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Of Men and Cars

By

JIM GEOGHAN

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JIM GEOGHAN

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(OF MEN AND CARS)

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Of Men and Cars

CHARACTERS

JIM (m): 20 to 30.

DAD (m): 40 to 65.

MOM, ANNA, N.Y. WOMAN, DOROTHY (w): 40 to 65.

FRANKIE TWO FINGERS, SALESMAN, WARREN,
SHRINK, MONTAUK MAN (m): 40 to 65.

GIRL NEXT DOOR, COLLEGE GIRL, L.A. WOMAN,
SALESWOMAN (w): 20 to 30.

DOMINIC, N.Y. MAN, JACK (m): 20 to 30.

RUSSO, POT HEAD (m): 20 to 40.

“Everything in life is somewhere else,
and you get there in a car.”
—E. B. White

Of Men and Cars

ACT I

(The set is four identical chairs arranged to represent a number of different four-door sedans throughout the years. As we begin, we find DAD repairing his Ford with a large pair of pliers. After a few beats, JIM enters and watches DAD for several beats.)

JIM. I've owned the car I currently drive for three years, and it occurred to me the other day I've never looked at the engine. So I opened the hood and damn it, I looked at the engine. I'm glad to report it was there. All six cylinders. Or is it eight? I've got to look that up. Anyway, I know it's a gasoline engine because I have put gasoline into my car. The car's a hybrid which means it also has electric motors *somewhere* powered by batteries *somewhere* and a computer *somewhere* connected to a satellite that makes a map on my dashboard that tells me where I can buy frozen yogurt. Dad's car didn't do any of that. It was a 1939 Ford. Dad liked Fords.

DAD. Dependable. Gets you home.

JIM. As a four-year-old, it was always great fun to watch Dad fix his fifteen-year-old car every time it broke down.

DAD. It didn't break down! It just needs maintenance!

JIM. 'Kay.

DAD. The exhaust pipe.

JIM. What's that?

DAD. It runs from the manifold to the muffler.

JIM. What's a man fold?

DAD (*points*). It's over there.

JIM. What's a mudler?

DAD (*points*). There.

JIM. 'Kay.

DAD. The exhaust pipe needs an L-bracket.

JIM. What's that?

DAD. A bracket shaped like an L.

JIM. What's a L?

DAD. A letter shaped like this.

(DAD shows JIM with a finger and a thumb.)

JIM. 'Kay.

DAD. The old one broke.

JIM. Why?

DAD. Potholes.

JIM. Why?

DAD. The city don't give a crap.

JIM. Why?

DAD. It's part of the oath they take when they're elected.

JIM. 'Kay.

DAD. Bracket broke and I'm replacing it.

JIM. You buy a new one?

DAD. No, they cost a fortune!

JIM. There's the man at the gas station.

DAD. Carmine charges a fortune!

JIM. To Dad, the repair of anything always cost the same amount of money ... a fortune.

(DAD wipes his hands on a rag.)

DAD. Done!

JIM. You fixed it?

DAD. I replaced the bracket with some wire.

JIM. What kind?

DAD. Thick.

JIM. How thick?

DAD. A wire hanger.

JIM. Where'd you get it?

DAD. Your mother's closet. Don't tell her.

JIM. 'Kay.

DAD. Good boy.

(JIM picks up a small piece of metal.)

JIM. Is this what broke?

DAD. Yeah.

JIM. What does it cost?

DAD. No idea but whatever it is, it's too much. Listen to me, Jimmy. To reach into your wallet and take out money to replace a piece of metal when you've got half a ton of metal crap hanging around doing nothin' is insane! It's wasteful! It's more than that, it's a sin! It's a mortal sin in the eyes of the Catholic church to waste money buying a bracket you don't have to. If I went to confession, I'd have to tell the priest, "Forgive me Father, I bought an L-bracket for my thirty-nine Ford!" He'd say ... *(Bad Italian accent.)* "How mucha you pay?" I'd tell him it was sixty cents, and he'd say ... *(Bad Italian accent.)* "Wassa matter! You no have no wire somewheres?"

JIM. Why's he talk like that?

DAD. Because he's Italian! All these priests are Italian! You'll know what I'm talking about when you turn seven and start confessing your sins.

JIM. What are sins?

DAD. Sins are evil acts that make the Devil happy. If we don't confess them before we die, we're sent to Hell forever where you burn in fire and little guys poke you with sharp sticks.

JIM. Dad had a sunny streak a mile wide.

DAD. Wasting money is sinful. In the Depression you had to get by with whatever you had. People had nothing. Nothing! Everyone had one pair of shoes, one pair of socks, an undershirt if they were lucky, and no one ever rode on a bus or went to the movies.

JIM. Why not?

DAD. It cost a fortune! Breakfast was some oatmeal slop, dinner was a big potato and that was it! You bought nothing because there was no jobs, no money, nothing. If something broke, you fixed it. If you needed parts you either made them or found them. And it was all because we had a Depression!

JIM. Do we still have it?

DAD. No.

JIM. If we don't have it ...

DAD. Yeah?

JIM. Why don't you buy stuff?

DAD. Good God! It's like talking to a brick wall! I give up!
(*As he exits, he shouts to MOM.*) Do something with your son! Tell him money doesn't grow on trees!

(*MOM and DAD argue offstage.*)

MOM (*offstage*). Leave him alone for Christ sake, he's only four! He doesn't know about money! He can't even count to ten! He doesn't understand half the crap you say! You get all worked up and pick on the kid! Get a beer and relax before you drive me crazy!

DAD (*offstage*). I'm just trying to learn him we're not made out of money! He has no idea that things cost money and someone's gotta earn it before you spend it! To him money is just there! Like we're millionaires! Next time the car has trouble he'll want me to buy a new one!

JIM. Thinking of times like that makes me feel terrific. In the Bronx, people who yell at you are people who love you. Watch ... *(Calls to offstage.)* Dad! Why did you yell at me?
DAD *(offstage)*. Because you're worth it, goddamn it!

(JIM smiles.)

JIM. The Bronx was like a romantic comedy full of nutty people falling in love and yelling. A borough of blue-collar dreams. For me, dreams began and ended in a place called City Island, a small island off the coast of the Bronx. The most remarkable thing about City Island is that in four hundred years it has avoided the deadly trap of becoming trendy.

(FRANKIE TWO FINGERS enters. He stands in place and surveys activity offstage.)

JIM *(cont'd)*. There's a "fraternity of men" that live on City Island, and they like things the way they are. My dad's Army friend Frankie Two Fingers was one of them. Frankie and his friends wanted City Island to stay just the way it was.

FRANKIE *(speaks to an unseen neighbor)*. Hey! This house you're buildin'! Is it gonna look trendy? 'Cause me and my friends, none of us like trendy. If this house looks trendy, there's gonna be problems. And is that a second story you're buildin'? No, I don't think so. It'll block my view. You block my view, there's gonna be problems. You want a second story, make a *basement*. Build *down*, not *up*. You pick a color yet? I don't wanna look at no stupid color, you understand? Show it to me before you put it on.

(FRANKIE begins to exit, then stops and turns back around.)

FRANKIE (*cont'd*). One other thing, this section of curb, that's my parking space, even when I'm not here. I come home and someone's in my space, there's gonna be problems.

(*FRANKIE exits.*)

JIM. Today, City Island looks pretty much the way it always has. Cute homes, ancient trees, narrow streets, all of them leading to the water ... water that turns inky black at night offering a floor for the lights of Manhattan to dance on. I knew my girlfriend would like it there. That's where I was headed the first time I drove a car. I was four years old. Yeah, I stole my father's car when I was four. But I wanted to take my girlfriend somewhere romantic. What can I tell you? I was a player.

(*THE GIRL NEXT DOOR enters. She carries a coloring book.*)

JIM (*cont'd*). That's The Girl Next Door. She had a coloring book and a box of sixty-four crayons. Yeah, sixty-four. She was beautiful *and* she came from money. You don't let a woman like that get away.

(*JIM approaches THE GIRL NEXT DOOR.*)

JIM (*cont'd*). Hi.

GIRL. Hi.

JIM. I'm Jim.

GIRL. I'm The Girl Next Door.

JIM. Told you. What are you coloring?

GIRL. Pictures.

JIM. What kinda pictures?

GIRL. Kittens.

JIM. I love kittens.

GIRL. Me too.

JIM. I had one.

GIRL. What happened?

JIM. It ran away.

GIRL. So did mine.

JIM. You'll notice we're both four, standing on the sidewalk, not one adult in sight. If it were present day, we'd both be on the six o'clock news by now. *(Then.)* You want to color in my dad's car?

GIRL. 'Kay.

(JIM and THE GIRL NEXT DOOR sit in the back seat.)

GIRL *(cont'd)*. It's nice in here.

JIM. Yeah. Sometimes I hide in the back seat and scare my father when he gets in.

GIRL. How?

JIM. Like this. *(Loudly.)* YAAAAH!!!

GIRL. 'Kay.

JIM. He doesn't like surprises.

GIRL. Why not?

JIM. He was in the war.

GIRL. What's the war?

JIM. I don't know. But it makes people nervous.

GIRL. 'Kay.

JIM. You color good.

GIRL. Thank you.

JIM. How do you stay inside the lines?

GIRL. When I think I'm going outside the line ...

JIM. Yeah?

GIRL. I stop.

JIM. Why's the kitten purple?

GIRL. I like purple kittens.

JIM. So do I. *(Then.)* Even though I was four, I knew it wasn't worth disagreeing with women over trivial things. *(Beat.)* Or important things.

GIRL. I like this car.

JIM. My dad lets me drive it whenever I want.

GIRL. Really?

JIM. Yeah. Wanna go somewhere?

GIRL. 'Kay.

(JIM and THE GIRL NEXT DOOR get out of the back seat and into the front seat.)

JIM. Where you want to go?

GIRL. I don't know.

JIM. How about City Island?

GIRL. What's that?

JIM. It's a nice place.

GIRL. 'Kay.

(JIM fiddles with the dashboard.)

GIRL *(cont'd)*. What are you doing?

JIM. Finding the thing that makes it go.

GIRL. 'Kay.

(SFX: Loud car horn.)

JIM. That's the horn.

GIRL. Yeah.

JIM. Loud.

GIRL. Yeah.

JIM. Funny.

GIRL. Yeah.

(JIM tries again.)

MUSIC: "Hound Dog" by Elvis Presley, or something similar.)

JIM. That's the radio.

GIRL. Yeah.

JIM. That's Elvis Presley.

GIRL. Yeah.

JIM. My dad hates him.

GIRL. Mine, too.

(The music fades.)

JIM. It turns out Dad had taken out the key but didn't turn the car off. If the car was in gear, and it was, it would go forward powered by the starter. *(Pushing buttons.)* This one doesn't work ... this one doesn't do anything. I wonder what this one does?

(JIM pushes a button.)

SFX: gear grinding and a mild car crash.

The sounds continue as JIM and THE GIRL NEXT DOOR sway wildly and scream.)

JIM & GIRL. Noooo! Ahhhh! Stop!

(THE GIRL NEXT DOOR jumps out of the car and exits crying.)

GIRL. Mommy! Mommy!

JIM. We traveled about forty feet and stopped when we hit Mister Russo's fig tree. The car was fine but Mister Russo had just planted the fig tree, and he was not pleased.

(RUSSO enters.)

RUSSO. My fig tree! Look what you did! My God! I just planted this! Cost me twelve dollars! Look what you did! It's dead! You killed it!

JIM. Mind you I'm semiconscious and bleeding.

RUSSO. Oh, my God! I don't believe this! Look at the dent! Look how the bark is scraped off! *Un bambino colpito così giovane!* (New thought.) Burlap! I need burlap! (Screams offstage.) Anna! Where's that roll of burlap!

ANNA (offstage). I dunno!

RUSSO (as he exits). Dumb bitch!

JIM. For the next three years, Mister Russo wrapped burlap around the wound on his tree and changed it every other month. At night you could hear him screaming at his wife and kids.

RUSSO (offstage). You're so frikkin' stupid it's pathetic! Blah blah blah! Shut your mouth! I'm so tired of listenin' to your crap!!

ANNA (offstage). Drop dead! I'm stupid because I married you! Jerk! Go to hell, Carmine! Blow it out your ass! Eat crap and live!

JIM (cont'd). Mister Russo was hated by everyone who knew him including his own family. When the neighborhood found out I damaged his stupid fig tree I became a minor celebrity.

(DOMINIC enters.)

JIM (cont'd). Even my friend Dominic was impressed.

DOMINIC. You go driving?

JIM. Yeah.

DOMINIC. In the car?

JIM. Yeah.

DOMINIC. Your daddy's car?

JIM. Yeah.

DOMINIC. You hit this tree?

JIM. Yeah.

DOMINIC. I hate this tree.

JIM. Yeah.

DOMINIC. My father hates it, too.

JIM. Everyone does.

DOMINIC. You drive alone?

JIM. No.

DOMINIC. With someone?

JIM. Yeah.

DOMINIC. Who?

JIM. The Girl Next Door.

DOMINIC. The one over there?

JIM. No, the one next door.

DOMINIC. Oh.

JIM. Yeah.

DOMINIC. She's pretty.

JIM. Yeah.

DOMINIC. I like her.

JIM. We listened to music.

DOMINIC. What kind?

JIM. Elvis.

DOMINIC. My father hates Elvis.

JIM. Mine too.

DOMINIC. Yeah.

JIM. I'm going to marry her.

DOMINIC. Who?

JIM. The Girl Next Door.

DOMINIC. OK.