

CHICAGO SHUFFLE

by

Dennis Capps

A SNOW-GLOBE

Snowflakes swirl and fall upon the street scene encased within. We MOVE IN closer, until the liquid-filled orb fills the screen, then continue inside...

EXT. MAIN STREET - ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS - 1931 - NIGHT

...the miniature town comes to life, the snow continues to fall. Christmas decorations in evidence along the street.

Still MOVING IN, we approach the offices of "Goodman & Fenwick, Accounting & Actuarial Services" according to a sign we pass before entering a window...

INT. ACCOUNTING OFFICES - "GOODMAN & FENWICK" - NIGHT

...where an army of stone-faced accountants toil at noisy adding machines. Among them, HARVEY GOODMAN, the lone employee who enjoys his work. Numbers, we will learn, serve as Harvey's sword and shield in life. Also, his crutch...

At a neighboring desk, FRANK MILLER reads the newspaper.

FRANK

Get this: what Elliot Ness and all the kings' G-men couldn't do, a couple of accountants like us pulled off. Al Capone is going to jail for tax evasion! What's that tell you?

HARVEY

That people can lie, cheat and steal, but...

(his mantra)

...numbers speak only the truth.

He punches the "Total" button on his Burroughs adding machine as if to prove his point. Watches with delight as it spits out the result on a curling ribbon of paper tape.

Another accountant, BILL THOMPSON, appears with grim news.

THOMPSON

Old Man Fenwick wants to see us in his office. Now.

FRANK

Crap.

HARVEY

(only half-kidding)

Nice knowing you, Frank.

THOMPSON
You too, Harvey.

HARVEY
Me?! What did I do?!

INT. ARTHUR FENWICK'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The summoned men stand before ARTHUR FENWICK, a sour, grey, joyless old man. His nose buried in the company ledger.

FENWICK
You're fired.

He lets it hang there. No clarification.

HARVEY
All of us?

FENWICK
(looks up, irritated)
Not you, Harvey. Sit.

He does.

FRANK
What is it we've done, sir?

FENWICK
Not nearly enough, I'm sure. Last quarter profits were down by--
(snaps his fingers)

HARVEY
(from memory)
\$632.56.

FENWICK
Equivalent, ironically, to what I find myself obligated to pay each of you young men during the same time period.

HARVEY
Actually, sir, that number is
\$687.92.

FENWICK
(shrugs)
So I'll save a pittance more by letting one of you go.

HARVEY
Fifty-five dollars and--

Fenwick cuts him off with a sharp gesture.

FENWICK

The only number you need to concern yourself with, Harvey, is one.

HARVEY

I don't follow, sir.

FENWICK

Which one of these men cleans out his desk to balance our books? It's your choice...

He sits back with a self-satisfied smile. Intends this to be a "learning" opportunity for Harvey.

HARVEY

Me?! No!!! You can't ask me to do that, sir!

FENWICK

I'm not... I'm telling you to.

THOMPSON

That isn't fair, sir! Frank here is Harvey's brother-in-law. I don't stand a chance!

FENWICK

Oh, I'm sure there's some measurable degree of probability in your favor.

(mockingly)

Harvey here believes that all of life's problems have mathematical solutions, so each of you will be assigned a fair and impartial numeric value and your fate will be calculated accordingly. Isn't that right, Harvey?

HARVEY

Why are you doing this, sir?

FENWICK

I built this business with your father, God rest his soul, and I find it more than a little sad to say: you're just like him.

He leans in close. Too close.

FENWICK

Your father was weak, Harvey. Show me you can be strong.

HARVEY

Please, Mr. Fenwick, I'm not your partner! I'm merely an employee, like Frank and Bill here.

FENWICK

No, Harvey, you're not... Before your father died I swore to look out for you and keep you employed. These men have no such guarantee.

He rocks back in his chair again, puffed up with self-importance. The wisest of mentors.

FENWICK

With privilege comes responsibility, and the fate of these two men is now yours.

Both men look to Harvey. He averts his eyes and slumps forward, in misery... A long silence passes... And then:

HARVEY

(looks up, smiles)

Each of us will take a thirty-three per cent cut in salary! You'll offset the dip in profits and we'll all keep our jobs.

(to the others)

What do you say, fellas?

They quickly nod agreement. Not the result Fenwick wanted.

FENWICK

You confound me, Harvey... Here you are, an adopted son, but you couldn't be more like your father than if spawned from his own flesh and blood.

THOMPSON

(a little too relaxed now)

That's the age-old "Nature vs Nurture" debate...

(off the looks he gets)

...never mind.

FENWICK

If I'm still paying you -- even thirty-three per cent less -- it's certainly not to have you standing around here engaged in idle chit-chat. Go!

They beat a hasty retreat. Harvey starts to follow.

FENWICK

Not so quick, young man. I've got something else for you.

HARVEY

Please, sir. I can't fire anyone.

FENWICK

No, this is nothing but numbers, right up your alley. A client up in Chicago needs a tax return prepared by this Friday.

HARVEY

Why then? There aren't any tax deadlines this time of year.

FENWICK

Apparently, for this gentleman, there is. And he's been a "friend" to the firm, providing financial assistance when the banks wouldn't.

He rises and crosses around the desk. Clamps a hand on Harvey's shoulder and squeezes hard.

FENWICK

I can't stress to you enough how important this job is, Harvey. But let me try...

(smiles grimly)

My promise to your father notwithstanding, if you fail me here, you'll receive a "one hundred per cent reduction in salary". Are we clear?

HARVEY

(processes)

You mean you'd fire me?

FENWICK

(pats Harvey's cheek)

Smart boy...

INT. HARVEY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Harvey's pregnant wife, SHIRLEY, and their children, MORGAN (12), JULIE (10) and PEPPER (4) are busy with Christmas decorations. When Harvey enters, Pepper runs and attaches herself to his leg.

PEPPER
Daddy's home! Daddy's home!

HARVEY
(pretends not to see her)
I must have picked up thirty pounds
of road salt in my shoe.

PEPPER
It's me, silly! It's Pepper!

He scoops her up. Grabs a handful of popcorn from a bowl on the table where Julie and Morgan make garlands.

JULIE
Dad! There won't be enough.

MORGAN
We saved the cranberries for you.

HARVEY
Last year my fingers were stained
for a piano's worth of hours.

It's a challenge: Morgan and Julie quickly calculate.

JULIE
A piano has eighty-eight keys.

MORGAN
Eighty-eight hours equals three
and --

MORGAN/JULIE
-- two-thirds days!

Harvey lands in the kitchen, where Shirley dips caramel apples.

SHIRLEY
But I was washing it out of his
clothes for weeks.

PEPPER
Four weeks equals...

Harvey holds up one finger and mouths the words...

PEPPER
 ...one ...month!

He leans in to give Shirley a peck on the cheek.

SHIRLEY
 (overly saccharine)
 Frank dropped by. He offered to
 "help us out any way he can", now
 that we've got a growing family and
 a shrinking paycheck.

HARVEY
 (sotto)
 I can explain...

He turns to the kids, upbeat.

HARVEY
 Guess where I'm going tomorrow.

JULIE
 To the North Pole?

MORGAN
 To Goetz Brothers to buy me a new
 runner-sled for Christmas?

PEPPER
 To work, silly.

HARVEY
 That's right, Pepper. But "Goodman
 & Fenwick" is only three and a half
 miles from here. Tomorrow I'm
 going eighty-two miles to work.

Shirley drops a metal bowl in the sink with a loud clang.

SHIRLEY
 Chicago--?

The kids react, impressed.

SHIRLEY
 Why you? Why not Frank? Somebody
 without a family?

MORGAN
 Because Dad's their top man! The
 "General Assistant Accounting
 Supervisor". Right, Dad?

Shirley turns back to the sink and bangs a few pots and pans around angrily, making her displeasure known.

HARVEY

C'mon, kids. Let's get out of your mother's hair. We have cranberries to string.

INT. HARVEY'S GARAGE - LATER

He applies a coat of red lacquer to an old RUNNER-SLED. Shirley appears in the doorway with a caramel apple.

SHIRLEY

Peace offering?

He sets down his brush. Shows her a pair of ICE SKATES.

SHIRLEY

My old skates?

HARVEY

I sharpened the blades, polished the boots, and got brand-new laces.

SHIRLEY

(half-hearted)
Julie will love them.

HARVEY

Hey...
(waits for eye contact)
Old Man Fenwick forced to play King Solomon. I couldn't fire Frank, or Bill Thompson... you know that.

SHIRLEY

But we're barely getting by as it is, and now with another baby on the way...

Her eyes well up. He wraps her in his arms.

HARVEY

We'll figure something out. We always do...
(then)
I just wish that Old Scrooge would get it through his thick head that I don't have any ambition to ever be "the boss". Especially if it means being like him.

SHIRLEY

You wouldn't be, Harvey. I'm sure
your father wasn't.

HARVEY

(with difficulty)

Fenwick says he was weak... And
that I'm just like him.

SHIRLEY

Because you let him push you
around. If you stood up to him--

HARVEY

(pulls away)

You think I'm weak too?

SHIRLEY

No, Harvey! No!

She draws him back in. Holds him as tight as she can.

SHIRLEY

You're the kindest, strongest,
sweetest man I've ever met. But I
can't stand to see bullies like him
take advantage of your good nature.
Like sending you to Chicago four
days before Christmas!

HARVEY

What, you think the big city is
going to change me? That I'll come
back too "cosmopolitan" for you?

SHIRLEY

(laughs)

Hardly...

He spots the apple.

HARVEY

Doth m'lady tempt me with forbidden
fruit?

(takes a bite)

Mmm... this is heavenly.

SHIRLEY

Is it? I haven't tried one yet.

She reaches for it, but he plays "keep away".

HARVEY

Fight you for it?

SHIRLEY

(a sly smile)

You sure..? The kids are all sound asleep. We wouldn't want to wake them.

She takes his hand and guides the apple to her mouth, letting her lips linger there as she bites into it. Her tongue flicks at its dripping juices, sensual and seductive...

HARVEY

I guess I'm more of a lover than a fighter anyway.

He switches off the light and, awash in moonlight, they begin to make love...

A BLAST OF STEAM

obliterates the screen as --

EXT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - CHICAGO - DAY

-- a LOCOMOTIVE arrives at its destination.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

Harvey bobs along like jetsam in the flow of humanity, wide-eyed at the hustle and bustle of the big city.

EXT. "THE DAVIS" HOTEL - DAY

Harvey emerges from a taxi and gawks at the swank hotel. The DOORMAN snaps to attention.

DOORMAN

Apologies, sir! Didn't see you step out!

A BELLBOY hustles for Harvey's suitcase.

HARVEY

(re: a slip of paper)

I'm meant to go to the penthouse.

BELLBOY

Yes, sir. Of course.

INT. HOTEL - PENTHOUSE FLOOR - DAY

The Bellboy knocks on the lone door. It swings open and there stands a voluptuous platinum blonde by the name of CUDDLES DELLACORTE. She looks at Harvey and laughs.

CUDDLES

Sweet cakes, why the devil are you
dressed like that?

She pulls him inside

THE PENTHOUSE FOYER

and removes his coat -- then plants a warm, wet one on him
that about curls his toes. He squirms free.

HARVEY

Jeepers, ma'am! I appreciate your
hospitality, but--

BUGSY COOPER -- a fiery pit bull of a man -- enters down the
hall to see what the commotion is about. His jaw drops.

BUGSY

Holy Toledo...

He pokes Harvey, to be certain he isn't an apparition.

BUGSY

(calls off)

Boss! Get out here, quick! You
gotta see this.

The Bellboy deposits Harvey's bag and leaves discreetly as
Harvey shakes Bugsy's hand, grateful to be rescued.

HARVEY

I'm Harvey Goodman, the accountant
you requested. I'm here to see...
(reads from the slip of
paper)
...a Mr. Shad Pendrake.

Cuddles' face wrinkles in confusion. And when SHAD PENDRAKE
enters, we see why -- Shad and Harvey are IDENTICAL TWINS!

It takes everyone (including us) a moment to absorb this...

Shad is clearly the sharper dresser. In fact, everything
about him is sharper: the crease of his trousers, the part in
his hair, the words off his tongue.

He's also too vain to wear glasses (Harvey does). He steps
in close and squints at Harvey.

SHAD

What year you born? '98?

Harvey nods.

SHAD

Adopted out of the orphanage at St.
Luke's?

Another nod.

SHAD

I was left behind...
(he pumps Harvey's hand)
The bums never told me I had a
brother, let alone a look-alike!
What are the odds?

HARVEY

Of being born twins: ninety to one.

SHAD

That's right, you're the numbers
man.

HARVEY

But the chances of us meeting like
this, accidentally, are...
(tries to calculate)
...impossible.

SHAD

It's a miracle is what it is. No
need to put numbers to it.

CUDDLES

(awestruck)
A Christmas miracle.

SHAD

What kind of people adopted you?
Good ones, I hope.

HARVEY

(nods)
But they never told me about you.

SHAD

They probably didn't know. That
old weasel, Father Milligan, likely
as not hid me in the back room. He
was of the opinion there was
something "wrong" with me because I
would never cry, not a single tear,
even as a baby...

He drapes an arm across Harvey's shoulder and leads him off.

SHAD

I see Cuddles took your coat, and
if she had half a chance, your
virtue. Can I offer you a drink?

HARVEY

Please. Lemonade if you have it.

SHAD

(calls off)

Cuddles, fix us up. My "brother"
and I will be in the study...

CLOSE - A PHOTOGRAPH

of Harvey and his family posing in the woods with a freshly
cut Christmas tree.

HARVEY (V.O.)

That was last Christmas...

INT. STUDY

Shad admires the photo, a trace of longing in his eyes.

SHAD

You've got a handsome family, Harv.
But I'll be damned if it doesn't
look like me standing there with
them.

(hands it back)

You could fool the average Joe with
this.

Harvey drains his lemonade. Seeing this, Shad presses a
button and a BUZZER sounds in another room.

SHAD

All the dough in the world can't
buy what you've got right there.
That ship passed me by.

Cuddles enters with a pitcher to freshen Harvey's drink. He
stands, as his manners dictate, which prompts her to giggle.

HARVEY

This lemonade is delightful, Miss
Dellacorte. Thank you.

She attempts a makeshift curtsy and giggles some more.

SHAD

What are you cackling about?

CUDDLES

A thought just occurred to me...

SHAD

You're right, that is funny.

CUDDLES

(makes a sour face)

Never mind then, I'll keep it to myself.

HARVEY

No, please. What thought?

Cuddles, we discover, is a girl who needs little encouragement.

CUDDLES

Well, if there were two of you --

SHAD

There are, Cuddles.

CUDDLES

-- one could be for working and making money, and the other could be just for making me happy!

SHAD

Me making money is what makes you happy. Now scram.

She sticks out her tongue at him before sashaying off.

HARVEY

What about you and Miss Dellacorte?

Shad doesn't catch his meaning...

HARVEY

Marriage? Family?

The absurdity of this notion provokes a sharp laugh. But out of it, Shad adopts a grave and serious tone.

SHAD

They don't allow conjugal visits down in Joliet. That's where I'm heading if I don't deliver a tax return to the Feds by noon, Friday.

HARVEY

Prison?! Why?

Copyright 2014 Dennis Capps -- All Rights Reserved