

The Rental Company

By

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Characters:

Lenny, 40s

Ray, 40s

Marla, 30s

Setting:

*Let's Go For a Drive* car rental company.  
Chicago. Christmas eve.

Time:

1975.

Note: These characters, however outrageous, should be performed as real people and not caricatures. This play does not work if they are treated as cartoons.

Chicago. North side. 1975. In the black, the sound of the El train passing. Lights up. A car rental company. Front office. A rough and tumble place. Reeks of a hard-won, hands-on era. A pathetic Christmas tree (the barrel of a gun fits nicely on the crown) is in one corner on a table offering "free eggnog." LENNY, smoking a cigarette, is on a phone behind a wide, battered desk. LENNY is weathered, wiry, and sleazy. Bundled from the cold, RAY, a wimp, enters as:

LENNY

Look, pal, I know the contract says five days and today is only the third day. I can add. I went to elementary school. Until I blew it up. I need the car back. Now. (beat) I don't give a shit about your family's last Christmas in Evanston with your dying grandfather.

LENNY eyes RAY, who stands there, scared. LENNY pulls the phone from his mouth.

LENNY (cont'd)

What do you want?

RAY

I...I want to rent a car.

LENNY

Do you? Well splash me with olive oil and toss me in a salad. Sit down.

RAY sits. LENNY returns to the phone.

LENNY (cont'd)

I tell you what, Mr....uh...(reading contract in front of him)...Mr. Piatkowski, I'll make this very simple. You don't return the station wagon by tonight, I'm gonna take a screwdriver and carve "Lenny was here" on your nuts.

LENNY slams the phone down. He snatches a bottle of Pepto-Bismol from his desk top and throws back a swig.

LENNY (cont'd)

I tell you, the Christmas season is the worst. Makes you wanna rip somebody's head off and piss into their lungs. What's your name?

RAY

My name? Ray Phister. I made a reservation about an hour ago.

LENNY

Well, Ray Phister, we don't take reservations. Our policy is - you call about a car, you better come get the car.

The phone rings.

LENNY (cont'd)

Don't move.

LENNY snatches the phone.

LENNY (cont'd)

*Let's Go For A Drive.* (beat) What? (beat) No, Vinnie, I said North Clark. 5009 North Clark St. It's near Wrigley Field. (beat) Right, right...he's a beefy guy. White beard. Big red suit. (beat) He's got the Cadillac, right. If you see one scratch on the car, take that fat bastard to the Michigan Avenue Bridge and hang him upside down by his Achilles tendons.

LENNY hangs up the phone.

LENNY (cont'd)

Now, Ray Phister, you ever rented a car from us before?

RAY

No. I'd remember. I wouldn't be here except my car quit on me last night and...uh, no one can fix it until after Christmas, and you guys are right around the corner, and I saw the neon sign out front...it says, "GET IN HERE."

LENNY

Going home for the holidays?

RAY

Well, my ex-home. In Joliet. Where my ex lives. With our son. I really miss them. I mean, him.

LENNY

That's beautiful.

RAY

And you?

LENNY

Naw, lost my family 'bout six month ago in a warehouse fire.

RAY

That's terrible.

LENNY

Yeah, well, I was strapped for cash and they were pissing me off. But it don't mean I'm alone for the holidays. I'm spending Christmas the right way. Face first into a pair of big knockers. (beat) OK, I'm gonna need to see a driver's license and phone number of next of kin.

LENNY pulls a contract from the desk.  
RAY hands LENNY his driver's license.

RAY

N-n-n-next of kin?

LENNY

Yeah, we gotta know who to contact in case someone slits your throat and tosses you in a ditch. It's a scary world, Ray. This is 1975. Life ain't all Doris Day anymore.

LENNY writes down license information and hands RAY his license back.

RAY

You know, I'm beginning to think maybe this isn't such a good idea.

RAY stands up, as if to leave.

LENNY

Sit down and give me a number. We got another policy. We provide service to all our customers. *Or else.*

Terrified, RAY sits.

RAY

Well, uh, a number of next of kin? OK. That would be my grandmother in Hyde Park. 312-373-5442. Try not to call after nine p.m.

LENNY

OK, we got two cars left. The El Dorado and the Continental. If you take the Continental, make sure you check under the hood for any unusual objects before you start it up in the morning.

RAY

I'll...I'll take the El Dorado then.

LENNY

How long do you want it?

RAY

How long do you want me to want it?

LENNY

What is this, the Newlywed Game? Screw it. I'll call you when I want the car back. *Be available.*

RAY

My motto.

LENNY

We rent on a cash basis only. The El Dorado is fifteen bucks a day.

You can go anywhere you want, but I highly recommend avoiding the North Loop area, particularly Randolph St., more particularly, anyone with the last name Meucci. If you absolutely have to drive there, I have provided for you, in the trunk, Wisconsin plates.

RAY

Wisconsin plates? D-d-d-d-do you think that's necessary?

LENNY

Yes, Ray, I do. Now, continuing, as long as the car is in your possession, you are never to utter my name or the name of this establishment. Got that?

RAY

I'm not a squealer.

LENNY

Good. OK, now, Ray, normally, on all rentals, I require a deposit, which usually gets pretty bloody, but I'm in the Christmas spirit. No deposit required. But, if I were you, I'd bring the car back exactly as it is now, otherwise I lose the Christmas spirit real fast.

RAY

(faking a laugh)

Ho, ho, ho.

LENNY

In case of gun fire, you are not to abandon the car. You stay with the car. Do you catch my drift?

RAY

Maybe...maybe I should get some insurance.

LENNY

All our vehicles come with insurance. There is a number for insurance related issues scrawled inside the lid of the glove compartment. Call that one. Ask for "The Butcher."

LENNY pushes the contract at RAY.

LENNY (cont'd)

All right, put your John Hancock right there.

RAY

Where?

LENNY

There, where it says "sign here, asshole."

RAY signs. LENNY rips away the bottom sheet.

Your copy.  
LENNY (cont'd)

LENNY gives it to RAY. The phone rings.

Just a second.  
LENNY (cont'd)

LENNY grabs the phone.

LENNY (cont'd)  
*Let's Go For A Drive.* (beat) Now slow down. (beat) It what?  
(beat) It doesn't work? (beat) You've had the Monte Carlo for  
three weeks and now you want to bitch that the horn doesn't  
work? Who you gotta honk at? (beat) The Christmas Day parade  
can kiss my ass! Run 'em down if they're in the way! This is  
the third phone call! Blinker, eight-track, horn...I get one  
more call from you I'm coming down to poke your beady eyeballs  
out with an ice pick. Good-bye, Mom!

LENNY slams the phone down. Takes  
another swallow of Pepto Bismol.

LENNY (cont'd)  
*Relatives.*

(to Ray)  
I need to get your car key, so hang tight. Try the eggnog if  
you're feeling lucky. But don't even think about leaving.

LENNY exits the back door. RAY sits  
alone. He looks at the front door, then  
the back door. He rises and starts to  
tip-toe out. MARLA comes barging through  
the door, waving a gun. She's all  
makeup, jewelry, and furs. She's drunk  
and has a bottle in her other hand.

MARLA  
Where is he? Where is he?! Where is that two-faced rat?!  
I'll shoot a bullet right through his pee-hole!

MARLA looks around and doesn't see LENNY.  
Instead, she sees the terrified RAY.

MARLA (cont'd)  
Hey, Cutie Pie! Is Lenny in?

RAY  
I-I-I-I-I-I-I-I-

Stumbling towards him, she aims the gun.

MARLA  
Speak you little weasel! Is...he...in?

RAY

Don't kill me, please. I just came to rent a car.

Putting the gun to his forehead:

MARLA

Is...he...

MARLA vomits over his shoulder. LENNY enters.

LENNY

Marla. Sweetheart. Sit down, relax, have some eggnog.

MARLA turns the gun on LENNY immediately.

MARLA

There you are, you sack of shit!

LENNY

Hey, again with the gun?

MARLA

How did you figure I wasn't gonna find out about it!?

LENNY

Find out about what?

MARLA

My sister! You did it with my sister!?

LENNY

Hey, she's family.

MARLA fires at him. But she's drunk. And she misses. By a lot.

LENNY (cont'd)

Marla, put the gun down.

MARLA

I thought the men's room at Sal's Pizza was *our* place?!

MARLA fires at him again. Misses again.

LENNY

Marla, please. It's Christmas.

MARLA

I'm Jewish!

She fires again and again until the gun clicks repeatedly, empty. LENNY casually grabs the gun from the top of the tree and fires at her, killing her.



LENNY

Christ Almighty. Now I'm gonna need a date for Christmas.

RAY

Oh, God...oh, God...oh, God...oh, God...

LENNY downs the last of the Pepto Bismol.

RAY (cont'd)

You killed that woman!

LENNY locks the front door. Draws the blinds.

LENNY

They come, they go, they gotta be disposed of. Grab her legs.

RAY

But...she's dead!

LENNY

Life, like cars, Ray, is rented. Whoa, I just got profound. Grab her legs. We've got to dump the body.

LENNY removes some of MARLA'S jewelry and pockets it as:

RAY

Dump the body?

LENNY

I know it's old fashioned, but the wood chipper's busted. We're gonna put her in the back of the El Dorado.

RAY

My car? No.

LENNY

Yes. You're gonna take her to the county dump before you head out to Joliet. I'm giving you the car, you're going to dump my girlfriend. A gift for a gift. It's the gift-giving season, Ray. Now grab her legs.

RAY

I just came to get a car!

LENNY

Grab her legs.

LENNY grabs MARLA'S arms.

RAY

This is insane! It's Christmas!

LENNY

So sing some carols on the way over.

RAY

No! I won't do it!

LENNY

Ray, Ray, Ray, you're coming unglued here.

RAY

I work in a library where it's quiet and safe!

RAY starts to back out of the office.

LENNY

Ray.

RAY

I've never been an accessory! I don't know how to be an accessory! I will not be an accessory!

LENNY

Don't take another step!

RAY stops. LENNY drops MARLA'S arms. He goes to RAY and puts his arm around him.

LENNY (cont'd)

It's going to be OK. But she's bleeding all over the hardwood, Ray. Do you know what a pain in the ass it is to get blood out of oak?

RAY

No, I don't.

LENNY

It's a bitch, let me tell you. Like pulling teeth, which are also a pain in the ass to get out.

LENNY gently guides RAY back to the body as:

RAY

(weepy)

I just want to see my son for Christmas.

LENNY

(not weepy)

Ray, you're making me weepy here. You want to see your son. I understand. You love the little shit. What's he into...baseball? Basketball? Football?

RAY

Parcheesi. I got him an antique game board for Christmas that's from 1890!

LENNY

Jesus H. Ray, don't take this the wrong way, but you're raising a little Mary Alice. Do him a favor and take him out and get him laid.

RAY

He's nine.

LENNY

It's not illegal if they're both underage. (beat) I'm kidding! I'm sorry, Ray. I'm feeling the suffering of my loss here.

LENNY looks down at the body.

LENNY (cont'd)

There, I'm over it. So, are you going to help me dump the broad or am I going to be dumping a dead Ray, too?

RAY

I don't want to die.

LENNY

Nobody does, Ray. Not you, not me, not even a fly. Every living thing practices self-preservation. Holy shit, I need to write these down.

RAY

My son's mother is going to be very upset when I'm late.

LENNY

Is she?

RAY

She's going to yell at me.

LENNY

When you come in the front door, and she starts in, you tell her to "get squeezed." Say it.

RAY

G...g...get squeezed.

LENNY

Like a man, Ray. Say, "get squeezed, slut."

RAY

Get squeezed, s-s-slut.

LENNY

"Get squeezed, slut, or I'm going to rip your heart out through your mouth and shove it up your ass until you're shitting a pulse."

RAY

That one may get a little wordy.

LENNY

You know, Ray, I think this is exactly what you need. I remember when I dumped my first body. I was 11. I couldn't believe how quickly my old man sank to the bottom of the river. It's the kind of thing that changes you, Ray. In a very deep way. Reminds you that death is very permanent. (beat) You're getting big time life lessons here today, Ray. I hope you appreciate it.

RAY

Oh, I do.

LENNY

Good.

From his pocket LENNY gets a key and gives it to RAY.

LENNY (cont'd)

Here's the key to the El Dorado. Lose it and you lose your lips. Let's go.

They drag MARLA out the back way as:

LENNY (cont'd)

(singing)

*Have yourself a merry little Christmas  
Let your heart be light*

LENNY glares at RAY.

LENNY (cont'd)

Sing with me, Ray.

LENNY/RAY

(singing)

*From now on  
Our troubles will be out of sight..."*

They exit.

THE END