

The Perfect Prank

The Perfect Prank

And Other Stories

Jim O'Brien

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ISBN: Softcover 978-1-4500-2433-4

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These stories are a sort of test.
If there is love in you, you will see the
delights they have to offer.
If there is no love in you, you will see nothing
of worth in them.

J.M.O.

THE PERFECT PRANK

CHAPTER 1

They are nice girls, these sisters . . . ages six, nine, and twelve . . . but they do have a little mischief in them . . . and this makes them fun.

In almost any home there is a spot . . . a special spot . . . where the informal family conversations most often take place. Sometimes it is the dining room table. Often it is the kitchen. Here, in this household, it is the opening in the wall that separates the dining room from the kitchen. It's set up like a diner, with this "portal" allowing for quick service to the people waiting for the food, but here it also is a place where meals come to a stop . . . and are eaten. It (the opening) is about six feet long . . . with a nice counter top running the full length of it . . . and has a curved dome-like shape that is about three feet high in the middle. Mom and Dad are always on the kitchen side and the three girls are always on the dining room side . . . sitting on stools.

Off to the far end of this counter top sits a sign . . . one those small sign boards restaurants use to advertise daily specials . . . and it reads:

Scrambled Eggs and Bacon
Or
Waffle
(with whipped cream & strawberries)
Choice of juice included
Toast, hash browns optional

As the breakfast is being eaten, the conversation on this Saturday morning is about . . . pranks. The morning newspaper has, on page five, a photo of a prank that was engineered by some high school seniors two days earlier. The school year is just about over and this is their way of saying good-bye. The seniors stacked fifteen old car tires over and then down onto

the flag pole that stands out in front of the high school, and Dad is showing the picture to the girls.

Erin (the nine-year old): How in the world did they do it?

Mom: I don't know. They must've used a big ladder.

Dad: One time the seniors took a car apart and put it back together right in the middle of the cafeteria.

Tammy (the twelve-year old): No way!

Mom: Way!

Dad: The principal saw it, and in his morning announcements over the school speaker system he said, "There are several announcements this morning . . . the first concerns parking."

Tammy: (laughs) He wasn't mad?

Dad: Nope. He's a good guy.

Pranks, generally speaking, are a lost art. There are some, like our intrepid high school seniors, who keep the tradition going, but it is like the old professional baseball player. He still swings the bat pretty well but, ah, do you remember when. And so it is with pranks.

Erin: Has anyone ever done a prank at Holmes School (the local elementary school)?

Dad: Um . . .

Mom: Not that we know of.

Tammy: We could do one.

Ashley (the six-year old): Yeah.

Erin: It'd be fun.

And that is how the idea has its genesis. Each member of the family would, from that moment on, try to think up a good prank, and these ideas would be evaluated. The best prank idea would then be chosen, and the family, it was decided, would do it . . . together.

The first brainstorm session produces a few possibilities. They could spray paint the message of "Holmes School is the best" on the grass in front of the school, or they could make a giant smiley face flag and run it up the flag pole, or they could spread little yellow rubber duckies all over the school's front lawn. But none of these ideas seem to ring a bell . . . the bell that tells them that "This is the one." . . . and life goes on for our family.

CHAPTER 2

With spring comes the start of softball season, and so, Mom, once again, becomes Coach Mom, and Dad becomes Coach Dad. The bus comes in handy during the softball season. It is one of those small buses . . . white, with six rows of seats . . . that Dad picked up for a song and fixed up. He made sure everything was mechanically sound and then he made some modifications inside the bus. He unbolted the seats in rows two and three . . . turned them around so they faced the back . . . and then re-bolted them down. He also installed two little narrow tables on the walls between rows three and four, tables that can stay upright (and out of the way) or fold down for whatever use they might provide. It is a fun bus . . . and the girls like it.

Coach Mom and Coach Dad take turns driving the bus. They are the driver and the navigator . . . picking girls up and dropping them off . . . all around the town in which they live.

Today is a “game day” and the bus is on its way to the playing field. Every team member is aboard . . . except Elizabeth. Elizabeth . . . one of three nine-year old “rookies” on the team . . . is going to the game with her mother. Despite sincere protests, her mother insists on bringing Elizabeth to and from the games and practices herself. Oh well.

The bus arrives at the softball field and the girls all pile out the rear emergency exit door and head onto the field to start their warm-ups. Coach Dad helps six-year old Ashley . . . who is also dressed in the team uniform . . . set up the free water table. Free ice water . . . the whole game . . . for both sides. Ashley will sit there . . . safely protected behind the home plate backstop . . . with a large water cooler and a stack of paper cups sitting on top of a card table and a large sign announcing “FREE WATER” hanging from the front of it. It should be noted that, despite this act of good sportsmanship, the opposing team and their fans are normally reluctant to

accept it . . . coming over for water in about half the numbers of our own team and our own fans. Still, the good gesture is there, and they take that in . . . in their hearts.

It is the fourth inning now and the girls are coming in from the field for their turn to bat. There is something of a break in the action and Coach Dad calls to the three twelve-year olds . . . the veterans . . . on the team.

Coach Dad:	Tammy, Sadie, Brooke?
The girls:	Razzle-dazzle Coach?
Coach Dad:	If it's OK with you.

And it is. The three girls grab their mitts and a ball and head over to a spot to the right of first base. At this, some of the parents in the stands smile and lean over to one another to whisper a word or two. Tammy, Sadie, and Brooke then form a circle (or, you might say, a triangle) and begin to toss the ball to each other. Initially these throws go from hand to glove, but soon the tosses become more fancy, and they go from knee to glove, from inside of the elbow to glove, and from behind the back to glove . . . with there being no telling as to whom the ball will travel next. And they are talking the whole time . . . Tammy, Sadie, and Brooke are chatting away . . . as if nothing at all unusual is happening. This little demonstration goes on for about ten minutes before they return to the bench. The inning has started . . . and Elizabeth is up.

"Come on Elizabeth!" "Show us how it's done!" The pitch comes in. Elizabeth swings at it . . . and misses the ball completely. "Whoa . . . nice breeze Elizabeth." As Popeye the Sailor might say, "That was embarriskin." Elizabeth grimaces. The muscles around her mouth tighten up, and a little bit of fire can be seen emerging from her eyes. She digs her sneakers into the dirt and then bangs the thick end of the bat onto home plate. "That's it Elizabeth!" Coach Mom yells from the third base coaching box, "Get good and serious!" The next pitch comes in and Elizabeth swings at it with all her might . . . and she gets all of it . . . sending a rocket up the middle and on into the outfield. Elizabeth . . . a tad surprised . . . starts running toward first base. She rounds first and heads toward second. Her teammates are all standing now and they, and all of our fans, are cheering, "Go Elizabeth go!" The outfielder retrieves the ball and throws it in to an infielder. Elizabeth rounds second base and heads for third, where Coach Mom decides to take a chance and give Elizabeth the "green light." "Go for it Elizabeth!" Coach Mom yells. And Elizabeth does . . . stomping on third base then making the turn for home. "It's going to be close!" Coach Mom shouts to an Elizabeth who is motoring down the third base line.

And it is close. The throw comes in from the infielder to the catcher, but it is a little off line and it pulls the catcher out of position . . . a few feet to her left . . . allowing Elizabeth to slip past her, where she slams her right foot onto home plate. Safe. A homerun. Everyone on that side of the field erupts into loud cheers, and her teammates all come out to congratulate Elizabeth with pats on the shoulders and head (or, we should say, helmet).

Elizabeth, a few minutes later, can be seen over by the stands where she is talking to her mother. "Please Mom . . . PLEASE!" And the older woman, after some hesitation, finally gives in to the younger woman's pleading, and an elated Elizabeth runs back to the bench. Elizabeth's mother then leans over to Brooke's mother and asks, "Does Brooke ever ride home with you?" "Are you kidding?" she replies, "The bus ride is the funnest part."

The game is now over and everyone . . . including Elizabeth . . . is on the bus. They are on their way to Martha's Ice Cream, a local ice cream stand that is open only during the warm months. Coach Mom parks the bus in the lot next to Martha's and the girls pour out the rear exit and crowd in front of the two service windows. Everybody gets ice cream cones and then heads over to the picnic tables to the side of the shop. "Hey girls," Coach Dad says, "what do you think about entering a float in this year's Fourth of July parade?" And from among the bobbing of ice cream cones the idea is given a unanimous approval.

The bus is now dropping team members off at their homes. Coach Mom is the driver and Coach Dad is the navigator. Alexis has just been let off at her home and the bus is moving again. "Who's next?" driver asks navigator. "Elizabeth." replies Coach Dad. And soon they are at the address. Elizabeth descends from the bus and steps out onto the driveway in front of her home. There are four open windows on that side of the bus . . . windows that are now filled with the shoulders and heads of four of Elizabeth's teammates.

- Erin: Nice hit Elizabeth.
 Carissa: See you at practice slugger.
 Brooke: Hey Elizabeth. We're going to have to buy a new bat!
 Tiffany: Yeah. The one you used has a *dent* in it now!

A grinning Elizabeth sort-of hops and spins at the same time and then . . . with glove in hand . . . runs up to her front door. Coach Mom and Coach Dad make sure she gets inside all right, the bus door closes, and Coach Mom says, "Who's next?"

CHAPTER 3

It is a few nights later and our family of five are sitting around a card table playing Monopoly. Monopoly games can, if you let them, go on for days. And there have been times, in this household, when the warning of, “Don’t touch the Monopoly game.” has been issued, and that particular game will sit there . . . frozen . . . until such time as play is resumed . . . usually the next day. For this game, Tammy is the top hat token, Erin is the boat, Ashley is the horse and rider, and Mom and Dad . . . who are playing as one player . . . are the thimble. Mom is being the real estate agent and Dad is the banker.

Erin: Seven. Saint Charles Place. I’ll buy it.

Mom: That’s a hundred and forty dollars please.

Dad: And the woodpecker is the only one who can hop backwards.

Ashley: Double fours. Yes! Community Chest. “Advance to GO” Excellent! Two hundred dollars please.

Dad: Here you go. Every other bird has to stop . . . turn around . . . and then start going again.

Ashley: Nine. Connecticut Avenue. I’ll buy it.

Mom: A hundred and twenty dollars please.

Dad: A woodpecker can just . . . zip . . . go right back down the tree backwards.

Tammy: Eleven. Marvin Gardens. I’ll buy it.

Mom: That’s two hundred and eighty dollars please.

Dad: The other birds, I bet they *can* go backwards. They probably have just never tried it.

Mom: Six. Park Place. Should we?

Dad: Absolutely.

The game goes on for about two hours . . . a short game by most Monopoly players' standards . . . and then everything is folded up and put away. Mom goes into the kitchen where she pulls some ice cream sandwiches from the freezer and delivers them to her husband and children. And they all just sort-of lounge around . . . like a bunch of satisfied cats.

Then Dad gets a notion. He clears his throat . . . which gets everybody's attention . . . and then starts to recite a few improvised verses:

Ice cream is cold
Just like an icicle
But eating it is fun
Like riding a bicycle

The girls and Mom laugh. Then Tammy tries her hand at it:

Ice cream is fun
On pie or with cake
But my favorite of all
Is a chocolate milkshake

Now Ashley tries:

Ice cream is fun
Ice cream is yummy
It goes into my mouth
And down to my tummy

Erin then chimes in:

During the week
Or on the weekends
Ice cream is fun
With sisters or friends

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