

Tradition

SCENE 1

A cold night. A DAD and his 13-year old DAUGHTER are battling the wind, snow and cold as the DAD looks for a Christmas tree. The DAUGHTER is having none of this.

DAUGHTER
(impatiently)

Dad, dad...

DAD
(absently)

Uh?

DAUGHTER
Dad, let's just get the thing and go home.

DAD
I wonder if this is a Blue Spruce...I think I like Blue Spruces...or maybe its Scotch Pine.

DAUGHTER
Dad, you don't know Elm from Oak. Let's go.

DAD
No. We came out here to look for a tree. And dammit, that's what we're going to do.

DAUGHTER
(disgusted, whiny)
We've been looking for hours. We've been to five lots. They're all the same... old, scraggly, and picked over. My feet are popsicles. I want to go home.

DAD
No, not until we find the tree.

Daughter twirls around in disgust
and flops down on a stomp.

DAUGHTER

I'm not moving.

DAD

What?

DAUGHTER

I'm not moving. I'm staying right here.

DAD

Don't you want to...

DAUGHTER

No.

DAD

But this is...

DAUGHTER

No.

DAD

Suit yourself. But you're missing all the fun. Remember when
you were little, you used to sit on...

He moves on and his words fade in
the distance.

DAD (CONT'D)

My shoulders and you'd insist on touching the tree top?

Daughter faces the audience.

DAUGHTER

I'm thirteen. My dad had always been a Christmas addict, but
never like this year. Later, when I was older, my mother told
me that that was the year we almost lost our house. It might
have been the last
Christmas in our house. She said my dad was determined to
make it the best Christmas ever. A big beautiful tree was
essential.

(beat)

But, like every year, he waited until the night before to
find the tree. The right tree. The tree of all trees.

(beat)
 Every Christmas Eve, ever since I can remember instead of spending it in a warm house, drinking hot cocoa with marshmallows, he'd drag me out of the house at..

Looks at her watch.

DAUGHTER (CONT'D)
 10 p.m. To find a tree. It was cute when I was five and thought that Santa Claus was only hours away, but now I'm thirteen. I have things to do. My friends are having a party. I can't go because I have to help pick the tree. Crap!

(beat)
 To this day I wonder if Derrick would have kissed me at the party underneath the mistletoe.

(beat)
 Dad, how about this one? It doesn't look too messed over.

DAD (O.S.)
 I think I see a good one over there.

He exits.

DAUGHTER
 (groans)
 My mom's at home untangling the lights. That's because as eager as Dad was to get the tree up, he was just as eager to take it down and didn't bother to put the lights in order. Most of the time we'd come back with the tree and find my mom sitting in the dark because she had blown a fuse. We would have to light a fire and candles in order to see because we never had working batteries for our flashlights. That's how we would decorate the tree.

(beat)
 Of course we wouldn't have Christmas lights until the next day when Dad could see where the blown fuse was, but it was nice to see the tree by firelight.

(beat, to Dad)
 Dad, this year how 'bout an artificial tree? They don't cost...

DAD (O.S.)
 No fake tree in my house.

DAUGHTER
 (sighs)
 He said it wouldn't be Christmas without a real tree, but he'd wait until the last minute. He said it was more fun that way.

(beat)

Yeah, right... He's cheap.

(beat)

See, all the trees are marked down by Christmas Eve and he vowed not to pay more than five dollars for one. That's why we go from lot to lot to lot. Once we find a tree, Dad begins his negotiations.

Dad comes back on stage.

DAD

So how much?

DAUGHTER

(seller's voice)

Fifteen. Out the door.

DAD

Mmmmm will you take five?

DAUGHTER

Twelve.

DAD

Five

DAUGHTER

Ten?

DAD

Five.

DAUGHTER

Mister, I gotta make a living too.

DAD

Five.

Dad walks off looking for tree.

DAUGHTER

Five it is.

(beat, herself)

That's what we're looking for. A five dollar tree that looks like it belongs in front of the White House. One Christmas, when I was eight, we bought the five dollar tree and was taking it home when a truck in front of us dropped a Christmas tree in the street.

Dad stopped the car, picked that tree up, and took it home too. Two for the price of one. Man, you would have thought he won the lottery. We had one tree in the living room and the other in my bedroom.

(beat)

Two days later, I broke out with little red bumps then I started throwing up and itching. Chicken pox. My fever spiked to 106. They were going to take me to the hospital when my fever finally broke. All that time I stared at the angel on the top of my tree and I swear I could see her move. My mom said I was hallucinating because of my fever.

(beat)

My mom and dad didn't take the tree down until the end of January. We were finding needles in my bed in July. To this day I associate the smell of pine trees with that pink stuff you put on chicken pox to stop the itching.

(beat)

Five years from now, when my plane is delayed and I won't get home from college until 10 at night on Christmas Eve, my father will be waiting for me at the door so we can get a Christmas tree.

(beat)

For Christ sake dad, I spent ten hours in an airport and only ate a bag of potato chips...

(aside)

because I spent my money buying a new dress...

(beat)

I bought it to wear for my boyfriend who then dumped me for my roommate who then got pregnant and had to drop out of school six months later.

(beat)

I was tired, hungry and miserable.

Dad comes back on stage.

DAD

We're off to get the tree.

DAUGHTER

That was not a good freshman year for me. To this day I see a Christmas tree, I think of being dumped. Nor was it a good year when I lost my first job, was broke, and had to ask my dad for money to pay my rent. You know what my dad said?

DAD

A Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. That'll make things better.

DAUGHTER

Every year. Every Christmas Eve we hunted for the right five dollar, glorious Christmas tree and every year we found one. Tall, majestic and fresh...except the year when he was in the hospital. There was no Christmas tree on Christmas Eve.

Daughter stands up and transforms herself into a thirty-year old MOM. She walks to one side of the stage. The Dad, now the SON, follows her.

DAD/SON

(whiny)

Mooooooooommmmm, I'm tired, I'm cold, and I want to go home.

DAUGHTER/MOM

Not until we find the right tree.

DAD/SON

But everyone has a fake tree. You put it up in five minutes. Some even come with their own decorations.

DAUGHTER/MOM

It's not the same. No fake trees in my house.

DAD/SON

But, mom. We do this *every freakin' year*.

DAUGHTER/MOM

Yep, we buy the best tree and we only spend five dollars. It's a family tradition.

THE END