

Surviving A Christmas Story

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 Priest - any age)

CHORUS

Four actors who play A Couple with a Baby, Tourists, Christmas Carolers, a Lawyer, a Real Estate Agent, Butlers, Nannies, and a Deranged Easter Bunny

TIME & PLACE

Cleveland, Ohio, 2003

Act One - Christmas Eve, Morning & Afternoon

Act Two - Christmas Eve, Afternoon & Evening

SETTING

There are three simple 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 has a display counter with hat-covered mannequin heads. A confessional at Saint Patrick's. The scenes flow without pause or blackout.

CASTING

Jerry, Rosy, and Loretta should be the same race. Landon is white. Father Ramona and the Chorus are open to all.

Surviving A Christmas Story

(ACT I)

(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 screwball.)

LORETTA
(To the audience)

My parents are nuts.

JERRY
(To the audience)

My daughter is more 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 live in a house across the street from where the movie 'A Christmas Story' was filmed.

ROSY

In case you're interested, 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 confusing our house with the the Christmas Story house.

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 where would they find Randy's house?

JERRY

(To the audience)

And can they see our stupid Christmas leg lamp.

ROSY

(To the audience)

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

JERRY

(To the audience)

Our lives are 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 twelve 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!

(As he slams the door in their faces, one of them holds up the baby and quickly says...)

COUPLE 1
(Holding up the baby)
We named our baby Ralphie!

(JERRY rejoins ROSY and LORETTA.)

ROSY
(To audience)
During the holidays, this would happen six to twenty times a day.

(During the following, ROSY walks over 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 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)

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. Jan Pogozelski, Joyce Cooper, and Barbara Hilton.

ROSY

(On phone)

Jan Pogozelski, 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 dials.)

LORETTA

(To the audience)

The constant interruptions and traffic made my father a dedicated Scrooge. His goal in life was to get 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

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.

LORETTA
(*To the audience*)

The year was 2003.

ROSY
(*To the audience*)

Twenty years after 'A Christmas Story' came out.

JERRY
(*To the audience*)

Twenty years into my personal nightmare.

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

LORETTA
(*To the audience*)

As time passes, you'll find that one Christmas flows into the next, they become indistinguishable, but the Christmas of 2003 would be one I'd never forget, for it was the Christmas I learned that real life is nothing like the movies.

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

NO LIGHT ESCAPES MY FAMILY

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

(Lights up on the confessional, where we find a nervous LORETTA and FATHER RAMONA, a kind, ageless Priest.)

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?

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 an 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 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 sling shot and marbles. God knows what terrible things he has planned for this year.

(Crossfade to...)

DAISY RED RYDER 200 SHOT AIR RIFLE

*(Lights up on the living room.
JERRY enters with a BB gun. ROSY is
decorating 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!

ROSY

Give me the BB gun!

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

ROSY

Guess who called.

JERRY

Rosy, you know I don't like guessing.

ROSY

One little guess.

JERRY

Elvis.

ROSY

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.

JERRY

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

ROSY

Looks like it. 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 lingo.

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

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 have known that that middle-aged pervert was a pee-o-file. (*he mispronounces it*).

ROSY

He was a periodontist!

JERRY

Still, does it sound right?

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

JERRY

Here we go again!

ROSY

You're not shooting 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 starts away. Doorbell. He opens the door to the same TOURISTS wearing eye patches.)

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!

(Terrified, the TOURISTS run for their lives with JERRY in pursuit.)

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

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 and killed him!

FATHER RAMONA
 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. 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 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 Farrah Fawcett Shampoo. Do you remember Farrah Fawcett Shampoo?

FATHER RAMONA
 Can't say I do.

LORETTA
 Well, it really smelled nice. 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 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. That 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

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...

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?

(There is a tinkle of an off stage door chime. LANGDON KENNEDY, late 20s, handsome, well dressed, cosmopolitan enters. He does not wear 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! 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 my lawyer 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
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? What are you, homo-erectus?

LANGDON
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. 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 for my father. 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.

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

LANGDON

Veiled Plaza Suite.

JERRY

You know there's no shame in being homo-erectus.

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

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 them.)

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 AHHHHHHHHH!

(The CAROLERS run for their lives. JERRY chases them off. LANGDON is amazed.)

LANGDON

What a nut.

(Crossfade to...)

LISTENING THERAPY DOESN'T WORK

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

FATHER RAMONA

You need to call your parents.

LORETTA

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 little confessional door between them and places 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 don't know.

(She delays.)

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, light 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

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 druggie. 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 grabs the phone.)

ROSY

Let Me Have The Phone! *(Suddenly 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 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 edgewise around here so we have a lot in common.

(Bored with ROSY's long-winded monologue, during the following, JERRY ever so slowly begins to deflate and go 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 war - Two things that will tear the world apart.

(During the following, bored out of his mind, Jerry inch by inch, slides out of his chair on to the floor. ROSY is so into her speech, she doesn't notice.)

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? 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.

(Jerry is now on the floor, where he fakes his own death.)

ROSY

'Cause listening is the key to being a good parent. Someday you'll know this to be true.

(MORE)

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.

(Over in the Confessional, bored out of her mind, LORETTA now begins to go limp and slide onto the floor.)

ROSY

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 can't take it anymore; he falls to his knees and prays that Rosy will 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 sees that JERRY is on the floor playing dead.)

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.)

(During the following, JERRY and ROSY get so into 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. I think he's a pixie.

ROSY

You mean a leprechaun?

JERRY

No, I mean, I think he's homo-erectus.

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? Homo-erectus. 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!

(Pissed She exits 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 grabs 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 and exits.)

(ROSY sees that the speakerphone is still on; she 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 and 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
(This isn't easy)

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, badly, 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. 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 and crosses himself. Then, for even more good luck, he crosses his fingers.)

(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...)

KNUCKLE-DRAGGING STUPID HEADS

*(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. 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.
Exits.)*

(Crossfade to...)

NO ORDINARY BUMP ON THE HEAD

*(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

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.
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

J.F.K.

JERRY

Him and 'A Christmas Story.'

LANGDON

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

JERRY

Because it made hats look oldfangled. 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?

Ten. LANGDON

Hat? JERRY

Ah... LANGDON

You don't know. JERRY

Well, not exactly. LANGDON

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.)

But- LANGDON

You heard me. Sit. JERRY

(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.

What? LANGDON

You got a bump there. JERRY

Yes, I know. LANGDON

Childhood injury? JERRY

No. LANGDON

Auto accident?
 JERRY

No.
 LANGDON

Must've hurt.
 JERRY

Mr. Nutt, I—
 LANGDON

This is no ordinary bump.
 JERRY

My size?
 LANGDON

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

My size?
 LANGDON

Seven.
 JERRY

Good to know.
 LANGDON

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

But—
 LANGDON

End of conversation!
 JERRY

(Outside, the CHRISTMAS CAROLERS enter singing 'Go Tell It On The Mountain' but with 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 is it.

FATHER RAMONA

No, it isn't.

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 seven years ago today, Christmas eve. Loretta was just minding her own business. Then a car ran a stoplight and T-boned her. 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.

(MORE)

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. Seeing her, JERRY quickly hangs up.)

JERRY
(on the phone)

Call you back.

ROSY
Who were you talking to?

JERRY
Nobody.

ROSY
It wasn't our Loretta?

JERRY
No. Sales call.

ROSY
What were they selling?

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

ROSY
Ice Capades?

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 talk to 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

What?

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 seven 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

(Whispering 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. I saw it in this movie once.

ROSY

A John Travolta movie?

JERRY

I don't remember the particulars. 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 this bump. Was feeling his head and I found it.

ROSY

A bump?

JERRY

Yes, an auto accident-sized injury 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 make sure Loretta is okay. To forgive himself for what he did. Don't you see? 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

(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 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 ticket counter and she left.

(ROSY holds up one hand - a broken handcuff dangles 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 then 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

(Pissed)

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! If you hang up you communist, weirdo who supports the National Endowment of the Arts, I will cut you out of the will!*(Beat. It's not Loretta. 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 to tell you that I'm leaving for good 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 when she sees Loretta and goes all 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 the lipstick off - As she does the broken handcuff dangles from her wrist. LORETTA sees it.)

ROSY
(Beat, off the handcuff)

I can explain.

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

LORETTA
 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. *(She kisses her again - big, sloppy)* Muh! Now get off your feet. I'll make soup, oh, and a sandwich. And 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 a communist, who supports the art. 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 on a person wearing the DERANGED EASTER BUNNY outfit from the movie.)

DERANGED EASTER BUNNY

Is this the Christmas Story house?

JERRY

(Screaming)

Ahhhhhhhh!

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

DERANGED EASTER BUNNY

(Running off)

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

(They're gone. LORETTA sinks to her knees totally embarrassed.)

(Blackout.)

END OF ACT ONE

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 exit.)

Surviving A Christmas Story

(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 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. 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 and shows ROSY a small recording device with wires taped to his skin.)

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, 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 Austin, Reed and Greenberg.

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 no 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 would love to stick my tongue to the flagpole.

(JERRY losses 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. The bell over the off stage front door tinkles, and LORETTA enters the empty hat shop.)

LORETTA

Hello?

(LANGDON enters reading a law book.)

LANGDON

Welcome to the Mad Hatter—

LORETTA
(Seeing him)

Oh my!

LANGDON

Loretta!

LORETTA

Langdon!

(Thrilled to see each other, they hug, but then LORETTA pulls away.)

LORETTA

Wait. What are you...?

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 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 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 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.)*

How's your head?

LORETTA

What head?

LANGDON

The bump.

LORETTA

Much much better.

LANGDON

*(In each other's arms, they
 disappear 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 came to the door. I thought it was just a passing fad. By the tenth Christmas, we were averaging twenty per day, and they started quoting lines from the movie. Do you know how many times I've heard, "I Triple-Dog-Dare Ya?" One thousand four hundred and twenty-two times. *(Starting to lose it)* "Fra-GEE-Lay!" I've heard that two thousand four hundred and three times. I tried to sell the house, but no one wants to buy a house 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. When that failed, I poured scalding water on them from the roof. *(Building into a fit)* Yet they still came! That's when it occurred to me that life was absurd, existence a joke, and that the only way to survive in this screwed-up world was to become a professional Grinch!

(Beat.)

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

Oh, 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

(Locking 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. *(Beat)* 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.

(Behind, shocked, LANGDON'S head comes up from behind the display case. ROSY doesn't see him.)

(Behind her back, LORETTA waves LANGDON off. He hides.)

LORETTA

Mama-

ROSY

I've never understood you Lori-honey. Never got why 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.

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?

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

LORETTA

...Me.

(ROSY enters with a hatbox.)

ROSY

Someone there?

LORETTA

No mama. It's nothing.

ROSY

I thought I heard the front door.

LORETTA

Just the wind. I'll lock it.

(She walks off. We hear the tinkle of the front door as she closes it. 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. I met your father when I was the hat-check girl at the Starliner dance club on Rockwell Street. 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

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

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 so many of them.

(Crossfade to...)

WE ALL NEED FORGIVENESS, EVEN JERRY

(Lights up on the living room. JERRY enters talking into his shirt button.)

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 from JERRY.
JERRY closely follows.)*

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. I had had a few.

JERRY

Yes. Alcohol. Nothing good comes from it.

LANGDON

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 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, six months ago, 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, I think adoption is a great idea, 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 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 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... *(He delays)* I've heard a rather nasty rumor.

JERRY

About me?

FATHER RAMONA

Yes. People tell me that you are 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... seven 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 puts a comforting hand on JERRY'S shoulder. Beat.)

JERRY

(Heartbroken)

I've never been able to forgive myself.

But God does.

FATHER RAMONA

(LORETTA enters from outside, can't believe 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— 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 Trail Mix.

(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. God. 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.

You okay with adoption? ROSY
 The more the better. LANGDON
 Do you love him? ROSY
 (To Loretta)
 Mama- LORETTA
 Be honest, do you? ROSY
 Yes, but- LORETTA
 Good enough! Welcome to the family! What timing, we just
 happen to have a Priest on the premises! ROSY
 Mr. Nutt do you give us permission? LANGDON
 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! JERRY
 Father Ramona, let's unlock the church! ROSY
 Wait wait wait! (To Langdon) I'm sorry, Langdon. LORETTA
 Langdon? JERRY
 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
 (LORETTA heads for the door.)
 Lori-Honey. Wait! ROSY
 Mama, no. LORETTA
 Loretta. Please. There's something I need to tell you.
 Something I've held back for a very long time. ROSY

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

...Mama...

ROSY

A wonderful little baby girl.

LORETTA

(Her breath is taken away)

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.

(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. 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?

LORETTA
Kennedy weds Vanderbilt. 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, 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! This isn't going to happen!

(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)

That night, Christmas Eve, Langdon and I wed. The next day, we caught a flight to Massachusetts, where I met his parents. But that's another story. 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. God. *(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 come to her)* Yes. I gladly forgive you. From the bottom of my heart.

(ROSY laughs through her tears.)

ROSY

Bless you, Barbara Hilton, bless you.

(JERRY puts a comforting arm on ROSY.)

(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 a Christmas story.

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

(Doorbell.)

Oh no.
LORETTA

JERRY
(Angered)
Here we go again!

(JERRY answers. There's a 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!

(Christmas bells ring, if possible a light snow falls and the lights fade. All is right with the world.)

The End