

How To Survive Your Family At Christmas

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

LORETTA COORS

(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 kind Priest - ageless)

CHORUS

(Can be doubled)

A Lawyer

Tourists

Christmas Carolers

Butlers and Nannies

A Real Estate Agent

A Couple with a Baby

&

A Person in a Deranged Easter Bunny Outfit

TIME & PLACE

Cleveland, Ohio

Act One - Christmas Eve, Morning & Afternoon

Act Two - Christmas Eve, Afternoon & Evening

SETTING

The set consists of three designated playing areas. Jerry and ROSY's living room is represented by two easy chairs, a hat rack, and a Christmas tree. Jerry's hat shop is defined by a display counter with mannequin heads fitted with hats. The third playing area is a confessional located at Saint Patrick's. All transitions are continuous, with no pauses or blackouts.

How To Survive Your Family At Christmas

(ACT I)

(Lights up on LORETTA, a brainy college student in a Harvard T-shirt. Beside her stand her working-class parents, JERRY and ROSY. JERRY is abrupt, buttoned into a bow tie. ROSY is a sweet 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, are all kind of nuts.

LORETTA
(To the audience)

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

JERRY
(To the audience)

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

LORETTA
(To the audience)

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

JERRY
(To the audience)

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

LORETTA

(To the audience)

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. I mean, unless you're describing yourself as a "house."

ROSY

(delightfully upbeat)

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

LORETTA

(To the audience)

We were all driven nuts because we lived in the house directly across the street from where *A Christmas Story* was filmed.

ROSY

The Christmas Story house is located at 3159 W 11th Street in Cleveland, Ohio.

LORETTA

We live at 3160. As a result people--

ROSY

Mostly dyslexics.

LORETTA

(To the audience)

--Would constantly confuse our house with the house from *A Christmas Story*.

JERRY

(To the audience)

Once the film crews left, we thought it was over, that the neighborhood would return to normal.

LORETTA

We never realized what a success the movie would be.

JERRY

Ever since, all year round, people knock on our door and ask if little Ralphie can come out and play.

ROSY

(To the audience)

And can they see our leg lamp.

LORETTA

(To the audience)

And has any one who lives here ever shot their eye out.

JERRY

(To the audience)

Our lives are a big bowl of Farkus!

LORETTA

(To The audience)

My childhood was a veritable hell full of scenes like this.

(Doorbell.)

(Lights up on the quaint living room.)

JERRY

(Exasperated)

Here we go again!

ROSY

Be nice.

(JERRY opens the front door to find A COUPLE wearing winter coats and holding a swaddled baby.)

COUPLE 1

(Excited and in awe)

So sorry to bother you, but by any chance is this the Christmas Story house?

JERRY

No it's across the street.

COUPLE 2

We lovvvvvve that movie.

COUPLE 1

Seen it twenty-two times.

COUPLE 2

Could we come in?

COUPLE 1

Have a lookie around?

COUPLE 2

Perhaps spend the night in Ralphie's room?

JERRY

(Pissed off)

No! Know why? Because this is not the Christmas Story house!
And I hate that movie.

COUPLE 2

How could anyone hate A Christmas Story?

JERRY

Because every Christmas there's traffic, and tourists, and people blocking my driveway! But you know what I hate the most? People like you who knock on my door asking if this is the Christmas Story house!

(He starts to close the door. One of them holds up the baby and quickly says...)

COUPLE 1 & 2

(Sing-song)

We named our baby Ralphie!

(JERRY slams the door in their faces and rejoins ROSY and LORETTA.)

ROSY

(To audience)

During the holidays, this would happen six to twenty times per day.

(During the following, ROSY walks to the living room and dials the landline.)

LORETTA

(To audience)

Because of the constant interruptions my mother became convinced that she was being punished for her sins. So she made it her life's work to find forgiveness from everyone she'd ever wronged.

ROSY

(Delightfully upbeat on phone)

Hellooooo? ...Is this Jane Pogozeleski? ...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)

My mother's goal was to locate and apologize to every member of her high school graduating class.

ROSY

(Sing song, on the phone)

Let me tell ya, 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.

LORETTA

(To the audience)

There were only three names left on Mama's Karma list. Jane Pogozeleski, Joyce Cooper, and Barbara Hilton.

ROSY

(On phone)

Jane Pogozeleski, do you accept my 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.

(ROSY hangs up and rejoins the others. JERRY now picks up the phone and dials.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

The constant interruptions and traffic transformed my father into a dedicated Scrooge. His great ambition was to win financial restitution for the pain and suffering the movie had caused him.

JERRY

(on phone leaving a message)

Max. Give me a call when you get a chance cause I got this lawyer-type question for ya. How would one go about suing Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer? The Hollywood production company that made *A Christmas Story*. I want to get them for harassment, disturbing the peace and tons and tons of mental anguish!

(JERRY hangs up.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

I finally got away from my nutty childhood by going to Harvard. The day I left my mother said...

ROSY

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

LORETTA

And my father...

JERRY

(Pissed)

If you go to Harvard, you'll turn into one of those sandal-wearing communists who supports the National Endowment of the Arts.

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.

(Jerry and ROSY take their places on the living room set.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

Growing up, I thought my family was normal. We all make that mistake. Sooner or later, it dawns on you that your family is completely nuts. For me, that moment arrived the Christmas I fell in love and discovered that real life bears no resemblance to the movies.

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

(Please note: I've titled the scenes, but these titles should not appear in the play or program. They are simply helpful placeholders.)

NO LIGHT ESCAPES MY FAMILY

(Lights up on a confessional. LORETTA is in the grip of an anxiety attack. FATHER RAMONA, gentle and steady, tries to calm her.)

LORETTA

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
(Confused)

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?

FATHER RAMONA

I don't follow.

LORETTA

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

FATHER RAMONA
(Kindly)

You forgot elitist.

LORETTA

How can I be elite? My last name is Nutt! 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 the worst day of the year - Christmas Eve. The tourists are out.

FATHER RAMONA

Tourists?

LORETTA

People trying to find the Christmas Story house.

FATHER RAMONA

Oh, I know that street. Living there must be fun.

LORETTA

No. It's hell. Tourists from all over the country are constantly at our door. My father chases them off. And when he's not doing that, he's throwing snowballs at the Christmas carolers. One year, he pelted them with dirty socks. Another time, he used a slingshot and marbles. God knows what terrible things he has planned for them this year.

(Crossfade to...)

DAISY RED RYDER

(Lights up on the living room.

*JERRY enters carrying a BB gun as
ROSY decorates the tree.)*

ROSY

Jerry, I had a laundry basket full of dirty socks, have you seen it? *(She stops when she sees the gun)* What's that?

JERRY

(Defensive)

It's an official Daisy Red Ryder Carbine-Action 200-Shot Range Model Air Rifle.

ROSY

You're not going to do what I think you're going to do.

JERRY

If tourists or carolers show up I'm prepared.

ROSY

You're nuts.

JERRY

I was at Kalinowski's twenty-four-hour market this afternoon. Guess what they were doing? Playing Christmas music!

ROSY

It's Christmas 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 on the fourth of July!

Give me the BB gun!

ROSY

*(ROSY pulls it away from him.
Annoyed, JERRY sits and reads the
newspaper.)*

Guess who called.

ROSY

Rosy, you know I don't like guessing.

JERRY

One little guess.

ROSY

Elvis.

JERRY

No. Old lady Borkowski from Kalinowski's 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 Saint Patricks this morning.

ROSY

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

JERRY

Looks like it. Although it's not like her not to call.

ROSY

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

JERRY

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

ROSY

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

JERRY

The police talk in Latin?

ROSY

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

JERRY

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

ROSY

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 you hired a detective to follow the last boy she dated.

JERRY

I didn't hire a detective. I had Majewski at the station house check him out. And if I hadn't, we never would've known that middle-aged, white-lab-coat-wearing freak was a pathological.

ROSY

He wasn't pathological. He was a pathologist.

JERRY

Still, does it sound right?

(Doorbell. JERRY jumps up and grabs the BB gun.)

JERRY

Here we go again!

ROSY

Don't shoot them!

(JERRY opens the door to find two TOURISTS holding a camera.)

TOURIST 1

(Upbeat)

Sorry to bother you, but do you know where we'd find Warren G. Harding Elementary School?

TOURIST 2

(Upbeat)

We want to stick our tongues to the flagpole.

TOURIST 1

(Holding up a camera)

Photo op!

JERRY

Go away!

(JERRY slams the door in their faces. He strides off. The doorbell rings. He opens the door to reveal the same TOURISTS, each sporting an eye patch.)

TOURIST 1&2

(Big smile)

We shot our eyes out! We shot our eyes out!

JERRY

(Screaming as he loses it)

Ahhhhhh!

(JERRY attacks them)

TOURIST 1&2

Ahhhhhh!

(The TOURISTS bolt, screaming. JERRY barrels after them.)

ROSY

Jerry, Stop! Stop!

(ROSY runs after.)

(Crossfade to...)

CHLORINE CAUSES SKEPTICISM

(Lights up on the confessional.)

LORETTA

(A bundle of nerves)

I can never go home again.

FATHER RAMONA

But it's Christmas and you live in the perfect neighborhood to celebrate it.

LORETTA

I can't go home because I've been dating this Harvard law student. He's perfect. Intellectual. Loved Shakespeare. From Cape Cod. He took me yachting. Can you imagine me yachting. Growing up, my parents never let me near water. My mother said chlorine caused skepticism. I told my Cape Cod law student, no problem, I know all about yachting. Then I let go of this rope... and this big... thing... came sweeping across the deck... and killed him.

FATHER RAMONA

(Shocked)

You killed him?

LORETTA
Well, almost. Knocked him cold.

FATHER RAMONA
Is he okay?

LORETTA
He's got this huge lump.

FATHER RAMONA
Lump?

LORETTA
On his head, just above the hairline. Still there. Then he told me he loved me.

FATHER RAMONA
Because he was delusional?

LORETTA
No, because I told him I loved him.

FATHER RAMONA
Did you do this 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 I never had 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
(Depressed)
Yes. American royalty.

FATHER RAMONA
(Delighted)
Ooooo, a Catholic.

LORETTA
(Not happy about it)
He asked me to marry him.

FATHER RAMONA

That's a good thing, isn't it?

LORETTA

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

(Ashamed)

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 Herbal Essence Tropical Coconut Hydrating Shampoo. Know it?

FATHER RAMONA

Can't say I do.

LORETTA

It really smells good. And he was obviously interested. And then he asked my name and I couldn't tell him it was Nutt, 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 can't be from this family. I must be adopted.

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

FATHER RAMONA

There-there.

LORETTA

So I wrote him a Dear John letter and came home. Then I got a call from my roommate saying that he's trying to find me.

(MORE)

Which means that poor polo shirt-wearing Coxswain is now searching Golden Colorado for a red Porsche.

FATHER RAMONA

Coxswain?

LORETTA
(Weeping)

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

You, my child, need to call your parents and tell them you're home. And you must contact this... this...

LORETTA

Coxswain.

FATHER RAMONA

And invite him to meet your parents.

LORETTA

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

(FATHER RAMONA grabs a Bible and looks up a reference. After checking...)

FATHER RAMONA

It's a sin for a Catholic to jump from the Sears Tower.

(Crossfade to...)

JOHN KENNEDY DIDN'T WEAR A HAT

(Lights up on a quaint little Hat Shop lined with every type of men's and women's hats. In the window hangs a 'Help Wanted' sign.)

(JERRY is on the land line.)

JERRY

(on the phone)

Is this Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer? Do me a favor and put the boss-man on the line will ya? ...Yeah, the big wig. Tell'em Jerry Nutt's calling. ...No. Two Ts. N.U.T.T... No, I don't have an appointment, but he's going to want to talk to me. ...Why? Cause I've hired myself a lawyer and I'm suing him and everyone at MGM. ...Why? For distress cause by the movie *A Christmas Story*. Tell'em I'm asking for damages in the amount of fifty thousand big ones! *(The party has hung up)* ...Hello. ...Hello?

*(An offstage door chime tinkles.
LANGDON KENNEDY enters, late 20s,
handsome, impeccably dressed,
cosmopolitan, with a great head of
hair. He is entirely out of place.
He is not wearing a hat.)*

LANGDON

(Kennedy accent)

Hello?

JERRY

Welcome to the Mad Hatter - The last shop dedicated only to hats in Cleveland. 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

Help wanted.

JERRY

Oh that. 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 Cleveland Community College.

LANGDON

No I attend(*He stops himself*). A school out east. I'm a law student.

JERRY

Law student! Let me ask you somethin'. How does one go about suing M.G.M.?

LANGDON

You mean the movie company?

JERRY

Yeah, I want to file a lawsuit against everyone involved in the movie 'A Christmas Story.' Producers, directors and actors, the whole kit and kaboodle.

LANGDON

(*Confused*)

Ah, sure, I guess, you can sue anyone.

JERRY

What would you charge to help me with this litigation?

LANGDON

I'm 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's a Bowler.

JERRY
Lucky guess.

(JERRY holds up another man's hat.)

JERRY
And this?

LANGDON
That's a Panama.

JERRY
And 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. 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
Stop! 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. JFK 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 all the deaths that've 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. 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

Kowalski.

(They shake.)

JERRY

Stanley Kowalski. Good name. Solid name.

(Outside, CHRISTMAS CAROLERS enter singing.)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS

DECK THE HALLS WITH BOUGHS OF HOLLY

FA LA LA LA LA, LA LA LA LA

JERRY

They're back! Quick get the laundry basket full of dirty socks from under the counter.

LANGDON
The what?

JERRY
The dirty socks! Now!

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS
TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY
FA LA LA LA LA, LA LA LA LA

(LANGDON finds the box of dirty socks. JERRY grabs it.)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS
DON WE NOW OUR GAY APPAREL

(JERRY runs out and pelts the CAROLERS with socks.)

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

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS
FA LA LA LA LA AHHHHHHHHHH!

(The CAROLERS scatter in panic. JERRY drives them off. LANGDON looks on, astonished.)

LANGDON
(To himself)
What a nut.

(Crossfade to...)

LISTENING THERAPY DOESN'T WORK

(Lights up on the confessional where we find FATHER RAMONA and LORETTA.)

LORETTA
(Panicking)
I'm adopted, I must be adopted.

FATHER RAMONA
You need to call your parents.

LORETTA
(Still in a panic)
I can't.

FATHER RAMONA
Why not?

LORETTA
'Cause 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.

(FATHER RAMONA opens the small door between their confessional booths and sets a landline phone on the ledge.)

LORETTA
You keep a phone in your confessional?

FATHER RAMONA
There are a lot of things back here you sinners don't know about. Sandwich?

(He offers her a sandwich.)

LORETTA
You eat while taking confessions?

FATHER RAMONA
Doing God's work burns a lot of calories. Dial.

LORETTA
I can't.

FATHER RAMONA
Don't think about it. Just do it. "The power of Christ compels you!" *(Delighted with his reference to the movie 'The Exorcist')* I've always wanted to say that.

(She doubts but dials.)

FATHER RAMONA
I'll put it on speakerphone.

(He pushes a button on the phone.)

(Split scene, lights up on the living room.)

(The living room phone rings. ROSY runs in.)

ROSY

That's our Loretta!

(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)

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

JERRY

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

ROSY

Okay, but you gotta be sensitive.

JERRY

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

ROSY

Be nice.

(ROSY surrenders the phone.)

JERRY

(on phone, fake conciliatory)

Okay, I admit I was wrong. You're not a communist or a smarty pants weirdo that supports the National Endowment of the Arts. *(Beat, angry)* You're a druggy. That's right, you're so hopped up on mara-jew-wana right now you can't even talk. Am I right? I'm not dumb, I can connect the dots!

ROSY

Give me the phone!

(ROSY grabs the phone.)

ROSY

(Sweet into the phone)

Lori-honeyyyyyy, forgive your father, since he gave up smoking, he's been a tad irritable. So what's up? Are you having some sort of overwhelming psychological 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 me? 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

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

What has she got to be disturbed about?

ROSY

Listen and find out.

JERRY

Once we listen then what?

ROSY

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'll 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.

(MORE)

I swear I can barely get a word in edgewise around here so we have a lot in common.

(As ROSY continues her long-winded monologue, JERRY gradually deflates, going limp in his chair.)

ROSY

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 starvation and pain - All I know for sure is that two conditions rule God's beautiful creation: heartache and disappointment - Two things that will tear the world apart.

(As ROSY drones on, JERRY, bored beyond endurance, slowly oozes from his chair to the floor, inch by inch. She never notices.)

ROSY

So Lori-honey, speak your mind and we will listen-listen-listen. Although I can't imagine what the problem could be. You had a pretty nice childhood. Sure, you stayed in your room a lot - talked about joining the Peace Corps but did you ever want?

(JERRY sprawls on the floor in a heroic imitation of death, milking every last breath for maximum tragedy.)

ROSY

Okay, now and then. But you had food on your table and a shirt on your back. So do it, say whatever's troubling you and we will listen. 'Cause listening is the key to being a good parent. Someday you'll know this to be true.

(During the following, in the confessional, LORETTA, overcome by boredom, wilts and slides to the floor.)

ROSY

Someday you'll be on a speakerphone listening to your own daughter's overwhelming psychological problems. But in order to get there you gotta get married. I do hope you'll find the right man with a good job and nice car. 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. Talk.

(FATHER RAMONA finally breaks. He falls to his knees, praying desperately for ROSY to stop talking.)

ROSY

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's goin'? That's up to God. So take advantage of us while ya still got us.

(ROSY finally notices JERRY on the floor, frozen in his performance of death.)

ROSY

Wait, Lori-honey, your father is on the floor playing dead again. One second while I hit him with my copy of Catholic Digest.

(She grabs her copy of Catholic Digest and beats Jerry.)

ROSY

Get up! Get up!

(JERRY gets up and sits.)

ROSY

Okay, Lori-sweetie it's all about you now. Ready? Talk.

JERRY

That's right. Carp Denim!

ROSY

Carp Denim, what is 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. Here goes. Talk.

(ROSY and JERRY listen.)

FATHER RAMONA

(Whispering)

Say something.

(LORETTA can't.)

FATHER RAMONA

Please.

(During the following, JERRY and ROSY become so absorbed in their conversation that 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. The couple next door had a fight this morning - I don't know what for. Okay, your turn. Talk about something.

JERRY

Like what?

ROSY

Like what happened at work this morning?

JERRY

Why would I talk about work?

ROSY

To relax your daughter so she can open up to us.

JERRY

What's to say?

ROSY

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. He was a dandy.

ROSY

What does that mean?

JERRY

He's like your Uncle Stefan.

ROSY

Oh! Oh my. How do you know?

JERRY

Occam'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. The simple answer? Dandy. But he did know his hats.

ROSY

Then hire him.

JERRY

Why should I?

ROSY

'Cause he knows 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.

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

Why do you do this? Every time you come home for lunch you start a fight!

JERRY

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

(Furious, she storms off to the kitchen.)

ROSY

(O.S.)

I'm not a billboard!

JERRY

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

(JERRY snatches up his hat and coat. ROSY re-enters.)

ROSY

Where're you going?!

JERRY

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

(Lonely, JERRY puts on his coat and hat, then exits.)

(ROSY sees the speakerphone is still on and sits beside it.)

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.

(LORETTA hangs up. There's a click, then a dial tone. A tear comes to ROSY as she turns off the speakerphone.)

(Crossfade to...)

LIFE IS NOTHING LIKE THE MOVIES

(Back to the confessional, continuous.)

LORETTA

(Still a bundle of nerves)

Father?

FATHER RAMONA

Yes, my child?

LORETTA

I've been lying to my Kennedy.

FATHER RAMONA

Yes, you mentioned, Coors and the Porsche.

LORETTA

No, there's another reason he won't love me. A bigger problem. He wants to have children. Like six or seven.

FATHER RAMONA

And you don't?

LORETTA

No. I do. I want children. I told him I want a big family, only... it's just... *(This isn't easy)* I can't.

FATHER RAMONA

I'm so sorry to hear that. There's always adoption.

LORETTA

He's a Kennedy.

FATHER RAMONA

So?

LORETTA

All they do is breed.

FATHER RAMONA

I'm sure he'll understand.

LORETTA

No, he won't.

FATHER RAMONA

Why not?

LORETTA

Hair.

FATHER RAMONA

Hair?

LORETTA

(breaking down in tears)

Yes, if we adopt they won't have the Kennedy hair. That big beautiful head of hair they're all born with.

FATHER RAMONA

Have you told him you can't have children?

LORETTA

...No.

FATHER RAMONA

A relationship based on lies is not a relationship. Now, you must call this young man and tell him the truth. And while you're at it call your mother.

LORETTA

Why?

FATHER RAMONA
Because at times like this you need family.

LORETTA
No. I'm leaving.

FATHER RAMONA
Going back to school?

LORETTA
No. Antarctica.

FATHER RAMONA
Excuse me?

LORETTA
Well, first I'm flying to Argentina, then I'm taking a boat to Antarctica.

FATHER RAMONA
Why?

LORETTA
I'm joining a year-long Harvard research project there. That way my Kennedy can never find me. That way, he'll never know I lied to him.

FATHER RAMONA
When are you doing this?

LORETTA
My flight leaves at one o'clock.

FATHER RAMONA
Loretta, you can't run away from your problems. Please, Call this boy.

LORETTA
No.

FATHER RAMONA
Or your mother.

LORETTA
All I'll do is hang up.

FATHER RAMONA
Your father's gone back to the shop. It's just your mother now. Have faith.

LORETTA
And what's faith?

FATHER RAMONA
...It's a deep conviction that lets you know that everything will be... okay.

(MORE)

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 whom?

FATHER RAMONA

...All right. I guarantee it.

LORETTA

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

(FATHER RAMONA says a quick prayer, crosses himself, then crosses his fingers for good measure.)

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

LORETTA

It's busy. I have a plane to catch.

(LORETTA hangs up and exits.)

FATHER RAMONA

Loretta wait!

(FATHER RAMONA runs out after her.)

(Crossfade to...)

(Back to the living room, continuous. ROSY is on the land-line.)

ROSY

(On phone, delightfully upbeat)

...Is this Joyce Cooper? ...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. You're on my karma list and I'm calling to ask for your forgiveness.

(MORE)

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)* Hello? Hello?

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

ROSY
(To herself)

Only one name left. Barbara Hilton.

(Crossfade to...)

NO ORDINARY BUMP

(Lights up on the hat shop. LANGDON is putting up Christmas decorations.)

(JERRY enters.)

JERRY
(unpleasant)

What're you doing?

LANGDON
I thought I'd put up some Christmas decorations.

JERRY
Well stop it. Any customers?

LANGDON
No.

JERRY
(to himself)
Bah Humbug.

(Pissed, JERRY starts to exit to the back.)

LANGDON
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. This conversation is over! Say it!

LANGDON
Conversation over.

JERRY

(Continuing the conversation)

Every major religion has a hat. Where would the Pope or your Shriners be without their 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

I never question my values. Know why? 'Cause life's too short to run around questioning everything. And so I know what I know. I go to work and 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

I know. John Kennedy.

JERRY

Him and the movie *A Christmas Story*.

LANGDON

How did a 'A Christmas Story' kill the hat business?

JERRY

Because that movie reminded people of happier times.

LANGDON

What's wrong with that?

JERRY

Because when you're reminded of happier times, it makes people realize how screwed up their lives are right now! *A Christmas Story* has caused more unhappiness than any movie in the history of Hollywood.

LANGDON

I kinda like it.

JERRY

That's because you don't live in the neighborhood where the movie was made. It's constant traffic. During the holidays, I can't even get out of my driveway!

LANGDON

How does your daughter feel about growing up there?

JERRY

What does this gotta do with my daughter?

LANGDON

Nothing, just wondering.

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

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 also 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. Boat accident.

JERRY

Must've hurt.

LANGDON

Mr. Nutt, I--

JERRY

This is no ordinary bump.

My size?
LANGDON

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

My size?
LANGDON

JERRY
Seven.

LANGDON
Good to know.

JERRY
(Still suspicious)
It's possible to measure a man. You can size him up. I'm connecting the dots with you.

LANGDON
But--

JERRY
End of conversation!

(Outside, the CHRISTMAS CAROLERS appear, belting out "Go Tell It on the Mountain," with their own new lyrics.)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS
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
SMELL EVEN WORSE HE'S STUPID AND HE'S UGLY.
HIS PRESENCE IS A CURSE.

(JERRY goes berserk.)

JERRY
Get out! Get out of here!

(JERRY chases them off with the broom.)

CHRISTMAS CAROLERS
Ahhhhhhh!

(The CAROLERS run for their lives, with JERRY in hot pursuit, yelling insults. LANGDON is dumbfounded.)

(Crossfade to...)

CHRISTMAS HANDCUFFS

*(Lights up on the confessional.
ROSY and FATHER RAMONA.)*

ROSY

Bless me Father, for I have sinned. 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 due to get this attendance medal and give a little speech at graduation. In those days, I was always eating cookies. On my way to the podium, I tripped, and my cookies flew into the air. I picked them up, but little did I know that one rogue chocolate-chocolate-chip had lodged in my hairdo. As I spoke, people started snickering. But to this day, I'm absolutely-almost-totally positive that it was the head cheerleader Barbara Hilton who started it. Soon everyone was laughing and pointing. That's when I called the two-hundred-and-forty-seven members of the graduating class a bunch of knuckle-dragging, slack-jawed, pickle-sucking, stupid heads.

(ROSY begins to cry.)

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 Hilton. But I've not been able to find her. *(Beat, she pulls herself together)* Father, life's nothin' like the movies.

FATHER RAMONA

True.

ROSY

In the movies, Ralphie gets his BB gun. Farkus is defeated. But in reality there are husbands who hate Christmas and daughters who won't come home for the holidays and... Auto accidents.

FATHER RAMONA

Auto accidents?

ROSY

Father, all my problems started five years ago today, Christmas eve. Loretta was just minding her own business. Then a car ran a stoplight and T-boned her.

(MORE)

We thought we were going to lose her, but two weeks later she came home from the hospital. Everything healed... *(A tear comes to her)* Almost everything.

FATHER RAMONA

And that's why she can't...

ROSY

Give us grandchildren. I've often wondered, where was she going? What was so important that she had to be driving down that exact street at that exact moment.

FATHER RAMONA

Rosy, what are you doing today at one o'clock?

ROSY

One? Where else would I be on Christmas Eve? 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

We're going to stop your daughter from moving to Antarctica.

(On ROSY's confusion, cross fade to...)

JOHN TRAVOLTA AT THE ICE CAPADES

*(Lights up on the living room.
JERRY is on the landline.)*

JERRY

(on the phone)

Hello? Max? Jerry Nutt. I've been connecting the dots on our lawsuit against MGM. What if instead of just suing the movie, cast crew and actors, we made it a class action lawsuit against everyone who likes 'A Christmas Story.' If you think about it, the whole country is to blame for my problems.

(ROSY enters.)

JERRY

(On the phone)

Call you back.

(JERRY quickly hangs up.)

Who were you talking to? ROSY

Nobody.

JERRY

It wasn't our Loretta?

ROSY

No. Sales call. JERRY

What were they selling?

JERRY
Ah... *(Making this up)* Christmas Ice Capades tickets.

Ice Capades? ROSY

JERRY
Yeah, told'em we weren't interested.

ROSY
I don't know, I might like the Ice Capades.

JERRY
Since when are we Ice Capades people?

ROSY
I took Loretta when she was a child.

JERRY
I'm not goin', that would be my personal vision of heck.

ROSY
You don't know that - one of the elves might fall and hurt themselves, you'd like that.

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

ROSY
Jerry we need to talk.

JERRY

And I'm sure what you gotta say is important, but first I need to tell you about somethin' and I don't need you to get all flummoxed.

ROSY
Somethin' happened--

JERRY

You know how I'm a good listener, well I need you to be a good listener cause we gotta talk about Loretta's accident.

ROSY

No. I won't relive it.

JERRY

Disassociate yourself from yourself.

ROSY

Not today, Jerry.

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 guy who broadsided our Loretta. The guy they never caught.

ROSY

Warning, you maybe got thirty seconds.

JERRY

Pretend you're someone else.

ROSY

Like who?

JERRY

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 daughter five years ago on Christmas eve! 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

It was a stolen car, they were running from the police. How could it not be a criminal?

JERRY

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

ROSY

No.

JERRY

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

ROSY

(A mantra to herself)

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

JERRY

They'd want to fix the one thing that wasn't fixable. And so they'd go back and look up that family. Make sure they're doin' okay. Don't you see?

ROSY

(Confused)

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.

(MORE)

It makes no sense. Then, I found this lump. Was feeling his head and I found it.

ROSY

A lump?

JERRY

Yes, an old injury. A auto accident-sized injury above the hairline.

ROSY

You were feeling his head?

JERRY

I was measuring it!

ROSY

So you're saying...?

JERRY

He's the one who broadsided our Loretta. He keeps asking about her at work. Don't you see what this means? He's come back to check on us. To make sure Loretta is okay. To forgive himself. Connect the dots!

ROSY

What dots?

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

And 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! Twenty-five years of measuring heads has given me insight that most people don't got.

ROSY

(Upset)

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 airport.

JERRY

The airport? What was she doing at the airport?

ROSY

Running away from love. Father Ramona and I tried to reason with her. When she wouldn't listen, we handcuffed ourselves to the TSA check-in so she couldn't get past us.

(ROSY raises her hand, a broken handcuff dangling from her wrist.)

JERRY

Handcuffs? You're wearing handcuffs!

ROSY

Father Ramona couldn't find the key, so the police used bolt cutters. But I can't get the other side off.

JERRY

What're you saying?!

ROSY

They were going to arrest us, but while we were sitting in the squad car, Majewski saw us and let us go with just a warning.

JERRY

(Frustrated)

Go make soup!

ROSY

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

JERRY

Yes. Make soup!

ROSY
(Annoyed)

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

JERRY
I don't care! Just make soup!

(She starts for the kitchen,
stops.)

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

JERRY
Occam's razor, woman!

(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 or I will personally disinherit you,
you communist, National Endowment for the Arts-loving
lunatic. (Beat. A pause. Then, instantly pleasant.) Oh. I'm
so sorry. Yes, I would be delighted to donate 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 to tell you that I'm
dropping out of school and I'm never coming back.

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

ROSY

Here's Your Damn Soup! I Hope You Choke on it--! *(She stops short at the sight of LORETTA, her tone instantly sweet)* Lori-honeyyyyyy! Sweetheart, give us 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 off her lipstick, revealing the broken handcuff dangling from her wrist. LORETTA notices.)

ROSY

(Beat, off the handcuff)

I can explain.

(ROSY puts down the soup and stuffs the handcuff into her sleeve.)

LORETTA

(Frustrated)

Mama, I--

ROSY

You look hungry. Let me get you somethin' to nosh on.

LORETTA

Mama--

ROSY

(Avoiding the subject)

Oh, I love that coat!

LORETTA

Mama--

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.)

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. And I'll make it with the good cheese. Velveeta.

(ROSY bolts into the kitchen. JERRY and LORETTA lock eyes, bristling.)

JERRY

(Righteous)

And so the prodigal daughter returns. Went off to her fancy college thinkin' she was better than the rest of us.

(MORE)

Got her head full of a bunch of nonsense, experimented with mara-jew-wana no doubt, and now she's a communist, who supports the arts. 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!!!!

(Doorbell. JERRY grabs the broom and opens the door to a person in a bunny suit suspiciously similar to the one from the movie.)

BUNNY

Is this the Christmas Story house?

JERRY

(Screaming)

Ahhhhhhhh!

(JERRY hits the BUNNY with the broom. It screams and hops off, Jerry is in hot pursuit.)

BUNNY

(Running off)

What did I do, Ma, what did I do!

(They're gone. LORETTA drops to her knees, humiliated beyond words.)

LORETTA

(Crying quietly to herself)

I'm adopted. Oh please let me be adopted.

(Blackout.)

END OF ACT ONE

How To Survive Your Family At Christmas

(ACT II)

FINAGLE'S LAW OF DYNAMIC NEGATIVES

(Lights up on the living room. ROSY is on the phone.)

ROSY

(Worried, On phone)

Hello. Mrs. Borkowski? ...So sorry to bug you on Christmas Eve, but our Loretta said she was going for a walk to clear her head, whatever that means, and it's been nearly two hours. By any chance did she stop by the market? ...She didn't? ...Well, okay. ...No, everything's fine. ...Merry Christmas

(JERRY enters.)

JERRY

You're on the phone! I said steer clear of the phone.

(ROSY hangs up.)

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. Anything that comes into your head.

ROSY

Okay. I'm worried about our daughter.

JERRY

No! Into the button.

ROSY

What button?

JERRY

This here button.

(JERRY proudly holds out an odd-looking button on his shirt. It is, in fact, a microphone.)

ROSY

You want me to talk into your shirt button?

JERRY

Say anything - just say it into the button.

ROSY

Fine. Our daughter has been gone for almost two hours.

(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 down the block.

(JERRY lifts his shirt, exposing a small recording device crudely taped to his skin, wires trailing like veins.)

ROSY

Are you nuts?

JERRY

No, I'm connecting dots. A confession without a witness is worthless in court. So, I've invited Stanley Kowalski for dinner. We're getting a confession.

ROSY

I'm not going to be part of your crazy schemes.

JERRY

All you gotta do is act natural like and let me do the nonchalant probing. 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 and 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 and dials.)

JERRY

(On phone)

Majewski, 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? Then it must be Finagle's Law of Dynamic Negatives: What can go wrong, must go wrong and at the worst possible moment. Or maybe it's the batteries.

(ROSY enters with her coat.)

JERRY

Where're you goin'?

ROSY

To look for Loretta.

JERRY

You can't leave right now, I've invited him over, the plan is about to be hatched!

ROSY

Out of my way.

JERRY

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

(But before ROSY can leave, Doorbell.)

JERRY

Here we go again.

(JERRY opens the door to find a well-dressed, sophisticated LAWYER.)

LAWYER

Hello.

JERRY

Go away!

LAWYER

Mr. Nutt, I'm from the law firm of Mason, Gallagher and Moore.

JERRY

So?

LAWYER

We represent M.G.M.

JERRY

(Delighted)

A-ah! Come right in. This here is my wife Rosy.

LAWYER

Nice to meet you Mrs. Nutt.

ROSY

Merry Christmas.

LAWYER

I wish it were.

JERRY

I take it you are in receipt of my lawsuit.

LAWYER

Yes, Mr. Nutt.

ROSY

You look hungry, can I get you some soup?

LAWYER

No, thank you.

ROSY

Sandwich? I'll make it with the good margarine - Parkay.

LAWYER

Not hungry.

JERRY

So, I take it that you've come to make me an offer.

LAWYER

Mr. Nutt. There is zero chance of you winning this lawsuit. It has no basis in reality.

JERRY

We'll see about that.

LAWYER

But, unfortunately, your antics might cause publicity that MGM would like to avoid. So, I've been authorized to offer you a check for five hundred dollars if you drop your lawsuit.

(He takes out a check.)

JERRY

I'm asking for fifty thousand.

LAWYER

Mr. Nutt, why would you want to sue such a beloved movie. 'A Christmas Story' has brought joy to millions of people all around the world. It's a classic.

JERRY

Well, it's brought me nothing but heartache. Am I right Rosy?

ROSY

I kinda like the movie--.

JERRY

Quiet Rosy!

LAWYER

Mr. Nutt, I've been authorized to pay up to one thousand but that's the limit.

JERRY

Fifty thousand or nothing.

LAWYER

Then it will be nothing. Good day, Mr. Nutt. And Mrs. Nutt.

ROSY

(Up beat)

Stop by anytime.

(The LAWYER stops at the door and looks at the place.)

LAWYER

By any chance, do you know where Warren G. Harding Elementary school is? I'd love to stick my tongue to the flagpole.

(JERRY loses it.)

JERRY

Ahhhhh. Get out! Get out!

(JERRY chases the LAWYER out. ROSY runs after.)

(Crossfade to...)

LA TRAVIATA VS. THE ICE CAPADES

(Lights up on the hat shop. LANGDON decorates for Christmas.)

*The offstage door bell tinkles as
LORETTA enters the empty shop.)*

LORETTA

Hello?

*(LANGDON enters reading a law
book.)*

LANGDON

Welcome to the Mad Hatter--

LORETTA
(Seeing him)

Oh my!

LANGDON

Loretta!

LORETTA

Langdon!

*(They hug, thrilled to see each
other, but LORETTA pulls away.)*

LORETTA

Wait. What are you here?

LANGDON

Selling hats.

LORETTA
(Dumbfounded)

You... You... What?

LANGDON

I work here. Your father hired me.

LORETTA
(Despondent)

You met my father?

LANGDON

Yes.

LORETTA

Oh, 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. 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.

LANGDON

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

LORETTA

I was protecting you.

LANGDON

From what?

LORETTA

The Nutt family.

LANGDON

Loretta. Just because we come from different socioeconomic backgrounds that doesn't mean we can't get married and have a big family.

LORETTA

(Her heart sinks)

No. *(She turns away)* 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 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 as if 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 Cleveland, 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 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
How's your head?

LANGDON
Head?

LORETTA
The bump.

LANGDON
Oh. Much much better.

(*Holding each other, they slip out of sight behind the hat display counter.*)

(*Crossfade to...*)

BUG ZAPPER DOORBELL

(*Lights up on the confessional where we find JERRY and FATHER RAMONA.*)

JERRY
(*At first calmly*)
It started small. One or two the first year. No big deal. By the second Christmas, their numbers swelled. Five people a day at the door. I thought it was a passing fad. By the tenth Christmas, we were averaging twenty a day. And they started quoting lines from the movie. Do you know how many times I've heard, "I triple-dog-dare you"? One thousand four hundred and twenty-two times. (Starting to lose it) "Fra-gee-lay." Two thousand four hundred and three times. I tried to sell the house, but no one wants to buy a place haunted by an endless stream of happy people. I called the police so many times they said I was tying up the phone lines. By the fifteenth year, they were clogging the street. So, I took the law into my own hands. I installed a bug zapper as a doorbell.
(MORE)

When that failed, I poured scalding water on them from the roof. *(Building into a fit)* And they still came! That's when I realized life was absurd, existence was a joke, and I had only one career path left. Professional Grinch.

FATHER RAMONA

Mr. Nutt, ah, is there a reason you stopped by?

JERRY

(calming)

Oh. I was just on my way to Kalinowski's twenty-four hour market for batteries.

FATHER RAMONA

Do you have anything to confess?

JERRY

Why would I?

FATHER RAMONA

You're in a confessional.

JERRY

Nothing I can think of.

FATHER RAMONA

Nothing?

JERRY

I'm one hundred percent guilt free.

FATHER RAMONA

That's a first.

JERRY

Well, maybe just one thing.

FATHER RAMONA

And that would be?

JERRY

Father, I'd like to confessed that I... *(Loud and Proud)* Have never seen the movie *A Christmas Story*!

(Crossfade to...)

EMBRACE YOUR AVERAGENESS

(Lights up on the hat shop. Still kissing, LANGDON and LORETTA come up for air.)

LORETTA

How does your head feel now?

LANGDON

Wonderful.

LORETTA

We have an understanding?

LANGDON

Understanding?

LORETTA

You'll 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 girl, 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 off stage front door tinkles.)

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.

LORETTA

I was walking by, saw the lights on. You okay?

ROSY

I might recover.

LORETTA

Tell you what, let me take you 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. We talk loudly.
(Beat, tender) 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

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

LORETTA

Mama, there were extenuating circumstances.

ROSY

You didn't tell him about the auto accident did you.

LORETTA

Mama--.

ROSY

You never told him you can't have children.

(LANGDON's head pops up from behind the display case, shocked. ROSY doesn't see him.)

(LORETTA desperately waves him away. He hides himself again.)

LORETTA

Mama--.

ROSY

Do you know what your problem is Lori-honey? You can't embrace your averageness.

LORETTA

Mama, I graduated first in my class.

ROSY

But you graduated first in your class in Cleveland, that's like average everywhere else.

LORETTA

I earned 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.

LORETTA

Where are you--?

ROSY

Got ya something. It's in the back room.

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 pokes his head up. LORETTA waves him to the door.)

LORETTA

Call me?

(ROSY is coming he doesn't have time to answer. He runs out.)

(ROSY enters with a hatbox.)

ROSY

Someone there?

LORETTA

(Depressed)

No mama. It's nothing.

ROSY

I thought I heard the front door.

LORETTA

Just the wind. I'll lock it.

(She walks out. The front door bell tinkles. A moment later, she reenters.)

ROSY

Is it locked now?

LORETTA

It's locked, mama. *(Defeated)* I think that door's locked 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.

(LORETTA 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. It's yours.

LORETTA

Mama...

ROSY

You talk to that boy. If he loves you he'll accept you as you are. Open it. Go on.

(LORETTA opens the hat box. Inside is a wedding veil.)

ROSY

Look inside the rim.

(LORETTA inspects the rim of the wedding veil and discovers a small envelope tucked inside.)

ROSY

Was going to give it to ya for Christmas but I think 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

(Teary)

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. *(Teary)* Now you got me going...

(They hug.)

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 gobs and gobs of them.

(Crossfade to...)

WE ALL NEED FORGIVENESS

*(Lights up on the living room.
JERRY enters, speaking into the
button on his shirt.)*

JERRY

(Talking into his button)

Okay, new batteries installed. 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 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 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 them apart. *(Hinting)* Night after night they lay in bed and all they can think is I'm not forgiven. I'm going to heck. 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. JERRY stalks after him, determined to keep him within microphone range.)

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

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 after a party. 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 woman was driving.

JERRY

Very young.

LANGDON

She and her husband... They survived. With minor injuries.

JERRY

Wait a minute, what husband?

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 handled. The couple's medical bills were paid, and they got a handsome payoff. In the end, I didn't even get points on my driver's license. Mr. Nutt, if I'd been born into another family, I'd have a record, maybe even jail time, but I was born into the right family, so I am allowed an endless string of second chances. Then, I met someone - Before her, everything was replaceable. But now I know she can never be replaced... 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 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 a communist who supports The National Endowment of the Arts and marry a dandy!

(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 Modern Catholic Magazine.)

JERRY

(Nonchalant)

It's open.

(FATHER RAMONA enters.)

FATHER RAMONA

Good evening, Mr. Nutt.

JERRY

Hello Father, what brings you to this neck of the woods?

FATHER RAMONA

Rosy here?

JERRY

She's out. What's up?

FATHER RAMONA

Mr. Nutt, I've heard a rather nasty rumor.

JERRY

About me?

FATHER RAMONA

Yes. People tell me that you're attacking Christmas carolers.

JERRY

Who me?

FATHER RAMONA

Yes, you.

JERRY

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

FATHER RAMONA

You sure? I can take your confession right here.

JERRY

I have nothing to confess, nothing to be forgiven for. Now, if you don't mind...

(FATHER RAMONA starts for the door, stops.)

FATHER RAMONA

Mr. Nutt, you are the only person I've ever met who has no regrets. You say what you mean, you're always honest about your feelings. You've never, even for a moment, doubted yourself, doubted your values, or even your parenting skills. You are truly 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

...Goodbye Mr. Nutt.

(FATHER RAMONA heads for the door. JERRY's heart melts.)

JERRY

Wait. I do have something to confess.

FATHER RAMONA

Yes?

JERRY

I did in fact see 'A Christmas Story.'

FATHER RAMONA

And?

JERRY
(Ashamed)

I liked it.

FATHER RAMONA
If that's all I'll be going.

JERRY
And...

FATHER RAMONA
And?

JERRY
One more confession. (*This isn't easy*) Father... I used to be a smoker.

FATHER RAMONA
Smoking isn't a sin.

JERRY
It was Christmas eve... five years ago tonight... 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
And you are forgiven.

(A rare tear comes to JERRY.)

JERRY
No. You don't understand, Father. I knew I couldn't slip down to the store to buy some cigs so I asked Loretta to do it for me. (*For the first time there's a crack in his armor*) She had just got her drivers license, so I made her this deal. She could take the Chevy for a ride if she picked me up some Viceroy lights. ...She said she'd only be gone twenty minutes... She didn't come back.

FATHER RAMONA
The accident.

JERRY
Yes.

(FATHER RAMONA puts a comforting hand on JERRY'S shoulder. Beat.)

JERRY
(Heartbroken)
I've never been able to forgive myself.

FATHER RAMONA
But God does.

(LORETTA enters from outside and stops short, stunned by what she sees.)

LORETTA

What's going on?

JERRY

I'm confessing.

LORETTA

You? Not possible.

(LANGDON enters from the kitchen.)

LANGDON

Soup's fine-- *(Seeing her)* Loretta!

LORETTA

Langdon! What're you doing here?

LANGDON

Checking the soup.

(ROSY enters from outside.)

ROSY

What's this? A party? I'll make cheese and crackers. I'll use the good crackers - Saltines.

(ROSY starts for the kitchen, LANGDON stops her.)

LANGDON

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

ROSY

Oh my! You're the boy who broke my daughter's heart and destroyed her life. *(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
You okay with adoption?

LANGDON
The more the better.

ROSY
(*To Loretta*)
Do you love him?

LORETTA
Mama--

ROSY
Be honest, do you?

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 want you to know, I think you're a horrible human being. But let's deal with that later, for now, welcome to the Nutt family!

ROSY
Father Ramona, let's unlock the church!

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

JERRY
Langdon?

LORETTA
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
Loretta. Please. 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 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?

JERRY

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 Detroit Avenue we didn't see.

LORETTA

Mama--

ROSY

Turns out I couldn't have children either.

LORETTA

...What are you...?

ROSY

But then Father Gorzynski came to us and said that he knew of a baby that was up for... adoption.

LORETTA
(*Stunned*)

...Mama...

ROSY

A wonderful little baby girl.

LORETTA
(*Breath taken*)

You're... not serious.

ROSY
(*Tears*)

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

...ah...Vanderbilt.

LORETTA

Loretta Vanderbilt. Wow. That's a name.

(LANGDON kneels and takes out a beautiful ring.)

LANGDON

Loretta Vanderbilt, will you marry me, right now, tonight? And then adopt lots of children?

LORETTA

Kennedy weds Vanderbilt. Not bad.

(LORETTA and LANGDON kiss, then remain locked in a long, passionate embrace during the following.)

JERRY

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

FATHER RAMONA

My children, it's time to unlock the church.

ROSY

Yes! Let's unlock--!

JERRY

Wait! I withdraw my permission!

ROSY

Let's get to the church before they change their minds!

JERRY

My daughter will not marry a Kennedy!

LANGDON

I love you, Loretta Vanderbilt.

LORETTA

I love you, Langdon Kennedy.

(LANGDON and LORETTA exit.)

JERRY

Did you hear me? I withdraw my permission!

(FATHER RAMONA and ROSY run out.)

JERRY

No Kennedy is going to marry my daughter! Wait! Stop! Come back here!

(But no one is listening to him. JERRY runs out.)

(Crossfade to...)

ALL IS RIGHT WITH THE WORLD

(Lights up on LORETTA.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

Early Christmas morning, Langdon and I wed. The next day, we caught a flight to Massachusetts.

(MORE)

Later that night, missing her daughter and new son, I can't help but think that my mother must've gone home and cried herself to sleep.

(Lights up in the living room, ROSY enters in a bathrobe. At first, it appears that ROSY is crying. But it's really a sneeze. ROSY has a cold. JERRY enters with hot soup.)

JERRY

Did I not tell you to 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.

(ROSY sneezes.)

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. ...Who's this? *(Stunned)* ...Oh my! *(To Jerry)* It's Barbara Hilton! *(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. *(She listens, tears of joy welling up)* Yes. I gladly forgive you. From the bottom of my heart. *(ROSY laughs through her tears)* Bless you, Barbara Hilton, bless you.

(JERRY puts a comforting arm on ROSY.)

(Doorbell.)

JERRY

(Angered)

Here we go again!

(JERRY answers. There's a REAL ESTATE AGENT at the door.)

REAL ESTATE AGENT

Hello. Is this the Nutt residence?

JERRY

So, what of it?

REAL ESTATE AGENT

I understand you're unhappy living here.

JERRY

Very.

REAL ESTATE AGENT

Mr. Nutt, I'd like to buy your house. I'll pay you ten thousand more than it's worth.

JERRY

What?

REAL ESTATE AGENT

Cash.

JERRY

Why would you want to buy this house?

REAL ESTATE AGENT

I'm going to make it into *A Christmas Story* gift shop.

JERRY

A gift shop! That's a brilliant idea! Rosy, I just connected the dots! *(Loud and proud)* We're going to open a gift shop! With hats!

(The lights come up on LORETTA.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

A year later, I got the greatest Christmas gift I had ever received, or would ever receive - Langdon and I adopted. Say hello to Ralphie.

(LANGDON enters holding a swaddled baby.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

The following year we adopted little Randy.

(One of the chorus members enters dressed as a BUTLER holding a swaddled baby.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

And then Schwartz.

(Another chorus member enters dressed as a NANNY holding a swaddled baby.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

Then Grover and Flick.

(Another chorus member enters dressed as a NANNY holding two swaddled babies.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

There's no such thing as a perfect family - Yours or mine. And love is fra-gee-lay. And that's why we need to forgive. Forgiveness - That's how you survive your family at Christmas.

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

(As the lights fade, Christmas bells ring, all is right with the world.)

THE END