

Miracles tend to happen around Christmas. Everybody hopes for them, but not all miracles end on happily ever after. Somebody gets that miracle that they'd immediately like to return to the maker. That December, Paul was the chosen one.

Christmas Eve. Fear is in the air. The fear of not being able to find all the presents for your family and friends in time. But Paul wasn't nervous about it. He knew that he could deliver his gifts in January and no one was going to die. It's all about the thought and the care, not the date.

Paul was only 31, but the amount of stress he carried put him in reach of a genuine mid-life crisis. The summary of his life read like this: in addition to for some unknown reason, two University degrees, his work experience to date included a low-level shipping clerk, also a younger sister who was totally dependent on him financially, a wife who controlled both his wallet and his balls, parents who considered it their duty to show up everywhere he went, and, finally, his six-year-old daughter Veronica. Veronica was the hardest of all. It seemed to Paul that his daughter wasn't entirely sure what purpose he served in the apartment. Paul felt about as necessary as an appendix. All he wanted from Veronica was a sense that he was needed, a little daddy/daughter warmth and affection. Instead, he mostly got smiles for good behavior and even condescension. "Mom, we'd better buy dad three sets of gloves, you know he's going to lose two as soon as it gets cold," "Dad, why does Grandma not like the word 'clerk' and promises that I'm never going to be one, and always finishes with 'God forbid.'" Paul's mood, as I'm sure you can understand, did not improve with these comments. No, but of course, that didn't make him love Veronica any less.

And here it was the night before Christmas, December 24th. Dinner time. Quality family time, that is, food and four words spoken over two hours.

"Clean up the dishes."

"Okay, I've got it"

Then Marsha, his wife, went to the bedroom, but returned much too quickly.

"Where's Veronica's letter to Santa? We have to buy a present for her, and she said she gave it to you this morning when you took her to the park."

Paul, whose nickname in school was Slug because he couldn't remember anything, immediately got tense, but thankfully his memory was with him for a change.

"It's in my coat - in the inside pocket."

Paul was making himself comfortable with a tray of food so getting up from the sofa was decidedly a challenge. His wife went into the hallway, but suddenly her voice, sounding like a police siren, summoned Paul for an interrogation.