

## Garfield, the Dream Car, and the Insurance Policy

Once upon a time there was a 16 year old boy named Garfield. (Yes, his real name was Garfield.) As if he did not have enough grief over being named after a cartoon cat, he was born with bright orange hair, and a black stripe right down the middle of his head. All Garfield had ever wanted his whole life was to have his driver's license. He wanted to be able to see his friends all over town, without his mom having to cart him around in her stupid green minivan. He hated green. He hated minivans. He hated having to ride with his mom.

Garfield had driven his fair share in that green minivan, though, because he was practicing every chance he could for his driver's exam. He wanted to pass the test, and get his own car. He wanted a black H2 Hummer. He had wanted the SUV ever since he first laid eyes on one. He knew that he could never have one, because they were so expensive. His mom and dad only laughed when he mentioned it. "You'll be lucky to be able to borrow your mom's minivan on the weekends," they said, "We can't buy you a new car! Let alone an expensive SUV like that!" Garfield always felt defeated, but he still believed that there was a way he could get his dream car.

One day Garfield went home from school particularly down in the dumps, because a new kid moved to town who – believe it or not – was named Odie. Seriously. The new kid's name was Odie. As if that wasn't bad enough, Odie now sat right next to Garfield in Algebra. Odie had blonde hair, and he even drooled a lot in class when he fell asleep on his book. The jokes never stopped that day! "I'll show everybody! They think they can make fun of me?" Garfield fumed, "When I have my new, black H2 Hummer, they'll all want to ride with me, and they'll have to apologize for making fun of me and my orange hair with a black stripe!" He fell asleep that night dreaming of pulling up to the Homecoming Dance with his new wheels.

The next day was very normal, although the other students at school were getting more and more clever with the Garfield and Odie jokes. Garfield would have even thought some of them were clever, had they not been at his expense. He arrived home that night, surprised to see that both of his parents' cars were in the driveway. "That's funny," he thought. "Dad isn't supposed to get home until around 6:00." When he walked into the house, he found his mom and dad blaring the radio, and dancing around the room and laughing so loudly that they didn't hear Garfield come in the front door.

"What's going on?" Garfield yelled. His parents turned to see their extremely confused son.

"GARFIELD! It's about time you came home! We have fantastic news! You won't believe it!" Garfield's parent's rushed to him, and wrapped their arms around him, pulling him off of his feet with their excitement.

"Try me," he replied. Wishing they would just put him down.

His father screamed his words as he spoke. "I bought a ticket on my way home and I won! I WON!"

"Won what? What ticket?" Garfield replied. He was wondering how much coffee they had had today.

"The lottery! The big jackpot they've been talking about! I won! Now we don't ever have to worry about money again!"

Garfield stood still, stunned by what his father had said. He wondered if this were some sort of joke his parents were playing on him. But part of him . . . okay a big part of him wanted to believe it. He wanted to believe it, because all he could think of was his dream car. All he could get stammer was, "car."

His father scrunched his eyebrows and looked confused. "No, son. The lottery. I didn't *get* a ticket, I *won* the ticket."

Garfield tried again. "My car. I mean, can I have my car. I mean, a car. Can I have a new, black, H2 Hummer???"

His mom and dad turned to look each other in the eyes. Their gaze held for a brief second, and they started laughing hysterically all over again. Garfield turned red, certain that they had been playing a cruel joke on him.

“Of course you can, Garfield! We know you’ve wanted your own car for a long time. You’re prayers must have worked, because this was the only way we could have ever afforded that SUV! We’ll go first thing Saturday morning to pick it out!”

Garfield couldn’t believe his ears. He pinched his arm, just to make sure he was awake. As he watched the skin around the pinch turn bright red, he realized that he was actually going to get his dream car, and his life would be perfect from now on! No one would ever make fun of his name again. And he would never, ever give Odie a ride.

“There’s one condition though, Garfield,” his dad spoke a bit more softly. “You will need to learn about the **insurance** required for this type of vehicle. I will expect you to know your **policy**, and to pay for your own **premiums**.”

Garfield had no idea what was involved by what his dad was talking about, but any price was worth it. “Absolutely!” Garfield replied. “I’ll do whatever I need to do to make it happen!”

The next day Garfield came home to find a brand new, black, H2 Hummer with chrome wheels, leather seats with automatic warmers, a navigation system, boss speakers, and even those cool flip-down TV screens for the back seat passengers. He tried to get into the vehicle, but his dad walked out of the house and laughed, “Not so fast! Before you’re getting into that vehicle, we’re going to our insurance agent to get some details worked out.”

“But, Dad . . .”

“No buts, Garfield. This is what we agreed. Now get into the minivan and we’ll go before the office closes for the day.

Garfield reluctantly crawled into the minivan he was sure he would never have to be seen in again. At least this HAD to be the last time. On the drive to the insurance agency Garfield’s dad went back over their agreement. “You are responsible for knowing your own **policy**, and for the monthly **premiums**. I will help you make some decisions, but you are responsible for understanding your **deductible**. Garfield pretended to listen, but all he could think of was getting back to the house in time to take the Hummer out for the football game that night.

Walking into the insurance agency Garfield began to realize that they would be here for a while. He decided that he would simply agree to whatever his dad suggested to make this ordeal that much faster.

“Hello, Garfield,” said a man in a white polo. “I’m Jim, and I’m going to get you set-up with the protection you need. Congratulations on the new car, by the way.”

“Protection? Protection from what?” The man in the polo caught Garfield off-guard. He quickly reminded himself that he wasn’t going to ask any more questions.

“Ha ha! Protection from **risk**, Garfield! You didn’t think you could just drive around in a huge vehicle like that and not give your parents some peace of mind, did you?”

Garfield didn’t understand why his parents needed any more peace of mind. The size of his vehicle assured that he would be safe no matter what happened. He couldn’t say as much about whoever might meet the large SUV in the case of an accident. That wasn’t his problem, though. He didn’t plan on getting in any accidents. He didn’t really understand how this guy in the white polo could really protect him, anyway. He wasn’t about to ask, though. He just wanted to get out of the office as soon as possible.

He followed Jim and his dad into a small office that was decked-out in golf decorations. If this guy liked to golf as much as his office indicated, Garfield wondered when he found the time to protect all these drivers he supposedly “insured.”

"Now, Garfield," Jim began, "Your father and I have decided that with the price of your vehicle, it might be a good idea to insure you with a **collision/comprehensive** plan, instead of just the standard **liability** plan required by law. We know that this will carry higher monthly **premiums**, but in the long run, I really believe that this will benefit you the most."

All Garfield heard was 'higher monthly **premiums**.' He assumed that meant more money that he would have to pay. Although he didn't like the sound of that, he continued to listen, as he quickly checked his watch to make sure that he still had plenty of time to pick-up some friends before the game that night.

"Of course you'll want to add **uninsured motorist**, as well as **medical** to your **policy**. You just never know when you'll need them" Jim continued.

Garfield began to see more dollar signs flying around the room, and couldn't help but step-in before he lost any more money. "I thought you said something about car insurance being required by law. Why do I need to add something called '**uninsured motorist**.' If it's required by law, shouldn't everyone have it?"

"Legally, yes, Garfield. Everyone should have it. However, some people believe that they cannot afford it, or believe that the costs do not outweigh the benefits. If one of those people hits you, then they have no insurance to pay to fix your car, not to mention your medical bills if you're hurt."

Garfield slumped in his chair. "It just doesn't seem fair for me to have to pay for something that they should legally have to pay."

"Sometimes things like this aren't fair, Garfield" his dad explained, "but wouldn't you rather pay a small amount each month, than be stuck with several thousand dollars if one of these people causes damage to your car . . . or you yourself?"

"I guess so," Garfield said more because he noticed the time than he really agreed with his father. "But what about that '**medical**' thing you were talking about. Surely I won't be the one who gets hurt if I'm in an accident. Have you seen how big my car is? I'd be more worried about the other guy!"

Jim chuckled to himself. "You may be right, Garfield, but do you know how much a week in the hospital costs?"

"No, I guess not," Garfield replied, already sorry he had brought it up.

"Even if a doctor never touches you, and you receive no medicine, you're looking at at least \$60,000. Are you willing to take that kind of financial **risk**?"

"Oh." At least that part made sense to him.

"As far as the other guy being hurt, maybe you're right. Maybe he has a much greater chance of being injured in an accident than you. Let me ask you this, though. What if the accident is your fault? What if you caused someone to be put into the hospital for a week? Could you afford to pay their medical bills? Could you even afford to fix their car?"

Garfield had not considered this. He knew that he obviously couldn't pay those kind of bills. "Is that what the **medical** part is for?"

"Yes and no," Jim answered. "The medical part is for you. But the fact that you're getting the **collision/comprehensive** plan instead of the **liability** plan is going to help."

"Didn't you say that the collision whatever was more expensive than the **liability** one?"

"Yes. All the law requires is **liability** coverage. That's all the law requires because all it covers is the other guy. It only covers *his* medical bills and *his* car repairs. It doesn't cover any of your own stuff."

"Then why am I paying for it?" Garfield sarcastically replied.

"Because *you're* the one who caused the accident." Jim responded without missing a beat. "The law requires you to be able to fix what you broke, so to speak. That's what we're here to help with."

"But **liability** won't fix me or my car, right?" Garfield was starting to catch on. "That's why I need to **collision/comprehensive** plan?"

“That’s right.” Jim answered. “You’re driving an awfully expensive car to be taking the risk of having to pay to fix it yourself if it somehow winds up mangled around some tree.”

“Okay, so you’ve convinced me to get the **collision/comprehensive** plan. I’ve kinda got some stuff to do tonight, though, so do you mind if we hurry and sign the papers?”

“Well, we haven’t talked about what kind of **deductible** you want, Garfield . . .”

“What are my choices?” Garfield interrupted, trying to finish the meeting as soon as possible. He had already asked more questions than he wanted to.

“Well,” Jim responded, “typically the higher **deductible** you choose the lower your **premium**, and vice-versa.”

That was all Garfield needed to hear. Although he had no idea what a **deductible** was, he knew that ‘**premium**’ meant ‘payment.’ “I’ll go with the high one, then.” He quickly blurted without knowing what he was saying. At this point, he’d do anything to just get to the game.

“Are you sure, son?” His dad asked him. You’ll have to come up with it yourself if something happens. Are you prepared to do that?”

“Absolutely!” Garfield lied. He had no idea what he was getting into.

“Well, if you’re sure, then we’ll set you up with a \$1,000 deductible.” Jim began to gather papers together for him to sign. Garfield began to wonder what he had agreed to, but it was too late to ask. He had already sounded so sure of himself that he hated to back down now. As he signed the papers, Jim handed him a card with his name and his vehicle information on it, and also some pamphlets that he reminded Garfield to read over before he started driving. Apparently they outlined his **policy**. Garfield hastily agreed, stuffed the pamphlets into his pocket, and shook Jim’s hand. In his mind, this was the last hurdle he had to get over before he was free to drive his new SUV.

As they pulled into the driveway at the house, his dad once again reminded him to read over the pamphlets Jim had given him. “I will tonight, Dad, but I just have to get to the game. I’ve probably already missed the kick-off!” His dad hesitated, but finally agreed, making Garfield promise to read through his **policy** as soon as he got home that night.

Half an hour later, Garfield pulled his new vehicle into the High School parking lot, just in time to drive in front of several of the guys, including Odie. “Nice wheels, man!” Odie called out. Garfield would have rather seen anyone else that night, but he was eager for the attention he had waited dreamed of for so long, so he quickly replied.

“Yeah, no big deal. My dad picked it up for me on his way home tonight. I figure I’ll hang on to it for a while.”

Garfield could tell that his new car had made an impact on his friends, but he tried his best to hide his smile, and casually made his way into the stands with everyone else. He chose a seat at the top of the stadium, so that he could easily glance back to check out his car between plays. Part of him wondered still if it had all been a dream.

After the game, Odie and some of the guys followed Garfield to his Hummer, and asked for a ride around the town. “Oh, I guess.” Garfield replied, “but I’m kinda tired, so we’d better make it quick.”

Garfield peeled out of the parking lot, sending his friends back into their seats. Secretly it scared him, because the tires squealed more out of his inexperience behind the wheel, than his sheer coolness. He let them think it was because he was cool.

“Swing around by the lake, Garf!” someone shouted from the back seat.

“Then we’d better make this real quick,” Garfield replied while flooring the gas pedal. He raced down all the side streets he could, trying to keep his eyes peeled for any cops that might be lurking in the alleys. Down the street to his left, someone turned their porch light on. The small flicker of light was just enough to

catch Garfield's attention, and his head turned to check it out, sure that it was a police officer that had caught him going 20 over the speed limit for that road. However, when his head turned, so did his hands, and the large SUV soon followed suit. Garfield looked back ahead of him and tried to correct, sending the boys flying back to the right side of the road. This time it was too late to correct, and the Hummer ran head first into a giant oak tree and stopped. When Garfield lifted his head off of the airbag, he saw steam coming from the engine. He turned around to see the rest of the boys wide-eyed, but they all seemed unhurt. Slowly, they began to unbuckle their seat belts and get out, surveying the damage. "Does anyone have a phone?" Garfield asked somberly. "I think I'd better call my dad."

The next day Garfield found himself once again in front of Jim, talking insurance. This, however, was a welcome relief from the lectures and shrill reprimands he was receiving at his house. His father's angry shouts on the drive home from the accident was nothing compared to his mother's constant scolding he had listened to for the past several hours.

"Well, Garfield, this is what **insurance** is for. While we can't prevent you from getting into an accident, or even getting hurt, we can protect your pocket book from being hurt too deeply." Jim gave a pity smile and began shuffling more papers on his desk.

Garfield finally began to realize what Jim had been talking about the day before when he kept mentioning protection from **risk**. All that time he meant financial risk, not bodily risk or even risk of damage to his vehicle.

"Looks like all we'll need now is a check from you for \$1,000, and you'll be all ready to go . . . well, without your car, obviously, but you'll be done here on the insurance end of things."

"\$1,000?!" Jim exclaimed, "I thought you were supposed to *protect* my wallet!" What do I pay those monthly payments for if you're just going to charge me when I get into an accident? What's the point, anyway?!"

Slightly taken aback, Jim furrowed his eyebrows, and asked, "Didn't you read your **policy** I sent home with you yesterday? You agreed to the \$1,000 **deductible**, remember?"

"Yeah, so?" Garfield did not follow, but he didn't like the sound of where this was heading.

Jim sighed. Obviously Garfield had no idea what he was agreeing to yesterday. "Okay, so you pay a monthly payment, right?"

"Right."

"Well, you chose to have a lower monthly payment by taking a risk that you wouldn't be getting into an accident. The reason your payment is lower is because you chose to have a higher **deductible**. A **deductible** is the out-of-pocket amount you have to pay in case you file a claim. In other words, it's the small, up-front amount that you pay, before we step-in and pay the rest. You chose a \$1,000 **deductible**, so you only have to pay this much, and then we'll pay the rest of the damage to your car."

"But that's so much money. What if I change my mind? It isn't fair, because I didn't understand all the details!" Garfield felt as if he was grasping for straws.

"I feel badly for you, Garfield, really. But I can't do anything about it now. When you signed those papers yesterday you signed contracts that you were going to abide by our **policy**, or agreement. We can't go back in time and change it, but we can look at changing it for any other accidents that may happen in the future."

This was the second time in 24 hours that Garfield had to ask someone for a phone so that he could call his dad. He just didn't have that much money in his account, and he wasn't looking forward to asking to borrow money from his dad.

That afternoon Garfield once again set-out from the house in his mother's minivan. His mission: to fill-out as many job applications as he could until someone hired him. He had an insurance **premium** to pay for.