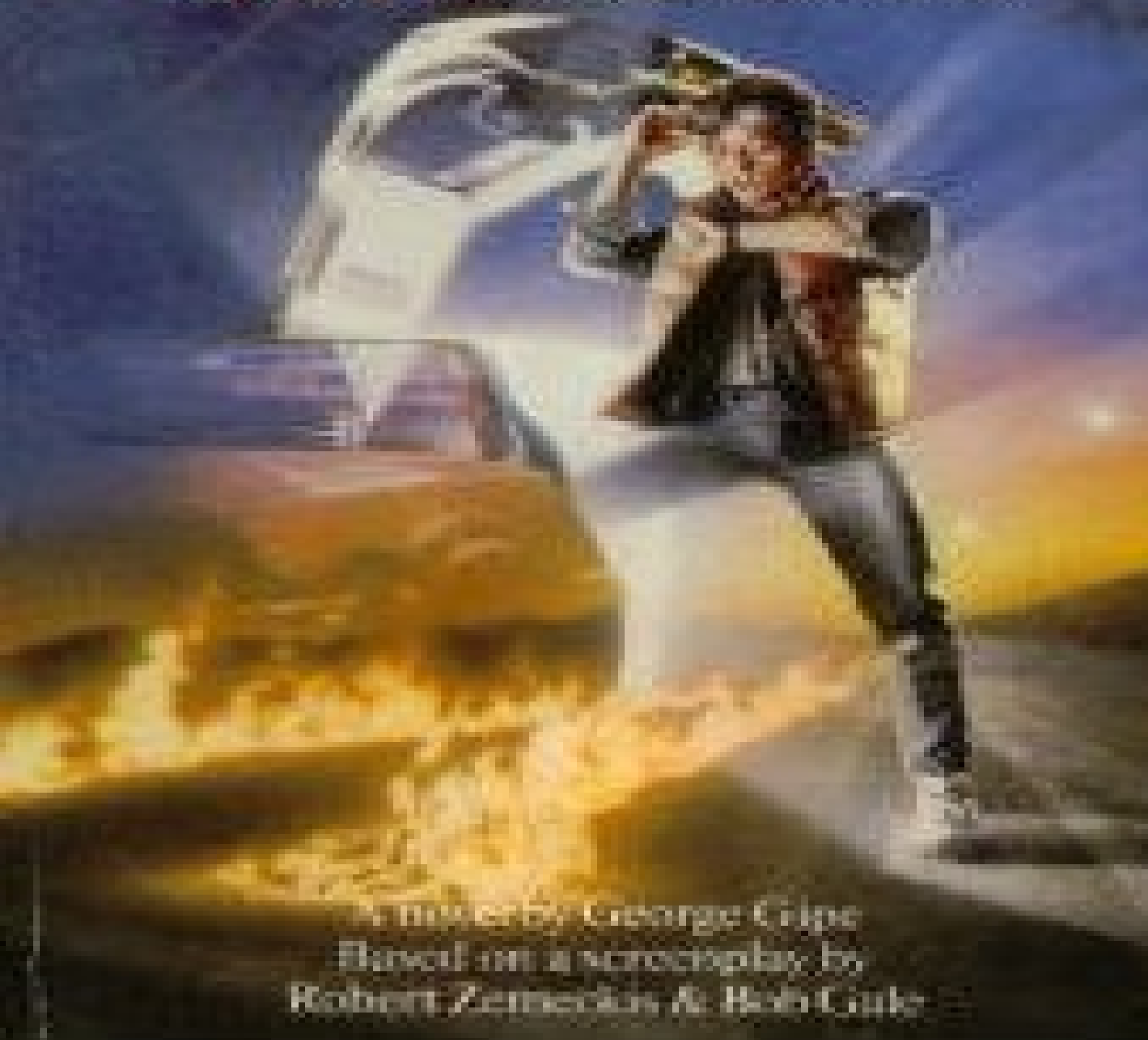


STEVEN SPIELBERG PRESENTS

BACK TO THE FUTURE

A ROBERT ZEMMECK'S FILM



A movie by George Lucas
Based on a screenplay by
Robert Zemeckis & Bob Gale

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BACK TO THE FUTURE

A novel by George Gipe
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Here, in the living room of a peaceful house in the suburbs, a typical family sits quietly. Dad reads the evening paper, unaware that disaster is about to strike. Mom cleans the dinner dishes, oblivious to the fact that in a few seconds their world will be reduced to a whirlwind of splinters and atomized debris. The children are in their rooms, doing their homework, little knowing that only a few moments of life are left to them, that they will never have to worry about homework again. The mightiest force ever created by man is about to be unleashed on them and there is nothing on earth they can do about it...

Five...four...three...two...one...

A second later, there was a flash of white and the unnamed family were enveloped in a surge of power that tore their tiny frames to pieces, bending them curiously out of shape before separating bodies from heads, arms from torsos, legs from abdomens. The solid-looking house simply crumpled into thin shreds of pulp and instantly ignited into a raveling avalanche of flame. A wind-tunnel effect then whisked the body parts and wreckage of furniture and plaster into a horrible whirling mass that was sucked into the tortured atmosphere. A long silent moment followed, the noise of the blast diminishing to a soft echo evoking the end of life on the planet.

The class was not impressed by the violent display and aftermath. At least there were no visible signs of amazement, horror, or even acute involvement.

Nevertheless, the announcer—probably long since gone to his own last resting place—continued his narration of the film on atomic power, circa 1955.

You have just seen how this mighty force can utterly destroy a society unprepared for its use. For this reason, some have protested the utilization of any form of atomic power. But it is too late to go back now. The potential for good of this force outweighs its potential for evil. A vital source of energy that may someday replace that created by coal or even conventional electrical power...

Most of the class listened to the illustrated lecture with only one ear. It was late in the day, much too late to pay close attention, and they had all seen the film before. Some thought of other things: a few drew pictures on the covers of their books in the semidarkness.

One student, the most daring and enterprising of the class, listened to stereo rock music. His eyes were nearly closed and his limbs had to struggle to remain still rather than follow along with the beat, but he gladly accepted this limitation as his lips quietly formed the words of the song.

Got to have your love...

Scientists predict that by the year 2000, at least half the homes in America will be run by atomic power...

Got to have you in my arms...Need to hold you...

There'll be atomic cars with an engine the size of an acorn. Ships with nuclear dynamos will be able to travel without refueling for indefinite periods, perhaps as long as a year. Finally, the idea that giant rocket ships powered by atomic fuel, going to the moon and even farther, will become a reality rather than science fiction.

Give me one more chance...Won't you please get up and dance?

This is our opportunity. The chance of a lifetime...

Give me one more chance...

Let us not fail...

Let's have one more dance...

The closing music of the film ended, followed by popping noises from the projector and then a solo baritone voice.

“Let's have one more dance...”

Twenty heads swiveled in the direction of the singer. Unfortunately, one of them was that of Mr. Arky, the social studies teacher. His sense of direction told him immediately that the singer was Marty McFly, but his decided myopia veiled certain specifics. For one thing, he didn't see Marty deftly remove the headphones from his ears and return them to the hollow book, which also contained a tiny but powerful Walkman cassette player. Nor did Mr. Arky see the sly smile Marty exchanged with Jennifer Parker, the attractive 17-year-old who sat next to him.

“What was that, McFly?” Mr. Arky challenged.

“Nothing, sir. I was just saying I hope we all have one more dance.”

“Indeed.”

For a long moment, Mr. Arky surveyed the young man, scanning his features for signs of arrogance or rebellion that he could convert to a reason for punishment. Singing in class was technically sufficient, but even Mr. Arky felt that a single line could be excused. *If* that had been all. He fixed young McFly with his most intimidating gaze, hoping to panic him into either a confession or further punishable arrogance. Instead, the infuriatingly good-looking face framed by medium-length brown hair simply stared back. After a moment of indecision, Mr. Arky backed away from the confrontation as gracefully as he could.

“Now, as you all saw in that film,” he intoned, “the attitudes about nuclear energy were quite a bit different in those days...You also—”

He was interrupted by the heavy rustling sound that always preceded an announcement over the school's antiquated public address system.

“Marty McFly, please come to the office,” the PA voice mumbled, barely above the threshold of intelligibility. “You have an emergency telephone call. Marty McFly.”

“Must be my agent,” Marty murmured to Jennifer and the others within earshot.

He was wise enough to remain in his seat until a reluctant motion of Mr. Arky's hand released him. Then, gathering up his books, he walked quickly out of the room.

In the nearly deserted hallway between classes, his mood vacillated from the joy of being dismissed early from Arky's post-film debriefing and concern that there really was an “emergency.” What could it be? An accident or death in the family? At 17, his life so far had been serene; he therefore had no premonition of disaster. In addition, being a genial and optimistic person, he was not disposed to consider life darkly. Then, nearing the office, his mind clutched at the worst possible calamity this particular day could offer—cancellation of his band's audition!

“No,” he said aloud. “Don't let it be that!”

Suddenly he found that his steps had taken on a new urgency, that he was nearly running.

The band was everything. At least for the moment it was his chance to be somebody different from

everyone else. It was his opportunity to excel, impress, win friends and influence people. He knew he had talent, that the possibility existed of his becoming a rock star. Yet there was something deeper than that, a feeling of freedom when he was jamming with the group. At those times when they were really going well, he experienced the excitement of doing something new, of courting disaster and somehow coming away not only unscathed but also glorified. It was an out-of-body experience bringing with it a sense of weightlessness, a feeling that no world existed outside the sphere reached by his music.

Jennifer was terrific, of course. He was quite taken by her, even felt that he “loved” her in the most adult sense. She was beautiful and fun to be around and she loved his music. Yet somehow she was not quite as important to Marty as the musical experience. Perhaps in time she would grow to be vastly more valuable to him, but for the moment Jennifer was of this world and his music was of the next.

The school office was quiet, populated only by the usual mousy staff and one student who slumped hunched in a corner of the waiting room. Nevertheless, the secretaries went about their business very slowly and deliberately for more than a minute before one of them looked up enough for Marty to grab her attention.

“Emergency call for me,” he said.

The chubby woman in her fifties, whose name he had never learned, motioned for Marty to come into the office area and use the phone on her desk. Then with studied politeness she moved to a faraway desk so that he could speak and listen with greater privacy.

Such was not the case with Gerald Strickland, the school disciplinarian who took his job as seriously as any prison warden. Five minutes ago, he had taken the so-called “emergency” call himself. Phony, he had thought at the time. The breathlessness and urgency were there in the man’s voice on the other end of the line but there was something that struck him as decidedly fake. Strickland considered himself a student of human nature, a master of detecting the deceitful maneuver. Though over sixty and nearing the end of his long career in education, he relished each day’s mental combat with the selfish young men and women who regarded him as nothing but an evitable obstacle to their willfulness. Strickland knew they laughed at him behind his back, chuckled at him wearing a bow tie every day, and considered him a tyrant. But, by God, they didn’t laugh when he was looking at them. No smart remarks emanated from their lips when he interrogated them. They knew he had the power to make their lives temporarily miserable and they respected him for this.

Now, timing his motions with Marty McFly, whom he could see across the room through his half-open door, Strickland picked up the receiver of his telephone at the same time as the young man.

“Hello,” he heard Marty say a bit nervously.

“Marty, it’s me,” the other voice said.

“Doc!”

Strickland experienced a momentary pang of doubt. Doc? Was it possible the caller was actually a physician about to inform McFly of some genuine emergency? If such was the case, he would not only be deprived of the opportunity to confront and punish the young man; it would be a severe setback to his own confidence in his ability to combat deceitfulness. The pulse of anxiety passed as quickly as it came, however, the relaxation caused by the casualness in McFly’s tone. How many teenagers call bona fide adult physicians “Doc”? No, it was too familiar. Doc, whoever he was, was a person he knew and a friend. Strickland, the moral bloodhound, was on the right track after all.

“I told you never to call me here,” Marty continued. “I’m in school.”

“I know,” the man called Doc replied. “I had to get in touch with you.”

“Why? What’s so important?”

“You’ll see. Listen, can you meet me at Peabody’s Farm around 1:15?”

“Peabody’s Farm? Where’s that?”

“I’m sorry,” Doc amended. “I mean Twin Pines Mall. I still think of it as Peabody’s Farm, but I guess that was before your time.”

Marty looked up at the large clock on the wall. “But it’s after 1:15 already,” he replied.

“I mean 1:15 in the morning.”

“Tomorrow morning? About ten hours from now?”

“Yeah.”

Gerald Strickland smiled. Whatever the “emergency,” it was obviously something that could have waited until the young man was out of class, school, and had arrived home. He had seen through the sham after all and he experienced a surge of pride in his continuing ability to outwit those nearly fifty years younger.

“Let me get this straight,” Marty said into the phone. “You want me to meet you at Twin Pines Mall at 1:15 tomorrow morning?”

“Right. I’ve made a major breakthrough and I’ll need your assistance.”

“Can’t you tell me now?” Marty asked.

Gerald Strickland found himself nodding in response. Yes, he thought, do explain more. Whatever it was sounded definitely shady and perhaps illegal. Most students are notoriously lazy, not at all likely to be awake at such an early hour. What could they be engaged in? He licked his lips, fascinated at the possibilities in this telephone call. It had made his otherwise dreary day.

But the one known as Doc was obviously a cagey customer.

Refusing to yield more information, either to McFly or Strickland, he said simply: “Look, I’ll give you all the details at the appropriate time.”

“O.K.,” Marty replied.

“Oh, and Marty,” Doc continued. “Good luck on your gig this afternoon.”

“How did you know about that?” Marty asked.

But there was only a click and silence at the end of the wire.

Gig, Strickland repeated inwardly. He had heard the word used before, of course. It usually referred to something musical, but he had heard it used less definitely. Perhaps whatever Marty McFly was involved in was shady enough to be mentioned elliptically. But no matter. The gig, innocent or evil, would not be attended by McFly this afternoon.

With that, Gerald Strickland placed his receiver down and started out of the office. He reached Marty just as he was about to push through the swinging door separating the inner office from the waiting area.

“Just a minute,” Strickland said.

Marty stopped, looked at the older man with a blank expression.

“Are you finished with your emergency call?” Strickland asked, a slight smile playing at the end of his thin lips.

“Yessir.”

“And is everyone in your family well?”

Marty nodded.

“Then may I ask what the emergency was?”

“It’s too complicated to explain,” Marty began, trying to dredge up some confidence.

“I have time,” Strickland replied curtly.

Marty swallowed and then plunged ahead. “There’s an aunt in Wisconsin,” he said. “And an uncle. They’re both crippled. They were in a car accident about ten years ago. Anyway, she’s going into the hospital tomorrow for another operation and they asked me—”

“Bull droppings,” Strickland interrupted.

“Sir?”

“I said, bull droppings. There’s no crippled aunt and uncle in Wisconsin. That was a personal call from McFly. You know students are to use the school phone only for emergencies.”

“Well, this was an emergency,” Marty shrugged. “Sort of.”

“I don’t think so, McFly.”

“Well, maybe not to me, but it was an emergency to the person who called me.”

“It’s all the same. It’s study hall for you.”

“But why?” Marty challenged. “How can I help it if somebody says it’s an emergency and it’s not? Maybe you should send them to study hall. Anyway, how do you know it wasn’t an emergency?”

“Because I was on the extension in my office and heard the entire conversation.”

Marty felt his ears starting to burn. “But that’s wiretapping,” he said angrily. “That’s against the law.”

“For your information, McFly,” Strickland returned. “It’s not wiretapping. It’s eavesdropping. But it wouldn’t matter. You’re in school, and here I’m the law. Whoever called you with a nonemergency call did you a great disservice. When you’ve come out of study hall, you can tell Doc he’s no friend.”

Marty stared. Inspired by the confrontation, Strickland had a sudden flash of intuition.

“That wouldn’t be Doc Brown, would it?” he asked. McFly’s silence told him he had successfully identified the caller—Doc Brown, the town eccentric, a man who in Strickland’s estimation was simply no good, a child who never grew up.

“Let me give you a nickel’s worth of free advice,” he said. “That Doc Brown is trouble. A real nutcase. Perhaps even dangerous.”

“To you, maybe,” Marty replied loyally. “I don’t see it that way.”

“Then you’re not only dim-witted, McFly. You’ve got a severe attitude problem. You’re a slacker. You’ve got aptitude but you don’t apply yourself.” Realizing that he hadn’t quite gotten to the young man, Strickland then applied the crusher. “As a matter of fact,” he rasped, “in a lot of ways you remind me of your father. He was a slacker, too.”

Marty blanched, for Strickland had struck the one nerve he was unable to protect. He simply did not enjoy being compared to his father, especially when the person doing so put them in the same category. If Strickland had been a contemporary, Marty would have thrown back an angry retort. That, of course, was impossible under the present circumstances, so he merely looked away.

“Excuse me,” he said. “I’m late for class.”

He started to take a step toward the door, but Strickland’s hand shot out quickly.

“I didn’t excuse you, McFly,” he said sharply, grabbing Marty’s elbow.

The sudden motion caused Marty to lose control of his books, two of which started to slide down his leg. Raising his knee, Marty succeeded only in knocking the others loose. A split second later everything hit the floor, including the hollowed-out book containing his Walkman stereo. As luck would have it, the illicit unit slid tantalizingly across the waxed tile in slow motion, coming to rest in the far corner of the waiting area.

Strickland regarded it with narrowed eyes. Too late, Marty started gathering up his books, quickly placing his body between Strickland and the Walkman.

“You know the rules,” the older man smiled. “No radios in school. That means detention for one week.”

Marty gulped. He started to protest, then accepted the inevitable. “Yessir,” he muttered.

“Starting today,” Strickland continued.

“Today?” Marty gasped. “But I can’t! Me and my band have an audition for the YMCA dance, Mr. Strickland. I have to be there at four o’clock.”

One might as well have tried begging a shark to seek food elsewhere. Through rheumy eyes spiked with malicious glee, Strickland stared unflinchingly at his victim. Then, with a curt wave of his hand, he began to turn away. “An audition, huh?” he said. “Well, McFly, it looks like you just blew it.”

The clock read 3:42.

Marty was beginning to wonder if he had somehow offended a local deity governing the fates of Hill Valley high school students. It was all too pat to be impersonal—the calculated eavesdropping of Mr. Strickland, bad luck in dropping the Walkman stereo, and now this. After careful consideration, he had decided to skip detention, pleading tomorrow that there had been a misunderstanding as to when the week’s punishment was to begin. That, however, was before he peeked into the classroom to see what teacher had charge of the detention session.

It was none other than Mr. Strickland himself.

“Damn!” Marty hissed.

There was no way of convincing *him* that a misunderstanding existed. He didn’t even have time to debate the pros and cons of simply splitting and taking the consequences. No sooner had he spotted Strickland than the piercing eyes honed in on him like enemy radar.

“Come in, McFly,” Strickland ordered.

Head down, Marty walked into the room. It was a typical classroom in the school which had been built at the end of the Great Depression. Green blackboards had replaced the old black types and the walls, desks and ceiling had been repainted. A new sprinkler system had been added, too, but the place still had a dreariness that Marty found almost terminally depressing. The expressions on the faces of the ten other students enduring punishment indicated that they regarded the place with equal misery. All stared glumly ahead or down at the desk top in front of them. One of the victims, a thin-faced kid named Weeze, had a skateboard tucked beneath his books, almost as if he expected Mr. Strickland to confiscate or destroy it.

His fear, if he harbored it, was not mere fancy. At the front of the room stood Strickland, ten Walkman units lined neatly on the desk next to him. Those who had been through it before knew what was about to happen next, a fact which did not make it much easier.

“Now...” Strickland smiled sadistically, “we are going to see how we deal with those who violate our ‘no Walkman’ rule.”

Gently, almost reverentially, he lifted one of the units and placed it in the jaws of a woodworking vise mounted on the corner of the desk. He then began tightening the jaws until the set broke in half, the sound approximating that of bones breaking. As bits of plastic and mangled parts trickled to the floor, one student winced as if the pain were being inflicted on his own body. Strickland, well aware which unit belonged to each student, smiled wickedly at the horrified young man.

“Now then, Stevenson,” he said. “You may come up here and claim your stereo.”

Stevenson got up and knelt down to pick up the shattered remains of his set.

With gleeful deliberation, Strickland continued the crunching orgy. Marty’s set was fourth in line for execution but he was more concerned about the passing time than the fate of his Walkman. He could still make it to the audition if Strickland released them early.

Fat chance, he thought. Then, after a moment of black despair, he forced his mind to think. There must be a way out, a scheme clever enough to create panic or some legitimate emergency. His eyes scanned the room. Only a sprinkler system offered possibilities, but he couldn’t formulate a workable plan of attack.

“This is yours, isn’t it, McFly?” Strickland interrupted Marty’s thoughts. “Number three?”

“Four,” Marty said evenly. He was determined not to let the creep see how much he hated to lose his Walkman.

With a brisk smile, Strickland dispatched the next set and then reached for Marty’s stereo with something like renewed passion. The jaws of the vise pressed in, causing a low scraping sound; almost as if the set were crying out in pain. Then, with a particularly loud snap, the Walkman’s splintered remains shot out of the vise in all directions. Momentary panic crossed Strickland’s features as shards of plastic flew past his eyes and head.

“It’s all yours, McFly,” Strickland said, quickly regaining his composure.

Marty got up to collect the broken pieces of his set. As he did so, the hint of a smile played around his lips, for he had conceived a daring plan that was at least worth a shot. He switched the shattered bits of plastic to one hand, then made a detour on the way back to his seat. Passing by the Carousel slide projector on a side table, he paused long enough to reach out and surreptitiously slide the lever into his pocket. Busily involved in the execution of the next Walkman, Strickland did not notice Marty’s quick movement.

Returning to his seat, Marty reached into the pencil pouch of his loose-leaf binder, withdrawing a rubber band and book of matches. He then reached into his pocket, unwrapped a stick of gum and began to chew. His chewing, however, was not that of a person seeking pleasure; rather, it resembled a chore that had to be accomplished as quickly as possible.

A minute later, taking the gum from his mouth, he opened the matchbook cover and spread the soft sticky gum on the back side like a tiny pancake. Next he “loaded” the cover into the rubber band and waited. He had always been a deft shot with rubber band-launched objects but never had so much depended on his accuracy as the shot he planned now. Above him, perhaps a dozen feet away, was the smoke detector connected with the sprinkling system. It was small, hardly an inviting target, but Marty knew he had to try. If he was successful, phase one of his two-part plan would be accomplished. If he missed...well, at least he had made an effort. If Strickland saw him, he could probably expect to remain in detention until well past Easter vacation.

The heck with it, he thought. I've gotta gamble.

He waited patiently until Strickland put the screws to the tenth and final Walkman. Just as shattered, Marty aimed at the valve, pulled the rubber band back as far as it would go, and let fly.

Like a rocket, the matchbook raced up to the ceiling and hung there, the gum making a tenuous connection.

A miracle, Marty thought.

Phase Two was rather less dramatic but nevertheless contained a great potential for being caught. Withdrawing the Carousel projector lens from his pocket, Marty adjusted it so that the bright slanting rays of the afternoon sun struck it and were refracted onto the matchbook stuck to the ceiling. Glancing upward even as he pretended to study from the book on his desk, he was amazed at how well the plan had worked so far. A sharp pin prick of white was focused on the matchbook. If only the sun would hurry up and do its thing!

The clock now read 3:52. He would be late for the audition but by only a few minutes. His hands were getting tired, holding the lens in an unmoving position, but he dared not rest even a second. Did he see a wisp of smoke? He squinted, decided it was his imagination.

Then he saw something that definitely was not imaginary. Getting up, Mr. Strickland strode to the back of the room and began pulling down the blinds.

"No!" Marty nearly shouted.

He twisted his head almost completely around, noting that the three rear rows of the room were now in semidarkness as a result of Strickland's action. As he watched, the next three rows fell beneath the dark cloud.

But now there was definitely a wisp of smoke slinking downward from the matchbook.

"Come on, come on," Marty whispered. "Burn, you sucker, burn."

A couple boys near him had already discovered what was going on. They watched in awe and amusement as the smoke grew more violent, a half circle of red crawling up the edge of the matchbook cover toward the double row of matches.

With a snap, Strickland released the next-to-last set of blinds.

"Poof!"

Just as the last strip of bright sunlight disappeared from the classroom, a mini-explosion of flames from the matchbook started a chain reaction. Smoke curling around the ceiling detector immediately triggered the sirens and sprinkler system. Panic, or something very close to it, followed.

"Fire!" somebody yelled. "Let's get outa here!"

"Stop! Wait!" Mr. Strickland's voice shouted above the din. "We must file out in an orderly fashion!"

He raced toward the front of the classroom as fast as he could, arms raised above his head. Bigger, heavier shoulders and faster, more muscular bodies rushed past, sending him spinning sideways against the wall.

"Wait!" he shouted again, just as a sprinkler valve went into action directly above his head, dousing him with cold water. The rest of his words were indistinguishable.

Marty, more prepared for the confusion than anyone else, was halfway down the hall by that time. As soon as the alarm sounded and the rain began to fall, he leaped to his feet and grabbed the skateboard belonging to Weeze.

“Let me borrow this,” he shouted back over his shoulder at the bewildered student. “I’ll bring back tomorrow.” Less than a minute later, he was skateboarding down the front steps of the high school, gliding in a wide arc onto the main drag of wide sidewalk bounding Town Square. Glancing nervously to his right, he passed the Hill Valley Bank’s time and temperature board just as it changed from 3:57 to 3:58. A man making a transaction at the Versateller leaped to avoid the oncoming figure, tripping himself and falling backwards in the process. Then it was Marty’s turn to gasp, a car bearing down on him so rapidly he had to pirouette like a ballerina to maintain his balance. For a half block after that, he raced out of control, his arms flailing and body tipping to 45-degree angles until he slowly managed to right himself.

Just ahead, the YMCA building beckoned. Leaning forward to gain even more speed, Marty pivoted at the steps, grabbed the skateboard and ran into the building.

His group, known as the Pinheads, was already set up. Nearby, Jennifer also waited, nervous, checking her watch. As he raced onto the stage, she let out a noisy sigh of relief and Marty winked at her.

A fat man, also glancing meaningfully at his watch, stared intently at Marty.

“Are you ready?” he asked coldly.

Marty nodded. His guitar, amp and microphone were already set up for him. Sitting quickly, Marty took a deep breath and tuned up in the shortest amount of time possible. Then, grasping the microphone, he looked toward the dance committee and spoke with a voice that rang with confidence. “All right,” he said. “We’re the Pinheads, and we’re gonna rock ‘n’ roll!”

The band kicked into a hot number, Marty’s fingers dancing across the strings and frets in a complicated lead line. Keyboard, bass and drums followed, embellished his thematic figures, hit the rhythm harder, preparing for the transition into Marty’s first variation.

“Fine,” a metallic voice called out. “That’s enough. Thank you.”

Marty could hardly believe his ears. In fact, he continued to play even as the rest of the Pinheads’ sound dribbled off into confused silence.

“Thank you,” the fat man repeated. “May we hear the next group, please?”

Marty came down off the stage in a daze. Had he gone through an afternoon of hell for *this*?

“What happened?” he asked Jennifer.

“I don’t know,” she muttered. “You sounded great. Maybe they’re looking for something else. Something more like Lawrence Welk.”

Ten minutes later, as they walked home, he was still in a state of shock. Jennifer put her hand on his arm. “Marty,” she said comfortingly. “One rejection isn’t the end of the world. You’re good and you’ll succeed one day.”

“I don’t know,” he murmured. “Maybe I’m just not cut out for music.”

“Sure you are,” she persisted. “You’re really good and so are the rest of the guys. The audition tape you made is really great.”

She handed him the cassette he had lent her a few days before. “Promise me you’ll send it to the record company before you decide to quit.”

“But what if they hate it?” Marty sighed. “What if they say, ‘Get outa here, kid, you got no future.’ Why should I put myself through all that anxiety?”

Jennifer didn’t answer.

“Jeez,” Marty said finally. “I’m starting to sound like my old man now.”

Jennifer looked at him quizzically.

“He’s kind of a pushover,” Marty explained. “No guts. People are always using him.”

“Well, they say all our emotional anxieties come directly from our parents,” she smiled. The words coming out of her mouth sounded a bit strange even to her. Where had she heard the phrase? Sociology class? *People* magazine? She wasn’t sure, but it sounded plausible.

“In that case, you can kiss me off right now,” Marty muttered.

“I’ll just kiss you instead,” she said, reaching up to peck his cheek.

They walked hand-in-hand for a while. “Is your father really that bad?” Jennifer asked finally.

Marty shrugged. “I think deep down inside he means well,” he said. “But the man just can’t get together.”

They had reached Town Square, and the presence of the big Toyota dealership, with its gleaming recessed windows and spotless showroom, made Jennifer think of happier things. “Well, at least your dad’s letting you borrow the car tomorrow night,” she smiled. “That’s a major step in the direction of getting it together.”

Marty nodded.

They stopped at the edge of the glass and looked inside at the salesmen circling potential customers like lions readying their attack on smaller beasts. “How come there are no used car saleswomen?” Marty asked. “I’ve never seen a woman selling cars, have you?”

Jennifer shook her head. “Maybe women can’t lie as well as men,” she offered.

Marty laughed, turned his gaze to a tricked-out four-by-four pickup truck in the showroom.

“Hey, check out that four-by-four,” he said. “Wouldn’t it be great to take that up to the lake tomorrow night? We could put our sleeping bags in the back...make out under the stars.”

“Mmmm,” Jennifer replied.

“Someday, Jennifer, someday,” Marty said.

Looking at her smooth profile and even white teeth was starting to make him feel better. Perhaps music wasn’t everything after all.

“What about your mother?” Jennifer asked as they turned away from the window and continued walking. “Does she know you and I are—”

“Are you kidding? She thinks I’m going camping with the guys.”

“Would she mind if she knew the truth?”

“Yeah,” Marty replied. “If she found out I was going camping with you, she’d freak.”

“I’m that bad, huh?”

“It’s not you. It’s a moral thing. She’d give me the standard lecture about how she never behaved that way when she was in high school. She must have been a real goody-two-shoes, I’ll bet.”

“Most people then were, weren’t they? I mean, that was way back in the 1950s, before the pill, rock ‘n’ roll or a lot of things that were really good.”

Marty nodded. “Yeah, I guess it wasn’t easy, growing up in those primitive days.”

They were opposite the former Courthouse Building of Town Square, which had seen better days. The 1950s, in fact, had been the heyday of this part of town. Then people gathered at Town Square to socialize, do business, simply pass the time of day or evening. There had been a Texaco station here

then, a soda shop, florist, the Essex movie house, a record store, a realtor's office, women's dress shop, Studebaker dealer, barber's, an Ask Mr. Foster travel agency, stationery store, Western Auto appliance center and numerous other small businesses. Now nearly all were gone, victims of progress and lack of adequate parking. Many of the building facades were boarded up, covered with peeling notices and signs. One set of election posters read: RE-ELECT MAYOR "GOLDIE" WILSON. HONESTY, DECENCY, INTEGRITY. The picture beneath the inspiring words showed the face of a black man, about fifty years old with a gold front tooth. "This was where Mom used to hang out," Marty said.

"There used to be a soda shop here."

"I guess you couldn't get in trouble there," Jennifer smiled. "Anyway, maybe she's just trying to keep you respectable."

"She's not doing a very good job, is she?" Marty laughed, sliding his arm behind her back. "Terrible..."

"Wonderful..."

They were standing with their hips touching, about to kiss...

"Save the clock tower!" a grating voice suddenly ordered, causing them to jerk apart.

Simultaneously, a donation can was placed between the two teenagers. It rattled hollowly, as there were only two or three lonely coins inside.

"Save the clock tower!" the voice repeated.

Jennifer and Marty turned to look at the person who had interrupted them. She was a middle-aged church-type woman with prematurely blue hair. Her upper lip, Marty noted with just a touch of revulsion, was covered with nearly enough fine hair to provide an aspiring young man with a decent mustache. Under her arm were dozens of printed flyers.

"Please make a donation to save the clock tower," the woman said, rattling the can again.

"Lady, can't you see I'm busy here?" Marty asked. Ordinarily, he would have been pleasant to the interloper, but the events of the day had worn his nerves to a frazzle.

The woman was not put off by his lack of interest, however. Stepping between the two youngsters, she addressed them with swiveling head.

"Mayor Wilson is sponsoring an initiative to save or repair that clock," she intoned, pointing to the stopped clock mounted high on the old courthouse tower. "We at the Hill Valley Preservation Society think it should be preserved exactly the way it is, as part of our history and heritage. Thirty years ago lightning struck that clock tower and the clock hasn't run since. We at the society feel it's a landmark of scientific importance, attesting to the power of the Almighty."

Marty took a deep breath, preparatory to interrupting her spiel, but apparently that was it. They had heard the complete speech.

"All right, lady," Marty said, relieved that they didn't have to listen to even more. "Here's all we have at the moment. A quarter. Is that O.K.?"

"We're delighted with anything," the woman smiled, revealing badly stained dentures. "A good cause can get by with nickels and dimes because it has the backing of the people. A bad cause, even if funded by millions from evil sources, is nevertheless bound to fail."

Marty nodded, started to leave with Jennifer.

"Don't forget to take a flyer," the woman urged. "It tells the whole story of the clock tower."

Marty took the flyer from her hand.

“And here’s something for your friend.” the woman continued, thrusting yet another flyer at him.

Something nearly snapped in Marty then. For a long but as many as he could carry, telling the woman he would distribute them at school. Then he would look for the nearest trash can and dump them. At the last moment, fortunately, he realized that the woman, though irritating, really meant no harm.

“Thanks,” Marty said, taking the flyer and handing it to Jennifer.

With a curt smile, he grabbed his girlfriend’s arm and guided her away from the crusader as fast as he could move without breaking into a run. A few moments later, they were safely around the corner.

“Now...where were we?” he said.

Jennifer snuggled closer to him, looked both ways and then turned her face upward toward his.

“Right about here...” she murmured.

They moved closer. Marty could smell her skin, feel her breath against his chin. Slowly he put his hand on her neck, just below the ear and bent to kiss her...

A car horn shattered the magic moment. Jennifer looked away from him and Marty saw annoyance in her eyes. “That’s my dad,” she said.

“How did he find you here?” Marty asked.

“Just luck.”

“The kind of luck I’ve been having all day.”

“Nothing lasts forever, not even bad luck.” The horn honked again.

“I’ll call you tonight,” Marty promised.

“I’ll be at my grandma’s,” she said.

“What’s the number?”

“243-8480.”

Marty repeated the number, got two numbers transposed. “You should have saved one of those flyers,” Jennifer said. Then, looking at her hand, she saw that it still clutched one of the propagandist pieces. Waving to her father to wait, she took out a pen and wrote something on the back of the paper and thrust it at Marty. Then she hopped in the car and left. Marty waved and watched her until the car was out of sight.

Only then did he look at the paper. On it was written the telephone number and the simple phrase “I love you.” Marty smiled.

Folding the paper, he put it in his pocket and skateboarded down the street toward home.

“If only I don’t die of a heart attack or a stroke first,” Dr. Emmett Brown muttered aloud.

He was close to seeing his dream become a reality. No doubt about that. One by one the scientific and physical obstacles had been eliminated. Was this to be “the day”?

“Don’t count on it,” he replied to himself. There was no use getting too high, he reasoned.

At sixty-five, he was one of the nation’s most talented and most unheralded inventors. In fact, not one except Marty McFly even knew of his accomplishments, but that didn’t matter. Soon all that would change. His lifetime of struggle, of being the recipient of ridicule, would suddenly turn golden.

He looked around his workshop, which was nothing more than a garage filled with the detritus and equipment that had been accumulated over a forty-year period. Some of that gear included a jet engine, piles of circuit boards, enough automobile parts to build at least two cars, a short-wave radio, a Seeburg jukebox, workbench with welding equipment, the remnants of a robot, a working refrigerator, and dozens of clocks. Clocks were Doc Brown’s favorite collector’s item. He had everything from cuckoo clocks to digital models—and every one was in dead sync with the others.

The presence of so many timepieces was not accidental.

Time was Doc Brown’s latest, and perhaps final, dominating, interest. During the 1950s, he had tried to uncover the secrets of the human mind via a variety of mind-reading devices. None had worked. A half-decade earlier, he had been smitten with the theory that all mammals spoke a common language. Some other schemes included the notion that gold could be mined by superheating the earth’s surface, that each person’s age was predetermined and could be revealed by studying the composition of their fingernails, and he published a paper which claimed that the sex of babies could be predicted before they were conceived. The fact that all of Doc Brown’s work yielded nothing should have discouraged him but did not. Through the ’50s, ’60s, ’70s, and into the ’80s, he continued to experiment, earning perennial scorn as the crazy scientist of Hill Valley.

Now, on October 25, 1985, he was ready for fulfillment. He had worked out every element of his time-travel theory until it was perfect. By the end of the century, scientists and historians would be using his device to explore the future and past, and through this exploration, work to improve the present. His view of time as a dimension was summed up in the simple explanation he once gave to the editor of the Hill Valley newspaper. “I think of time as spherical and unending,” he said. “Like the skin of an orange. A change in the texture at any point will be felt over the entire skin. The future affects the past and present, just as the past and present affect the future.”

“But the past is over and done with,” the editor replied. “How can it be affected?”

“That’s just my point,” Doc Brown had retorted. “The past isn’t over and done with. It’s still there. And once we can find a way to penetrate it, we’ll be able to change things that may happen tomorrow.”

The editor didn’t buy it but he printed the interview anyway. Residents of Hill Valley either ignored the article or complained that valuable space had been wasted printing the ravings of a madman.

Such unfavorable publicity once hurt, but now that was all behind him. "If all goes well..." he murmured as he began to prepare for the evening's work.

The sentence remained unfinished. Whistling softly, he dressed slowly in a white radiation suit, slipped the hood over his head to test its feel, then took it off, pressing it flat against his back. Checking his image in a mirror, he ruffled his wild white hair even more, perhaps perversely adding to his own reputation as a wild eccentric. He then walked to the front of the garage, opened the rear door of the oversized step-van on the side of which was lettered DR. E. BROWN ENTERPRISES—24-HOUR SCIENTIFIC SERVICE, and peered inside.

It was, of course, still there. Even in the sparse light of the garage, the sleek stainless steel DeLorean with its gull wings shone back at him like a giant Christmas tree ornament. How appropriate, he thought, that the vehicle which would propel mankind into the past and future should be such an extraordinarily beautiful piece of machinery. There was no doubt in his mind as he closed the doors.

"It will work," he said softly. "And I'll be famous."

All that remained was the final countdown check of minor items. Brown would handle that during the few hours before Marty arrived at the Twin Pines Mall and then, together, they would take a step as significant for mankind as the moon landing of 1969.

It was getting dark when Marty turned the last curve in front of his house, but he knew something was wrong long before that. Flashing lights are seldom harbingers of joy, except at Christmas, and the holiday was two months away. Through the trees blocking his home from view, he could see the flashers blinking yellow. Not the police, he thought. That would be blue and red. Yellow was the usual color of wreckers.

He was quite correct. Gliding onto the court, he could make out the tow truck poised like a giant praying mantis near the McFly driveway. In its jaws was the 1979 Plymouth Reliant, looking quite helpless with one set of wheels off the ground. As he drew closer, Marty saw that its front end was completely smashed, as if someone had driven it into a brick wall. Nearby stood Marty's father and Biff Tannen, watching in silence as the truck driver unhitched the damaged vehicle.

George McFly was forty-seven but seemed much older to Marty. An uninspired man who was generally afraid to take even the tiniest daring step, not having changed his haircut in over thirty years, he was dressed in an equally boring suit he had purchased four years before at Sears. The man standing next to him was a sharp contrast in both sartorial color and demeanor. Just a year older than George McFly, Biff Tannen stood with his potbelly leaning unashamedly over his trouser tops, an attitude that made his loud plaid suit, pinky rings and gold chains seem even more bizarre. Where George McFly was reticent, Biff was loud and obnoxious, the type of person who talks loudly in movie houses or yells epithets at players during sports events. He was, in short, an intimidating loudmouth and no one was more easily intimidated than his friend and associate George.

Now, as Marty approached on the skateboard, he heard the familiar tone of disgust in Biff's voice as he addressed his father.

"I can't believe you did this, McFly," Biff rasped. "I can't believe you loaned me your car without telling me it had a blind spot. I could have been killed."

Tell him good, Marty thought, tell him we'd all be better off if Biff Tannen was in traction.

George McFly, of course, could not stand up to Biff's assault. Instead he replied weakly: "Biff,

never noticed any blind spot before.”

“What, are you blind, McFly? It’s there! How else can you explain this?”

Tell him the driver was lousy, Marty thought. If only his father would stand up to him once!

George McFly looked at the ground and made no direct answer to the irrational question. “Can I assume that your insurance will pay for this?” he asked. It sounded more like begging.

“My insurance?” Biff returned hotly. “It’s *your* car with *your* blind spot. Your insurance should pay for it. I want to know who’s gonna pay for this.”

He indicated his stained suit.

“I spilled beer all over it when that car hit me,” Biff continued. “Who’s gonna pay the cleaning bill? Tell me, that, McFly.”

Marty couldn’t stand it a minute longer. “Maybe the judge who hears you were drinking while driving will pay for it,” he interjected.

Biff’s eyes narrowed. “Tell your kid to keep outa this, McFly,” he ordered.

George did not issue such an order but he might as well have done so. Pulling out his wallet, he extracted a twenty-dollar bill and handed it to Biff. “Will this cover it?” he asked meekly.

Biff snatched the bill out of George’s fingers and cast a quick triumphant glare at Marty.

“It’s a start,” he said.

“It’ll probably buy two of those suits,” Marty shot back.

Biff flushed. “Shut up,” he said.

Then, turning back to his primary target, he said to Marty’s father: “Where are your reports?”

George McFly paled even more than his usual off-white fishy complexion. “Well, I haven’t finished them yet,” he apologized. “I figured that since they weren’t really due till Monday…”

Biff stepped forward and tapped George’s forehead with his fist, like someone rapping on a door. “Hello,” he said. “Is anybody home in there? Think, McFly, think! I’ve gotta have time to get the reports retyped. If I turn in my reports in your handwriting, I’ll get fired.”

Marty was furious with his father. Tell him to do the reports himself, he thought.

Once again his father backed off. “O.K.,” he said. “I’ll finish them tonight and run them over first thing in the morning, if that’s all right.”

“Not too early,” Biff muttered. “I sleep in on Saturdays.”

Marty turned away. He honestly thought he was about to throw up. Not only was Biff’s treatment of his father subhuman, but also he had just realized that, with the car wrecked, his date with Jennifer was out the window. It had been the worst of all possible days.

Biff Tannen wasn’t through yet, however. As he turned to leave, he looked down at the ground.

“Oh, hey, McFly,” he said matter-of-factly. “Your shoe’s untied.”

“Huh?” George said, falling for it by glancing down at his feet.

As he did so, Biff’s hand flew up, hitting George in the chin. A grating guffaw split the air, Biff Tannen having executed his idea of a terrific practical joke.

“Don’t be so gullible, McFly!” he shouted. “Boy, you haven’t learned a thing in thirty years.”

George, pleading guilty to the charge with his silence, could only grin weakly.

Oblivious to the fact that Marty viewed him with disgust, Biff pointed to his sparkling new

Cadillac nearby and winked. "Hiya, kid," he said, just as if there had been no bad words between them. "How do you like my new paint job?"

Marty shrugged.

A moment later, Biff and his newly painted car were heading down the road. George McFly started to walk into the house. Marty stepped in front of him.

Raising his hands, George stepped away. "I know what you're going to say, son, and you're right," he murmured. "You're absolutely right. But he happens to be my supervisor, and I'm afraid I'm just not very good at confrontations."

"Confrontations," Marty shot back, "you don't even practice self-defense."

George didn't answer.

"Dad, look at the car," Marty persisted. "Look what he did to the car. He nearly totaled it. And then he concocted some story about a blind spot. He blamed the wreck on you and you didn't say a thing!"

"Well, you can't argue with a person like that," George said feebly.

"Look at that car," Marty continued. "It's a mess. I was counting on using it tomorrow night. Do you have any idea how important this was to me, Dad? Do you have any idea at all?"

Not knowing that Marty was planning to take Jennifer away in the vehicle, it was not possible for George McFly to understand how much the trip truly meant to Marty.

"I'm sorry, son," he muttered. "All I can say is I'm very sorry."

For Marty that wasn't enough and the infuriating events of the day would not let him back off. "Dad, did it ever occur to you to say 'no' to people when they start pushing you around? Is that so hard?"

"Son, I know it's hard for you to understand," George said with maddening calmness, "but the fact is, I'm just not a fighter."

"Try it once, Dad," Marty challenged. "Just one time, say 'no.' N-O. 'No.' It won't hurt nearly as much as you think."

George shrugged.

I give up, Marty thought, I can't even get him to say "no" to the idea of saying "no."

George McFly turned away, finding it easier to look at the damaged front of his car than at Marty's accusing and disappointed eyes. He envied other men, macho types who taught their boys how to fight, encouraged them to be combative, stand up for their rights. These men invariably pushed their male offspring into organized sports, bragging when their boys won a big game, browbeating the lads who they took the final strike of the game with their bats on their shoulders. For his part, George McFly was secretly pleased when his sons Marty and Dave declined to take part in sports. At least he was off the emotional hook.

During his frequent moods of quiet self-analysis, George McFly managed to dissect his psyche, find out how he did worry about his own lack of grit. He thought it all went back to one occasion in grade school when he was accosted by the class bully. The bully had just punched his friend Billy Stockhausen and for a split second George was so angry he literally saw the red that everyone talks and writes about. Stepping up to the bully, he pulled his fist back—

And couldn't strike. The bully merely smirked and walked away. Since that moment thirty-five years ago, George had wondered what might have happened if he had followed through. His happiest fantasy was that his single punch would have sent the bully into oblivion. But even if the bully had had

back and he had learned the give-and-take of combat, might not that have been better than the cowardly limbo, never-take-a-chance attitude George had trapped himself in all these years?—

He sighed. Why bother to relive that moment...Why bother to try explaining to Marty or anyone else why he was such a pushover? He could barely accept the most favorable rationalization himself.

Now, as if to underscore Marty's challenge of a moment before, a voice called to him from the window of the house next door. It was that of his neighbor Howard, a forty-year-old, potbellied, generally unpleasant character who, like Biff Tannen, spoke to George only when he needed something or wanted another person to berate.

His voice was less tinged with scorn at the moment, no doubt because he was looking for George's help.

"Hey, McFly!" he called down. "My kid's selling Girl Scout cookies. I told her you'd be good for a case."

"A case?" George replied. "What's a case?"

"What difference does it make?" Howard shot back belligerently. "Twelve. Twenty-four. Thirty-six. It's for a good cause, ain't it? Or do you want me to tell the kid you're a cheapskate?"

"It's just that—" George began, then hunched his shoulders helplessly. "Never mind. Sure. Tell her I'm good for a case, whatever it is."

Marty shook his head and went inside.

His sister, brother, and mother were already seated at the dinner table; none of them looked up when Marty entered and slumped into his chair. For once, Marty was glad they were so wrapped up in their own lives that they didn't think to ask how the musical audition had turned out. He didn't feel like explaining why he had lost or seeing their expressions of fake sympathy.

"Meatloaf again," he said flatly.

His criticism did not keep the jaws from working. Brother Dave, twenty-two, sat opposite him wearing a Burger King uniform. He kept one eye on the clock and the other on his food, which he wolfed down in large sections, swallowing noisily like a half-starved animal. On Marty's left sat Linda, nineteen, who was cute in a kind of sleazy way, partly because she invariably wore too much eye shadow. Marty tried to remember when he had last seen her without either purple or green eyelids and he finally gave up. On Marty's right was dear old Mom, who was once very attractive and bright. Now, at forty-seven, she was overweight, drank more than was good for her and had more food on her plate than anyone else. The fare, besides the inevitable meat loaf, included Kraft macaroni and cheese, Birds Eye mixed veggies, and French's instant mashed potatoes.

Dad, the last to be seated, turned the television to an old *Honeymooners* rerun and put paper instead of food in front of him. Marty noted angrily that he had already started doing the "homework" Biff Tannen had so ungraciously assigned him.

For a few minutes, Marty and Dave amused themselves and each other by reciting the *Honeymooners*' lines one beat ahead of the TV actors, a routine that finally got Mom's goat.

"All right," she said. "We know you've seen it a hundred times. But your father wants it on, O.K. So let him enjoy it in peace."

Marty and Dave shrugged.

Silence reigned for a minute until Mom finally looked at Marty, smiled, and said: "Well, Marty, how did the audition turn out?"

Marty exhaled wearily.

“We lost,” he said simply.

Everyone tried to think of something to say, or at least everyone pretended to be thinking.

“It was probably fixed,” Dave said at length, a superficial statement which surprisingly cheered Marty. That, in fact, was what he had been thinking since the sham contest was held.

“Could be,” he shrugged.

“They probably knew going in who was gonna win,” Dave nodded. “The rest was just window dressing.”

“Sour grapes,” Linda said softly, not looking up from her dessert, which was Jell-O Instant chocolate pudding with a generic brand instant whipped topping.

“It’s too bad,” Mom sighed. “I think your group’s very good. I just don’t see how any other band could have been better.”

Dad looked up from his homework. “Believe me, son,” he dared to venture, “you’re better off not having the aggravation of dealing with that YMCA dance.”

“What aggravation?” Marty asked coldly.

“Well, you’d have to worry about getting all your equipment there—”

“We’ve done that lots of times already,” Marty interjected. “It’s no problem.”

“You’d have to make contingency plans in case somebody got sick,” his father continued.

“Nobody’s ever been sick.”

“All the more reason for somebody to be now,” he went on. “Then you’d have to make sure you got your money, see that everybody got the right share, settling with the musicians’ union...”

“Wow,” Marty muttered. “You sure can find a lot of good reasons to do nothing.”

It didn’t slow down his father even a half-beat.

“What if you were so good other people wanted to hire you?” he continued. “Then you’d have to worry about scheduling your job around school.”

“You’re right, Dad. Maybe I’d better just take to my bed right away. The longer I stay alive, the more problems I’m going to have.”

“Believe me, son, you’re better off without all those headaches,” his father concluded.

“He’s right, Marty,” Dave added sardonically, putting on his father. “If there’s one thing you don’t need, it’s headaches.”

Marty finally stopped arguing, even though quitting made him feel a little like his father.

Lorraine McFly turned her attention to Linda, who was finishing her pudding. “You didn’t have to eat that, you know,” she said. “We’ve got cake.”

Linda raised her eyebrows. “What cake?” she asked. Lorraine pointed to the three-layer cake on the kitchen counter. On the top was written WELCOME HOME UNCLE JOEY. Above the letters was a tiny black bird flying out of a barred window. It was hardly subtle, but Uncle Joey’s situation wasn’t a secret.

“It looks like we’ll have to eat this cake by ourselves again,” Lorraine smiled grimly. “Uncle Joey didn’t get a parole.”

“Maybe we should just try putting a file in something,” Dave suggested.

“It’s a shame,” Lorraine continued. “They practically assured him he’d get out this time. The only thing that hurt him was that shake-up in prison management. I guess that hurt him more than anything. Everybody

has his own axe to grind.”

“It’s probably just as well,” Marty said. “If he came out, there’d be a lot of decisions to make. He’ll have to find a job and fill out tax forms...”

“True,” Dave chimed in. “He’d have to worry about getting from place to place, having enough change to make phone calls...It’s probably better that he’s gotta stay in the joint.”

Lorraine frowned, looked at both of them angrily. George McFly did not look up from his homework.

“I wish you’d show a little more respect,” Lorraine said. “He’s my brother, you know.”

“Well, I think it’s a major embarrassment, having an uncle in prison,” Linda murmured.

“We all make mistakes in life, children,” Lorraine said philosophically.

“Yeah, but Uncle Joey made them consecutively,” Dave smiled. “And while on parole. That’s not only a mistake, that’s plain dumb.”

Lorraine didn’t answer. Instead she took another helping of potatoes.

Looking once again at the clock, Dave wiped his mouth and pushed his chair back. “Damn,” he said. “I’m gonna be late again.”

“Please watch your language,” his mother warned.

“Hell, yes,” Dave said, getting up and starting for the front door. A moment later, they heard his car start up and roar off. Marty wished he owned his own car, even a heap like Dave’s. At least he would be independent; if something went wrong with the car, he would have only himself to blame.

“By the way,” Lorraine said. “That girl Jennifer called...wants you to call her back.”

Marty nodded.

“I think her last name was Parker.”

“I know her last name, Mom.”

“But it could have been another Jennifer, couldn’t it?”

“Yes, but I don’t know any other Jennifers right now.”

“Sorry,” his mother said, scooping up the remains of her potatoes with a crust of bread. “Anyway, I’m not sure I like her. Any girl who calls up a boy is looking for trouble.”

Marty and Linda exchanged a meaningful glance. Had their mother lost her marbles?

“Oh, Mother,” Linda muttered, “there’s nothing wrong with calling a boy.”

“Well, I think it’s terrible,” Lorraine persisted. “Girls chasing boys—whoever heard of such a thing? I never chased a boy when I was your age. I never called a boy, or asked a boy for a date or sex in a parked car with a boy...”

What a dull childhood, Marty thought.

“Because when you behave like that, boys won’t respect you, Linda. They’ll think you’re cheap.”

Linda rolled her eyes. She’d heard it several hundred times already, although it probably seemed like at least one million.

“Then how are you supposed to meet anybody?” she asked.

“It’ll just happen,” Lorraine smiled. “Like the way I met your father.”

“But that was so stupid!” Linda whined. “Grandpa hit him with a car.”

“It was meant to be.”

“Maybe you should hang around the emergency wards,” Marty suggested.

“That wouldn’t do any good,” Lorraine said, unaware of his sarcasm. “You see, you’ll meet Mr. Wonderful in a certain way that you can’t make happen. And you won’t be able to avoid it either. It’s just bound to happen, like the sun’s supposed to come up tomorrow morning.”

All the metaphysics did not impress Linda. “I still don’t understand what Dad was doing in the middle of the street,” she said.

Dad, oblivious to the entire conversation, did not look up from his work, so Mom raised her voice to get his attention. “What was it, George?” she asked. “What were you doing there—bird-watching?”

George shook his head like a person coming out of a coma. “Huh?” he muttered thickly. “Did you say something, Lorraine?”

“Never mind.”

“He was probably just a very incompetent hitchhiker,” Marty offered. He really wasn’t interested in hearing how his parents had met.

Lorraine was interested in telling the story, however. “Anyway,” she went on, “Grandpa hit him with the car and brought him into the house. He was completely unconscious...”

“Like now,” Marty interrupted.

Lorraine shot a chiding glance at him. “He seemed so helpless...like a little lost puppy. And my heart just went out to him.”

“Yeah, Mom,” Linda smiled. “You’ve told us a million times. It was ‘Florence Nightingale to the rescue.’”

Lorraine leaned back in her chair, her eyes dreamy with nostalgic thoughts and pictures. “The very next weekend,” she continued, “we went on our first date. The ‘Enchantment Under the Sea’ School Dance.”

“*Under the sea?*” Marty interrupted again. “You mean everybody came dressed as a clam or an oyster?”

His mother ignored him.

“I’ll never forget it,” she said. “It was the night of that terrible thunderstorm. Remember, George?”

“What’s that, dear?” George McFly mumbled.

“The night of our first date.”

“Mmm. It was raining.”

“Worst thunderstorm before or since,” Lorraine elaborated. “People still talk about it. Anyway, your father kissed me for the first time on the dance floor...and that was when I realized I was going to spend the rest of my life with him.”

“That really must have been some thunderstorm,” Marty smiled.

“I can’t believe Dad actually got up enough nerve to kiss you in public,” Linda said.

Lorraine flushed. “Well,” she said coyly. “I may have encouraged him a little...”

“I’ll bet you had to practically jump on his bones,” Marty offered.

With that, he finished eating, declining a piece of the convict’s non-homecoming cake, wiped his mouth and stood up.

Lorraine scarcely noticed, so lost was she in thought. “Thinking back on it,” she reminisced, “I did. I practically had to—”

Not wishing to fall into contemporary “obscene talk,” as she called it, she let the rest of the sentence die in her throat. It was an appropriate ending, anyway. Marty was halfway out of the kitchen, Linda was looking out the window at something happening next door and George was still lost in his papers. Lorraine shrugged and reached for the nearest knife. If no one was going to have a piece of Uncle Joey’s cake, she would give it a try.

Smiling in anticipation, she carved herself a four-inch wedge, shoved it onto her coffee saucer, and began to attack it. As the creamy icing melted in her mouth, so evaporated any feelings that the past thirty years had been anything but glorious.

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