised vegetarians who eat steak on Fridays or Unitarians who believe in something. All she said was:

(Lights up on the quaint living room where we find the effervescent ROSY putting tinsel on the Christmas tree.)

ROSY

(As she decorates the tree)

"They went to sea in a sieve they did, in a sieve they went to sea: In spite of all their friends could say, on a winter's morn, on a stormy day, in a sieve they went to sea. And when the sieve turned round and round, And every one cried, 'You'll all be drowned!'"

(ROSY dials.)

LORETTA

After my brother's unfortunate death, my father became a dedicated sceptic, while my mother set out on an apology tour.

ROSY

(Delightfully upbeat on phone)

Hellooooo? ...Is this Jan Pogozelski? ...It's Rosy Nutt, formerly Rosy Grabowski. I sat near you in freshman English. ...That's right, the girl who got the perfect attendance award at commencement! How are ya?

LORETTA

(To the audience)

Her goal was to locate and apologize to all 357 members of her 1942 high school graduating class.

ROSY

(Sing song, on the phone)

Let me tell ya, it hasn't been easy finding you. You've been on my karma list for years. ...The reason I'm calling? I just wanta say I'm sorry for the way I treated you back in high school. ...What? ...A.A.? How-ja-know? Yes, I've been a proud member of Alcoholics Anonymous for three years and almost-totally-completely-dry now for two.

LORETTA

(To the audience)

After three years of phone calls there were only three names left on her list: Jan Pogozelski, Doris Johnson and Barbara Roosevelt.

ROSY

(Sweetly, on phone)

Jan Pogozelski, do you accept my deep heartfelt apology? ...Bless you. From the bottom of my heart, I'm sorry for grabbing the microphone during commencement and calling you and the entire graduating class a bunch of knuckle-dragging, slack-jawed, pickle-sucking, stupid heads. *(Delightful)* Bye bye.

(Pleased with herself, ROSY hangs up, joyfully crosses a name off her karma list and goes back to the Christmas tree.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

As time passes you'll find that one Christmas flows into the next, that they become inseparable, but the Christmas of 1975 would be one I would never forget.

(End of prologue.)

(The play begins.)

NO LIGHT EXCAPES MY FAMILY

(Lights fade to the confessional where we find a nervous LORETTA and fatherly FATHER RAMONA.)

LORETTA

(Having an anxiety attack)

Bless me Father, for I've sinned. It's been five years since my last confession. I was just pacing out front and I thought what the... heck. I've been home from college for two days and I just can't get up the nerve to call my parents. It isn't that my parents aren't okay people, it's just that they're a black hole devoid of flexibility - no light escapes my family.

FATHER RAMONA

...Did you say five years?

LORETTA

(Not listening)

How was I born into this family? How is it possible I came from people who've never read Buddha, or Kurt Vonnegut, or Ken Kesey, or The Last Whole Earth Catalog!

FATHER RAMONA

I don't follow//

LORETTA

(Ranting)

Okay, okay, be honest - Do I sound like a petty, ungrateful child?

FATHER RAMONA

(Kindly)

You forgot elitist.

LORETTA

How can I be an elitist? My last name is Nutt!

FATHER RAMONA

(Recognizing the name)

Did you say Nutt?

LORETTA

Yes, it's not a mistake.

FATHER RAMONA

(To himself)

Oh dear.

LORETTA

(Continuing her rant)

Do you know why no one produces Shakespeare's play Coriolanus?

FATHER RAMONA

(Confused)

No.

LORETTA

It's not that it's not an okay play - it's the name. Coriolanus. When I was a kid I'd've given my soul to come from parents who were New England intellectuals with a last name like Rothschild, or Morgan/Stanley. Okay, I'll shut up, what should I do?

FATHER RAMONA

You should call your parents and tell them you're home.

LORETTA

I can't. It's Christmas Eve-eve, and the carolers are out.

FATHER RAMONA

And that's a problem?

LORETTA

Yes. My father, is the reincarnation of scrooge, he always drives them off. One year he threw snow balls at them. Another year he used a sling shot and marbles. God knows what terrible things he has planned for this year.

HOW TO DRIVE AWAY CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

(The Living Room - JERRY enters holding a bb gun, he's ready for the Christmas carolers. ROSY enters with a broom.)

ROSY

I had a laundry basket full of dirty socks, have you seen them?

(ROSY stops when she sees the gun.)

ROSY

(Pissed)

What is that?

JERRY

(Defensive)

It's an official Daisy Red Ryder 200 shot Range Model BB gun.

ROSY

You are not going to do what I think you are going to do.

JERRY

If carolers show, I'm prepared.

ROSY

You are nuts!

JERRY

I was at Kalinowski's market. Guess what they were doing? Playing Christmas music!

ROSY

It's Christmas Eve-eve why wouldn't they be playing Christmas music?

JERRY

It used to start a week before Christmas, then they started doing it a week before Thanksgiving. Pretty soon they'll be playing Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer in June! We gotta stand up for our rights!

ROSY

Give me the BB gun.

JERRY

No!

ROSY

Give me the BB gun!

(She pulls it away from him. JERRY pouts.)

ROSY

(Changing the subject)

Guess who called.

JERRY

Rosy, you know I don't like guessing games.

ROSY

Guess. One little guess.

JERRY

Elvis.

ROSY

No. Old lady Borkowski from the Kalinowski market. She said that she's absolutely-almost-positive-for-sure that she saw our Loretta, or someone who looks almost-just-exactly like her, pacing out front of Saint Hyacinth this morning.

JERRY

What do ya know, our brainy daughter finally came home for Christmas.

(ROSY sweeps.)

ROSY

Although it's not like her not to call.

JERRY

Not like her? That's exactly her M.O.

ROSY

M.O.? What's this M.O.?

JERRY

It means "Modo Operarodus" *(Yes, he mispronounces it)* It's Latin police terminology.

ROSY

The police talk in Latin?

JERRY

All the time, it confuses the heck out of the crooks.

ROSY

I had this dream last night that she met a boy. Wouldn't that be nice. Maybe she's come home to introduce him to us. Oh, I do hope he's a decent fella.

JERRY

I'd be happy if she found a man with enough gumption to work a forty-hour week.

ROSY

And you wonder why she never introduces you to the boys she dates.

JERRY

Why? Cause I care about her future?

ROSY

That's why the last boy she dated you hired a detective to follow.

JERRY

I didn't hire a detective. I got Majewski down at the station house to check him out. And if I hadn't we'd never known that that middle-aged pervert was a pedophile.

ROSY

He was a periodontist!

JERRY

Still, does it sound right?

(Outside, the CHRISTMAS CAROLERS enter singing.)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS
(Singing)

JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD IS COME
LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING

JERRY

(Pissed off)

Where's my BB gun!

ROSY

You are not shooting them!

JERRY

Where's my gun!

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

(Singing)

LET EVERY HEART PREPARE HIM ROOM
AND HEAVEN AND NATURE SING

*(ROSY and JERRY struggle over the
BB gun. ROSY wins so JERRY grabs
ROSY's broom and runs out.)*

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

(Singing)

AND HEAVEN AND NATURE SING
AND HEAVEN, AND HEAVEN, AND NATURE

JERRY

(Screaming)

Get Out Of Here! We don't want your types around here! Get
out!

*(Terrified, the CAROLERS run for
their lives.)*

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

Ahhhhhhhh!

JERRY

Get Out!

ROSY

Jerry Stop!

*(JERRY chases the CAROLERS off with
the broom. ROSY runs after.)*

CHLORINE CAUSES SKEPTICISM

*(Confessional. Back to LORETTA and
FATHER RAMONA. She's in the middle
of her panic attack.)*

LORETTA
(*A bundle of nerves*)

I can never go home again.

FATHER RAMONA

But it's Christmas.

LORETTA

I can't.

FATHER RAMONA

Why?

LORETTA

Father, I've been dating this Harvard law student. He's perfect. Intellectual. Loves Shakespeare. Comes from Cape Cod. Took me yachting. Can you imagine me yachting! Growing up my parents never let me near water. My mother told me chlorine caused skepticism. I told my Cape Cod law student, no problem, I know all about yachting. And then I let go of this rope and this big... thing came sweeping across the deck killing him!

FATHER RAMONA

You killed him?

LORETTA

Well, almost. Knocked him cold.

FATHER RAMONA

Is he okay?

LORETTA

He has this huge lump on his head. Then he told me he loved me.

FATHER RAMONA

Because he was delusional?

LORETTA

No because I told him I loved him.

FATHER RAMONA

Before or after you tried to kill him?

LORETTA

He wants to meet my parents. But I can't.

FATHER RAMONA

Why not?

LORETTA

Father, I grew up in a world devoid of words like yachting or opera, and never more than one fork at dinner.

FATHER RAMONA

But if you're in love//

LORETTA

His last name is Kennedy. He's not just any Kennedy but the real thing, a Massachusetts Kennedy.

FATHER RAMONA

A descendant of...?

LORETTA

(Upset)

Yes. American royalty.

FATHER RAMONA

(Delighted)

Ooooooo, a Catholic.

LORETTA

(Not happy about it)

He asked me to marry him.

FATHER RAMONA

That's a good thing isn't it?

LORETTA

(Panicked)

No it's not! Can you see us in the New York Times' Sunday Weddings Page? "Kennedy weds Nutt!" It just doesn't sound right. It's like... "Tuba Scholarship" two words that just don't go together.

FATHER RAMONA

But he knows your last name.

LORETTA

No. He doesn't. I told him my last name was Coors.

FATHER RAMONA

Coors?

LORETTA

Yes. We met at this party and he had such great hair and he smelled like Farrah Fawcett Shampoo. Have you ever smelled Farrah Fawcett Shampoo?

FATHER RAMONA

Can't say I have.

LORETTA

It really smells good. And he was obviously interested. And then he asked my name and I had this beer in my hand and...

FATHER RAMONA

In other words, you lied.

LORETTA

Well sort of. But then I broke it off.

FATHER RAMONA

Why?

LORETTA

Because it can't work. Can you imagine my parents meeting his? It'd be P.B.S. vs. Professional Wrestling. My parents actually watch Professional Wrestling! I'm so ashamed.

(She weeps. FATHER RAMONA hands her a tissue.)

FATHER RAMONA

There there.

LORETTA

So I wrote him a Dear John letter and left school. Then I got a call from my roommate saying that he's trying to find me. That means that that poor polo shirt Coxswain is now searching Golden Colorado for a red Porsche.

FATHER RAMONA

Coxswain?

LORETTA

That's the one who steers the boat. He's on the Harvard rowing team.

FATHER RAMONA

Golden Colorado?

LORETTA
(Weeping)

That's where Coors beer is made!

FATHER RAMONA

Let me go out on a limb here; I take it you don't drive a Porsche.

LORETTA

Not exactly.

FATHER RAMONA

Young lady, "Not exactly" and "well sort of" are signs of an ungodly mind. You, my child, need to call your parents and tell them you're home. And you must contact this... *(He can't say it.)*

LORETTA

Coxswain.

FATHER RAMONA

And invite him to meet your parents.

LORETTA

Father if my coxswain ever came to Chicago I'd jump off the Sears Tower.

(FATHER RAMONA quickly pulls out a Bible and flips through it.)

FATHER RAMONA

(To himself, turning pages)

Samuel 1, Samuel 2, Kings 1, Kings 2. *(He finds what he's looking for)* Ah! Here it is! It's a sin for a Catholic to jump from the Sears Tower.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY DIDN'T WEAR A HAT

(Hat Shop. JERRY is on the phone.)

JERRY

(On Phone)

Hello Max. It's Jerry Nutt. ...Look, I know you're retired and all, but I got this lawyer-type question for ya - How would one sue for a baptism reversal?

*(There is a tinkle of a door chime.
LANGDON KENNEDY, late 20s,
handsome, well dressed, great hair,
cosmopolitan enters.)*

LANGDON
(Kennedy accent)

Hello?

JERRY
(On phone)

Gotta call ya back.

(He hangs up.)

JERRY
Welcome to the Mad Hatter - The last shop dedicated only to hats in Chicago. Jerry Nutt! Proprietor. I don't like the word "owner." I'm a proprietor. There's a difference. Let me guess. You're looking for a hat.

LANGDON
(Tentative)
No, I'm here about the sign in the window.

JERRY
Sign?

LANGDON
The 'help wanted' sign.

JERRY
Oh. That. Right. Sorry but the position's not open.

LANGDON
Then why is there a sign?

JERRY
I'm waiting for my daughter to come to her senses and take the job.

LANGDON
Your daughter?

JERRY
Yes.

LANGDON

She must be very special.

JERRY

Jury's out on that.

LANGDON

You're sure she'll show up here.

JERRY

She hasn't been home for Christmas in two years, probably not.

LANGDON

Well darn, I was just walking by, saw the sign and thought I'd found my dream job.

JERRY

Part time help at a hat shop is your dream job? (*Suspicious*)
What are ya, a college student?

LANGDON

Yes.

JERRY

Pretty snappy dresser for Chicago Community College.

LANGDON

No I attend// A school out east. I'm a law student.

JERRY

Law?

LANGDON

Yes.

JERRY

What would you charge to help me with a little papal litigation I got goin'?

LANGDON

Not a lawyer yet, but I'd be happy to give you a little pro bono advice.

JERRY

Pro bono?

LANGDON

It's Latin.

JERRY

Of course! I totally know Latin! Okay. Mr. Lawyer type person, pass this test and you're hired. Temporarily.

(JERRY holds up a man's hat.)

JERRY

What's this?

LANGDON

That? That's a Bowler.

JERRY

Lucky guess.

(JERRY holds up another man's hat.)

JERRY

This?

LANGDON

That's a Panama.

JERRY

This?

(JERRY holds up a lady's hat.)

LANGDON

Pillbox.

JERRY

Interesting.

LANGDON

Something wrong?

JERRY

You know what a lady's Pillbox is?

LANGDON

Yes.

JERRY

What are you, homo-erectus?

LANGDON
(Amused)

Excuse me?

JERRY

You know what I mean.

LANGDON

I don't think you need to be gay to know that that's a pillbox hat. It was made famous by my... *(He stops himself)*
By Jackie Kennedy.

JERRY

What did you say?!

LANGDON

It was made famous by Jackie//

JERRY

We do not mention the name "Kennedy" in this shop! Are we clear on this?

LANGDON

Because?

JERRY

You may know your hats but you don't know your hat history. John Kennedy didn't wear a hat during his inauguration in 1960. Suddenly it became fashionable to go hatless. He destroyed the men's hat business. And to top it off, think of the deaths that have been caused by that man's reckless actions.

LANGDON

Deaths?

JERRY

From people catching colds cause they're not wearing hats!

(JERRY holds up a man's hat.)

LANGDON

Stetson.

(JERRY holds up another man's hat.)

LANGDON

Fedora.

(JERRY holds up a fancy lady's hat.)

LANGDON

Veiled Plaza Suite.

JERRY

You know there's no shame in being pro bono.

LANGDON

Do I get the job?

JERRY

Okay, Mr. snappy-dresser, you're hired for a one day test. Name?

LANGDON

(Making it up)

Ah... Stanley

JERRY

Stanley what?

LANGDON

Ah... Kowalski.

(They shake.)

JERRY

Stanley Kowalski. Good name. Solid name.

(Outside, the CHRISTMAS CAROLERS arrive singing.)

CAROLERS

DECK THE HALLS WITH BOUGHS OF HOLLY
FA LA LA LA LA, LA LA LA LA

JERRY

(Pissed off)

Quick get the laundry basket full of dirty socks!

LANGDON

The what?

JERRY

The dirty socks! Behind the display counter!

LANGDON

What are you going to do?

JERRY

Watch! Listen! Learn!

CAROLERS

TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY
FA LA LA LA LA, LA LA LA LA
DON WE NOW OUR GAY APPAREL

(LANGDON finds the box of dirty socks - JERRY grabs them, runs out and starts throwing them at the CAROLERS.)

CAROLERS

FA LA LA LA LA, LA LA LA AHHHHHHHHHH!

JERRY

Get out of here! I'm trying to run a business!

(The CAROLERS run for their lives.)

JERRY

Get out! Get out!

(JERRY chases them off. LANGDON is amazed.)

LANGDON

What a nut.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE NUTTY KIND

(Confessional. The lights fade to LORETTA and FATHER RAMONA.)

FATHER RAMONA

You're wrong, your family's not nuts.

LORETTA

Yes they are.

FATHER RAMONA

You need to call them.

LORETTA

I can't.

FATHER RAMONA

Why not?

LORETTA

Cause if I call I'll hang up.

FATHER RAMONA

Don't hang up.

LORETTA

But I always hang up.

FATHER RAMONA

God doesn't want you to hang up. You're going to call them right now.

(From his side of the confessional, FATHER RAMONA hauls out a land-line phone.)

LORETTA

You keep a phone in your confessional?

FATHER RAMONA

There's a lot of things back here you sinners don't know about. Ham sandwich?

(He offers her a sandwich.)

LORETTA

You eat while taking confessions?

FATHER RAMONA

Doing God's work burns a lot of calories.

(He hands LORETTA the phone.)

FATHER RAMONA

Dial.

(She delays.)

FATHER RAMONA

Don't think about it. Just do it. "The power of Christ compels you!" *(Delighted)* I've always wanted to say that.

(She dials.)

(Split scene, the living room and the confessional.)

(The living room phone rings. ROSY runs in)

ROSY

That's our Loretta! Jerry, come in here.

(JERRY enters.)

JERRY

How do ya know?

ROSY

A mother's God-given intuition is most of the time almost-hardly-ever-wrong.

(ROSY answers the phone.)

ROSY

(Sing song - On the phone)

Hellloooo. *(Beat)* Hellloooo? *(Covering the phone)* Nothing. Just dead air.

(Meanwhile in the confessional LORETTA and FATHER RAMONA share the phone.)

JERRY

Dead air! That's her! Let me talk to her.

ROSY

I can handle it.

JERRY

I want to talk to her!

ROSY

You gotta be sensitive.

JERRY

What's not sensitive about asking her a simple question?

ROSY

Okay. But be nice.

(ROSY surrenders the phone.)

JERRY

(on phone, fake conciliatory)

Okay, I admit I was wrong. You are not a communist or pregnant or one of those weirdos who wears socks and sandals in the middle of winter. *(Beat, angry)* You're one of those les-B-ians *(Yes, he mispronounces it)* Am I right? You're a les-B-ian and you do drugs. Matter of fact you're so hopped up on mara-jew-wana right now you can't even talk. I'm not dumb I can connect the dots!

(ROSY grabs the phone.)

ROSY

Let Me Have The Phone! *(Suddenly sweet in to the phone)* Lori-honey, forgive your father, since he gave up smoking he's been a tad irritable. So what's up? Are you having overwhelming psychological problems? Not a problem, I'll put you on speakerphone. *(To Jerry)* Which button do I push?

JERRY

How should I know?

ROSY

How bout I try this one.

(She pushes a button on an ancient speakerphone between them.)

ROSY

(Artificially loud)

How's that? Can you hear us? You're on the speakerphone your Great Aunt Annabelle left us. She could only hear out of her right ear so we should be nice and loud. We put it on that little table between us? Remember that table? That's where you are. On that little table we got from your Uncle Mort when he died of diabetes after being hit by that bus.

JERRY

What does she care about the table for?

ROSY

Let me deal with this, I know about such things. *(To speakerphone)* Lori-honey, your father and I are going to go about what we're going about and when you're comfortable you talk.

JERRY

What are ya doin'?

ROSY

I read about this in Reader's Digest. It's called "Listening Therapy." She talks - we listen.

JERRY

Listen? What for?

ROSY

As long as your daughter is emotionally disturbed we listen.

JERRY

Once we listen then what do we do?

ROSY

(Without pauses)

Good question, the article was a two-parter, I won't find out until next month. *(To the speakerphone)* Okay, Lori-honey, we are officially listening. Don't hold back nothin'. And while you talk we will remain totally silent so that you can let it all out, without interruption. Trust me, I know what heck it can be to be interrupted all the time. I swear I can barely get a word in around here so we have a lot in common.

(Bored out of his mind, JERRY begins to ever so slowly slides out of his chair.)

ROSY

(On phone, on a mission)

If you think about it, what we have in common makes us family. Never forget family - For family is all that matters at Christmas even if the world is full of chaos and death and starvation and pain - All I know for sure is that two conditions rule God's beautiful creation: jealousy and suspicion. Jealousy at any level, even the smallest traces, will tear the world apart.

(JERRY slowly slides on to the floor.)

ROSY

(On phone)

Suspicion al-a-carte isn't so bad. So Lori-honey, speak your mind and we will listen-listen-listen. Although I can't imagine what the problem could be.

(JERRY slides under his chair.)

ROSY

(On phone)

You had a pretty nice childhood. You stayed in your room a lot - talked about joining the Peace Corps but did you ever want? Okay, now and then. But you had food on your table and a shirt on your back.

(JERRY fakes his own death.)

ROSY

(On phone)

So do it - Say whatever's troubling you and we will listen. Cause listening is the key to being a good parent.

(Over in the confessional, LORETTA now begins to slowly slide on to the floor.)

ROSY

(On phone)

Someday you'll know this to be true. Someday you'll be on a speakerphone listening to your own daughter's overwhelming psychological problems.

(LORETTA is now on the floor.)

ROSY

(On phone)

But in order to get there you gotta get married. I do hope you'll find the right man and have lots of little ones. Cause you know birth control pills cause blood clots.

(FATHER RAMONA drops to his knees and silently prays to God to stop Rosy from talking.)

ROSY

(On phone)

That's Jesus' way of telling us that we should stay away from birth control. But I'm getting off the subject, which is the fact that we are now going to listen-listen-listen. Are you ready? Here goes. You ready dear?

(ROSY stops, sees that JERRY is dead on the floor.)

ROSY

Wait a minute Lory-sweetheart, your father is on the floor again. I gotta bop him with my Modern Catholic Magazine.

(ROSY grabs her copy of 'Modern Catholic Magazine' and hits JERRY over and over.)

ROSY

Get up! Now! It's Not funny!

(He gets up off the floor. She calmly goes back to the phone.)

ROSY

Okay your father is back. So talk. Cause if you don't talk I don't know what to do - Except get old and die, which is going to happen, someday, and then we won't be available to listen. Will we be able to listen from heaven or wherever the heck your father is goin'? That's up to God. So take advantage of us while ya still got us.

JERRY

That's right. Carp Denim!

ROSY

Carp Denim, what's this Carp Denim?

JERRY

It's Latin, it means "Fish the day."

ROSY

That's right. Carp Denim! Cause you got two parents who are good listeners. Okay. Go. It's all about you now. Here goes. Talk.

(ROSY and JERRY listen.)

(In the confessional, FATHER RAMONA coaxes LORETTA to talk, she can't.)

(During the following JERRY and ROSY get so into their conversation they forget about the phone.)

JERRY

She talkin'? Cause if she is I can't hear squat.

ROSY

Wait. I'm about to be brilliant. *(To the speakerphone)* Lori-honey, obviously you're too deeply disturbed to talk, so tell ya what, to relax ya, your father and I are going to have a regular conversation.

JERRY

Whadya mean regular?

ROSY

Say something regular. I'll start. Here goes... The couple next door this morning had a fight - Don't know what for. Okay, your turn.

JERRY

What?

ROSY

Talk about something.

JERRY

Like what?

ROSY

Like what happened at work this morning? Anything happen?

JERRY

A guy came in.

ROSY

(To the speakerphone)

Did you hear that Lori-honey? A guy came in. Isn't that interesting.

JERRY

He wanted Loretta's job that she hasn't done for three years, but who's counting. Said his name was Stanley Kowalski. I think he's a fairy.

ROSY

You mean a leprechaun?

JERRY

No, I mean, I think he's like your Uncle Stefan.

ROSY

Oh! Oh my. How do you know?

JERRY

Ockham's razor: when you're shavin' and someone asks you a question. If there are two answers, the easies answer is the one to go with. The easies answer? Uncle Stefan.

ROSY

If you don't want to hire him don't hire him.

JERRY

Trust me I won't. But he does know his hats.

ROSY

Then hire him!

JERRY

Why should I?

ROSY

Cause he knows his hats!

JERRY

That shows how little you know about retail! There are many other facets to consider!

ROSY

Like what?!

JERRY

Like the fact that he wasn't wearing a hat! A guy comes into a hat shop and asks for a hat job and he's not wearing a hat!

ROSY

Don't start with me again!

JERRY

Like my wife - Who also doesn't wear a hat!

ROSY

I said don't start//

JERRY

I'm just sayin' that if you walk into a hat shop and ask for a hat job you better be wearing a hat. And if your husband runs a hat shop maybe just maybe his wife//

(ROSY hits him with her 'Modern Catholic Magazine.'

ROSY

Every time you come home you start a fight!

JERRY

Is it so much to ask? A little free advertising!

ROSY

I'm not a billboard!

(ROSE exits.)

JERRY

(Yelling off)

Who's asking you to be a billboard? I ask for so little! Put something on your head! Life on this earth is pulled down hard on a man's head! *(Quietly, to himself)* I ask for so little.

(JERRY grabs his hat and coat. ROSY enters.)

ROSY

(Pissed off)

Where're you going?!

JERRY

Back to the shop, where else is there for me to go?!

(JERRY exits.)

(ROSY walks over to the speakerphone and sits.)

ROSY

Lori-sweetheart? I'm sorry you had to hear that. I know this is hard for you but I want you to know that your father's a good man. And a decent provider. And an okay listener - once in a great, great, great, great while, a really kinda-okay listener.

(There is a click and dial tone. A tear comes to ROSY as she turns off the speakerphone.)

(Back to the confessional, continuous, LORETTA has just hung up. Beat.)

LORETTA
(Still a bundle of nerves)

Father?

FATHER RAMONA

Yes, my child.

LORETTA

I've...

FATHER RAMONA

Yes?

LORETTA
(This isn't easy)

I've been on a twenty-four hour waiting list for twenty-four hours.

FATHER RAMONA

...Meaning?

LORETTA

I'm... I'm...

FATHER RAMONA
(Dawning on him)

You're... You're...

LORETTA

Yes.

FATHER RAMONA

With...?

LORETTA

Child. *(Tears)* Farrah Fawcett Shampoo and a yacht - I kinda got carried away.

FATHER RAMONA

You must call this young man.

LORETTA

No. Never. I've got an appointment at the clinic.

FATHER RAMONA

The clinic?

LORETTA

You know what I mean.

FATHER RAMONA

Loretta, life is//

LORETTA

Sacred? Is that what you were going to say?

FATHER RAMONA

Not exactly//

LORETTA

(Tears)

If that's the case, then why did God allow my little brother...? On Christmas eve... You know, if he had been speeding, or drunk, but he was just minding his own business. ...I've often wondered, where he was going? ...What was so important that he had to be driving down that exact street at that exact moment.

FATHER RAMONA

God works//

LORETTA

I know what you're going to say. "God works in mysterious ways." Am I right?

FATHER RAMONA

Well sort of//

LORETTA

"Well sort of." "Not exactly." Thanks for listening, Father, but I've got an appointment to keep.

(She starts to leave.)

FATHER RAMONA

When?

LORETTA

Three o'clock.

FATHER RAMONA

(Desperate)

Wait! Before you do something rash, call one more time.

LORETTA

All I'll do is hang up.

FATHER RAMONA

Your father left. It's just your mother now. Tell her you're with child.

LORETTA

Never.

FATHER RAMONA

Have faith...

LORETTA

And what's faith?

FATHER RAMONA

...It's a deep conviction that lets you know that everything will be... okay. It's perhaps the most complex of human emotions, and I have to admit there are times that even I can't say I have faith but if ever there was a time, this is it.

LORETTA

A time to have faith in faith?

FATHER RAMONA

Call your mother and everything will work out for the best.

LORETTA

You guarantee it?

FATHER RAMONA

I don't have the power to//

LORETTA

You're a man of God. If not you then who?

FATHER RAMONA

(Beat)

All right. I guarantee it.

LORETTA

Okay. If my mother answers I'll talk. If she doesn't I'm keeping the appointment. And so it's in God's hands. Here goes, an act of faith.

(FATHER RAMONA says a quick prayer and crosses himself. Then for even more luck he crosses his fingers.)

(LORETTA dials. Beat. We hear a busy signal.)

LORETTA

It's busy.

(LORETTA hangs up and exits.)

FATHER RAMONA

Loretta wait!

(FATHER RAMONA runs out after her.)

(Back to the living room. ROSY is on the phone.)

ROSY

(On phone, Delightfully upbeat)

...Is this Doris Johnson? ...It is? It's Rosy Nutt, formerly Rosy Grabowski. I sat near you in sophomore algebra. I was the one... That's right, who was never sick. The reason I'm calling is cause you're on my karma list and so I'm calling to ask for your forgiveness. ...What? ...A.A.? How did you know? So let me just say, from the bottom of my heart, I'm sorry that I called you and the entire graduating class a bunch of knuckle-dragging, slack-jawed, pickle-sucking, stupid heads. *(The party has hung up on her)* Hello? Hello?

(Pleased with herself she hangs up and crosses the name off her list. Exits.)

EVERYONE SHOULD WEAR A HAT

(The hat shop. LANGDON is putting up Christmas decorations.)

(JERRY enters.)

JERRY

What are you doing?

LANGDON
Christmas decorations.

JERRY
Stop it. Any customers?

LANGDON
No.

(Pissed, starts to exit to the back.)

LANGDON
You know Mr. Nutt, perhaps it's time to admit that hats are old fashioned//

JERRY
Stop right there! This conversation is over! *(Continuing the conversation)* There are trends. Things come, things go, but not hats! So I stay the course. That's the key to life - Stay the course and never hang your hat higher than you can reach. And so this conversation is over! Say it!

LANGDON
Conversation over//

JERRY
(Continuing the conversation)
Hats are still important! Every major religion has a hat. Where would your nuns, or your Islamicsists or your Shriners be without hats? Hats are values - Values that have stood the test of time!

LANGDON
Like?

JERRY
Like not cheating too much on your taxes. Like asking the parents for permission to marry their daughter instead of telling them.

LANGDON
Isn't that a bit old fashioned?

JERRY
These are values! And I never question my values.

LANGDON

Why not?

JERRY

Cause life's too short to run around questioning everything. And so I know what I know. I go to work, I sell hats, that's my function within the creation. Conversation over!

LANGDON

Conversation over//

JERRY

(Continuing the conversation)

You know what killed the hat business?

LANGDON

J.F.K.

JERRY

Him and this newfangled thing called 'casual Friday.' That's what's wrong with society. It's all come as you are. Gentlemen no longer know how to tie a perfect bowtie and ladies are always trying to find themselves, only they got no idea how to do it. And so they go to fancy colleges and put off marriage, and before you know it, they're paying out tons of cash to strange voodoo doctors cause their tubes are all clogged up. God intended us to wear hats. He intended us to have children early. And above all he intended us to patronize corner stores!

LANGDON

Maybe your daughter doesn't want children.

JERRY

Wait, what's this gotta do with my daughter?

LANGDON

Sorry, I thought you were talking about your daughter.

JERRY

All morning all you did is ask about my daughter. What's with all these personalized questions?

LANGDON

Just small talk.

(JERRY gets suspicious.)

JERRY
What's your shirt size?

LANGDON
Excuse me?

JERRY
Shirt size?

LANGDON
Ah. Sixteen and a half. Why?

JERRY
Shoes?

LANGDON
Ten.

JERRY
Hat?

LANGDON
Ah...

JERRY
You don't know.

LANGDON
Well, not exactly.

JERRY
I knew it! My intellectual-logic told me something was up with you. You memorized a bunch of stuff about hats from the encyclopedia, but you don't know your own size. Sit.

(JERRY pulls out a chair.)

LANGDON
But//

JERRY
You heard me. Sit.

(LANGDON sits.)

(JERRY grabs a measuring tape. During the following JERRY measures LANGDON's head.)

JERRY

You can tell a lot about a person by their head. Of course brain size has nothing to do with hat size. Lots of people have big heads but thick skulls, thus small brains. (*After measuring*) Huh. Interesting.

LANGDON

What?

JERRY

You got a bump there.

LANGDON

Yes, I know.

JERRY

Childhood injury?

LANGDON

No.

JERRY

Auto accident?

LANGDON

No.

JERRY

Must've hurt.

LANGDON

Mr. Nutt, I//

JERRY

This is no ordinary bump.

LANGDON

My size?

JERRY

Sure. What business is it of mine? None whatsoever. People keep a lot of things under their hat.

LANGDON

My size?

JERRY

You're a size seven.

LANGDON

Good to know.

JERRY

(Still suspicious)

It's possible to measure a man. You can size'em up. And I'm closing in on you.

LANGDON

(Changing the subject)

Oh, that's right someone did stop by. A Father Ramona.

JERRY

Ramona? Ha! Let me guess he was in a bit of a panic.

LANGDON

Now that you mention it, he did seem a tad nervous.

JERRY

Perfect! He got the letter from my lawyer!

LANGDON

He didn't say anything about a letter, he just asked if your daughter was here.

JERRY

My daughter?

LANGDON

He was in such a hurry he left his appointment book.

JERRY

Let me see that.

(JERRY looks through the appointment book.)

JERRY

I don't believe it! This is the answer to my prayers. The number to the Pope's direct line! I don't got long distance here in the shop, I gotta go home. Right back.

LANGDON

What are you going to do?

JERRY

What else, I'm going to call the Pope!

But//
LANGDON

JERRY
End of conversation!

(JERRY runs out.)

ALL I WHAT FOR CHRISTMAS IS HANDCUFFS

(Lights up on ROSY as she enters the confessional.)

(She doesn't know that the priest side is empty. She is talking to herself.)

ROSY
(Alone in the confessional)
Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It's been a week since my last confession. First Father, I want to say it was nice of you to call and invite me over. What would you like me to confess?

(She listens - no one is there.)

ROSY
Father? ...Of course. A stupid question does not deserve an answer. You know Father, lately I've been thinking that all my problems are caused cause I have an interfaith, inter-food marriage. Do you think that's the case? *(Beat)* ...Once again silence. I see your point - Why would God care? You know, Father, I learn so much from your meaningful silences.

(During the following, outside the confessional FATHER RAMONA enters with several protest signs. He hears her voice and figures out that it's coming from the confessional and silently slips in.)

ROSY
You know last week when I started telling you my problems. About my dear departed son. It seemed to really affect you. I could tell by your long meaningful silences you took it personally. And I've figured out why. Cause you're a good listener. Am I right, father? Am I right?

FATHER RAMONA
(Clearing his voice)

Yes.

ROSY
 What shall I do in the way of penance? How about three Hail Marys.

FATHER
 Rosy, what are you doing today at three?

ROSY
 Three? Where else would I be? I'm going to afternoon mass.

FATHER RAMONA
 You're not going to mass today.

ROSY
 Miss mass? Oh dear, Father, my sins must be sizable.

(He holds up a pair of handcuffs.)

FATHER RAMONA
 They are... Now you must do exactly what I say.

JOHN TRAVOLTA AT THE ICE CAPADES

(Living room - JERRY runs in and dials.)

JERRY
(on the phone)
 Hello? Hello? ...Put the Pope on would ya? ...Hey, how's it going. Look the reason I'm calling. I need a baptism reversal and a compensation for mental pain and suffering in the amount of one thousand bucks... That's right one thousand big ones//

(ROSY enters she's distracted. She carries a protest sign. JERRY quickly hangs up.)

ROSY
(seeing the phone's off the hook)
 Who were you talking to?

Nobody.

JERRY

It wasn't our Loretta?

ROSY

No. Sales call.

JERRY

(He hangs up the phone.)

What were they selling?

ROSY

Ah... *(Making this up)* Christmas Ice Capades tickets.
Told'em we weren't interested.

JERRY

I don't know I might like the Ice Capades. I took Loretta
when she was a child.

ROSY

Where the heck you been? You left the soup simmering. Almost
boiled dry - I didn't know what to do.

JERRY

*(ROSY sets the protest sign against
the wall. It reads, "RECONSIDER -
BEING A MOTHER ISN'T THE END OF THE
WORLD!")*

Jerry, we gotta talk.

ROSY

What's this? A sign? Whadya gotta sign for?

JERRY

I've been to a protest.

ROSY

A protest? Since when are we protest people?

JERRY

Jerry, we got problems.

ROSY

JERRY

And I'm sure they're so important that I gotta hear about 'em right this moment, but first I need to talk to you about somethin' and I don't need you to get all flummoxed.

ROSY

Somethin' happened this afternoon//

JERRY

And I'm sure it's so important I gotta hear about it right this second but first you gotta listen. You know how I'm a good listener, well I need you to be a good listener too.

ROSY

Jerry//

JERRY

Please, I'll give you tons of time to talk, but first we gotta talk about Charlie.

ROSY

What?

JERRY

Our son, so disassociate yourself from yourself.

ROSY

I can't talk about Charlie, not today.

JERRY

Just follow my intellectual-logic. You know how they never found the guy.

ROSY

What guy?

JERRY

The guy in the other car. The police said that the other guy must've been injured in the crash. But they never found him.

ROSY

Warning, you maybe got thirty seconds.

JERRY

Think disassociation.

ROSY

How?

JERRY

Pretend you're someone else.

ROSY

Like who?

JERRY

Like someone with a clear head. How about John Travolta? You're John Travolta at the Ice Capades.

ROSY

I never cared for John Travolta.

JERRY

You don't gotta like him. Just be someone else for a moment so I can tell you my theory.

ROSY

But why would John Travolta be at the Ice Capades?

JERRY

See, it's working. Your mind is off the subject. Now I got this theory. You know how they never found the guy in the other car.

ROSY

What other car?

JERRY

The car that broadsided our son on Christmas eve.

ROSY

Oh my God.

JERRY

Think John Travolta at the Ice Capades. The police said the guy in the other car must've been injured but he fled the scene. We've always assumed that it was some delinquent. But what if it wasn't.

ROSY

I don't follow.

JERRY

What if it was a good person - someone who just made a mistake. A person with a promising future who ran away because they were, I don't know, young. Not criminal-minded.

ROSY

How could it not be a criminal? The car was stolen from the church rectory.

JERRY

Okay maybe someone who made some bad choices but who now, years later, has overturned a new leaf. You see what I'm sayin' here?

ROSY

No.

JERRY

Whoever hit our boy must be haunted by the fact that they didn't pay their debt to society. And so what would you do now that you got your life turned around?

ROSY

(Whispering to herself)

John Travolta at the Ice Capades, John Travolta at the Ice Capades.

JERRY

You'd want to fix the one thing that wasn't fixable. And so you'd go back and look up that family. Make sure they're doin' okay. I saw it in this movie once. Don't you see?

ROSY

See what?

JERRY

Why is Stanley Kowalski here?

ROSY

Stanley who?

JERRY

The law student - The third year law student I hired down at the shop. He's a good person - I mean as good as a person can be being a law student. And he takes a low paying job. It makes no sense. Then, I found his lump. Was feeling his head and I found it.

ROSY

A lump?

JERRY

Yes, an auto accident-size lump above the hairline.

ROSY

You were feeling his head?

JERRY

I was measuring it!

ROSY

So you're saying that he's come here to...?

JERRY

To check us out. To forgive himself for what he did. Don't you see? Connect the dots! It adds up.

ROSY

How? How does that add up?

JERRY

Ockham's razor: when you're shavin' and someone asks you a question. If there are two answers, the simplest answer is the one to go with.

ROSY

So what do we do?

JERRY

We gotta set a trap. We'll invite him over for dinner, ply him with intoxicating liquors, and once he's drunk we ask him for the truth. Then we do it.

ROSY

Do what?

JERRY

Spring the trap! We have the police waiting right outside, they rush in, make the arrest. I'll probably have to wear a wire.

ROSY

A wire?

JERRY

A concealed mike. Don't worry, Majewski, down at the station house knows about these type things.

ROSY

You're a nut. Everything everyone says about you is true.

JERRY

What do they say? Do they say that I see things other people can't? Is that what they say, cause I can. Cause I know how to connect dots. Most people go through life without connecting dots. Unlike me, I understand the fine art of dot connection! Decades of measuring heads has given me insight that most people don't got.

ROSY

(Pissed off)

You want insight. I'll give you insight. I saw our Loretta.

JERRY

What's this now?

ROSY

With my own eyes. She was at the clinic.

JERRY

Clinic? What clinic?

ROSY

The clinic down on Biltmore Street. Father Ramona and I handcuffed ourselves to the clinic's front door.

(ROSY holds up one hand - a broken handcuff dangles from her wrist.)

ROSY

Then the police arrived.

JERRY

Handcuffs? Why are wearing handcuffs?

ROSY

The police used bolt cutters - But I can't get the other side off. Father Ramona has the key.

JERRY

What're you saying?!

ROSY

They arrested Father Ramona. They were going to arrest me too, but while I was sitting in the squad car Majewski saw me and let me go with just a warning.

JERRY

Since when are we handcuff-ourselves-to-the-front-door-of-clinics type people?

ROSY

Jerry, I saw our Loretta. And she wasn't there to protest.

JERRY

What're you saying?

ROSY

Think about it!

JERRY

I don't understand.

ROSY

Connect the dots!

(Beat - It hits him.)

JERRY

...She's no daughter of mine!

ROSY

She's our daughter all right! The only child we got left.

JERRY

Go make soup!

ROSY

Our child's in trouble and you want me to make soup.

JERRY

Yes. Make soup!

ROSY

(Pissed)

Fine! I'll make soup! Cup or Bowl!

JERRY

Don't care! Just make soup!

(She starts for the kitchen.)

ROSY

And as for your stupid Stanley Kowalski theory, I think it's the dumbest thing I've ever heard!

JERRY

Ockham's razor!

(The phone rings.)

ROSY

Oh my, that's her! I'm almost-completely-for-sure-positive!

(JERRY jumps for it first.)

JERRY

(On the phone, yelling)

Don't you dare hang up! If you hang up you communist, pregnant weirdo...! *(Beat - suddenly nice)* Oh. ...Yes, I would like to make a donation to the March of Dimes.

(ROSY storms out.)

JERRY

(On phone)

...Yeah, yeah, put me down for two bits.

(LORETTA enters. She's desperate.)

JERRY

(On phone)

Cancel that.

(JERRY hangs up.)

LORETTA

Don't get your hopes up. I've just come for my stuff.

(ROSY charges in with a bowl of splashing soup.)

ROSY

Here's Your Damn Soup! I Hope You Choke//! *(She stops when she sees Loretta and goes all sweet)* Lori-honeyyyyyy! Sweetheart, give your mama a kiss! *(Kissing her cheek)* Muh, muh, muh. Wait, I got lipstick on ya - let me wipe that off.

(ROSY dips a tissue in the soup and wipes the lipstick off - As she does the broken handcuff dangles from her wrist. LORETTA sees it.)

ROSY
(Off the handcuff, innocently)

...I can explain.

(ROSY stuffs the handcuff into her sleeve.)

ROSY
 You gotta be hungry. Let me get you somethin' to nosh on.

LORETTA
 Mama//

ROSY
(Avoiding the subject)
 Oh, I love that coat!

LORETTA
 Mama, we need to talk//

ROSY
 But you've made a mistake. If I'm right that's not machine washable. Let me check the tag.

(ROSY pulls back LORETTA's collar and inspects the label.)

LORETTA
 Mama, I know you//

ROSY
 "Dry clean only." I was right. You'll have to take it back. We can do it tomorrow. Now get off your feet. I'll make soup, oh, and a sandwich! I'll make it with the good cheese Velveeta!

(She runs into the kitchen. JERRY and LORETTA glare at each other.)

JERRY
(Righteous)
 And so the prodigal daughter returns. Went off to her fancy college thinkin' she was better than the rest of us, got her head full of a bunch of nonsense, experimented with mara-jew-wana no doubt, and now she's an atheist, communist, les-B-ian. This! This is what happens when you attend Harvard! This is what happens when you forget who you are! Am I right? Loretta Nutt?! Am I right?!

LORETTA
(*Bitter*)

...You're right, Dad, you're always right about everything.

JERRY

I know! Know how I know? Cause my intellectual-logic tells me how to connect dots! (*Loud and proud*) I Am A Dot Connector!!!!

(*Outside, the CHRISTMAS CAROLERS enter singing but with new lyrics.*)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

(*Sung to 'Go Tell It On The Mountain'*)

GO, TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN
OVER THE HILL AND EVERYWHERE
GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN THAT
JERRY NUTT IS A JERK!
HIS BREATH SMELLS LIKE DIAPERS
HIS FARTS SMELLS EVEN WORSE
HE'S STUPID AND HE'S UGLY...

(*After a slow burn, JERRY runs out and chases them off.*)

JERRY

Get out! Get out!

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

Ahhhhhhh!

(*The CAROLERS run for their lives, with JERRY in hot pursuit yelling insults. LORETTA sinks to her knees totally embarrassed.*)

(*Blackout.*)

END OF ACT ONE

How To Survive Your Family At Christmas

(ACT II)

OPTIONAL OPENING TO ACT TWO

(The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS enter and sing to the audience.)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS
(Sung to "O Tannenbaum")

AT CHRISTMAS TIME AT CHRISTMAS TIME THE
CHRISTIANS FILL THE PEWS
BUT ALL THE SONGS THE CHRISTIANS SING ARE
WRITTEN BY THE JEWS
IRVING BERLIN, YES HE'S A JEW
AND TECHNICALLY JESUS WAS TOO
YES, ALL THE SONGS THE CHRISTIANS SING ARE
WRITTEN BY THE JEWS

(A CHRISTMAS CAROLER holds up a menorah.)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

Happy Hanukkah!

(The CHRISTMAS CAROLERS quickly exit.)

(If you don't want to use this opening, just start with the next scene.)

FINAGLE'S LAW OF DYNAMIC NEGATIVES

(Christmas Eve. Living room. ROSY is on the phone. She holds a newspaper.)

ROSY

(Delightfully upbeat, on phone)

Hellooooo. By any chance is this Barbara Roosevelt, Pulaski High School? ...It's not? ...You sure? I was just going through the paper and I saw this picture of a woman named Barbara Roosevelt on the society page that looks a lot like a Barbara I knew//. ...Well do you know of a Barbara Roosevelt? ...No, this is no sales call. Please don't hang up. Let me say it again real slow just in case you didn't pick up on it. *(Deliberately)* Bar-bar-a-Roos-s// ...Hello. ...Hello?

(The party has hung up. JERRY enters.)

JERRY

You're on the phone! I told you to steer clear of the phone.

ROSY

I don't just blindly do what you say, Jerry, I need a reason.

JERRY

You want a reason, here's a reason. Say something.

ROSY

Like what?

JERRY

Say anything.

ROSY

What should I say?

JERRY

Anything that comes into your head.

ROSY

Okay. There's three hundred dollars missing from our savings account.

JERRY

No! Into the button.

ROSY

What button?

JERRY

This here button.

(JERRY holds out an odd looking button on his shirt - it's a microphone.)

ROSY

You want me to talk into your shirt button?

JERRY

Say anything - just say it into the button.

ROSY

Fine. I went to donate to Father Ramona's defense fund and discovered that there's three hundred dollars missing from our savings account.

(JERRY dials the phone.)

JERRY

Watch. Listen. Learn. *(On the phone)* Majewski? Did you hear that? ...You did? Ah! It's working.

(He hangs up.)

ROSY

What's working?

JERRY

I'm wired. Majewski's listening in from an unmarked cop car out front.

(JERRY lifts his shirt and shows ROSY a small black box and mass of wires taped to his t-shirt.)

ROSY

Are you nuts?

JERRY

No, I'm connecting dots. A confession without a witness is worthless in court.

ROSY

Jerry, I'm putting my foot down, you're not doing this.

JERRY

I've invited Stanley Kowalski for dinner. We're getting a confession.

ROSY

I'm not going to be part of any crazy scheme.

JERRY

All you gotta do is act natural like. Let me do the nonchalant probing and you just be yourself - only don't say anything stupid. Now go. Kitchen. Make soup.

ROSY

Jerry, there's three hundred dollars missing from our savings account.

JERRY

It's unimportant!

ROSY

How can three hundred dollars be unimportant?

JERRY

Cause when this is done I'll account for every penny. I just need a little retainer money for a papacy litigation I got goin'. *(Into his button)* You there Majewski? Let's do a distance test. *(To Rosy)* Stay. *(Crosses to the other side of the room)* Now say something. Testing one two three. Go ahead say it.

(ROSY just glares at him.)

JERRY

Say it! Testing one two three.

ROSY

You Are A Nutcase!

(ROSY exits into the kitchen. JERRY picks up the phone.)

JERRY

(On phone)

Did you hear that? She called me a nutcase. ...you couldn't? The sensitivity knob must be screwed up. ...It's up all the way? It must be Finagle's Law of Dynamic Negatives: "What can go wrong, must go wrong and at the worst possible moment."

(ROSY enters with her coat.)

JERRY

Where're you goin'?

ROSY

Confession!

JERRY

What the heck do you gotta confess?

ROSY

I'm going to confess that my husband is an idiot!

JERRY

You can't leave right now, the plan is about to be hatched!

ROSY

You heard me, Jerry, you are nutcase! *(Into his button)* You too Majewski.

(ROSY exits.)

JERRY

(Calling after)

At least put on a hat! Fine! See if I care! It's snowing; you'll probably die of pneumonia!

(JERRY runs back to the phone.)

JERRY

(On phone)

Majewski? Did you hear that? She was yelling. You couldn't? Wait! Idea. Maybe my shirt's too thick. That's it! I'll change shirts!

(JERRY runs out.)

CHRISTMAS IS FOR LOVERS

(The hat shop. LANGDON enters reading a law book. The bell over the front door tinkles and LORETTA enters.)

LANGDON

Welcome to the Mad Hatter//

LORETTA
(Seeing him)

Oh my God!

LANGDON

Loretta!

LORETTA

Langdon!

(Thrilled to see him she runs into his arms. They kiss. Then she stops, pulls away.)

LORETTA

Wait. What are you doing here?

LANGDON

Selling hats.

LORETTA
(Dumbfounded)

You... You... What?

LANGDON

I work here.

LORETTA

You what?

LANGDON

Your father hired me.

LORETTA

You met my father?

LANGDON

Yes.

LORETTA

Oh, god, no. No. I can't do this.

(She starts to leave.)

LANGDON

Wait! ...He's not that bad. You have nothing to be ashamed of, well, not a lot to be ashamed of.

(MORE)

He's a little old fashioned, but a hard working man who is committed to his, very, very, very limited point of view.

LORETTA

Does he know who you are?

LANGDON

He's clueless.

LORETTA

I can't believe you did this. You lied to me.

LANGDON

I lied? You told me your last name was Coors.

LORETTA

That's different, I was protecting you.

LANGDON

From what?

LORETTA

The Nutt family.

(She starts to leave.)

LANGDON

Loretta. Just because we come from different socioeconomic backgrounds that doesn't mean we can't be together//

LORETTA

You had no right to come here.

LANGDON

What else was I supposed to do? I meet a wonderful woman - things are going great. Okay, she nearly kills me on my yacht but other than that things are fine. And then one morning I find that she's packed her bags, left an ambiguous note and jumped ship.

LORETTA

You just don't get it. My childhood was a never-ending train-wreck. At fifteen, I asked for a copy of Mrs. Dalloway, they got me a cat picture book. On my sixteenth birthday I told my mother I wanted tickets to La Traviata. They got me tickets to the Ice Capades! It's like my parents took a snapshot of me when I was eight years old and nothing has changed.

LANGDON

Isn't that true of all parents? My parents keep buying me books on e.e. cummings. And as you know I've been off cummings for years. It's Tennyson or maybe Yeats. Not cummings.

LORETTA

Langdon don't you see, before they go to bed your parents read *The Complete History of the Peloponnesian War*, my parents read *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*! Not the book, the Cliff Notes!

LANGDON

Don't you feel anything for me?

LORETTA

Yes. I was taken by your intelligence, how you acted like success was preordained. But... You're a Kennedy and I'm a... a Nutt, it's not going to work.

LANGDON

Loretta... I was at this wine-and-cheese reception at my parents' estate the other night. I was talking with this anti-stratfordian scholar about whether or not Shakespeare actually wrote the plays attributed to him//

LORETTA

What does this have to do with anything?

LANGDON

Hear me out. He gave all the standard reasons why not. Shakespeare's lack of education, his lack of knowledge of court life, his parents' rather average standing in society. It was a convincing, if not ironclad argument as to why Shakespeare could never have written the plays attributed to him. But then I came here, to Chicago, and met your father.

LORETTA

So?

LANGDON

Now I know, that if you came from *this* family, Shakespeare wrote those plays.

LORETTA

You betrayed my confidence.

LANGDON

You told me your Porsche was in the shop.

LORETTA

How did you find me?

LANGDON

Your roommate helped. Loretta, this fixation you have with your family - So they're just average people. You're not.

LORETTA

Sorry. Not good enough.

LANGDON

Fine, we won't get married. We won't commit. Is that what you want? We'll just continue doing what we're doing. Staying up late arguing about Shakespeare, reading Tennyson - But no commitment.

LORETTA

(Hopeful)

Really? You mean it?

LANGDON

We'll just have a meaningless physical relationship with no commitment.

LORETTA

(Delighted)

That's the nicest thing a man's ever said to me!

(She falls into his arms, they kiss.)

LORETTA

(Through the kiss)

How's your head?

LANGDON

(Through the kiss)

What head?

LORETTA

(Through the kiss)

The bump.

LANGDON
(Through the kiss)

Much much better.

LORETTA
(Totally in love)

Say it.

LANGDON

Say what?

LORETTA

Say *it*.

LANGDON
(With a thick Kennedy accent)

"We choose to go to the Moon! We choose to go to the Moon. We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard!"

(That melts LORETTA's heart. They disappear beneath the display counter, kissing all the way down.)

JINGLES-BELLS VS. JERRY NUTT

(Continuous. Outside, the CHRISTMAS CAROLERS run through chased by angry JERRY.)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS
(Singing as fast as they are running)

JINGLE-BELLS-JINGLE-
 BELLS-JINGLE-ALL-THE-WAY
 OH-WHAT-FUN-IT-IS-TO-RIDE
 IN-A-ONE-HORSE-OPEN-SLEIGH!

(Terrified they run for their lives.)

KEYS TO THE HANDCUFFS

(ROSY enters the confessional, she is totally alone.)

ROSY
(Alone)

Bless me Father for I have sinned. It's been less than twenty-four hours since my last confession. First let me say how sorry I am for yesterday, and I'm sorry you spent the night in jail, but most of all I'm sorry to ask but would ya happen to have the keys to the handcuffs?

(She pulls the handcuff attached to her wrist from her sleeve. Beat, she listens, he's not there.)

ROSY
I see your point. Don't concentrate on negatives. Right?

(Beat - silence.)

ROSY
This time your silence is more meaningful. I think what you are trying to say is, I should confess. Okay, here goes. Back in high school I never missed class. I've never been sick a day in my life. As a result I was to get this attendance medal and give a speech at graduation. In those days I was chubby and everywhere I went I carried cookies. On my way to the podium to give the speech, I tripped and the cookies flew into the air. Little did I know that one rogue chocolate-chocolate-chip had lodged in my beehive hairdo.

(FATHER RAMONA happens by and hears her voice in the confessional. He quietly slips in.)

ROSY
As I spoke everyone started laughing. But to this day, I'm absolutely-almost-totally positive that it was the head cheerleader Barbara Roosevelt who started it. Soon everyone was laughing. That's when I called the one-hundred-and-forty-seven members of the graduating class a bunch of knuckle-dragging, slack-jawed, pickle-sucking, stupid heads.

(ROSY begins to cry. FATHER RAMONA helps her out of the confessional.)

ROSY
Will I ever be forgiven?

FATHER RAMONA
...Yes.

ROSY

No, I won't, not until I call every member of the graduating class. There's only one left... Barbara Roosevelt.

FATHER RAMONA

Rosy, I've been transferred.

ROSY

What?

FATHER RAMONA

Father Sanchez will be taking confessions starting next week. He's a little more by the book than I've been.

ROSY

Oh, no please, you can't go.

FATHER RAMONA

Before I leave, I need you to do me a favor.

ROSY

Please tell me it doesn't involve handcuffs.

FATHER RAMONA

I need you to take my confession.

(FATHER RAMONA and ROSY switch places in the confessional.)

ROSY

Wow, things look so different from this side. You may confess... my son.

(FATHER RAMONA takes moment. This isn't easy.)

FATHER RAMONA

...I was the last person to see Charlie alive...

EMBRACE YOUR AVERAGENESS

(The hat shop. LANGDON and LORETTA come up from behind the hat display counter wearing hats. They're still in each other's arms.)

LORETTA
(Seductive)

How does your head feel now?

LANGDON

Wonderful.

LORETTA

We have an understanding?

LANGDON

Understanding?

LORETTA

You'll quit and tomorrow go back to Cambridge. And I'll join you in a few days. And we'll continue as we were. Then in about a year your family will pressure you to find a proper girlfriend, some suburban royalty and you'll go your way and I'll go mine.

LANGDON

Loretta//

(She silences him with a kiss.)

(The bell over the front door tinkles. Someone is entering.)

LORETTA
(Looking off)

It's my mother - Hide!

(LANGDON dives behind the display counter.)

(ROSY enters, jumps.)

ROSY

Jesus! Mary and Joseph! Oh! Lori-honey you scared me!

LORETTA

I'm so sorry.

ROSY

What the heck are you doin' here? I could've had a heart attack. ...You okay?

LORETTA

Me? Fine. Tell you what, let's lock up and go home.

ROSY

What's for me at home?

LORETTA

You and dad have another fight?

ROSY

Of course not. Your father and I never fight.

LORETTA

Mama//

ROSY

That's it isn't it?

LORETTA

What?

ROSY

That's the reason you broke up with that boy... Cause of your father and I.

LORETTA

What boy?

ROSY

The boy you won't introduce us to. The boy you're in love with.

LORETTA

Mama, there were extenuating circumstances.

ROSY

You're having his baby.

(Behind the display counter,
shocked, LANGDON'S head shoots up!)

*(LORETTA waves him off before ROSY
can see him.)*

LORETTA

Mama, I'm not pregnant.

ROSY

I saw you at the clinic.

LORETTA

Mama//

ROSY

I've never understood you Lori-honey. Never got why you've never been able to embrace your averageness.

LORETTA

Mama, I graduated first in my class. I have a full ride scholarship to Harvard.

ROSY

If God didn't want you to be average then why did he give you the last name Nutt? Am I right? Ah! I've stumped the scholar. Wait here. Got ya something.

LORETTA

But//

ROSY

Don't worry. It's apropos of what we're talking about. "Apropos." Do you know that word?

LORETTA

Yes, mama.

ROSY

Your father tells me it's Latin for "kinda on the subject."

(ROSY exits into the back room.)

(The moment she's out, LANGDON runs for the door.)

LORETTA

(Hopeful)

Call me?

(He doesn't have time to answer. He's gone.)

LORETTA

(Heartbroken)

...Or not.

(ROSY enters with a hatbox.)

ROSY

Someone there?

LORETTA

What? No mama. It's nothing.

ROSY

I thought I heard the door.

LORETTA

(Depressed, defeated)

No, I think that door's closed for good.

ROSY

Such a long face. This'll cheer you up.

(ROSY hands LORETTA a hatbox.)

ROSY

Open it.

LORETTA

Mama, I don't need a hat.

ROSY

Nor do I, never wear'em, but now and then I make an exception.

(ROSY opens the hatbox. Inside is a simple wedding veil.)

LORETTA

It's beautiful, Mama.

ROSY

Ya like it?

LORETTA

...Sure.

ROSY

It's the only hat I've ever worn. I met your father when I was the hat-check girl at the Starliner dance club on Michigan Avenue. One thing I learned working there - A hat is what a person hopes to be - Not who they are. It's yours.

LORETTA

Mama...

ROSY

Look inside the rim. Go on.

(LORETTA looks inside the rim of the wedding veil. She finds a small envelope.)

ROSY

Was going to give it to ya for Christmas but ya need it now.

LORETTA

Oh Mama.

ROSY

Open it.

LORETTA

Thank you, but//

ROSY

I spent my whole allowance on it.

(LORETTA opens the small envelope.)

LORETTA

(A tear)

Two tickets - To the Ice Capades.

ROSY

Whatcha think? Just us girls?

LORETTA

(Wiping a tear)

Sure mama.

ROSY

You like it so much you're crying. *(A tear)* Now you got me going...

LORETTA

Mama, please understand, I'm not average.

ROSY

Of course you are. Don't worry, God loves average people, that's why he made so many of them.

WE ALL NEED FORGIVENESS

(The lights fade to the living room. JERRY enters wearing a thin shirt.)

JERRY

(Talking into his button)

Okay. Fifth time is a charm. The thinnest shirt I own. This has gotta work. Can you hear me? Testing one two three. Ring once for yes. Twice for no.

(JERRY runs over to the phone. It rings once.)

JERRY

Yes!

(The phone rings a second time.)

JERRY

Darn.

(Then a third ring. JERRY answers.)

JERRY

(On phone)

I said once for yes, twice for no! There was no three rings in the equation. ...What? ...If you don't hear me how would you know to ring twice? ...Look don't get all mental on me// ...What? ...Bogey? Whadya mean, "Bogey approaching"?

(Doorbell.)

JERRY

(on phone)

Bogey at the door! Act natural! *(He hangs up and calms himself)* It's open!

(LANGDON enters without a coat - He's freezing.)

LANGDON

Hello, Mr. Nutt.

JERRY

Welcome// Where's your coat?

LANGDON

Oh. I... I forgot it.

JERRY

You forgot your coat?

LANGDON

It's only twenty blocks and a short train ride from the shop.
(*Shaking*) I'm not cold.

JERRY

Thank you for coming over for dinner. Any business?

LANGDON

A customer came in, she browsed a bit but no sale.

JERRY

She'll be back. Did you know that the average customer tries on a hat three times before they buy it? That's why I have a grace policy. Return it in one week - no questions asked. Know why?

LANGDON

(*Still trying to get warm*)

No.

JERRY

Cause I'm into forgiveness.

LANGDON

Oh.

JERRY

You know I was thinking the other day. What is forgiveness? Did you ever think about that?

LANGDON

Sure, I guess.

JERRY

I dare say that some people couldn't survive without forgiveness. I mean their *guilt* must be tearing'em apart.
(*Hinting*) Night after night they lay in bed and all they can think is I'm not forgiven. I'm going to heck.

(**MORE**)

Know what I mean, heck - you got your flames, your smoke, your thick smoke. And pain, lots of pain. Then more smoke.

LANGDON

Do you feel guilty about something?

JERRY

Me? I regret nothing. I mean not even things I've done by accident. (*Hinting*) Know what I mean, by... accident?

LANGDON

Okay, I get your point.

JERRY

Point, I'm not making a point.

LANGDON

Mr. Nutt, may I call you Jerry?

JERRY

No.

LANGDON

...Mr. Nutt, there's something I need to confess.

JERRY

I'm all ears.

LANGDON

I've lived a charmed life.

(LANGDON walks away.)

LANGDON

Pretty much everything I've wanted I got. I guess what I'm trying to say is...

(He turns to find JERRY is standing only inches away.)

LANGDON

...Could you not stand so close?

JERRY

Why of course.

(JERRY moves back one inch.)

LANGDON
I've made mistakes in my life.

JERRY
I'm sure you have.

LANGDON
Big mistakes.

JERRY
I'm all ears.

LANGDON
For one thing, I lied to you about who I am.

JERRY
You've been lying to me? I shall take your confession.
(*Whispering into his button*) Hit record.

LANGDON
Excuse me?

JERRY
You were saying.

LANGDON
A few years ago... I've never told anyone this before.

JERRY
I'm sure you've kept it under your hat.

LANGDON
I was driving home from Harvard after a party.

JERRY
Harvard?

LANGDON
Yes, I attend Harvard. I had had a few. It was dark... No,
that's not it. I simply wasn't paying attention.

JERRY
And you ran a red light.

LANGDON
Yes. How did you know?

JERRY

I used my intellectual logic.

LANGDON

I broad-sided a Volkswagen.

JERRY

You mean a Chevy.

LANGDON

No, it was a Volkswagen.

JERRY

We can work out the details later.

LANGDON

A young man was driving.

JERRY

Very young.

LANGDON

He and his wife... They survived. With injuries.

JERRY

Wait a minute, what wife? Charlie had no wife//

LANGDON

Please, it'd be best if I did this without interruption. After the accident, I didn't immediately check on the couple. Instead, selfishly, the first thing I did is call my father's Manhattan attorney. That night, he made a few phone calls and everything was taken care of. The couple's medical bills were paid and they got a handsome pay off. In the end, I didn't even get points on my driver's license. Mr. Nutt, if I had been born into another family I'd have a record, maybe even jail time, but I was born into the right family and so I am allowed an endless string of second chances. Then, six months ago I met someone. She told me about her brother Charlie and for the first time I realized how a single action, one small gesture can affect the world. Before her, everything was replaceable. But now I know I can never replace her... Mr. Nutt, the only forgiveness in life comes when we don't repeat our mistakes. And so I'm here to tell you that I love your daughter, she's having your grandchild, and I'd like your permission for her hand in marriage.

(Beat, JERRY is dumbfounded.)

JERRY

(Slowly getting angry)

This only goes to prove what I've always known to be true -
Go to Harvard and you'll become impregnated by a homo-
erectus!!!

(The phone rings. JERRY answers.)

JERRY

(Pissed, on phone)

What?! Bogey? ...Who? ...Father Ramona. *(Hangs up)* You.
Kitchen. Now.

LANGDON

But//

JERRY

You want my daughter's hand in marriage then get in the
kitchen and check the soup.

(Doorbell.)

LANGDON

Soup?

JERRY

There's soup on the stove. Check it!

*(JERRY shoves LANGDON into the
kitchen.)*

(Doorbell.)

*(JERRY sits nonchalantly pretending
to read Rosy's upside down Modern
Catholic Magazine.)*

JERRY

(Nonchalant)

It's open.

(FATHER RAMONA tentatively enters.)

FATHER RAMONA

Hello, Mr. Nutt. I can't stay.

JERRY

Too bad we're making soup.

FATHER RAMONA

Rosy here?

JERRY

She's out.

FATHER RAMONA

Good. I just wanted to give you this.

JERRY

What's this?

(FATHER RAMONA hands JERRY a letter.)

FATHER RAMONA

A letter from the Cardinal. Sorry it's in Latin. But you said that you knew Latin.

JERRY

Of course, Latin's no problem.

FATHER RAMONA

As you can see it officially undoes the baptism//

JERRY

(Pretending to read the letter)

Of my son.

FATHER RAMONA

And offers the church's//

JERRY

(Pretending to read the letter)

Apologies. Of course that's what it says, it's all very clear. But isn't there something else?

(Beat. FATHER RAMONA takes out a check and hands it to JERRY.)

JERRY

(Reading the check)

One thousand smackers.

FATHER RAMONA

It's everything that I have in the world, but if it makes you forget this unfortunate incident.

JERRY

Yes. Everything seems to be in order. There's only one problem, I can't accept this.

FATHER RAMONA

Thank God.

JERRY

I can't accept it cause you didn't sign it.

*(JERRY hands FATHER RAMONA a pen.
He reluctantly signs the check.)*

JERRY

Well, everything worked out for the best. You know where the door is.

*(FATHER RAMONA starts for the
door.)*

FATHER RAMONA

Mr. Nutt... I've never met anyone like you.

JERRY

I am what I am.

FATHER RAMONA

You're the only person I've ever met who has no regrets. You've never, for a moment, doubted yourself, your purpose, or your parenting skills. You are the only guilt free person I've ever met.

JERRY

Thank you.

FATHER RAMONA

I hope you don't take this as an insult but I can't help but think... How boring your life must be.

JERRY

Not an insult at all. Know how I know? Hanlon's razor - A corollary of Finagle's law: "Never attribute to malice that which can be explained by foolishness. *(Beat)* While shaving."

FATHER RAMONA

Bless you Mr. Nutt. And may God have pity on your guilt free soul.

(He heads for the door. Just as he reaches it...)

JERRY

Wait.

(Pause, JERRY is off in his own world. He has a change of heart.)

FATHER RAMONA

Yes?

JERRY

(Taken with guilt)

Father Ramona... Before you leave... Would you be so kind as to take my confession?

FATHER RAMONA

Ah... If you want.

JERRY

Forgive me father, I used to be a smoker.

FATHER RAMONA

Smoking isn't a sin.

JERRY

(This isn't easy)

It was a Christmas eve... Three years ago... I was tired... I'd worked all day. I needed a smoke. Only I promised Rosy that if she'd stop taking hits of the Jim Beam she hides under the counter I'd stop smoking. ...I broke that promise.

FATHER RAMONA

(Confused)

And you are forgiven.

(A tear comes to JERRY.)

JERRY

You don't understand, Father, I knew I couldn't slip down to the store to buy some cigs so I asked my son Charlie to do it for me. *(For the first time there is a crack in his armor)* He had just got his drivers license, so I made him this deal. He could take the Chevy for a ride if he picked me up some Viceroy lights. ...He said he'd only be gone twenty minutes...

(FATHER RAMONA puts a comforting hand on his shoulder. Beat.)

JERRY
(Heartbroken)

I've never been able to forgive myself.

(A beat. FATHER RAMONA weighs his next words.)

FATHER RAMONA
(Desperate)

...Nor have I.

(That stops JERRY. He slowly connects the dots.)

JERRY
...Charlie. ...It was... you.

(FATHER RAMONA shakes his head 'yes.' It's a painful confession.)

FATHER RAMONA
(Quietly)

I was just out of seminary. And I was young and confused...

(FATHER RAMONA cries. Beat.)

JERRY
(Forgiving)
...But God does... God forgive us.

(Beat. JERRY rips up the check.)

(Just then, LORETTA enters.)

LORETTA
What? What are you doing?

JERRY
What does it look like? I'm taking confession.

(Just then LANGDON enters from the kitchen.)

LANGDON
Soup's fine// Loretta!

LORETTA
Langdon! What're you...?

LANGDON
Checking the soup.

(ROSY enters with the hatbox.)

ROSY
I'm home// What's this? A party? I'll make Trail Mix!

LANGDON
Mrs. Nutt?

ROSY
Yes.

LANGDON
I'm in love with your daughter, and I'd like your permission to marry her.

ROSY
Oh. My. God. You're the boy who impregnated my Loretta and totally ruined our lives forever. *(Up beat)* A pleasure to meet you.

LORETTA
(To Langdon)
What are you doing?

LANGDON
If your family is such a concern, I thought I'd make sure it was okay with them. Mrs. Nutt, may I have permission to marry your daughter?

ROSY
That depends, do you love her?

LANGDON
More than anything.

ROSY
(To Loretta)
Do you love him?

LORETTA
Mama//

ROSY

Be honest, do you love him?

LORETTA

Yes, but//

ROSY

Good enough! Welcome to the family! What timing, we just happen to have a Priest on the premises!

LANGDON

Mr. Nutt do you give us permission?

JERRY

Stanley Kowalski, I just want you to know that I think you're a horrible human being, and I'll never forgive you for ruining my daughter's life, but let's deal with that at a later date, for now, welcome to the family!

ROSY

Father Ramona, let's unlock the church!

LORETTA

Wait wait wait! *(To Langdon)* I'm sorry, Langdon//

JERRY

Langdon?

LORETTA

But when you marry you not only choose a person but their family. I can't expose you to mine. And I'm not comfortable with yours. I'm sorry.

(LORETTA heads for the door.)

ROSY

Lori-Honey. Wait!

LORETTA

Mama, no.

ROSY

What about the child?

LORETTA

Don't ask.

ROSY

Loretta. Please. Wait. There's something I need to tell you. Something I've held back for a very long time.

LORETTA

Tell me later.

ROSY

No, because I don't know if I'll have the strength to tell you later. Lori-Honey, when your father and I were first married. We wanted children. You can't imagine how much we wanted children. Am I right?

(Behind her back ROSY waves at JERRY to answer.)

JERRY

Sure. Who doesn't want children?

ROSY

But there were complications. I saw lots of doctors. I swear there's hardly a doctor between here and Michigan Avenue we didn't see.

LORETTA

Mama//

ROSY

But then one day I found out that I was with child. I can't tell you the joy that came into this home. Suddenly your father and I started getting along. The hat business picked up. And then the blessed day came. And after eighteen hours of horrible excruciating, I-thought-it-would-never-end-oh-my-God-pain-pain-pain-labor, suddenly I held in my hands a beautiful baby... boy.

LORETTA

(Confused)

Mama, I'm your oldest.

ROSY

Sort of...

LORETTA

...What are you...?

ROSY

We tried so hard to have a baby. The first time round we... we failed. Two years before I had Charlie, Father Gorzynski came to us and said that he knew of a baby that was up for... adoption.

LORETTA

...Mama...

ROSY

A wonderful little baby girl.

LORETTA

(Tears)

...Mama...

ROSE

(Tears)

The most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. Her hands, so small. And those clear bright eyes. But soon we discovered that she wasn't like us. She liked art. And algebra. And funny tasting French cheese.

LORETTA

(Her breath is taken away)

You're... You're not serious...

(Tears roll down LORETTA's cheeks.)

ROSY

Haven't you always known in your heart?

LORETTA

...When I was ten I used to go through your drawers trying to find the adoption papers.

ROSY

I did a terrible thing. Not wanting this day to come. I put them in the garbage. I'm so sorry, Lori-Honey, please forgive me.

LORETTA

...Who were my real parents?

ROSY

They were nice people but way too young. It broke your mother's heart to put you up for adoption. It broke her heart to pieces but she knew it was for the best.

(MORE)

I heard that, years later, after they went to Princeton, your real parents got back together. And married.

LORETTA

Where are they now?

ROSY

(Making things up)

...They became Peace Corps volunteers. They were on a boat heading out to help people someplace. It was a winter's morn. A terrible storm came up. Their boat was like a sieve and they were lost... Haven't I always said, avoid water.

(ROSY cries. LORETTA hugs her.)

ROSY

I was just so proud of you. I wanted you to be all mine. Forgive me?

LORETTA

Oh, mama, there's no need to forgive.

ROSY

So you see you're not a Nutt. You were never a Nutt.

LORETTA

But then what am I?

ROSY

Your last name is... is...

LORETTA

Yes?

ROSY

...Hilton.

LORETTA

Hilton?

ROSY

That's right.

LORETTA

Loretta Hilton. Wow. That's a name.

(LANGDON kneels and takes out a ring.)

LANGDON

Loretta Hilton, will you marry me?

LORETTA

Kennedy weds Hilton. Not bad.

(LORETTA and LANGDON kiss. They continue a long passionate kiss during the following.)

JERRY

Wait a minute. Kennedy! You told me your last name was Kowalski!

FATHER RAMONA

My children, look at the time, It's twelve-o-one. It's Christmas morning! Let's unlock the church!

ROSY

Yes! Let's unlock//!

JERRY

Wait! I withdraw my permission!

ROSY

Let's get the heck out of here before they change their minds!

JERRY

My daughter will not marry a Kennedy!

(ROSY runs out.)

LANGDON

(Talking through the kiss)

I love you, Loretta Hilton.

LORETTA

(Talking through the kiss)

I love you, Langdon Kennedy.

(FATHER, LANGDON and LORETTA exit.)

JERRY

(Yelling after)

Did you hear me?! I withdraw my permission! I do not give permission! Do you hear me? I do not give permission!

*(But no one is listening to him.
JERRY follows shouting as the
lights fade to...)*

EPILOGUE

*(Lights up on the CHRISTMAS
CAROLERS who quietly hum "Silent
night.")*

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

MMMM. MMMM. MMMM. (ETC.)

*(LORETTA enters and talks to the
audience.)*

LORETTA

(To the audience)

Early Christmas morning, Langdon and I wed. Later that day we caught a flight to Cambridge. At the airport I told Rosy that she'd not lost a daughter but gained a son. Later that night, missing her daughter and new son, I can't help but think that she must've gone back to her small Chicago home and cried herself to sleep.

*(The lights up on the living room,
ROSY enters in a bath robe. At
first it appears that she is
crying. But then she sneezes.
JERRY enters with hot soup.)*

JERRY

What did I say? Did not I say wear a hat? Did I not say, if you go outside without a hat you'll get sick?

ROSY

(Blowing her nose)

Get me some Vicks vapor rub.

JERRY

Rosy, we need to talk.

JERRY

Why did you tell Loretta she was adopted? You know she's our child. You know it and I know it. *(Doubting)* I'm right, right?

ROSY

Yes, she's your child. And mine.

JERRY

Then why?

ROSY

Jerry, being a parent isn't easy. And to be honest, I doubt if anyone has ever got it right. But one thing I know for sure - They'll never grow up, unless you let'em go.

JERRY

But she's going to find out.

ROSY

Sure she will, she's smart. But she'll also know why I did it and she'll forgive me.

(The phone rings.)

ROSY

That's her. Third time she's called tonight!

JERRY

It's good to have a daughter that calls.

ROSY

(On phone)

Hello, Lori-Honey did you make it home safe? ...What? ...I'm so sorry. ...Yes, this is Rosy Nutt, formerly Rosy Grabowski. ...Yes, Pulaski High School. Who's this? *(Stunned)* ...Oh. My. God. *(To Jerry)* It's Barbara Roosevelt! *(Back to the phone)* I've been trying to get hold of you for years and years. Oh, Barbara there's something I've gotta say// ...What? ...You're calling people on your Karma list? ...Oh no, you never treated me poorly in high school. And if you did I totally forgot. ...Well, if you insist. *(Pause - She listens - tears of joy come to her)* Yes. I gladly forgive you. From the bottom of my heart.

(ROSY laughs through her tears.)

ROSY

Bless you, Barbara Roosevelt, bless you.

(JERRY puts a comforting arm on ROSY.)

(The lights come up on LORETTA.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

There's no such thing as a perfect family - Yours or mine.
We're all nuts. And that's why we need to forgive.
Forgiveness - that's how you survive your family at
Christmas.

*(LANGDON enters holding a tiny
sleeping baby.)*

LORETTA

(To the audience)

That summer I was blessed with baby girl. For days Langdon
and I couldn't find the right name for her. We finally named
her, Caroline. Caroline "N" Kennedy.

*(LORETTA smiles with the confidence
of a Hilton but the heart of a
Nutt.)*

LORETTA

Guess what the "N" stands for.

*(LANGDON and LORETTA kiss, JERRY
and ROSY hug. If your theatre can
pull it off, it should be snowing.)*

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

(Singing)

SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT!
ALL IS CALM, ALL IS BRIGHT
ROUND YON VIRGIN, MOTHER AND CHILD
HOLY INFANT SO TENDER AND MILD
SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE
SLEEP IN HEAVENLY

*(As the lights fade, all is right
with the world.)*

THE END