

Fiery Coals

by Frank Gerber

Characters:

Ewald Greifman: a policeman — *Quinton*
Walter Schlichter: Judge — *Francis*
Arno Zwicki: lawyer — *Peter*
Paul Guckinsack: miser — *Wayne*
Edna Kluge; wise lady — *Robyn*
Ima Graham: social worker — *Petrona*
Ruth Brent: social worker — *Jackie*
Elsie: Guckinsacks' niece — *Tirzah*

Guckinsack: (sits stroking sack of money and crooning to it.) How dear, how dear, you are to me my treasure! Yes you are more to me than neighbour or friend, yes, more than wife or child! As long as you are here I shall live, even if it be a 100 years.

Elsie: (rings doorbell and G. hides sack) Good evening, dear uncle!

Guckinsack: You! What is it this time?

Elsie: I want to ask you, uncle dearest-

Guckinsack: Yes, yes, I know, don't tell me, I know! You want money, always it is money, money, money!

Elsie: oh dear uncle, I am collecting for the childrens' festival. be a dear and give just a little bit.

Guckinsack: Give, give give! Always the same song, give give give! Who ever gives me anything? You'll land me in the poorhouse yet- you and your "give give."

Elsie: Please, just a dollar. You will won't you?

Guckinsack: you shameless creature! One dollar, you say? Wait, I will give you something! (Elsie ducks, thinking he is going to hit her, but he wraps something up in a piece of paper and gives it to her.)

Guckinsack: Here you have it, now get lost! (Elsie leaves, he pulls out the hidden sack.) Oh my dearest, you they shall never have! 49 995 dollars! 5 more and I have 50 000. Yeeeeeeaaaah! (doorbell rings, hides sack: always in the same place)

Ima: Good evening, Mr. Guckinsack! I am collecting for the childrens' orphanage. Please be nice and spare the poor motherless and fatherless a bit of your money.

Guckinsack: Nothing, you will get! Money, money, money, and give, give, give! Why should I always have to give? You'll land me in the poorhouse yet! Get out, get out, I say!! (He watches to see if she can see him, then when he knows it is safe he pulls out his sack) You they shall never get, my treasure! Oh my dearest. 49 995 dollars! 5 more and I have 50 000 dollars. Hurraaaaaaaah!

Ruth: (Doorbell rings, this time Mr. G. hides sack in a different place) Hello, Mr. Guckinsack! Isn't it a lovely evening?

Mr. Guckinsack: Whatever, whatever! What do you want?

Ruth: I'm collecting for the old folks' home. We want to give the old people a bit of joy at Christmas time.

Mr. Guckinsack: Joy, you want to give, them eh? They would have their joy, if they had worked their fingers to the bone like I did, and saved for all these years, the good-for-nothing beggars! Parasites, they are, begging me to give until I don't have enough to keep body and soul together myself. Parasites!

Ruth: Oh Mr. Guckinsack, they can't help it that they are old and can't support themselves any longer.

Mr. Guckinsack: Yes, for that time exactly I am saying, and so they should have done too, if they were worth anything. So I don't have to beg when I'm that old.

Ruth: (smiling) Who knows what waits for you, Mr. Guckinsack?

Mr. Guckinsack: I know! You see, over there, where the carpenter left a hole when he built this room? Disappear through it, would you? Goodbye! (looks for money but can't find it, becomes frantic, looking everywhere, but still not finding it) Stolen! Oh my treasure, stolen!!! My precious, dear, lovely money, stolen! Oh no, no, no, no, no!

What shall I DO? Police! I'll call the police! (Runs out)

(Enter Edna, Irma, Ruth, Elsie)

Edna: So what did you work out with the old gentleman. Ruth, how much did he give you?

Ruth: He gave me nothing. he got angry and chased me out.

Edna: Tsk, tsk, that wasn't very nice! What about you, Irma, what did he give you?

Exactly as much as he gave Ruth, nothing! What a mean old man! I shook all over, I was so frightened! Wild horses couldn't drag me in there again.

Edna: My, my! To have such a cold heart at Christmastime, when God's love is in the hearts of men, when the fire of love burns bright, yes ven the hearts burn for love. And a heart to be so cold, so hard? For the children's festival he must have given something, Elsie, did he? After all he is your uncle.

Elsie: I don't know, I haven't checked yet.

Edna: You haven't checked to see what he gave you?

Elsie: No.

Edna: Well what did you do with it then?

Elsie: I have it in my pocket. He wrapped it up. It's probably a dollar.

Edna: So his heart wasn't so hard after all!

(Unwrap money, one paper after another)

Irma and Ruth: Let us see, Elsie! What is it?

Edna: Looks like a gold piece!

Irma: Wonderful!

Ruth: I would never have believed it!

Edna: (looks closely at cent Elsie is holding) Oh, it is not a gold piece.

Irma: What is it then?

Ruth: Is it a dollar?

Edna: No, it is a penny.

Irma and Ruth: (exclaim) A penny!! One penny?(Enter Guckinsack with Greifman)

Greifman: Which one was it now?

Guckinsack: (points at Ruth and Irma) Those two! They stole my money!

Irma: Stolen? Us?

Ruth: What, his money was stolen? Serves him right, they old miser!

Greifman: I arrest you both in the name of the law!

Guckinsack: Away with you! (Judge comes and seats himself, girls are brought before him)

Guckinsack: Your honour, I want to press charges against these two.

Schlichter: What is your complaint?

Guckinsack: They stole my money; all my precious money!

Schlichter: How much money was there?

Guck: Oh not much, not much indeed. I am a poor man, your honour!

Schlichter: you have to tell me how much it was. And where did you keep the money?

Guck: In a bag, I kept it.

Schlichter: There are many bags in the world! How will I know it was your bag if you don't tell me how much money there was in it?

Guck: Oh your Honour, I cannot tell you!

Schlichter: Then remove your presence from this courtroom!

Guckinsack: All right, all right, if you give me a piece of paper I will write it down. (He writes)

Schlichter: What! I thought you were a poor man!

Guck: I am not poor then? Not a cent do I have left, not a penny! Everything is gone!

Schlichter: (to Irma and Ruth) Where is your lawyer?

Irma : We weren't given a chance to hire a lawyer.

Ruth: Yes, we were dragged to this place.

Schlichter: You were not *dragged!*

Irma: Well, not by the hair, but you did not leave us much choice other than to come here.

Schlichter: Zwicki! Come here. These ladies need someone to represent their case. I want you to take it on. All right, Mr. Guckinsack, state your complaint, slowly and clearly.

Guckinsack: Today all of my money was stolen from my home. These ladies were the only people who were there.

Zwicki: Miss Graham, is that correct?

Irma: yes, I did visit him, but I did not get any further than the front hall before he chased me out.

Schlichter: What were you doing there?

Irma: I was collecting for the orphanage.

Zwicki: How much did he give you?

Irma: Nothing.

Schlichter: How was it with you, Miss Brent?

Ruth: Just exactly like that. He got angry and chased me out.

Zwicki: Your Honour, these ladies are innocent! Let them go! It is obvious that these brave and pious sisters did not steal any money.

Guckinsack: Now I shall certainly have to go to the poorhouse. Oh, oh, oh!

Zwicki: Yes I would try the children's house if I were you. They would treat you like the baby you are, there.

Schlichter: You are free to go, Miss Graham and Miss Brent.

Guckinsack: Oh, I shall have to go to the poorhouse! My money, my money!

Ruth: Yes, now you are old and helpless too, too bad you had to criticize the old folks so severely the other day. Besides you have to get a legal referral to the poorhouse, you can't just go there of your own accord.

Schlichter: And you're not getting one from me. (under his breath) 49 995 dollars!

Zwicky: And the pastor won't give you one either!

Guckinsack: Then I shall have to beg!

Zwicky: Yes, buy some black glasses, an organ and a big mug. Then you sit on the corner, wearing the glasses, and playing, "Ach du lieber Augustin, alles ist hin" and people drop pennies into your mug, sometimes. Then yoy bow and say, "Thankyou, thankyou!" (He is making fun of Guck.)

Schlichter: The court is adjourned. You are all dismissed.

(All leave. Girls gather in a discussion)

Edna: He has treated you miserably. His heart is like a rock.

Irma: I'm glad all his precious money is gone. It serves him right!

Ruth: I don't know, somehow I feel sorry for him! he doesn't love anything or anyone, except his money, and his money doesn't love him back. Does anyone really love the old miser?

Elsie: Yes! I do.

Ruth: Maybe if we had loved him more he would never gotten this far.

Edna: I think you are right. You know what? We should all show him some love now.

Elsie: Oh, please, please do! I would be so grateful!

(All exit.)

(Guckinsack enters, sits down and puts his head in his hands.)

Guckinsack: Oh, I am a poor poor old man! Poor me, poor me!

(Doorbell rings, he doesn't look up)

Edna: Merry Christmas Mr. G! Here is a present for you. (G. keeps on moaning)

Guck: Poor, poor old me! Poor poor me!

(Doorbell rings again and again as all the girls enter, leave a present, and wish Mr. Guckinsack a merry Christmas. Mr. G. doesn't look up but keeps on bemoaning his plight)

Elsie: Merry Christmas, Uncle! I brought you some flowers!

Guck: For me, Elsie for me? Oh, poor poor me, I am just not worth, not worth it!

Elsie: What's in that basket? Who brought it?

Guck: I don't know, I didn't look up.

Elsie: Let's see. Oh look at these gorgeous apples! And bread! (She checks all the baskets) Sausages and chicken, uncle, just look! Now we can have a happy Christmas!

Guckinsack: (Still in despair) Poor, poor- (Elsie claps hand over his mouth meanwhile she has spotted where he has hidden the sack of money)

Elsie: No, no, uncle! You are rich man. What is better, money; or love? Tell me uncle! (She is holding the sack of money behind her back)

Guck: Oh, love is so infinitely much better, love is better than anything on earth. I know that now!

Elsie: (smiling) Here is your money Uncle! I found it! See, it was over there.

Guckinsack: Oh now I remember! I hid it over there and forgot about it. But those dear sisters, I treated them so badly. And who brought all those lovely things?

Elsie: The sisters did.

Guck: Elsie, call the Pastor. I want to make out my will right away. I want to give half to the poor, now, the other half they shall get when I die-

Elsie: Uncle! You must not die! What would I do without you?

Guckinsack: Oh you dear little girl! For that you shall receive 1000 dollars right away!

Elsie: Uncle, it is worth much more than money if you would just love a little bit. Open up your heart to people, uncle!

Schlichter: Singing offstage, Alle Jahre Wieder, Kommt das Christus Kind. All join in softly, finish song.