**Test Drive**

**By Dave Carley**

**Synopsis**

The life and times of a car man are chronicled in *Test Drive*, which premiered in 2004 at Ontario’s famous Blyth Festival. Earl Hughes loves his wife, children and cars – and not always in that order. He also considers his life to be resoundingly ordinary, except that every ten years or so he sets out on a test drive that rocks his world. Earl’s first trip begins in 1954 – Hurricane Hazel is brewing but he thinks he’s still got time to sell a Nash Metropolitan to a would-be starlet. After that fiasco, Earl drives through the Cold War, discovers peace, love and brownies at Woodstock, and eventually comes to a screeching stop in 2004 – when he must fight his final battle, to keep his driver’s licence.

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**Test Drive**

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**Cast:**

The play requires three actors, and the most logical permutations for them are:

Actor One: Earl Hughes

Actor Two: Dorothy, Daphne, Speedy, Velma the Javelin, Tammy, Yuppie Woman, and Voice Mail From Hell

Actor Three: Harry Curran, Irish Cops 1 and 2, Dan, Franklin, Woodstock Announcer, and Cody.

**Acknowledgements:**

*Test Drive* was first produced and broadcast as a radio series on CBC’s Monday Night Playhouse, Sunday Showcase and Monday Playbill. Linda Grearson was the producer and Gordon Pinsent played Earl. *Test Drive* won the Bronze Medal at the New York International Festival (Best Radio Drama).

*Test Drive* (the stage play) has been developed with the assistance of Theatre Aquarius (Max Reimer, Artistic Director) and the Blyth Festival (Eric Coates, Artistic Director.) *Test Drive* premiered at the Blyth Festival in August, 2004.

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**Act One**

*EARL enters as an old man. He limps* *across a wide suburban road to a bus stop bench. There might be a car ad on the bench. Music establishes it is modern times.*

**EARL:** Isn’t this something. Isn’t this the cotton-picking limit. Earl Hughes taking public transit. Red light, red hand. Stop. Wait. OK. Little white fellow, little white guy walking, shake a leg Earl. There’s the bus stop. Take a bus you old fool cuz we’ve decided to wreck your life. The turncoats. Boy they make these roads wide, hang on there, give an old fool some time, will you. Take my car away. I sell cars! How can I sell cars if I can’t drive ‘em!

OK. OK. Gotta take a load off. Wow. It’s – hot out here. What’s that. Toyota. Damn. So this is the future. Sitting on a Toyota ad. So where is the bus anyway?

**DOROTHY:** *(As magical appearance as possible. Possibly she’s already on the bench, reading paper. Lowers paper. Or puff of smoke.)* Hello Earl.

**EARL:** Dorothy?

**DOROTHY:** Yes, it’s me.

**EARL:** Why’re you here, Dodo?

**DOROTHY:** Why do you think?

**EARL:** You’re taking a bus too?

**DOROTHY:** No Earl.

**EARL:** Cuz you always said the two dirtiest words in the language were ‘public transit’.

**DOROTHY:** There’s no bus taking us where we’re going Earl.

**EARL:** But a bus would be appropriate.

**DOROTHY:** How?

**EARL:** Because it’s so damn ordinary.

**DOROTHY:** Oh, you’re on that again.

(DOROTHY runs her hand over EARL’s eyes, closing them. EARL takes her hand and reverses the motion. He has a few more things to say…)

**EARL:** It’s the truth. I’m as ordinary as wallpaper.

**DOROTHY:** Yes dear. Earl. It’s time.

**EARL:** And now I’m going out, just like your old man, in public.

*(DOROTHY runs her hand down again; again EARL raises it.)*

Except I’m going on a bus. The kids took my license away, did you know that?

**DOROTHY:** Yes. *(Starts for a third time to close his eyes.)* Earl**.**

**EARL:** *(Stops her the third and final time.)* Dodo. Just in case you wondered, I never stopped loving you.

**DOROTHY:** *(That stops DOROTHY for a moment.)* You weren’t ever tempted to - ?

**EARL:** To what.

**DOROTHY:** Test drive another model?

**EARL:** Never.

**DOROTHY:** Never.

**EARL:** Never.

**DOROTHY:** Earl Hughes! You are such a bad liar!

*(Light and music effects change. We go back in time to 1954.)*

**EARL:** *(Staring industriously at the ceiling because he doesn’t dare gawk at his lovely customer.)* I’m caught on the horns of a dilemma. I want to sell a 1954 Nash Metropolitan and I’ve got a motivated customer but I don’t dare look at her. You don’t sell cars by gawking at your customers - but oh lord she’s so very gawkable. And I am so very, very married.

**DAPHNE:** Will it get me to California?

**EARL:** And my wife Dodo is so very, very vigilant.

**DAPHNE:** It seems awfully small.

**EARL:** We’ve done studies that show the average car load is exactly 1.8 persons.

**DAPHNE:** That’s a fascinating statistic.

**EARL:** Yes ma’am.

**DAPHNE:** Please – Daphne.

**EARL:** That’s an unusual name,

**DAPHNE:** I’m named after the ancient Greeknymph.

**EARL:** Of course.

**DAPHNE:** Do you have a kink?

**EARL:** What? No. Yes.

**DAPHNE:** So many men I meet develop bad necks. Now about the Nash. I do like it - but will it get me to California?

**EARL:** Sure…

**DAPHNE:** You see, I’m bored of Toronto. I’m especially bored of my job. I’m going to Hollywood to get discovered. Earl?

**EARL:** Yes Daphne.

**DAPHNE:** May I call you Jason?

**EARL:** You can call me anything you want.

**DAPHNE:** You know who I mean by ‘Jason’, don’t you – that ancient Greek fella?

**EARL:** *(He doesn’t.)* Yeah, sure.

**DAPHNE:** Jason had a ship named the Argo and I’m gonna buy a car named

Nash and both of us are setting out on epic voyages. I want some pep in my life, Jason, but it has to be inexpensive pep.

**EARL:** The Metropolitan lists for under fifteen hundred dollars and that’s including the front bench seat upholstered in leather, nylon and Bedford cord, the dash-mounted gearshift and

**DAPHNE:** - You see, I don’t earn a lot at the library. In fact, Jason, you might say I’m a galley slave. If I really was on Jason’s Argo, I’d be below decks with the Argonauts, rowing up a storm with all the sweaty fellas. Me, pulling on the oars, singing some salty rowing song – can you picture that?

**EARL:** Vividly.

*(There’s a door slam offstage.)*

**DOROTHY:** “EARL! We need you! Now. Daddy’s about to cut the ribbon and he wants you up on stage. *(Sees DAPHNE.)* Sorry to interrupt, Miss. But he’s required outside.”

**DAPHNE:** Why, I don’t know if I can give him up.

**EARL:** Miss - Daphne is interested in the Metropolitan.

**DAPHNE:** Jason is very eloquent.

**EARL:** I’ve been telling her all about its finer features.

**DOROTHY:** *(Sudden shift to sunny.)* Of course. The Metropolitan’s a lovely car. Everyone’s fascinated with it. *(To EARL.)* Who the hell’s Jason?

**EARL:** Me?

**DOROTHY:** Earl, let’s go!

**EARL:** *(Sotto; to DOROTHY.)* I’m this close to a sale!

**DOROTHY:** *(Turns back to DAPHNE, instantly pleasant.)* Daphne, did you know that we - American Motors, that is – just presented a black Metropolitan convertible with gold fittings to Princess Margaret? She loves it. But if I were you, I’d get the coupe, not the convertible – think of your hair. Now, you really must excuse us for a few minutes. My father’s about to make a big announcement outside - Earl! *(Leading him out.)* What the hell’s wrong with your neck?

**EARL:** Never mind. How’s your Dad feeling?

**DOROTHY:** OK, I think.

**HARRY:** *(Into squawking mike; maybe a Scottish accent.)* Before I cut this here ribbon I want to say how prrroud I am to be the first American Motors dealer in Toronto. After exclusively selling Nashes for twenty years, the Nash-Kelvinator Corporation has merged with the finnnne folks at Hudson Motors and our future looks brrrrright – verrrrry bright indeed. And on a personal note, let me say how pulllllleased I am to have my son in law working alongside me – Earl? EARL! Where are you? There he is – that’s Earl over there. Give ‘em a wayve, Earl.

*(EARL waves.)*

Nice suit Earlie. If you ever get tired of selling cars you can lie on your keester and get work as a checkerboard. OK, time to cut the ribbon.

*(HARRY begins to collapse behind EARL.)*

**EARL:** *(To self, then to Audience.)*It all happened so fast. Harry Curran’s heart had been giving him trouble all summer – he was popping nitroglycerin tablets like they were lifesavers.

**HARRY:** *(Still on mike.)* Earl. Earl.

**EARL:** Sir – don’t talk.

**HARRY:** Whaddya mean, ‘don’t talk’. Earl. Listen up. Can you hear me?

**EARL:** Uh yes sir.

**HARRY:** It’s all yours.

**EARL:** What’s all mine?

**HARRY:** The whole shooting match.

**EARL:** Pardon sir?

**HARRY:** What are you, deaf or thick or both? Curran AMC. It’s all yours. And Earl?

**EARL:** Yes sir?

**HARRY:** Don’t scccrrrrew it up.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* No one had expected his great big heart to quit the very same day we were launching the new dealership.

*(HARRY dies. DOROTHY sits down heavily. EARL tries to comfort her.)*

I’m sorry Dodo. He was such a good man, I’m so sorry.

**DOROTHY:** *(Pushes EARL back.)* Daddy spent his whole life selling things.

**EARL:** Yes he did.

**DOROTHY:** Well, the dealership is the first thing he’s ever *given* away. And he got it wrong. He got it all wrong.

*(EARL is trying to appease her.)*

I’m the one with the cars in her blood!

**EARL:** They’re in my blood too.

**DOROTHY:** I’m his daughter! He should’ve given the dealership to me. Who the hell are you when you’re at home.

**EARL:** I thought I was your husband.

**DOROTHY:** Apparently you’re more than that. Apparently you’re The Heir. The Anointed One. The Golden Boy. *(Exiting.)*

*(DOROTHY exits. EARL turns to Audience. The sound of rain will start up, under the following.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)*Dorothy stayed mad for the next couple of days while we made arrangements – she didn’t really start to grieve for her father until the funeral. It began to drizzle during the service and drenched our cortege as we drove from the church clear across the city to Mount Pleasant Cemetery. All the cars in the procession were Nashes, oh, except for the Cadillac hearse. Harry was in no shape to object. No sooner did we get Harry in the ground than the skies really opened.

*(To DOROTHY.)* I’m sorry about what he did; it wasn’t fair.

**DOROTHY:** It’s really coming down.

**EARL:** Dodo, please

**DOROTHY: -** At least we’re not in the Caribbean.

**EARL:** Dodo -

**DOROTHY: -** I heard on the news they’re having hurricanes there.

**EARL:** - I was surprised as you that he gave it to me –

**DOROTHY:** They say the rivers here are at dangerous levels from the rain last week… The Don River is as high as it gets in spring… OK, here’s the dealership.

**EARL:** Where are you going?

**DOROTHY:** Home. Speedy and Franklin need their dinner. Don’t you have cars to sell? Go. Sell. Shoo. It’s all yours Earl. Don’t screwwww it up.

*(DOROTHY exits.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)*ButI wasn’t selling anything that day – I kept Curran AMC shut for three days, out of respect, then re-opened mid-week. Things were really slow. Ford and Chev were in the middle of a price war and, besides, all the rain was keeping folks off the car lots. So there I was, king of a very empty castle, sitting amid my Nashes and Ramblers and Metropolitans, watching the rain pour down outside… Then, early Friday evening, October 18, 1954 – that date is forever fixed in my memory – my little nymph returned…

*(DAPHNE swings back in.)*

**DAPHNE:** Jason – can’t you do anything about all that darn rain?

**EARL:** I should be selling arks.

**DAPHNE:** That’s funny. OK, here’s a little known fact. Noah invented liquor.

**EARL:** Really.

**DAPHNE:** Uh huh. After the flood. Seems strange he’d want anything more to do with liquids.

**EARL:** *(Looking everywhere but at DAPHNE again.)* You’re very well-read.

**DAPHNE:** I’m a librarian; it’s an occupational hazard. Oh. Correction. I *was* a librarian. I finally did it! I quit! I planned on sticking it out through the winter but I just couldn’t bear another six months of shelving books – and then this week of rain… Jason: I’m going to California. It’s sunny there. I’ll be dry. Dry and discovered. I’ll never have to face another rain cloud. Or book. Do you still have my car?

**EARL:** The Met? Sure – but

**DAPHNE:** - Let’s take it out for a test drive. Not the convertible though. That loud and bossy woman last week was right. Convertibles are nice, especially in California, but I have to think of my appearances. I won't be discovered if my hair’s been blown half off.

**EARL:** Daphne, you’d be discovered even if you were bald.

**DAPHNE:** Maybe I am bald. How would you know? You never look at me. Jason? Look at me.

*(EARL can deliver this in the direction of DAPHNE, mesmerized. She is busy doing some sexy feminine thing – probably lipstick.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)*I looked at her. It was like the time last year when I found myself, Earl Hughes, seller of Nashes, falling in love with a 1953 Studebaker. You know the car I mean. Last season’s Studebaker with its gentle, road-hugging lines, so understated and classy it doesn’t need dressing up with chrome or fins, or lipstick - No No No. It’s wrong. It’s wrong. I’m a Dorothy man. I’m a rambling man… *Rambler* Man.

**DAPHNE: -** Let’s put it to the test, Jason.

**EARL:** What?

**DAPHNE:** Let’s take her for a ride.

**EARL:** The car?It’s wet out!

**DAPHNE:** Are you saying this Met won’t work in the rain?

**EARL:** Of course it will – it’s the epitome of reliability. They’re made in England. But look at the parking lot – it’s a lake!

**DAPHNE:** I want to make a deal today, so I can leave for California first thing Monday. Jason would never have been daunted by a bit of water.

**EARL:** I’ll – I’ll just make a phone call, then lock up. *(Moves off. To Audience.)* Three things. One: I’m a fairly happily married man but I couldn’t help thinking that this customer was absolutely one hundred per cent worth discovering. Like she was Daphne America and I was Earl Columbus. Two: *(Holds* *up ring finger, takes ring off, slips it in his pocket.)* It came off so easily. Like the Devil himself was soaping my ring finger. Three? I could have told Daphne the call I had to make was to my wife. But of course I didn’t.

**DOROTHY:** You’re going for a test drive now? Are you nuts?

**EARL:** The customer insists.

**DOROTHY:** Well he’s an idiot. There’s a Storm Advisory. The rain’s getting worse. I just heard it on the radio. Let me talk to him – I’ll get him to come back tomorrow. Put him on.

**EARL:** Uh, it’s a woman.

**DOROTHY:** Oh.

**EARL:** She’s very keen on the Metropolitan.

**DOROTHY:** I thought it was a man. Didn’t you just say it was a man?

**EARL:** I didn’t say she was either. She’s a librarian.

**DOROTHY:** Oh. A librarian. That’s OK then. Wait. How old?

**EARL:** Uh – she says she’s spent her entire life shelving books.

**DOROTHY:** Well you should be careful. You’re still a reasonably handsome man. I sometimes don’t think you know the moderately sensual effect you have on women.

**EARL:** Really?

**DOROTHY:** But a librarian will be immune. Take her for that test drive.

*(Dial tone. EARL is in a tight light. Rain gets louder. DAPHNE and EARL are sitting in the car.)*

**DAPHNE:** Oh, it’s very intimate in here, isn’t it. Why, this seat is barely wide enough for one point eight humans, let alone two. Still, I’m a single girl *(Checks* *out EARL’s denuded ring finger.)* and it’s kinda nice to have a big strappin fella squished up beside me. Jason, I want to drive by the library. Toot toot at my ex-colleagues. They’ll be so jealous.

**EARL:** They won’t be outside in this mess.

**DAPHNE:** Then I’ll run inside and get them. There’s no value in making an exit for California if you don’t have an audience.

**EARL:** You really want to drive over there? We’d have to go down into the valley

**DAPHNE:** We’re going all the way, Jason.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* Curran AMC is on the east side of the Don Valley. My home, my wife, my two small children are also on the east side.

*(To* *DAPHNE.)* I’m a bit worried about traction – in this rain – go slow down the hill –

*(To Audience.)* The Leaside Library is on the west side of the Don Valley. And guess what. There’s a river running down the middle of that valley and it’s called – The Don. And it was cresting

*(To DAPHNE.)* There’s the bridge – Daphne, the water’s too high – look – it’s over the road, turn back!

*(Water planing sounds.)*

**DAPHNE:** Relax!

**EARL:** We’ll never make it across – the water’s over the wheels!

**DAPHNE:** - Wheeee!

**EARL:** We’re doomed!

**DAPHNE:** - Wahoo!

*(Planing sound stops.)*

**EARL:** We made it! We made it across! I knew we’d make it!

**DAPHNE:** Let’s do it again!

**EARL:** NO! I mean, no – let’s go up the west hill – you’ll want to test the

Met’s pickup…

*(To Audience.)* Daphne’s co-workers had long since abandoned the library, so we started back east, this time heading for the viaduct.

*(To DAPHNE.)* Whoa – police. They want us to pull over *(Rolling down*

*window)*

*(COP #1 sticks his head in. DAPHNE may begin applying lipstick again.)*

**COP #1:** *(Irish brogue, of course.)* Sir, ma’am.

**DAPHNE:** Yes officer?

**COP #1:** Wow. *(COP #1 suddenly looks* *skyward.)* Sorry my neck. Where was I. Ah yes. It’s a hurricane! The viaduct’s closed! It’s too dangerous to cross – this wee little putt putt you’re squished into would get blown right off the bridge! You’ll have to turn back! The viaduct will be off limits to cars all night, and they’ve just closed the bridge down in the valley too.

*(COP #1 pulls his head back out and goes off. Pause.)*

**DAPHNE:** Looks like we’ll have to spend the night at my house. Jason.

*(Perhaps a thunder/lightning effect.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* I did try calling Dorothy. When Daphne was in the bathroom changing out of her wet things. I picked up the phone but the line was dead and then Daphne came back out in a silk kimono and

*(To DAPHNE.)* Where’d you find that – Hedy Lamaar’s closet?

**DAPHNE:** Catch.

*(DAPHNE tosses EARL a pink bathrobe.)*

You go dry off. I happen to know that a dry man is a happy man. And while you’re doing that, I’ll make us some drinks. ‘Cause I also like to make my dry men – a little damp.

**EARL:** *(Moving off; to Audience.)* Ohhhhhhh. *(Holds up robe, inhales it. Takes off jacket and starts putting on* *robe.)* Yeah, it’s not my colour but really, what is? After a martini or two, everything – colours, lights, morals – begins to blur.

**BAD EARL:** *(EARL’s voice amped, treated.)* You look very nice in pink.

**EARL:** Go away. I already feel guilty.

**BAD EARL:** Ah but what use is guilt without fun, Earl? As long as you realize Dorothy will find out.

**EARL:** *(Earl decides not to mess around.*) Darn.

**BAD EARL:** And kill you.

**EARL:** True true**.**

**BAD EARL:** But you’ll die a happy man.

**EARL:** *(Hesitating.)* But when I got married, I took a vow! I really should stay on the straight and narrow. Shouldn’t I?

**BAD EARL:** Sure, Earl.

**EARL:** *(Not entirely the answer he wants.)* Sure?

**BAD EARL:** Yield not to temptation.

**EARL:** Right right.

**BAD EARL:** And die of boredom.

**EARL:** *(Resolves to sin.)* Exactly.

*(To DAPHNE.)* Hiya. *(Does a little model of the bathrobe.)*

**DAPHNE:** Why Jason - aren’t you a sight for sore eyes. Give me your jacket and I’ll hang it up.

*(EARL hands DAPHNE his jacket and she shakes it.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* The sound you are about to hear is that of an average- sized wedding ring hitting the floor.

*(Giant crashing and rolling sound. EARL covers it with his foot.)*

**DAPHNE:** What’s that under your foot?

**EARL:** *(Removes foot and looks.)* Oh my gosh – a ring!

**DAPHNE:** Now where did that come from?

**EARL:** My pocket?

**DAPHNE:** And where was it before that?

**EARL:***(Beat.)* My finger?

**DAPHNE:** And why was there a wedding ring on your finger?

**EARL:** *(Sigh.)* That bossy woman you met last week – she’s sort of my wife. And you know what else – I’ve got two kids, Speedy and Franklin. Aw Daphne, I’m sorry. This was all a big mistake - I’ll – swim home now.

**DAPHNE:** Relax, Earl. I was already suspicious. The way you snuck off to make that phone call. I’ve had my share of men sneaking off. That’s another reason I’m heading to California. You can’t trust Toronto men.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* Hurricane Hazel swept through Toronto and, by the end of

that night, eight inches of rain had fallen and dozens had died. Houses had

been swept away, lives were ruined…and wives were waiting at car

dealerships.

**DOROTHY:** Earl! Thank God, you’re safe. We called the police and - haven’t we met?

**DAPHNE:** I’m Daphne.

**EARL:** The Librarian.

**DOROTHY:** She doesn’t look like a bloody librarian.

**DAPHNE:** That’s because I’m not anymore. I’m off to be discovered.

**EARL:** Daphne’s driving out to California on Monday. All the wayyyyy to California. Other side of the continent. She’s going wayyyy far awayyyy. Far far far/

**DOROTHY:** Earl.

**EARL:** Yes dear.

**DOROTHY:** Shut up*. (Taking deep breaths.) (Breath One)* I’m going to kill you. *(Breath Two:)* No, I’m going to kill her. *(Breath Three, big cunning smile).* No. I’ve got a better idea. So, Daphne the Librarian - how’d you enjoy your test drive?

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* And Dorothy made the sale! Daphne wrote a cheque and headed off into the light rain, off our lot and out of my life. At least, for now. And that left me and Dorothy – both of us coming up with the one idea each that would change our little corner of the universe.

**DOROTHY:** Earl. I’m going to start working at the dealership on Monday. I’ll do all the selling to women from now on. I’ll take them out for the test drives. I can’t have you out all night with librarians every time there’s a bloody hurricane.

**EARL:** Yes dear.

**DOROTHY:** And don’t even think about arguing with me.

**EARL:** No dear. And there’s something else we should do, starting right now.

**DOROTHY:** What.

**EARL:** Change the name of the dealership. I think we should call it ‘Dorothy’ Curran AMC.

*(Pause.)*

**DOROTHY:** OK.

**EARL:** And don’t even think about arguing with me.

**DOROTHY:** I would never argue with you.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* Within a week, Dorothy was AMC’s best salesman. Women look for different things in cars and Dodo knew exactly what those things were. And I was never again tempted to yield, because lurking behind every Rambler was a vigilant wife. Aw, that’s not it. I never again drove through the flooded valley of temptation because I had a reminder right there that I, an ordinary man, already had a great woman in my life. And what was better – she was selling four Nash Metropolitans a week!

*(Some transition music. To 1962. Perhaps period music or a sound collage. EARL can don a period jacket – his physique is a bit bulkier now.)*

Dorothy Curran AMC prospered through the ‘50’s, mostly because of Dodo’s business smarts. Speedy and Franklin grew like weeds and we built a split level in Don Mills… Life should have been good but instead we were anxious.

**DOROTHY:** Where the heck is everyone?

**EARL:** Our Rambler Classics should be generating showroom traffic – it just won the 1962 Motor Trend Car of the Year.

**DOROTHY:** I know - and October is usually our best month!

**EARL:** If they think the Russians are going to blow them to smithereens by Monday, they aren’t going to be in the mood for a new Rambler.

**DOROTHY:** No one should meet their Maker with a rust bucket in the garage.

**EARL:** You have to hand it to Speedy. She’s looking pretty smart right about now.

**DOROTHY:** Speedy’s a nutcase. How on earth did I get a daughter like that?

**EARL:** Why don’t you come to the office and I’ll remind you.

**DOROTHY:** Earl!

**EARL:** We’re all alone!

**DOROTHY:** I can’t have sex in front of my cars!

**EARL:** How about in one?

**DOROTHY:** Tonight. We’ll wait till everyone’s asleep and then we’ll sneak downstairs to Speedy’s bunker.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)*Speedy’s real name is Eleanor, after Eleanor Roosevelt, but she gotcalled Speedy uhh two ways. The official story – the only one you’re getting – is that she couldn’t wait to be delivered at the hospital. She made her entrance in the back seat of my father-in-law’s Nash, as we dashed to East York General, back in winter, 1946.

**DOROTHY:** Speedy should be dating boys.

**EARL:** Dating? You’d kill her. You’d kill them.

**DOROTHY:** Nonsense. She’s 17 and she hasn’t been out on a single date. Speedy would be a lot happier if she had a boyfriend making her miserable. But oh no, she’s always reading that emergency literature stuff. Well, you don’t get dates that way. Girls get dates by watching boys do things.

**EARL:** You couldn’t have spent thirty seconds watching someone else do things.

**DOROTHY:** It all depends on the boy. If I’d sat back and watched you I’d have been bored senseless.

**EARL:** True.

**DOROTHY:** Besides, I didn’t exactly have to catch you. As I recall, you pursued me relentlessly until I just gave up in exhaustion. *(Beat.)* Correct?

**EARL:** Yes, I chased you, feverishly. You were the most beautiful girl at Riverdale High.

*(DOROTHY swats EARL.)*

**DOROTHY:** You’re such a bad liar. I had the best car. In fact, I was the only girl with a car.

**EARL:** And it was a great one too. A ‘39 Nash. Ambassador eight, convertible coupe. Fender skirts, cigarette lighter, bed conversion. I’ll never forget the first time I saw that car. It was coming down the Danforth like it owned the road, children and dogs scattering in front of it. *(Notices DOROTHY is looking irritated.)* What?

**DOROTHY:** Earl – just an idle question here - did you happen to notice anything about the person driving it?

**EARL:** Yeah. You were driving it. Weren’t you? Oh - was it your Dad?

**DOROTHY:** I want you to go home and talk some sense into Speedy.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)*Speedy has always been a thoughtful sensible girl, at least until recently. I found her down in her bomb shelter, where else. *(To Speedy)* Wallpaper?

**SPEEDY:** I got a deal at the hardware.

**EARL:** Very nice pumpkin. I like floral. It makes the shelter look homey.

**SPEEDY:** I told them they were getting vaporized on Monday so they might as well give me the wallpaper at half price. They couldn’t dispute the logic. And hey – Franklin got the air exhaust fan working – give it a switch.

*(EARL does and there’s a loud roar. They mouth a few words and then EARL turns it off.)*

**EARL:** I’ll bring a muffler home tonight, maybe we can attach it. Where does all the used air go?

**SPEEDY:** The stale air goes out a vent at the bottom of our garden.

**EARL:** And where do we get fresh air from once the bombs drop?

**SPEEDY:** I’ve got twenty-four hours to solve that.

**EARL:** Speedy pumpkin. I think we should start calling you Eleanor. I know you like Speedy and it’s cute for a kid, but you’re seventeen now. A nice boy might find it strange.

**SPEEDY:** You’ve been talking to Mom.

**EARL:** Noooo.

**SPEEDY:** Daddy, you’re such a bad liar.

**EARL:** She thinks you should go watch some nice boys play basketball.

**SPEEDY:** Why would I spend my last hours on the planet watching a bunch of dumb guys playing stupid basketball? What else does Mom say I’m doing wrong?

**EARL:** She thinks you should stop riding your bike to school. Boys don’t like girls on bikes.

**SPEEDY:** Fine. I’ll take the bus.

**EARL:** It sends out a very bad message if the daughter of a car dealer is seen on public transit. We could get you a car.

**SPEEDY:** I prefer my bike.

**EARL:** Now you’re just being perverse. Honey. Isn’t the semi-formal coming up? I hear they’re holding it at Casa Loma this year. Wouldn’t you like to – Speedy – stop wallpapering and look at me. Wouldn’t you like to go?

**SPEEDY:** No one’s going to ask me, Daddy. Not now. I’m the school freak.

**EARL:** Honey, don’t say that.

**SPEEDY:** But I am, daddy. After my presentation on emergency readiness last week.

*(Change of lighting. SPEEDY addresses class.)*

My fellow classmates. In one short second you could be a pile of ash. The Russians have hundreds of atom bombs aimed at New York City and what happens if one of them falls a bit short – where does it land? Right here, Don Mills, Toronto. We’re atomic toast.

*(Sounds of ridicule begin rising under and will soon overwhelm*

*SPEEDY.)*

I wouldn’t laugh if I were you. The good news is, with the help of the two pillars of nuclear readiness – the Emergency Measures Organization and ‘Mechanics Illustrated’ – even you can avoid tragedy. I’ve run off a basic bomb shelter design on the school Gestetner *(Holds up sheet, and is temporarily distracted by the wonderful smell.)* and I’ve also mimeo’d some recipes, things you can do with beans, apples.

*(Special light out. Ridicule sounds out. SPEEDY turns back to EARL.)*

Daddy, boys may not like girls on bikes, but they like emergency-prepared freaks even less**.** Even if the world survives the weekend I won’t be getting asked to the formal.

**EARL:** Then ask a boy out yourself.

*(SPEEDY scoffs.)*

That’s what your mother did!

**SPEEDY:** Mom went out with guys?

**EARL:** Uh -me?

**SPEEDY:** You guys dated?

**EARL:** How do you think we got together?

**SPEEDY:** I figured she hit you over the head with an old tailpipe, and dragged you back to the dealership.

**EARL:** Actually, it was a Sadie Hawkins dance. I’d never have asked her out – I was scared to death of her. But she had a car. Will you at least think about the semi-formal, Eleanor?

**SPEEDY:** OK Daddy, on one condition. I still want to be called Speedy.

*(A turn back to showroom ambiance.)*

**EARL:** Hey Dodo, guess what!I got through to her. She’s a tough sell, and she was threatening to take the bus again – but she’ll be O.K.

**DOROTHY:** Then at least one good thing has happened today. Because we didn’t have a single walk-in the whole time you were gone.

*(A tinkling entry bell.)*

**EARL:** Ah – but hark – what’s that? Could it be – a customer?

*(DAN enters.)*

**DOROTHY:** Just a kid. *(Moving off.)* He probably wants an old beater. You go deal with him.

**EARL:** Hello son. I’m Earl. Earl Hughes.

**DAN:**  Dan. Dan Burkholter.

**EARL:** You looking for a trade-in?

**DAN:** Got nothing to trade. Unless you take horses.

*(Horse whinnies, off.)*

**DOROTHY:** *(Sticks head back in.)* Earl! There’s a bloody horse out there!

**DAN:**  That’s Chum. Named him after the radio station. Don’t want to trade him. Just want to buy a car.

**EARL:** What do you fancy?

**DAN:** Something plain.

**EARL:** Plain? Gosh. I’ve never actually sold a car before by calling it plain. I usually say a car’s snappy or peppy but not plain. You’re sure you want plain?

**DAN:**  Yes sir. And American Motors cars are the plainest ones around.

**EARL:** Ohh K. I guess our most economical car, the plainest one, is the Rambler American. Take a look at that four door sedan. Well, yes, now that I look at it, it is incredibly plain. But don’t take my word on it. Dorothy? Dodo?

*(DOROTHY re-enters.)*

This is Mr. Dan Burkholter. He owns the horse. But now he’d like a car as well, and I was telling him that the Rambler American is the paragon of plain.

**DOROTHY:** Earl! Have you lost your mind!? Dan, that American is sexy. Look at those vinyl bucket seats – they recline. Allll the way. If you catch my drift. Why Dan, you buy an American, you’ll be fighting off the girls. They’ll

be stacked on those reclining seats like sheets of eagerplywood.

**EARL:** Wrong answer.

**DOROTHY:** *(Without missing a beat.)* Plainest car in Christendom. Four wheels on a box. Why do you want plain, Dan?

**DAN:** My parents. Does the chrome come off? Knew a family once that took the chrome off their Chev. Father still won’t speak to them, but that was ten years ago. He might have changed.

**EARL:** Now I don’t condone vandalizing cars – even Chevs – but not talking to someone over a bit of chrome seems extreme.

**DOROTHY:** Earl. (*Pulls EARL aside.)* I think he’s a Mennonite.

**EARL:** Get out.

**DOROTHY:** There’s a colony of them outside Markham. Mennonites have odd views about cars.

**DAN:** Maybe if Father sees how dull this car is –

**DOROTHY:** But I read that they’re having trouble driving their buggies safely with all

the traffic now - so you never know. *(Tosses keys to EARL.)* It’s worth a try.

**EARL:** *(Tosses keys to DAN.)* Let’s take the American for a test drive.

**DAN:**  *(Tosses keys back to EARL.)* Don’t know how to drive.

**EARL:** This is a first. I do the test-driving and once we get to the farm you do the selling? Do you think your Dad will go for a car radio?

**DAN:** Not a chance. Once I rode into Markham and bought a radio, so I could listen to CHUM.

**EARL:** We advertise on CHUM.

**DAN:**  You do?

**EARL:** You must’ve heard our ads.

**DAN:**  No. Father found the radio and threw it in the fire.

**EARL:** He burned your radio?

**DAN:** Yes, but that was two years ago. Maybe he’s changed.

**EARL:** Aw, who needs a radio? The news is depressing – it’s all the Cuba missile crisis.

**DAN:**  The what?

**EARL:** You don’t – oh boy. The Cubans, they’ve got nuclear weapons and the Americans have given the Russians until Monday to respond to their ultimatum or it’s war.

**DAN:** On Monday?

**EARL:** This Monday.

**DAN:**  We’re pacifists.

**EARL:** That isn’t going to do you much good when the bombs start dropping. My daughter says we’re directly in the line of fire.

**DAN:**  Never think about stuff like that. .

*(DAN moves off.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* And when we got to Dan’s farm, I understood why he didn’t waste time thinking about nuclear annihilation. Don’t get me wrong; I’m a city boy – I’m not going soft on farms. The only good thing I can say about a farm is that to get to one you have to buy a car. But they sure are peaceful, and some of them are even kind of pretty. Yeah, the

average barnyard would be greatly improved by some flapping pennants, maybe a string of coloured lightbulbs… And they should be paved. But sitting there, waiting for Dan to sell his Dad a plain American, well, I just couldn’t imagine a bomb destroying all this.

*(DAN comes barrelling back. He is carrying a few possessions.)*

**DAN:**  No sale. Told me to leave. Turned his back on me. I’m sorry sir, I’ve wasted your time. Thought this might happen. Sorry. If you can drive me back to Chum I’ll get out of your hair.

**EARL:** But where will you go?

**DAN:** Don’t know. And like you say, come Monday maybe it won’t matter anyway.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* When I got back to the dealership I yanked Dodo behind a 1960 Ambassador Country Coupe four door hard-top with a V-8.

*(To DOROTHY.)* What do we do with him?

**DOROTHY:** What do you mean, what do *we* do with him? *You* give him directions to the Y.

**EARL:** He can’t ride his horse downtown! Where do you park a horse on College Street? How will he pay for a room? I doubt he has two nickels to rub together. He’s coming home with us.

**DOROTHY:** Have you lost your mind?

**EARL:** Yes! No!

**DOROTHY:** He’s a customer! We can’t start taking in every customer who has a fight with his father!

**EARL:** We’re taking this one home.

**DOROTHY:** No.

**EARL:** Yes.

**DOROTHY:** No.

**EARL:** You listen to me Dorothy Curran. An hour ago we thought he was good enough to sell a car to. Now he’s in big trouble. And the world is about to end, and maybe some people only care about what kind of stupid car is in your garage when we go poof but I care about who I’ve got living under my roof and who I have turned away.

*(Pause.)*

**DOROTHY:** You just called cars ‘stupid’.

**EARL:** Sorry.

**DOROTHY:** Don’t apologize. I kind of like you like this.

**EARL:** Like what.

**DOROTHY:** Forceful.

**EARL:** You do?

**DOROTHY:** Don’t make it a habit.

**EARL:** OK.

**DOROTHY:** Dan can use the pullout in the rec room. Aw dammit Earl, he’s got a horse!

**EARL:** Chum can graze in the backyard. Now, I’m going to take him home. It’s going to take us a while, because I have to lead them and he can only go at a trot. But I’ll see you at dinnertime.

*(Don Mills ambiance.)*

*(To DAN.)* Here we are. Don Mills. Home sweet home.

**DAN:** *(Awestruck.)* You really live here?

**EARL:** Uh huh.

**DAN:**  It’s brand new. And you’ve got a two car garage.

**EARL:** Yup. Press that.

*(Sound of automatic garage.)*

**DAN:** An automatic two car garage door! Now I know how Moses felt. Parting the Red Sea. It’s a miracle. Can I close it?

*(Sound of garage door closing.)*

**EARL:** Come inside. There’s a pullout in the rec room – there’s a TV there.

**DAN:**  Another miracle!

**EARL:** And this is the kitchen and this is

*(Some sort of romantic effect.)*

**DAN:**  Miracles come in threes!

**EARL:** No, that’s my daughter. *(Pause.)* She’s making preserves.

**DAN:** Applesauce. Jars and jars of it.

*(Welling romantic music.)*

*(To SPEEDY.)* What’s your name, preserves-making girl?

**SPEEDY:** I’m Eleanor. Eleanor Hughes. Who are you, jaw-dropped boy?

**DAN:**  I’m Dan. Dan Burkholter.

**SPEEDY:** I’m preserving applesauce.

**DAN:** I can tell.

**BOTH:** Jars and jars of applesauce.

**DAN:**  For when the bomb drops.

**SPEEDY:** You know!

**DAN:**  We’re right in the line of fire. Three more days and there won’t be an apple tree left standing in all of eastern North America. In fact, this could be the last apple sauce in the whole world.

**SPEEDY:** You understand!

**DAN:**  Oh yes. I used to help my mother preserve. Waxed the tops and sealed the jars. May I – may I watch you?

**SPEEDY:** Oh yes. You can watch me, Dan. And then – if you want to wax the tops – I’ll watch you. I really, really like to wax boys. Watch boys. Wax. Tops.

*(Lush romantic music out.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* And then a few things didn’t happen. The bombs didn’t fly. And Dan didn’t move out. Instead, he came in every day with Dorothy and me to the dealership, starting work as a janitor and moving eventually up to head mechanic. But even though the Cuban crisis was over, Speedy’s ardour for emergency preparation didn’t seem to abate.

**SPEEDY:** Bombs often fall when you least expect them, Daddy.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* She spent more and more time down in the basement. And then one Sunday Dodo and I came home from church and realized the house was way too quiet.

*(To DOROTHY.)* I don’t hear anything. From down there.

**DOROTHY:** That can only mean one thing. Hurry!

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* We raced downstairs and rolled back the bomb shelter door and there they were!

**DOROTHY:** What the hell are you two doing!?

**EARL:** Speedy!

**SPEEDY:** Hi Dad!

**DAN:** Hi Mr. Hughes. Mrs. Hughes.

**EARL:** What can you be thinking?

**DAN:** It’s OK, Mrs. Hughes. We’re engaged.

**EARL:** You can’t be engaged! You’re only seventeen.

**DAN:** That’s old with my people.

**DOROTHY:** Don’t you talk to me about your people. Your people don’t even drive cars. And *my* people think it’s plain shameless to have a 17 year-old daughter in a dark bomb shelter lying on top of an oversexed Mennonite.

**SPEEDY:** Aw Mom, what’s shameless about it? We love each other and we’re engaged. Anyway, talk about shameless, Dad said you chased him through high school.

**EARL:** I never ever, ever said that.

**DOROTHY:** You’re such a bad liar. So. You got us into this mess, Mr. Humanitarian Take A Mennonite Home To Dinner. You get us out.

**EARL:** Speedy, dear, you have to be careful about being in dark bomb shelters with boys. It leads to things happening. Like S-E-X.

**SPEEDY:** No kidding Dad. And S-E-X leads to guess what – girls named S-P-Eedy.

**EARL:** Over to you, dear.

**DOROTHY:** Your father and I don’t know what you’re talking about.

**DAN:**  She means you had premarital sex. Happens in our culture too. We call it bundling.

**DOROTHY:** Did anyone ask you to speak?

**DAN:** Well no but

**DOROTHY:** Then zip it. No zippers? Then button it! Right right, no buttons FASTEN IT SHUT, DAN!

**SPEEDY:** Mom, I’ve been able to do basic math since I was seven. You didn’t call me Speedy because I was born in Grampa’s car on the way to the hospital. I’m Speedy because I was born in Grampa’s car, practically on your honeymoon. I love Dan. He loves me. We don’t have to get married right away – I want to finish high school first. But we *are* getting married.

*(Some church music. Or ‘60s pop wedding music.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* I didn’t wear this to Speedy’s wedding. I had a tux and it hid this nicely. *(Pats stomach.)* What I couldn’t hide were the tears in my eyes. I was losing my little girl. Even if she was only moving down to the basement. Nobody came from Dan’s family and that was too bad, because I would have liked to tell them they’d done a great job raising their son. I don’t understand a religion where you can kick your kid out just for wanting a car. You know, if the whole world suddenly went strict Mennonite, it would sure kill the car industry. On the other hand, in a world full of Mennonites, there wouldn’t be any Cuban Missile crisis, or atom bombs, or even any Speedybunkers. I’d just about give up my own car to live in a world like that. Just about.

*(Music bridge to the late 1960s.)*

I’m a peaceful man but peace is rarely possible when you’ve got a teenage

son living at home. The best you can hope for is an occasional ceasefire.

**DOROTHY:** *(Starting under, periodically)* Earl. Earl. Earl! EARL!

**EARL:** Franklin was never as studious as Speedy but earlier this year he won the Grade 12 science prize. He designed and built a turbine car - on the chassis of an old American. I never could have done that. But then – how did this happen – in the three months since then, his marks have gone to hell, he won’t consider university, he won’t come work at the dealership – and that’s a real shame because the 1969 Javelins have just arrived and they’re drawing in young buyers. But Franklin turns his nose up at selling cars – all he ever does is sit down in that bomb shelter with his black light posters and his music and

**DOROTHY:** EARL!

**EARL:** Yes dear?

**DOROTHY:** Have you noticed it smells funny down there?

**EARL:** In the bomb shelter? Yes. That’s why Franklin fixed the ventilation system. I gave him twenty bucks to pay for a new motor.

**DOROTHY:** Mr. Naïve. Have you seen what’s going on at the back of the garden? Around that air vent? Where Franklin’s “stale air” comes out? The birds are all lying on the grass. Chirping. The cat is lying on the grass with them. Purring. Birds and cats, lying together? Purring and chirping?

**EARL:** *(Gets it.)* What, you think he’s – no, really – what, marijuana?

**DOROTHY:** Speedy thinks so too.

**EARL:** But if the birds and cats get so lovey-dovey, why doesn’t Franklin?

**DOROTHY:** We’re his parents. But I have a plan. We remove Franklin from his negative environment – the bomb shelter - and put him into a situation where he can bond with a Positive Influence.

**EARL:** Who’s that?

**DOROTHY:** *(Beat.)* You?

**EARL:** *(Beat.)* Me?

**DOROTHY:** The two of you can go on a car trip. Like the old days when all four of us would drive somewhere and just about kill each other but three hours after we got home we’d all agree we just had the best time of our lives.

**EARL:** He’s too old for Santa’s Village.

**DOROTHY:** *(Produces pamphlet.)* - I found this in his dresser. There’s a concert this weekend in upstate New York. That’s not far. You could drive down there, talk along the way, see a few singers, then drive back home Sunday.

**EARL:** What kind of singers?

**DOROTHY:** His kind. *(Reads.)* Big Brother and the Holding Company. Jimi Hendrix. Joan Baez. You can tolerate Joan Baez, can’t you? She’s the whiny one.

**EARL:** Why don’t you go instead of me?

**DOROTHY:** It’s you he’s mad at.

**EARL:** What’ve I done?

**DOROTHY:** You pressure him.

**EARL:** What do you mean “I pressure him”.

**DOROTHY:** You want him to be perfect, like Speedy. When he won the Science Prize for that turbine car you practically took an ad out in the Star.

**EARL:** So!

**DOROTHY:** So, it was the first time you’d acted that way. But he’s done lots of stuff to be proud of. They just weren’t connected to cars. Earl – he’s not the son you wanted. So what. Now go and ask him. You know where to find him.

*(EARL turns to FRANKLIN.)*

**FRANKLIN:** A rock concert. You’re just gonna drop me off, right?

**EARL:** Sure.

**FRANKLIN:** OK.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* We set off in a spanking new orange ’69 Mod Javelin with the Craig Breedlove options package that included a rooftop spoiler and simulated exhaust rocker mountings. I thought it was pretty groovy.

*(FRANKLIN rolls eyes.)*

Frankie didn’t say much on the drive out of Toronto and – odd thing – as we got close to the American border he started getting really jumpy.

*(FRANKLIN is nervous, pulling at collar etc.)*

*(To FRANKLIN.)* You OK, son?

**FRANKLIN:** Yeah yeah, it’s just I uh I’ll be fine. It’s the bridge. I think I have a bridge phobia. I’ll get out and walk across.

**EARL:** You’ll do no such thing. Now try not to snarl at the Customs Officer.

*(To* *Audience.)* Odd. He relaxed the second we got into the States. We drove east along the New York Thruway and didn’t even have our first real fight until about Rochester.

*(To FRANKLIN.)* Nice flowers eh?

*(FRANKLIN grunts.)*

They’re planting native wildflowers along all the interstates, part of a beautification plan. It was Lady Bird Johnson’s idea.

**FRANKLIN:** No wonder you like it.

**EARL:** Why?

**FRANKLIN:** Lady Bird Johnson: wife of LBJ, the number one imperialist warmonger on the planet. Earl Hughes. Yankee warmonger running dog lackey.

**EARL:** *(Laughs; not taking any of this seriously – his mistake.)* I’m a car dealer!

**FRANKLIN:** You sell *American* cars!

**EARL:** They’re made in Brampton!

**FRANKLIN:** It’s a US branch plant – what else do they make? Tanks?

**EARL:** We do not make tanks. I mean, the Ambassador, sure, you could call it a tank but

**FRANKLIN:** That’s right, always make a joke.

**EARL:** You’d enjoy life a lot more if you yanked that self-righteous pickle out of your ass.

**FRANKLIN:** Oh nice image Colonel.

**EARL:** Sorry to offend your tender sensibilities. Well Franklin, I happen to like Lady Bird’s wildflowers. They blend the very best of warmongering with peaceful nature. The only thing that would improve them would be a good shot of napalm.

*(FRANKLIN gives him the finger. Music growing, under.)*

By the time we got to Woodstock ***–*** we still weren’t speaking. Then, three miles from the concert site, the traffic ground to a halt and I pulled over. Suddenly my orange Javelin looked not so groovy among all the old beaters and Volkswagen buses – even I could tell that.

*(FRANKLIN gets out of the car.)*

Where the hell are you going?!

**FRANKLIN:** I’m walking the rest of the way!

**EARL:** *(Mocking.)* But it’s three miles! You’ll never make it! You’ll die!

**FRANKLIN:** Dad. Go – to – hell.

*(FRANKLIN slams door. Reverb. Light is tight on EARL.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)*And that was it. He was gone. Gone. How’s that for history coming full circle? My Dad drove out of my life when I was twelve – he left the house one morning in a rage, came back an hour later - in a brand new ’33 Essex Terraplane Eight, the very same model that John Dillinger favoured - packed his clothes, and drove off. And now there goes my son, skinny, dumb, surly… smarter and more talented and less ordinary than I ever was… walking down the road to Woodstock…You know what? He isn’t coming back. At least my Dad had wheels.

*(Back in scene; pulls out tin.)* Hmm. Funny. Brownies. We’ve been married twenty-three years and I never knew Dorothy to bake. *(Has a bite of one.)* They’re good. Whew. Different. *(Has another bite.)* But not bad. Just a regular Betty Crocker, my wife. *(Keeps eating.)* Got a bit of an aftertaste. Nice though.

*(EARL keeps eating. More music, and into psychedelia.)*

There’s a Studebaker. Pink. And a paisley Chev. The Studebaker says hi. The Chev says “Hiya yourself, ya big Studebaker.” Chev’s talk like that. Oh Oh. Here comes a Chrysler. Ooh, he’s jealous. Chrysler’s are so possessive.

**VELMA:** Earl!

**EARL:** Is someone calling my name?

**VELMA:** Earl Hughes!

**EARL:** Who’s talking.

**VELMA:** It’s me.

**EARL:** Who’s me.

**VELMA:** Me. Your car.

**EARL:** Javelins can’t talk.

**VELMA:** In America we can.

**EARL:** Oh. What’s your name?

**VELMA:** Velma. Earl, I want to thank you for driving me so carefully.

**EARL:** Oh, it’s nothing

**VELMA:** Earl – I want to marry you.

**EARL:** Really?

**VELMA:** Really.

**EARL:** Aw heck, I can’t.

**VELMA:** Why not?

**EARL:** I have a wife already.

**VELMA:** In the USA, you can marry your car plus keep your Canadian wife.

**EARL:** Who says.

**VELMA:** Lady Bird.

**EARL:** But isn’t it illegal – you’re a machine and I’m a human.

**VELMA:** Are you sure about that?

**EARL:** What’s that mean.

**VELMA:** Look at your arm, Earl.

**EARL:** It’s turning to chrome!

**VELMA:** Give your chest a whack.

*(EARL does; there’s a banging sound.)*

**EARL:** Hubcaps! I’m turning into a

*(EARL lifts his leg. There’s a squeaking sound.)*

What kind am I?

**VELMA:** In America you can be whatever kind of car you want.

**EARL:** Oh, I gotta tell someone. I gotta share this with the whole world!

*(Woodstock music of the next day seguing to:)* **ANNOUNCER:** Good morning America! Breakfast in bed for five hundred thousand! Hey – who are you, get off the stage, hey! Let go!

**EARL:** *(Amplified.)* I’m Earl. Earl Hughes. From Toronto. And I have a really big announcement to make. I used to be just an ordinary man but now I – AM – A – CAR!

**ANNOUNCER:** Someone get this nut off the stage. Security! Get him to the first aid tent/

**EARL:** *(Under.)* I’m a car dammit. Hands off my doors. Show some respect. Watch that. Watch it. Watch the chrome.

*(Silence.)*

**ANNOUNCER:** Is he gone? OK. From the top. *(Fading out.)* Good morning America!

Breakfast in bed for five hundred thousand!

*(Transition music to 1976.)*

**EARL:** That was pretty much the last I saw of Franklin for a long time. When my son dropped out he did it with a vengeance…he roamed the continent, commune to commune, coast to coast, beach to beach… he’d get religion, then he’d go back to being a pothead, then he’d get religion again. Then back to pot. Religion, pot, religion, pot. Then he became a United Church minister.

One of life’s natural progressions.

And the funny thing is, a few years ago he told me the main reason he was avoiding us was because he thought I was angry at him… Shows how little he knew me, or how little I’d let him see. Anger and Earl Hughes don’t ever park on the same lot. I’ve only ever been angry – I mean really angry, once… Dodo and I were driving to Montreal in a two-door 76 Pacer hatchback coupe. American Motors was calling the Pacer the ‘first wide small car’ but Dodo was unimpressed.

**DOROTHY:** We’ve got sixty-seven unsold cars on the lot. Nothing is moving!

**EARL:** This is not the time to worry about the dealership.

**DOROTHY:** If I don’t worry about it now, then when? Listen Earl, listen to me. Curran AMC is doomed. American Motors is doomed. We thought these Pacers would save us but let’s face it: they’re just space buggies. It’s like driving a fishbowl. And I’ve got more oomph than they do. Promise me you’ll sell the dealership.

**EARL:** No.

**DOROTHY:** Speedy agrees with me – she’s too busy with the kids to help out. Dan’s a great mechanic but he couldn’t sell a car if his life depended on it; he can barely drive one. And Franklin, he just says “The Lord will see us through”. What kind of business plan is that?

**EARL:** Franklin is very sincere about his latest conversion.

**DOROTHY:** He’s always sincere about his conversions. You have to sell.

**EARL:** NO! Dodo – we don’t need to go any further, we can turn around and

**DOROTHY:** - It’s Montreal or bust. We’ve had our tickets for the Olympics a year and dammit, we’re using them. The dealership can survive the weekend without us. It’s not as if there’s any customers.

**EARL:** There’s the Cobourg exit. Let’s at least pull off and go sit by the lake for a while. I’ll get you an ice cream cone. OK?

*(DOROTHY agrees.* *Faint music, off.)*

**DOROTHY:** It might be just the morphine, but I swear I can hear music.

*(Music is clearer. It’s ‘September Song’ – instrumental.)*

**EARL:** It’s from the bandshell. Can you tell what it is?

**DOROTHY:** I’m not a drooling idiot.

**EARL:** ‘September Song’.

**DOROTHY:** I knew that.

**EARL:** Our song.

**DOROTHY:** It wasn’t!

**EARL:** I remember exactly when we first heard it. Palais Royale. May ’39. Our grad formal. I was a shy, gentlemanly 18 year-old and you were all over me like grease on Dan’s overalls.

**DOROTHY:** A. It wasn’t our song. B. I wasn’t all over you. Was I?

**EARL:** You always said I had a moderately sensual effect on women.

**DOROTHY:** Can I ask you - why did you ask me out on that first date? Was it because I was so wildly attractive or because you knew I’d get Daddy’s brand new Nash.

**EARL:** A. It wasn’t our first date. B. It is our song. C. I didn’t ask you on our first date, you asked me. And it wasn’t the formal, it was a Sadie Hawkins dance.

**DOROTHY:** OK, just for the sake of argument, let’s say you’re correct and I asked you. Was it beauty or the car?

**EARL:** Beauty.

*(DOROTHY swats EARL.)*

*(More definitely.)* Beauty!

*(DOROTHY swats EARL again.)*

What!?

**DOROTHY:** I wish that, just once, just once before I go, you could tell a convincing lie. What kind of a salesman are you!? It was the car! It’s always, always the car, with you. And that’s why I love you. One of the reasons. Now, let’s push on to Montreal.

**EARL:** (To Audience.) We got to Montréal and checked into the Queen Elizabeth. Dodo barely made it to our room. We had tickets for a swimming event that night. We didn’t make it. But the next morning, we did get to see history being made. Nadia Comaneci floated down the balance beam and into the hearts of the world.

**DOROTHY:** Look Earl – perfect tens!

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* Neither of us commented on the two empty seats you could see just over Nadia’s shoulders. They were Dodo’s and mine – the best seats in the house, but we weren’t there. We saw it all on our hotel room TV. We got back to Toronto the next day and Dodo went straight into Princess Margaret Hospital. In two weeks, she was gone.

The next morning I went down to the dealership. Speedy and Dan were closing it for a week in memoriam. Dorothy would have hated that. And me, well, I always thought I’d be sad, but I was feeling something else entirely.

*(In scene.)* Speedy! Dan! Get out here!

*(They run out.)*

**SPEEDY:** Dad, you didn’t need to come in to work -

**DAN:** We’ve got everything under control.

**SPEEDY:** Mom wouldn’t have wanted -

**EARL:** - How many cars in the lot?

**SPEEDY:** I uh – sixty? Seventy?

**EARL:** Dan – gas them up.

**DAN:** Pardon?

**EARL:** Are you deaf? Gas them up. All of them.

**DAN:** Even the new ones?

**EARL:** Especially the new ones. Speedy, get on the phone. Call up your old high school, tell them we’re hiring every student who’s got a drivers license. And, and call the car clubs. Get me a list of your mother’s customers – I want them phoned too. We’re going to have a cortege. We’re going to have the biggest damn cortege in the history of this city. Move it!

*(Music can start, under.)*

*(To Audience.)* When the first bunch of high school students began streaming in the doors the next day, I started losing my anger. We gave them all car keys and then – and then the American Motors Car Club showed up in their Ramblers and Hudsons and vintage Nashes and – and now I wasn’t mad at all and then Speedy said

**SPEEDY:** - Daddy, take a look outside. Take a look.

**EARL:** And there were almost a hundred of Dorothy’s loyal customers all idling out there in the cars she’d sold them. I could barely see to drive. But I did. At the front of the cortege in – you guessed it – a ’39 Nash. We headed out, 150 cars, old, new some being driven badly because the students were still learners, others driven well because their owners loved them. All of those cars comprising the steel and glass and chrome bits of Dodo’s and my shared history. All of us rumbling in a convoy down Eglinton towards Mount Pleasant cemetery – first the police escort, then a Pacer wagon with Dodo’s coffin sticking out the back, and then me in the Nash. Following her, one last time.

Oh, it was a great thing. And if a couple of students dinged some bumpers along the way, who cared. And if my son in law Dan – the world’s worst driver – sort of backed into the Eaton mausoleum – it didn’t matter. We were seeing Dodo off.

*(Music out.)*

I can’t tell you the last things Dodo and I said to each other, that’s too private. But I will tell you what Dodo said to me the second last day, when she still had the strength to try and boss me around.

**DOROTHY:** Earl. We need to talk about business.

**EARL:** Not now.

**DOROTHY:** Yes. Now. Remember what I said on the way to Montreal? You’ve got to sell the dealership.

**EARL:** OK, I will.

**DOROTHY:** Don’t just say ‘OK’ to please me. You’ve got to do it. We had a good run with American Motors but it’s time to get out while we can. And I’ve got a plan. Listen up. Maybe it’s just the morphine but I swear Earl I can see into the future. And I know what’s best for you and the family. I can see it plain as day. Do you believe me?

**EARL:** Yes.

**DOROTHY:** It’s just one word. Toyota.

**EARL:** Japanese cars?It’s a fad.

**DOROTHY:** Oh Earl. You can be such a blockhead.

**EARL:** I’m not selling Toyotas.

**DOROTHY:** OK. I’ve got another word for you. It’s not quite as good, but it’s definitely not a fad. Are you listening?

**EARL:** Yes.

**DOROTHY:** You listen to this one word Earl, you really listen to it, and I’m going to rest easy, I’m going to know you and the family will all be safe. One word*. (she leans over and whispers to him)*

**EARL:** *(Listens, then turns to Audience.)* Doughnuts**?**

*Immediate black.*

***End of Act One***

**Act Two**

*EARL is at the dealership/store.*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* Doughnuts? Turned out to be brilliant advice. In hindsight. But I’m an ordinary man – a stubborn, ordinary man and first I had to try sticking it out with AMC.

**SPEEDY:** Why don’t you go home, Dad?

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)*But soon it was apparent we were dead in the water and in ‘87 Chrysler bought us up, mostly to get their paws on our Jeep line.

**SPEEDY:** They’re taking the dealership sign down this aft. Dad, you don’t need to see that.

**EARL:** I have no place else to – be.

**SPEEDY:** Seriously, Dad. I have to be here, otherwise I’d get the heck out too.

**EARL:** ‘Dorothy Curran AMC’. That was my idea, you know. Her Dad gave it to me but your Mom needed to be part of it…

**SPEEDY:** I know Daddy.

**EARL:** And lo and behold, now we’re about to become a Bobby Orr’s.

**SPEEDY:** Promise me you’ll get the name right some day. Dad - home.

**EARL:** Old man underfoot.

**SPEEDY:** Nooo.

**EARL:** That’s OK. I’ll go. Besides, it’s nearly lunch and Tammy’ll be home from school soon.

*(To Audience.)* After Dorothy died, my daughter Speedy, her husband Dan and their kids moved back into our house and I retreated to the basement flat – Franklin’s old domain. I call it my burrow. It’s got a shower and, in the case of nuclear attack, there’s always the Speedybunker. And I’m not lonely. *(He is.)*

Aw, I’m 65! People are always saying their lives started at 65! The idiots. My daughter Speedy wants me to take up a hobby, like lawn-bowling. My granddaughter Tammy, with all the wisdom of a ten year old, says, “Try dating, Grampa.” Imagine, getting ordered out on a date by your granddaughter. You know, it’s a real shame we’re losing the dealership because Tammy’s got the car genes.

**TAMMY:** Grampa! A strange man has pulled up in our driveway! He’s driving an antique ’72 Ambassador Brougham, four door station wagon! It’s likely a V-8.

**EARL:** They only came in V-8s, pumpkin.

**TAMMY:** Fake wood-grained exterior paneling. Oh, that’s gross. How could you ever sell cars like that? There’s a surfboard on top.

**EARL:** Oh Lord, it’s your Uncle Franklin.

*(To Audience.)* Perfect timing. Franklin. He hasn’t been home in five years; and he’s been wandering for the past 18.

*(To FRANKLIN.)* Hello son.

**FRANKLIN:** Hi Dad.

**EARL:** Your sister’s going to have kittens.

**FRANKLIN:** Speedy can relax. I’m only passing through.

**TAMMY:** Hey Uncle Franklin – are you the same uncle who didn’t pay rent last time you were here and ate us out of house and home?

**FRANKLIN:** Yup, that’s me.

**EARL:** Tammy, isn’t time to get back to school?

**TAMMY:** I have a sore stomach, Grampa. I really have to stay home.

**EARL:** There’s nothing wrong with your stomach. How long are you here for?

**FRANKLIN:** Just a couple of days. Don’t want to wear out my welcome – just say hi, then I’m off to Tofino.

**TAMMY:** Hey Uncle Franklin, what’s your all-time favourite car? It has to be from American Motors.

**EARL:** Tammy. School. Now listen Franklin, there’s a pull-out in the basement. Speedy and Dan are really busy at the dealership – er business – right now, so if you’re going to stay you’ve got to help me with the meals.

**FRANKLIN:** No problem Dad – I was just working as a short order cook.

**TAMMY:** Uncle Franklin, did it hurt when you smoked your brains out?

**EARL:** Tammy. Go.

**TAMMY:** But my stomach!

*(EARL points to the door. He watches her leave, and then turns back to FRANKLIN.)*

**EARL:** Now suppose you tell me why you’re here. Last we heard you were in

Nova Scotia. Surfing.

**FRANKLIN:** I was but then I got the call of the open road and

**EARL: -** In other words you broke up with someone.

**FRANKLIN:** Yeah, that too.

**EARL:** Do you need a loan to get to wherever it is you’re heading?

**FRANKLIN:** I don’t want a loan. I’ll work at the dealership to earn it. Just a couple of weeks. I can wash cars, whatever you want

**EARL:** How are you at mixing batter?

**FRANKLIN:** What do you mean?

**EARL:** You’ll see. Franklin. You’re welcome to stay here, of course. But you can’t smoke marijuana in this house, not with Speedy’s kids around. It’s not like last time. You can likely still fool Tammy and Timmy and Teddy, but Tommy’s 15. He’ll know what you’re up to.

**FRANKLIN:** Hell Dad, I was hoping Tommy’d supply me.

**EARL:** That’s not funny. I don’t want them thinking a thirty-seven year-old uncle who spends his life following big waves has a lifestyle worth imitating. Children need responsible people to look up to. People who soberly put one foot forward and then the other, and then another foot, then another. Then another. Then another. Sober. Unstoned.

**FRANKLIN:** “I-am-a-car!”?

*(Pause.)*

*(Repeats it as EARL once said it.)* I Am A Car!

**EARL:** How’d you know about that?

**FRANKLIN:** I saw the movie.

*(Pause.)*

**EARL:** What movie.

**FRANKLIN:** “Woodstock: the Outtakes”.

**EARL:** There’s a movie?

**FRANKLIN:** You can rent it anywhere. It’s got all the footage they cut from the real movie. “I am a car!”

**EARL:** Oh dear God.

**FRANKLIN:** You can’t really tell it’s you. I could. I’d recognize that jacket anywhere. Dad, what were you thinking?!

**EARL:** Your brownies?

**FRANKLIN:** I wondered. Is it too late to say I’m sorry?

**EARL:** Why apologize – apparently you launched my movie career. You’re sure I can’t be recognized?

**FRANKLIN:** Positive.

**EARL:** Because Speedy would kill us. She’s gotten very proper in her middle age. We better have a beer. We’ve got some catching up to do.

**FRANKLIN:** Right on, Dad. How about you. Seeing anyone special yet?

**EARL:** *(Turns to Audience and shrugs, then:)* Franklin actually was a great roomie – he was either working or he was meditating in the bomb shelter. He was a big help getting the new dealership uh store ready, painting, dry-walling, plumbing. Franklin had clearly picked up a lot of skills on those communes. Finally the day of our dress rehearsal arrived. We assembled in the parking lot.

**SPEEDY:** *(Megaphone.)* Here’s the plan. It’ll be just like test driving a new car. We have a hundred invited seniors coming this afternoon at four. Three busloads all the way from the Golden Plough Lodge. They’ll be tired, hungry and grumpy. It’s like a mock nuclear disaster only this time it’s

Seniors and doughnuts. Speaking of which, Dan, how’s everything in the kitchen?

**DAN:**  Not good, honey. Batter is still frozen solid. Can’t heat it up because it won’t fit in the ovens. I’ve got Tammy and the boys sitting on it.

**SPEEDY:** Good thinking. Daddy – I need you to wipe down the picnic tables again. OK everyone, five hours and counting.

*(Sound of seagulls up, and under.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* So this is what I’m reduced to. Cleaning guano off plastic tables. But they say it’s a licence to print money – owning a Frank Mahovolich’s.

*(Sound of car, close.)*

And then the vision. Up pulls a 1954 Nash Metropolitan hardtop. Two tone. White and Orange. Perky. The car stops. The door opens.

*(Sound of squeaky car door.)*

A leg splays out. And there’s a body on top of those legs. It’s been 33 years but I recognize her right away. And I feel something I haven’t felt a long time.

*(EARL begins looking at the sky.)*

**DAPHNE:** I wonder, young fella, if you could help me. I’m looking for the Curran Nash dealership. It used to be around here somewhere.

**EARL:** This is it. We sell doughnuts now. Is there something wrong with your car?

**DAPHNE:** The door squeaks in a most annoying fashion. A girl can hardly make an entrance if her door squeaks. It’s very distracting. Plus I need a new windshield wiper.

**EARL:** But that’s a ’54 Nash! We’d have to order special parts from a place in California!

**DAPHNE:** Isn’t that the limit! I just drove all the way here – from there. Do I know you?

**EARL:** I sold you that car. Thirty-three years ago. I’m – I’m Jason – and you’re Daphne.

**DAPHNE:** You remember me? But I must look so much slightly a teensy bit older.

**EARL:** You look exactly the same as that night we got caught in Hurricane Hazel. *(To Audience.)* OK, I’m a bad liar. She did look different. She was actually shaped like a ’58 Rambler Ambassador now. She curved out at the sides and her front grill was… But hey, I’m in no position to judge – I don’t even have all my original parts. *(To DAPHNE.)* Your car is in great shape.

**DAPHNE:** I only drove it on Sundays. Would you care to go for a spin?

**EARL:** Ohhh yes.

**DAPHNE:** Toronto’s changed so much since I left in ’54. I’m sure I’d get us lost. But are you able to drive?

**EARL:** Of course!

**DAPHNE:** But you have that nasty kink in your neck. Ohhh wait – don’t you have a fierce wife somewhere?

**EARL:** Dorothy’s gone now.

**DAPHNE:** Oh.

**EARL:** Eleven years.

**DAPHNE:** I’m sorry.

*(Squeaky doors, under. Car starts; EARL drives.)*

**EARL:** So did you ever get discovered? I was sure you’d drive right off the lot here and on to the front page of some movie magazine.

**DAPHNE:** I hung out at Schwab’s Drugstore and crashed a few parties, but no acting jobs came out of it. So I got into show business another way. You’ll appreciate this. I was an extra in some films, me and my Met. My biggest scene is in ‘American Graffiti’. I park it in a hamburger joint. Mostly it’s a rear view, but hey, your dealership label’s on the trunk, and there’s a close-up.

**EARL:** That’s terrific!

**DAPHNE:** Bet you never thought you’d be in the movies.

**EARL:** That’s very, very true.

**DAPHNE:** And we were in a few other shows, TV. It was fun. But mostly I was a librarian at the Beverly Hills branch, until I woke up and realized three decades had flown by, and I was old.

**EARL:** You don’t look old.

**DAPHNE:** Flatterer. You look kinda peppy yourself.

**EARL:** Life starts at 65, you know. It’s never too late for an adventure.

**DAPHNE:** You really think so?

**EARL:** Yeah. At least, that’s what my daughter says. Though I think she means ‘Adventures in Lawn Bowling’.

**DAPHNE:** Where are we heading?

**EARL:** Don Mills. Daphne – it’s 2:30 in the afternoon, the grandkids are all at school and I think a rum and coke with a pretty lady would be just the ticket.

**DAPHNE:** Why, you’re playing my song, Jason.

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* Daphne was quite fascinated with my basement apartment. I whisked Franklin’s dirty clothes under his bed and turned on the Christmas lights over the wet bar – it looked pretty. Maybe even a little romantic.

**DAPHNE:** What’s behind Steel Door Number One?

**EARL:** It’s our bomb shelter. In case of nuclear attack, my family is in a state of red alert. At least we were in the early ‘60s. But it’s been a quarter century and no bombs have dropped on Don Mills. Yet. So now we mostly used it for storage. I’ll show you.

*(Sound of door rolling back. Light switch on. One bulb.)*

See, it’s got everything. Running water, a fridge. I keep my beer in it and there’s a fan system that moves the air down a pipe to the back garden.

**DAPHNE:** It smells a bit – a bit like

**EARL:** - Musty, I know

**DAPHNE:** No, it’s – Earl. Do you smoke marijuana?

**EARL:** No. Why?

**DAPHNE:** Never mind. Earl – do you believe in fate?

**EARL:** Uhh

**DAPHNE:** - Because I think it was fate that you were outside cleaning those tables when I drove up today.

**EARL:** Yeah, it might have been.

**DAPHNE:** Are you really and truly ready for an adventure?

**EARL:** Adventure is my middle name.

**DAPHNE:** Really?

**EARL:** Well no. It’s Wilbur. But it could’ve been Adventure.

**DAPHNE:** Good.

*(DAPHNE reaches up and pulls the light switch. The stage goes to black.)*

I’m ready for an adventure too. Starting with a kiss.

**EARL:** OK. *(Pause.)* Where are you.

**DAPHNE:** Here. *(Pause.)* No Earl, that’s my elbow.

**EARL:** I knew that.

**DAPHNE:** Here.

*(They kiss.)*

**EARL:** Wow.

**DAPHNE:** You kiss well for a man who’s been on sabbatical.

**EARL:** Kissing is like driving a car.

**DAPHNE:** Are you calling me a car?

*(EARL laughs nervously.)*

Are you a car Earl?

**EARL:** Why - why’d you say that?

**DAPHNE:** Because if you were, I think you’d be a great, big comfortable sedan with a V 8 engine and lots and lots of leg room and when people asked me, “Daphne, what’s that you’re driving?” I’d reply, “Why, I’m driving a four door Earl.”

*(Feet under, then the shelter door rolls back and FRANKLIN bursts in.)*

**FRANKLIN:** Hoo-wee – not much time man do I need this Nova Scotia Gold. Here I come.

*(FRANKLIN pulls the light cord. Light comes on. FRANKLIN is holding an impressive spliff.)*

**EARL:** Hello Franklin.

**FRANKLIN:** Dad!

**EARL:** What exactly is Nova Scotia Gold? Some kind of cod? Hand it over.

**FRANKLIN:** I can explain. Hello –

**DAPHNE:** I’m Daphne.

**FRANKLIN:** That’s a lovely name.

**EARL:** In Greek mythology,Daphne is a nymph.

**FRANKLIN:** Excellent.

**EARL:** Daphne, this is my son Franklin. My son is holding what I keenly recognize to be a marijuana joint. Franklin, I said pass that to me.

**DAPHNE:** I’ve got a lighter somewhere, just a sec.

**EARL:** We’re not smoking it!

**DAPHNE:** Aw.

**FRANKLIN:**  *(With her)* Aw.

**EARL:** Listen Franklin, I thought we had an agreement. But just a few minutes ago I came downstairs with Miss Daphne here, and immediately I smelled something suspicious. Pot. I had an inkling you were up to mischief in here -

**FRANKLIN:** Dad – you never suspected a thing! Half the time you were right next door in your room, watching Lawrence Welk re-runs.

**EARL:** I never watch Lawrence Welk!

**DAPHNE:** Couldn’t we have a little puff?

**EARL:** No! *(Back to FRANKLIN.)* And anyway, it doesn’t matter if I didn’t smell it before. If a tree is smoking in the forest, it’s still a pothead.

*(Everyone ponders this.)*

**DAPHNE:** Actually Earl, I don’t think you even need to smoke the stuff.

*(Sound of giggling, off.)*

**EARL:** What’s that?

**DAPHNE:** What?

**EARL:** I hear giggling. It can’t be the kids – they won’t be home yet.

**FRANKLIN:** Sounds like Speedy.

**EARL:** What’s she doing home! We’ll just stand here quietly till they go back to work.

*(EARL turns out the light. But then the door rolls open.)*

**SPEEDY:** It’s gotta be fast, Dan! We’ve gotta get back and thaw that dough!

**DAN:**  It’s your dough I want to thaw.

**SPEEDY:** You are so bad.

**DAN:**  Off with that sexy uniform, Speedy

*(EARL clears his throat.)*

What was that?

**SPEEDY:** Who’s there?

*(Three throats clear.**EARL turns light back on.)*

**EARL:** Speedy!

**SPEEDY:** Dad!

**EARL:** Dan!

**DAN:**  Earl!

**EARL:** Kids!

**FRANKLIN:** Hey Speedy! Dan!

**SPEEDY:** Franklin!

**DAN:**  Franklin! Earl? Speedy?

**SPEEDY:** Dan, I came down here with you.

**DAN:**  Right right

**DAPHNE:** Hiya. You must be Speedy and Dan.

**DAN:** Good afternoon, ma’am.

**SPEEDY:** Who the hell are you?

**EARL:** This is Daphne.

**FRANKLIN:** Daphne is a Greek nymph.

**EARL:** She’s also a satisfied long-term customer.

**DAN:** Wayyy to go, Earl!

**EARL:** That would be cars, Dan.

**DAPHNE:** Pleased to meetcha both.

**DAN:** Never met a nymph before.

**SPEEDY:** Bite your tongue.

**DAN:**  Yes dear.

**EARL:** Speedy, shouldn’t you be at work?

**SPEEDY:** Of course I should be at work. Franklin, you should be at work, too. We should all be at work. What’s that you’re holding? OH MY GOD you people are smoking pot!! Dan! Look! My father and my brother and my brother’s date are in my bomb shelter smoking pot!

**DAN:** Wayyy to go. *(Gets the look from SPEEDY.)* Not good, Franklin, Earl and Franklin’s Nymph Date.

**DAPHNE:** Actually, I’m your father’s date.

**SPEEDY:** OH MY GOD my father’s smoking pot and dating!

**DAN:**  Earl wayyy to go!

**SPEEDY:** Bite your tongue again.

**DAN:**  Yes dear.

**FRANKLIN:** Our poppa’s got himself a brand new nymph.

**DAPHNE:** And I’ve got myself a big old Earl car.

**FRANKLIN:** Whoah – Dad told you about the Woodstock movie?

**SPEEDY:** What movie?

**FRANKLIN:** I thought you being in that was a state secret!

**SPEEDY:** What about Woodstock?

**FRANKLIN:** I – am – a – car!

**EARL:** *(Having fun.)*Franklin, you bite your tongue!

*(DAPHNE begins to leave.)*

Daphne? Daphne, where are you going?

*(EARL follows DAPHNE out.)*

**DAPHNE:** Earl, it’s been a slice. But I think you have a full enough life without me.

**EARL:** What are you talking about! I’m lonely as hell.

**DAPHNE:** You don’t know lonely, Earl. I know lonely. That ain’t it.

**EARL:** Stay for supper – I want you to meet my granddaughter.

**DAPHNE:** Aw thanks but I’m just going to/

**EARL:** But we were going to have an adventure!

**DAPHNE:** You’re already having one. And I’m still hunting for mine. But someday, we’re going to finish that kiss. Time to hit the road.

*(DAPHNE exits. Music starts – of a high school band type.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* So I went back to the dealership and finished cleaning the picnic tables. The seniors’ test run went smoothly, and Speedy deemed us ready for the general public. We hung up flags, brought in the high school band and called up the press. Tammy was beside herself with

excitement.

**TAMMY:** Guess what, Grampa! You’re going to test drive the drive-thru with a 1939 Nash Ambassador! Eight cylinders! Mom rented it from a car museum!

**EARL:** *(Remembers.)* Aw damn. I left my glasses at home. Dan. You’re going to have to drive.

**TAMMY:** You can’t let Daddy drive!

**EARL:** It’s just down that drive-thru lane.

**TAMMY:** It’s too narrow for Daddy!

**DAN:**  Earl: I can but try.

**TAMMY:** This is suicide.

**EARL:** I’ll be right beside you, coaching

**TAMMY:** - We’re doomed!

**EARL:** We’ll be fine. OK, here’s the speakers. Whoah. OK, we’ll make our order. Tammy smile for the cameras.

**SPEEDY:** (*Unseen; voice treated.)* Welcome to Tim Horton’s, Dad. What can I get you.

**DAN:** Hi honey.

**SPEEDY:** Dan. How come you’re ordering?

**DAN:**  Earl forgot his glasses. I’m driving.

**SPEEDY:** Oh Mother of God. Dan. Back up. No. Just turn the car off and get out, very slowly. I’ll come out and drive up.

**DAN:**  Honey, the photographers. They’re all waiting. Want a dozen Timbits. Two coffees. Juice for Tammy.

**SPEEDY:** OK, drive carefully Dan. Watch the TV crew. Careful, slowly -

*(Initial sound of smashing.)*

**EARL:** *(To Audience.)* Speedy managed to leap back just as Dan hit the drive-thru window.

*(Sound of smashing.)*

Coffee and doughnuts went flying –

*(Final crash.)*

And what’s better, it was all caught on film! We made the front page of the Star and all the supper hour broadcasts. The band played on, the customers came in droves… And last *month* we made as much profit from our franchise as we did in an entire year selling cars. Dodo was right. The future *is* doughnuts. Of course, within six months we’d all put on thirty pounds.

Daphne never returned. I’m pretty sure she went back to Hollywood. One night we rented a video – it was ‘The Bridges of Madison County’. I’m positive I saw her Nash Metropolitan in it. The scene is mostly set in one of those covered bridges, so you don’t exactly see too much of Daphne and her car. She drives in and then a bit later she comes out the other side. Her scene is over nearly as soon as it starts. You get a glimpse of something wonderful – and then it’s gone. Kind of like life.

*(Music segues to today. Sound of screeching tires and a collision.)*

**YUPPIE W:** You hit me! I was at a full stop and you just rammed me.

**EARL:** I’m sorry.

**YUPPIE W:** Sorry doesn’t cut it, old man. You smack my Lexus and all you can say is “I’m sorry!”?

**EARL:** You’re right. I take it back. I’m not sorry.

**YUPPIE W:** And now I’m going to miss my meeting. You stupid old man. In your stupid old car. *(Dials cell* *phone.)* It’s me. I’m going to be late. Some old codger in a Model T rammed me. Yeah. Yeah. The bumper’s creased. *(Ends call.)* Of course they don’t ask if I’m injured.

**EARL:** I’m sure they have their hopes.

**YUPPIE W:** What’s that supposed to mean.

**EARL:** And for your information, this stupid old car is a 1977 Matador Coupe.

**YUPPIE W:** Well I’ll be danged. Thank God, here’s the cop. Officer, you’ve got to get this man off the road.

**COP 2:** *(Irish accent, of course.)*Now it looks like we’ve had a wee accident.

**YUPPIE W:** A “wee” accident – you call this “wee”? I probably have whiplash. And look at my bumper.

**COP 2:** *(Hands her a sheaf of forms.)* Just wait by your car ma’am. Now Pops, how are you?

**EARL:** I’m fine.

**YUPPIE W:** He’s cuckoo.

**COP 2:** No scratches or anything?

**EARL:** This car could take Yorkville Mall without suffering any harm.

**YUPPIE W:** Isn’t it comforting we have people like this on our roads.

**COP 2:** Now Pops, do you know where you were going then?

**EARL:** Do you mean in the short term – or the long term?

**COP 2:** In other words you don’t have a clue where you are.

**EARL:** *(Pause.)*No.

**COP 2:** Then – sir – can you tell me your home address? Do you know where you live?

**EARL:** Of course I know where I live. I just can’t remember at this precise moment. *(Pulls out wallet.)* It’s in here. Listen, I’m Earl. Earl Hughes. I sell cars. I can sell you this one if you really want. It’s a real gem.

There’s a padded vinyl roof, the seats are velveteen.

**COP 2:** *(Over.)* It’s a nice car sir, but I’m afraid it’ll have to be towed.

**EARL:** Towed! The car’s fine!

**COP 2:** Regulations, sir. I’ll give you a lift home. Get in the back here.

**EARL:** I’d rather sit in the front. Because if I’m sitting in the front my nosey parker neighbours will just think I’m selling you a car. If I’m sitting in the back they’ll know I’ve done something bad and they’ll tell my daughter.

**COP 2:** And what could you do that would be so bad?

**EARL:** I was in a movie once.

**COP 2:** That’s not really a crime.

**EARL:** Don’t be so sure. OK, take me home. Time to face the music.

*(Light change to bunker.)*

**FRANKLIN:** I got here as fast as I could – what on earth happened!?

**EARL:** I was in a wee accident.

**FRANKLIN:** That’s why your car wasn’t in the drive! Did you hurt anyone?

**EARL:** No, and I’m fine, in case you’re wondering. They had to tow my car because of regulations, so let’s go get it back, and my licence/

*(SPEEDY bursts in.)*

**SPEEDY:** Why the hell doesn’t anyone tell me anything around here!

**FRANKLIN:** He just called me at the church. I was just about to start writing Sunday’s sermon and/

**SPEEDY:** Yes, well guess how I found out – at work! The cops were laughing **–** over their doughnuts **-** about some old guy smashing up some woman’s Lexus. And then they say the old man’s car is a Matador and I go ohhh… Is he OK?

**FRANKLIN:** Oh, he’s just as ornery as ever.

**SPEEDY:** He looks faint.

**EARL:** I’M STILL IN THE ROOM! And why are you assuming it’s my fault?

**SPEEDY:** The cops said you rear-ended her!

**EARL:** So I made a mistake. Can we go get my car?

*(Pause. SPEEDY and FRANKLIN look at each other.)*

**SPEEDY:** No.

**FRANKLIN:** No.

**EARL:** No!?

**FRANKLIN:** Dad. Drivers over 80 have their licenses automatically suspended if they’ve been in an accident. For good reason.

**SPEEDY:** You’re a menace.

**EARL:** I drive better than your husband.

**SPEEDY:** That’s irrelevant! No more car.

**EARL:** The constable said I can take a test and get my licence back.

**FRANKLIN:** You’re not well enough.

**SPEEDY:** You’re a danger on the roads.

**FRANKLIN:** You’ve had fainting spells, your attention is wandering –

**SPEEDY:** You could have killed that woman.

**EARL:** In my dreams.*(Exiting.)* If I can’t drive I might as well die.

**SPEEDY:** Where are you going?

**EARL:** To the bombshelter. To think.

*(Dark. EARL pulls light and gets phone book out.)*

Oh, I’ll think all right. I’ll think myself right back into the driver’s seat. OK. Oh lord, how’ll I ever find the number. How the living hell – could this be – *(Fumbling for numbers.)* Could they make these books any more confusing *(Tries number.)*

**VOICE MAIL:** *(Treated; establish and take under quickly.)* You have reached the Ministry of Transport. Pour service en francais, pressez numero un. For English, press two. Press Three if you’re a senior citizen and want service in sllloooow English. For licence renewals press four. *(Fading under CODY:)* If you are a senior citizen and you have just rammed your oversized antique into an SUV belonging to a tense yuppie, press five.

*(Full lights up. CODY enters with clipboard.)*

**CODY:** Ah, Mr. Hughes? I’m Cody. You’ve seen the 90 minute instructional video?

**EARL:** Gripping stuff.

**CODY:** *(Serious.)* Yes, it is. Well, I’m going to give you your road test now.

**EARL:** Are you old enough?

**CODY:** Yes sir, I’m twenty-one.

**EARL:** Imagine.

**CODY:** My car’s out here.

**EARL:** Don’t I get to drive my own car?

**CODY:** No sir. Our examination vehicles have double brakes, in case you/

**EARL:** But I only drive American Motors cars and yours isn’t likely/

**CODY:** It’s a Toyota Camry.

**EARL:** Dorothy warned me this would happen.

**CODY:** You’ll find the Camry awesome. It’s a very popular car with the elderly. And your car was uh impounded.

**EARL:** How’d you know that?

**CODY:** It’s in your file.

**EARL:** The government can’t answer their own phones but they’ve got a file on me!

**CODY:** Are you ready to head out sir? If you’d like to use the restrooms first they’re/

*(Light change. Tighter on them. EARL is driving. Some*

*reactions from CODY, mostly nervous.)*

**EARL:** Very smooth. Who’d have thunk it. I wonder how much these go for? Not that I’ll ever trade in my Matador. I plan to be buried in that beast. But I can see the appeal of these. I could have sold these, my wife was right – told me to go Japanese way back in - Whoops – where did she come from? Have you noticed women drive more aggressively these days? I was practically attacked by a woman in her Lexus the other day. I think it’s going well. Yes, I’m doing great. Am I doing OK son? Was that light orange? I suppose you like people to signal when they change lanes huh? OK, I’ll do that next time. Where the sam hill are we? Which way, why is that car – where do I turn there, can you just point it out to me –

**CODY:** Pull over!

**EARL:** Pull over?

**CODY:** Pull over!

**EARL:** But son, we just started!

**CODY:** Mr. Hughes. I’m afraid we are not having an entirely successful afternoon. There were problems parallel parking, you kept turning and changing lanes without using the lane indicator, your turns went wide and

**EARL: -** I can explain.

**CODY:** And you’re too easily distracted. If you have a passenger you just seem to keep talking.

**EARL:** That’s my training, from when I take customers out on test drives.

**CODY:** Except you’re distracting yourself as well. I’m sorry, I’m going to have to fail you.

**EARL:** I can’t have my licence back?

**CODY:** No sir. You can retest in a year.

**EARL:** I can’t have my licence back?

**CODY:** You’ll have to take the seminar again and then the in-car test. I know this is difficult for you but some Seniors do succeed the second time around. May I call you a taxi?

**EARL:** Son. Please. Please.

**CODY:** Or there’s a bus stop, just across the road from the testing centre.

**EARL:** No. Son. Cody. You don’t understand. Please.

*(CODY is exiting.)*

**CODY:** I’m sorry Mr. Hughes.

**EARL:** No! Franklin! Come back! Frankie! Oh God, he’s gone off again.

*(EARL begins walking.)*

Eighty years on this planet. I’ve driven for 64 of them. I sold cars for nearly 50. I ate cars, slept them, dreamed them, breathed them, started my year in September with the new models, let my heart race whenever a customer came into the showroom and then felt a little pang every time one of them drove one of my babies off my lot and out of my life. There is nothing else worth living for, nothing, nothing, put beside that, everything else is just – ordinary.

*(EARL reaches a bench – a pew this time. Gradually some church ambiance, maybe coloured light. There’s a woman beside him. DOROTHY.)*

**DOROTHY:** So.

**EARL:** So?

**DOROTHY:** So how was it really.

**EARL:** How was what really.

**DOROTHY:** The rest of your life.

**EARL:** Like I said, pretty average. I’m just an ordinary man, Dodo.

**DOROTHY:** I never saw you that way.

**EARL:** OK. Just ordinary man, surrounded by some pretty extraordinary - cars.

**DOROTHY:** That’s all?

**EARL:** Aaaand some other stuff.

**DOROTHY:** Like.

**EARL:** Why are you fishing for compliments? We’ve got all eternity for that. Let’s listen to what Franklin has to say. He’s a minister again you know.

**DOROTHY:** I know.

**EARL:** He tried a few more communes after you died.

**DOROTHY:** I know.

**EARL:** Hippie stuff. *(Mimes taking a toke.)*

**DOROTHY:** I know.

**EARL:** But he went back to God. Worst memory in the United Church.

**DOROTHY:** Let him talk Earl.

**FRANKLIN:** …So that was Dad. It wasn’t fair that he died in a bus shelter but it wasn’t fair that he was losing his licence. Then again, getting old isn’t fair either. And now, my friends, I’d like you all to join us, as we honour Dad, in the way we honoured my mother, and my grandfather before her. The cortege to end all corteges, as arranged by you, his customers and the collector clubs… in your Ramblers and Nashes and Metropolitans and Jeeps – Let’s go to our cars, let’s start our engines, and then let us all take this final test drive together. My friends, it’s time to take Earl home.

*(Sounds of the cars in the cortege starting their engines. Many cars. Music comes up.)*

**DOROTHY:** Ordinary huh.

*(EARL Smiles. DOROTHY leans over and closes EARL’s eyes. Stage goes to black.)*

**The End.**