

VIRGIL AND THE CITY SLICKERS

by Eddie McPherson



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**VIRGIL AND
THE CITY SLICKERS**

A FARCE IN TWO ACTS

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SYNOPSIS: The Sludges are simple country people who enjoy the rural trappings of gardens and green space. Enter Jennifer and Trish, two highbrow city slickers whose car broke down and desperately need a telephone (since their cell phones won't receive a signal "in the boonies"). The city girls who prefer trendy shopping districts and running water, walk into the middle of several family predicaments including a lovers' spat, a bad hair day, a miracle tomato-growing tonic, a cow-impersonating husband and an oversized baby who disappears.

As the girls hang around waiting for a ride, the country bumpkins warm up to the "city folks" who try to help the "backward" family with their problems. But that's easier said than done. And when Jennifer's fiancé finally shows up to take her home, things go from bad to worse and both country and city folk, as well as the audience, learn some valuable lessons by the time the final curtain falls. Puns, one-liners, groaners and silly situations make this farce fun to play and even more fun to watch.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 females, 5 males)

COUNTRY FOLKS

ELOISE SLUDGE (f)	Country housewife (121 lines)
HARLEY WAYNE SLUDGE (m)	Eloise's husband (51 lines)
VIRGIL SLUDGE (m).....	Their son (128 lines)
MARGARET SLUDGE (f)	Virgil's wife (93 lines)
BERTHA MAE SLUDGE (f)	Virgil's sister (89 lines)
BEATRICE HOOPER (f)	Eloise's best friend (102 lines)
LEONARD HOOPER (m)	Beatrice's husband (63 lines)
ELLARD (m)	Virgil's best friend and Bertha Mae's fiancé (111 lines)
WINNIE (f).....	The Sludge's country neighbor (22 lines)

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CITY FOLKS

JENNIFER (f)	The epitome of a high-brow city girl (145 lines)
TRISH (f)	Jennifer's best friend (79 lines)
BOBBY (m)	Jennifer's fiancé (29 lines)
PEACH (f)	Bobby's sister (11 lines)
JACY (f)	Peach's roommate (11 lines)

PRODUCTION NOTES**(Running Time: 80 Minutes)**

This is a farce, therefore it is not meant to be taken seriously; so please have fun with it. The characters are fun and the situations are over the top, which makes it easy to play broadly. Be careful where the script calls for pauses, though, and play them for effectiveness. Entrances and exits should be made quickly and the momentum of the action ought to flow smoothly.

SETTING

The setting is the Sludge's living room. It's not a pigpen or a shack; but neither is it something out of a home and garden magazine. An old sofa sits center stage. Other furniture can be added depending on stage space. There is a door that goes to outside stage right, a door that goes to the kitchen and back door upstage center, and another door that goes to the bedrooms and rest of the house stage left. A few out-of-date pictures hang on the walls along with a family portrait that's large enough for the audience to see. [NOTE: The family portrait is optional. If it's not used, the line referring to it is simply removed.]

PROPS

- ☐ Bowls and string beans
- ☐ long piece of string or rope
- ☐ ugly dress
- ☐ purses
- ☐ light jacket
- ☐ box of home perm solution
- ☐ several ripe tomatoes
- ☐ apple
- ☐ hand towels
- ☐ hair net
- ☐ telephone
- ☐ can of disinfectant
- ☐ Sludge family portrait
- ☐ two fake butcher knives
- ☐ two cooking pots
- ☐ wheelbarrow
- ☐ cow bell on a rope
- ☐ red beanbag chair
- ☐ fake shotgun
- ☐ drinking glass
- ☐ textbook
- ☐ tissue
- ☐ white handkerchief
- ☐ large doll wrapped in a blanket
- ☐ white baby's blanket
- ☐ two one-gallon milk jugs
- ☐ burlap blanket
- ☐ large bandage
- ☐ newspaper
- ☐ white bed sheet
- ☐ fake engagement ring
- ☐ business card
- ☐ hat box

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *It's the SLUDGE'S living room. The home is not a dump, but it isn't something to be featured in a home decorating magazine. BEATRICE and ELOISE are breaking beans on the sofa.*

ELOISE: You should have saw the look on Abigail's face when he told her.

BEATRICE: I can only imagine. What did she say?

ELOISE: Well, she cried at first of course; then she reared back and slapped that no-good scoundrel.

BEATRICE: No!

ELOISE: Right across the face as hard as she could.

BEATRICE: Poor Abigail.

ELOISE: He deserved it. If it had been me, I would have slapped him then turned him around and kicked him with my steel-toed boots.

BEATRICE: Well, I hope she left that rascal.

ELOISE: You'd think so wouldn't you?

BEATRICE: She didn't leave him?

ELOISE: She said she couldn't break up with him 'cause she luuuuuvs him too much.

BEATRICE: How many times is he goin' to have to go out on that girl before she sees the light?

ELOISE: A hundred I recon.

BEATRICE: Then what happened?

ELOISE: Well, the way I heard it – he admitted he'd been seein' somebody else on the side and that's when she slapped him – then he said he was sorry – then they went to an all-night seafood buffet and shared a plate of crab legs.

BEATRICE: No!

ELOISE: That's the way I heard it. But that's not the best part. While they was sittin' there eatin' them crab legs, the girl he'd been seein' walked up to their table and looked him right straight in the eye and says loud enough for Abigail to hear; she says, "Hi honey bunch, don't forget to call me tomorrow."

BEATRICE: She didn't?

ELOISE: Said it loud enough for her to hear it. Sure did.

BEATRICE: Barbara Anne told you this?

ELOISE: Straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

BEATRICE: What did Abigail do?

ELOISE: Barbara Ann said Abigail threw her head back, stood up from them crab legs and looked that hussy straight in the eye.

BEATRICE: (*Breaking beans faster and faster.*) I bet she got her told good. Don't just sit there, what did Abigail say?

ELOISE: I don't know.

BEATRICE: You don't know?

ELOISE: Barbara Anne said a commercial came on and next thing she knew it was time for the "Price is Right."

BEATRICE: Darn, and that was Friday's show?

ELOISE: Yep, won't know what happened 'til Monday.

BEATRICE: (*Relaxing after such a story.*) *The Road to Recovery* is my favorite soap. Them city folks get thei'selves in more trouble than I have ever saw.

ELOISE: The city's a nice place to visit, but you wouldn't catch me livin' there. (*Referring to her beans.*) I think that'll give me enough for supper. What about you?

BEATRICE: (*Checking her beans out.*) Yeah, I think so. Thanks for lettin' me pick some from your garden 'cause our beans ain't done a lick of good this season. Leonard put too much fertilizer on the garden this year and burnt ever'thing up.

ELOISE: You know you can't tell men nothin'. It's like I always say, a bird in the hand makes for an awful mess on the floor. You feel free to take anything out of our garden, 'cause now that we're family, it's share and share alike. Let me get these beans on and I'll be right back and you can help me find a hairstyle.

BEATRICE: Okay, Eloise. (*ELOISE exits to the kitchen as ELLARD enters from outside. He's pulling a string behind him.*)

ELLARD: Mornin' Ms Hooper.

BEATRICE: Mornin' Ellard. (*Pointing to the string.*) What in the world are you doin'?

ELLARD: Takin' Rufus out for a walk.

BEATRICE: And what would Rufus be, your invisible dog?

ELLARD: Invisible dog. (*Chuckles.*) That's a good one, Ms Hooper. (*Chuckles.*)

BEATRICE: If I knew I was that funny, I would have charged admission.

ELLARD: Admission. (*Chuckles.*) There you go bein' funny again.

BEATRICE: You never did answer my question. Why you pullin' that string behind you that way?

ELLARD: (*Looking behind him for the first time.*) Darn it all. He done went and got loose.

BEATRICE: Don't tell me you found yourself another wild pet, Ellard.

ELLARD: Yes ma'am, but it keeps gettin' loose. (*Crossing to the door and yelling through it.*) Rufus! Rufus, where in the world did you go?

BEATRICE: What is Rufus, another red-tailed lizard?

ELLARD: No ma'am. I outgrew lizards.

BEATRICE: Raccoon?

ELLARD: No ma'am, I outgrew raccoons.

BEATRICE: Then what was it?

ELLARD: Snappin' turtle. Found it down at Elmer Jennins' catfish pond. I keep forgettin' it's too slow to keep up with me. Ms Hooper, is Bertha Mae home?

BEATRICE: (*Cleaning up her mess.*) No, Eloise said she went into town with her daddy.

ELLARD: (*Sitting on the arm of the sofa.*) That's good to hear.

BEATRICE: That's not much of a way to talk about the girl you're goin' to marry.

ELLARD: You mean the girl I might be goin' to marry.

BEATRICE: What does that mean?

ELLARD: (*Catching himself.*) Nothin', I was just talkin'.

BEATRICE: Ellard, is there somethin' you're not tellin' me 'bout you and Bertha Mae?

ELLARD: Of course not. Me and Bertha Mae will be happier than two peas in a pod after we're married.

BEATRICE: That's more like it.

ELLARD: Unless she finds out.

BEATRICE: Finds out what?

ELLARD: Never mind. I've said enough. There's nothin' else to say 'bout me and another girl.

BEATRICE: (*Shocked.*) Ellard!

ELLARD: What?

BEATRICE: What about you and another girl?

ELLARD: Who told you?

BEATRICE: Well, it's no business of mine. Bertha Mae is Eloise's daughter and what ever is goin' on between you and another girl is strictly your affair – I mean fling – **BUSINESS!**

ELLARD: (*Staring at her.*) Are you feelin' okay Ms Beatrice?

BEATRICE: (*Fanning herself.*) I'm fine – just a little shook up with all this business with Abigail. I won't get a bit of sleep over the weekend worryin' about that poor girl.

ELLARD: Is she a friend of Bertha Mae?

BEATRICE: Who, Abigail? No, she's on "The Road to Recovery" every day.

ELLARD: Good, at least she's gettin' better.

BEATRICE: Never mind about Abigail; if you're glad Bertha Mae's not home, why are you here?

ELLARD: Virgil said him and Margaret was comin' over here this mornin' so Margaret can give his mama a new hair-do. And I need to talk to Virgil 'bout somethin' real important.

BEATRICE: The same somethin' you won't tell me about?

ELLARD: Right.

LEONARD: (*Enters wearing overalls and working gloves and speaks to BEATRICE.*) There you are. Come on, I need you to help me put fertilizer on the 'maters.

BEATRICE: Leonard Hooper, you have killed ever'thing in that garden puttin' too much fertilizer on it.

LEONARD: But honey bunch, fertilizer helps things grow.

ELLARD: (*Sincerely to LEONARD.*) Have you tried mixin' a little with your shampoo?

LEONARD: You keep out of this, Ellard.

ELLARD: Yes sir, I'll just go look for Rufus.

BEATRICE: You ain't goin' anywhere 'til I get my chance to talk some sense into you. (*ELOISE enters.*) Now sit! (*ELLARD does.*)

ELOISE: Got the beans on. Well, Ellard this is a nice surprise.

BEATRICE: That's what you think.

ELOISE: If you're lookin' for Bertha Mae, she's not here right now. She went with her daddy into town.

ELLARD: That's okay. I was wantin' to talk to Virgil anyway.

ELOISE: (*Cleaning up her mess.*) Well, him and Margaret should be here any minute. Margaret's doin' my hair for our trip to the city. You and Bertha Mae goin' out tonight?

BEATRICE: Why you askin' him about Bertha Mae?

ELOISE: Huh?

BEATRICE: Can't you just leave the poor boy alone? Can't you see he's upset enough?

LEONARD: (*To BEATRICE.*) I'm goin' to be upset too if you don't come on and help me in the garden.

ELOISE: Upset? (*To ELLARD.*) Why in the world are you upset?

ELLARD: Oh, I guess she's talkin' 'bout Rufus. He's got loose again.

ELOISE: Ellard, boy, you're the only person in Lickskillit who could lose a turtle. Like I always say, The way to a man's heart is to rip it out through his chest.

BEATRICE: That's right, he's upset about losin' Rufus. Nice save, Ellard.

ELOISE: Good gracious, I'm surrounded by a couple of knuckleheads.

LEONARD: (*To ELOISE.*) Hey, what am I, invisible?

ELOISE: Sorry, Leonard; I meant three knuckleheads.

LEONARD: That's better. (*To BEATRICE.*) Well, I'm headin' to the garden. If you want to join me, you know where I'll be. (*Exits.*)

BEATRICE: (*To herself.*) Yeah, up to your neck in manure. (*Putting an arm around ELLARD.*) Now, remember, Ellard, don't worry about nothin' 'cause I'm sure it will all work out. Just remember me and Leonard. Even though he's as dumb as a stick I have stayed with him all these years 'cause I love him. (*Looks at ELOISE who is staring at BEATRICE, confused.*) So...I...know love will bring you and Rufus back together. See Ya'll later. (*She rushes out.*)

ELOISE: Ellard, hun, I know that turtle means a lot to you, but after all it's just a wild animal.

ELLARD: (*Confused.*) I guess Ms Beatrice got real attached to Rufus or somethin'.

ELOISE: (*Picking up a tacky dress from off the back table.*) Oh, I forgot to show Beatrice the dress I made to wear to the city. (*Holds it up to her.*) You like it, Ellard?

ELLARD: Yes ma'am, that's real fancy.

ELOISE: Well, you can't expect me to go to an eggstravagent (*She's trying to say extravagant.*) restaurant in the city wearin' somethin' embarrassin' do you? (*Prancing around the stage keeping the dress up against her.*) No sir, I ain't about to go out lookin' like a country bumpkin. Just wait 'til Margaret gives me my home perm. You won't recognize me I'll be so suffocated (*Sophisticated.*).

ELLARD: Gollee. (*BERTHA MAE and HARLEY WAYNE enter.*)

BERTHA MAE: Daddy, I will never forgive you for that! It was the most embarrassin' thing I ever saw in my life! (*ELLARD tenses up when he sees BERTHA MAE.*)

HARLEY WAYNE: Honey, it was all in fun.

ELOISE: Oh no, what did he do this time?

HARLEY WAYNE: I was only tryin' to have a little fun.

BERTHA MAE: (*To BEATRICE.*) We was inside the tractor wholesale warehouse and Daddy started mooin' like a cow again.

HARLEY WAYNE: (*Laughing.*) It was so funny.

BERTHA MAE: It was embarrassin' and humidifyin' (*Humiliating.*). Ever'body started lookin' around 'cause they thought a cow got loose.

HARLEY WAYNE: (*Laughing as he demonstrates.*) I went, "mooooooooooooo." I had ever'body in that whole warehouse fooled. I'm so witty.

ELOISE: (*Hands on hips.*) Harley Wayne, what have I told you about actin' like a cow in public?

HARLEY WAYNE: (*Laughing.*) You should have saw the look on ever'body's face.

ELLARD: Hey Bertha Mae.

BERTHA MAE: Ellard! (*Throws out her arms and runs to him and gives him a hug.*) I didn't know you was goin' to be here, you rascal. You wanted to surprise me by showin' up this way, didn't you? You're lookin' to take me for a romantic walk! You're lookin' to get me alone! You're lookin' to steal a kiss!

ELLARD: I'm lookin' for your brother.

BERTHA MAE: (*Taken aback.*) Virgil? I thought you wanted to see me.

ELLARD: I do, hun.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(To BERTHA MAE.)* Speakin' of seein' you, has he saw you without your makeup, yet?

BERTHA MAE: Daddy!

ELOISE: You'd better hush your face, Harley Wayne.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Crossing to ELLARD and placing his arm around him.)* I just wanted to talk to my future son-in-law man to man.

ELOISE: You're two men short.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(To ELLARD.)* I never saw Eloise without her makeup 'til the first mornin' I woke up in bed with her.

ELOISE: Harley Wayne, I'm warnin' you...

HARLEY WAYNE: I rolled over in bed and thought my prize heifer had crawled up under the covers.

ELOISE: *(Hitting him with her dish towel.)* Harley Wayne, you did not! You told me I was the prettiest bride in the whole world.

HARLEY WAYNE: What did you expect me to say on my honey moon, "Good heavens, somebody poke out my eyes; I've been blinded by ugly?"

ELOISE: Don't you listen to him, Ellard. Ever'body knows he still thinks I'm beautiful. *(Everyone stares at her in disbelief.)* Why is ever'body lookin' at me like I'm on fire?

HARLEY WAYNE: Just your pants, honey. Just your pants.

BERTHA MAE: Anyway, *(To ELLARD.)* If you didn't come to see me, just say so.

ELLARD: I didn't come to see you.

ELOISE: Ellard! *(To BERTHA MAE.)* Of course he came to see you, honey. And while he's here, he's goin' to talk to Virgil, ain't that right, Ellard? *(ELLARD looks at ELOISE and picks up on her cue. She's nodding her head slowly. He nods his head right along with her.)*

BERTHA MAE: That's more like it. And why are you wearin' that jacket in the middle of summer? *(Starts to help him off with his jacket.)*

ELLARD: No, Bertha Mae, I can't take my jacket off.

BERTHA MAE: Why not?

ELLARD: 'Cause I'm cold. You want me to get the flu?

BERTHA MAE: It's eighty-five degrees outside.

HARLEY WAYNE: Bertha Mae, remember, he's the man. If he wants to keep his jacket on, that's his own business.

ELOISE: You keep out of it, Harley Wayne; you're already in the dog house for actin' like a cow in public.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Talking to himself as he exits to the bedroom.)* That ain't no way to treat a body. I won't be pushed around forever. Treat me like a child sometime. *(He's gone.)*

ELOISE: *(Shouting after him.)* And stop talkin' to yourself! *(To BERTHA MAE and ELLARD.)* Good gravy, maybe some day I'll get that man trained.

BERTHA MAE: Mama, sometimes I think you need to treat Daddy more like a husband instead of the family dog; *(Turns quickly.)* Ellard, sit. *(ELLARD sits quickly.)*

ELOISE: I'll leave you two lovebirds alone and go check on my green beans. *(As she exits, she speaks to herself.)* Harley Wayne, sit. I like the sound of that. Harley Wayne, sit. *(She exits.)*

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, before we get married, I wanted to talk to you about this obsession you have with collectin' critters. I'm not sure it's a very good idea.

ELLARD: What's the matter, Bertha Mae, don't you like turtles?

BERTHA MAE: Why, sure I do, Ellard. But I like them outside in the woods; not in the bath tub.

ELLARD: But turtles like water.

BERTHA MAE: It's just that I don't think I want lizards and frogs runnin' around the house under foot all day. Ellard, you're not a little boy any more. You're a grown man who's about to take a wife, and grown men don't play with turtles and red-tailed lizards.

ELLARD: Then what do grown men play with?

BERTHA MAE: I'll tell you on our honeymoon. *(Standing.)* I feel so much better now that we've got all that worked out.

VIRGIL and MARGARET enter. MARGARET carries a box of home perm solution.

ELLARD: *(Rushing to VIRGIL.)* Virgil, I'm glad you're here.

VIRGIL: That's quite a welcome, Ellard.

MARGARET: Thanks a lot, Ellard; does that mean you're not glad I'm here?

BERTHA MAE: I'm glad you're here, Margaret.

MARGARET: Thanks, Bertha Mae. Where's your mama?

BERTHA MAE: In the kitchen. Since Ellard is so bent on talkin' to Virgil, come on in my bedroom and I'll show you a picture of my weddin' dress.

MARGARET: Okay. Virgil, if you see your mama, tell her I got the stuff for her hair-do.

VIRGIL: Okay, honey bunch. (*The girls exit.*) What's the matter, Ellard? You're actin' like a scared rabbit on openin' day of huntin' season.

ELLARD: Virgil, I've been keepin' a secret from Bertha Mae. A secret that I've been hidin' from her the whole time I've known her. Somethin' that could keep us from gettin' married. I'm talkin' about this. (*He quickly takes off his jacket.*)

VIRGIL: Your farmer's tan?

ELLARD: (*Pulls up his shirt sleeve.*) This, Virgil. This right here. (*He reveals a tattoo that reads, "Sundra."*)

VIRGIL: Holy garden plow. You done went and got a tattoo.

ELLARD: Right, but I've had it for a long time.

VIRGIL: Who's Sundra?

ELLARD: She was a girl I met up in Boon County back before I knew Bertha Mae.

VIRGIL: Would you look at that. That's some nice artwork too. Yes, sir, that is a beauty. And the good thing about a good tattoo is that it will never come off. No sir, them things are permanent. Your arm will say Sundra for the rest of your life. (*He looks at ELLARD'S face.*) Uh-oh.

ELLARD: Uh-oh is right. Virgil, how am I goin' to explain this to Bertha Mae? I told her she was the only one I ever loved. If she sees this, she'll leave me for sure.

VIRGIL: Three weeks before your weddin' ain't a good time to be bringin' this up, Ellard.

ELLARD: I tried several times to tell her but I couldn't get up the nerve. Virgil, what am I goin' to do?

VIRGIL: You could try keepin' your shirt on.

ELLARD: But what will I say on my honeymoon when she sees I don't want to take my shirt off?

VIRGIL: She won't say nothin'. Shoot, me and Margaret was married eight months before I took my shirt off in front of her.

ELLARD: How come?

VIRGIL: I was afraid that if Margaret saw what she got after she married me, she'd been runnin' down the street yellin', "Annulment! Annulment!" So I just stayed covered up 'til it was too late for her to annul me.

ELLARD: But you did finally take your shirt off in front of her.

VIRGIL: Only because I caught on fire; then she was too scared to laugh.

VIRGIL: The point is, I had to let her see what she got sooner or later. And you'll have to take yours off and Bertha Mae will see "Sundra" and ya'll will have a good laugh.

ELLARD: But what if she wants to break up with me?

VIRGIL: Bertha Mae won't break up with you.

ELLARD: You're right. She'll kill me first.

VIRGIL: How in the world did you come up with a girl's name on your arm?

ELLARD: Well, like I said, I was up in Boon County at the tenth annual tractor pull. I had a bad cold and had took some of Mama's antihistamine tablets so I was feelin' a little braver than normal.

VIRGIL: Your body never did handle mild medications too good.

ELLARD: Durin' intermission when the antihistamine was at the peak of doin' its thing, I walked up to the concession stand and there she stood handin' out foot-long chili dogs. That high hair, ketchup and mustard smeared on her white polyester blouse. It was like I was lookin' at a hillbilly angel.

VIRGIL: (*Sarcastically.*) Sounds like a real winner, Ellard.

ELLARD: It was my turn in line, so I said, I'll take two foot-longs." "Two foot-longs comin' up," she said showin' them gapped teeth for the first time. She said, "I like a man who knows what he wants." I looked into them eyes of her's – one eye was a little bigger than the other – and I said, "I do know what I want and I want to take you out for ice cream after the tractor pull tonight."

VIRGIL: Then what? Then what?

ELLARD: I tell you, Virgil. It was love at first sight and it wasn't just the antihistamine talkin'. It was ever'thing about her: Her uneven eyes, her gapped teeth, her high hair – all of it added up to the most beautiful girl I had ever saw.

VIRGIL: Okay, okay! Just get to the part about the tattoo?

ELLARD: Well, later that night after she got off work, we went for a walk across the pasture to a travelin' carnival. We held hands so I could help her with her limp.

VIRGIL: Did she hurt her foot?

ELLARD: No, one of her legs was longer than the other. Then we came up on the man who done the tattoos and she told me about this boyfriend she had one time who proved that he loved her by wearin' her name...

VIRGIL: Okay, Ellard. I get the picture.

ELLARD: Right after I had her name put on my arm, my nose started runnin' which meant the antihistamine was wearin' off and that's when I realized what I done. I never saw her after that.

VIRGIL: Your mama always warned you about the wild women in Boon County.

ELLARD: Well, I ain't proud of it, but what is done is done and now I am in a real pickle.

VIRGIL: We got to think quick, Ellard.

MARGARET: (*Entering with BERTHA MAE as ELLARD quickly puts on his shirt.*) That dress is goin' to be plum pretty on you, Bertha Mae.

BERTHA MAE: It better, it's costin' all of thirteen dollars to have made.

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, look at Ellard's face – he's hidin' somethin'.

VIRGIL: What?

ELLARD: No I ain't. I ain't hidin' nothin'.

MARGARET: Oh yes you are, you scoundrel. You're tryin' to hide the excitement of gettin' married. Virgil did the same thing when we got married. Men are always tryin' to pretend they don't have emotions. (*Off stage we hear, "Mooooooooooooo."*) What in the world was that?

BERTHA MAE: Daddy, is that you? I told you that wasn't funny.

HARLEY WAYNE: (*Entering laughing.*) I got all you good didn't I? You thought a cow got loose. I am so funny.

VIRGIL: Daddy, I hate to be the one to tell you this, but that cow thing has never been funny.

HARLEY WAYNE: That's the trouble with you kids today: no sense of humor.

VIRGIL: Maybe if you tried bein' a chicken or a wolf.

ELOISE: (*Offstage.*) Ellard? Bertha Mae?

HARLEY WAYNE: Here comes your mama. Watch this. (*He hides in front of the sofa. ELOISE enters carrying a bag full of trash.*)

ELOISE: Virgil, I didn't know you and Margaret was here. Margaret, did you bring the home perm?

MARGARET: Yes ma'am. It was on sale for two dollars a box.

ELOISE: Good, that means it's the good stuff. I'll get Harley Wayne to get you some money.

MARGARET: Don't worry about it, it's on me. We couldn't have you goin' to the city wearin' nothin' but the best.

HARLEY WAYNE: Moooooooooooo.

ELOISE: Harley Wayne, wherever you are, come out and get this trash to the road this very minute.

HARLEY WAYNE: (*Standing.*) How did you know it was me?

ELOISE: Because you're the only jackass who sounds like a sick bull when he's imitatin' a cow. Now go! (*He drops his head and exits to the kitchen.*) I need a couple of you kids to come help me in the kitchen.

BERTHA MAE: We'll help you, Mama. Come on Ellard.

ELLARD: But I needed to talk to Virgil some more.

BERTHA MAE: I said come on! If you're goin' to be my husband, you've got to practice takin' orders without a fuss. (*Points to the kitchen.*) Go! (*He drops his head just as HARLEY WAYNE did before and exits.*) We'll be back. (*BERTHA MAE exits.*)

MARGARET: (*Opening the home perm box and taking out the contents.*) Them two sure are goin' to make a funny home together.

VIRGIL: You're goin' to stink up this whole house with that hair stuff.

MARGARET: It'll be worth it. You want your mama to be beautiful don't you?

VIRGIL: How dose that junk work?

MARGARET: First, I'll tattoo your mama's hair a couple of times, then I'll...

VIRGIL: (*Interrupting.*) What did you say?

MARGARET: I said, first I'll shampoo her hair a couple of times, then I'll...

VIRGIL: You said tattoo her hair.

MARGARET: Tattoo? Virgil, why would I tattoo your mama's hair?

VIRGIL: I don't know, but that's what you said. Do you know somethin' you're not tellin' me?

MARGARET: You're talkin' as crazy as your daddy. I said, shampoo her hair.

VIRGIL: Oh.

MARGARET: Then I apply the solution, let it set for a while until your mama's hair has beautiful body.

VIRGIL: Margaret, can I ask you a question? What if I revealed a secret to you after we've been married this whole time?

MARGARET: I've already seen you without your shirt; nothin' could be more shockin' than that.

VIRGIL: Let's just pretend that you found out about somethin' that I did before we got married that wasn't too smart. Would you be mad?

MARGARET: What are you tryin' to tell me, Virgil?

VIRGIL: Nothin', we're just pretendin'. What if, let's say, you found out I had a tattoo of another girl's name on my arm.

MARGARET: I know that's not true 'cause I've seen both your arms.

VIRGIL: I know, but Ellard hasn't...

MARGARET: Ellard?

VIRGIL: *(Covers his mouth.)* Margaret, I didn't mean...

MARGARET: Ellard got a tattoo?

VIRGIL: Now, Margaret, don't get...

MARGARET: Another girl's name on his arm?

VIRGIL: I didn't say...okay, YES! Ellard got giddy on antihistamine and had his old girlfriend's name tattooed on his arm.

ELLARD: *(Entering speaking to BERTHA MAE who is still off stage.)* I'll be right back sweet thing. Margaret, could you excuse me and Virgil for a minute.

MARGARET: *(Rushing over to ELLARD and pulling up one of his jacket sleeves.)* Where is it? Which arm?

ELLARD: *(Rushing over to VIRGIL.)* Virgil, you told her.

MARGARET: *(Rips his jacket off, she sees the tattoo and gasps.)* I can't believe it. I just can't believe you would do such a thing!

ELLARD: Virgil, you promised you wouldn't tell.

MARGARET: I bet you went to the tractor pulls, didn't you? You know what kind of girls hang out over there and you went to the tractor pulls. Am I right! I knew it! I'm right, ain't I.

ELLARD: It wasn't like that, Margaret. She was a workin' girl.

MARGARET: (*Pointing to the door.*) You get out of my husband's mama's house with that kind of talk.

VIRGIL: That's not what he meant, Margaret. She was workin' the concession stand.

MARGARET: A concession stand worker at the tractor pull. This is goin' to just break Bertha Mae's heart, that's all.

VIRGIL: Margaret, if you would be quiet long enough for us to explain. He did it on the spur of the moment.

ELLARD: You know what they say, love is blonde.

VIRGIL: Love is blonde, Margaret.

MARGARET: I think you mean love is blind. Ellard, you cannot marry Bertha Mae with another girl's name tattooed on your arm.

ELLARD: Don't you think I know that?

VIRGIL: Yeah, we know that! That's why we're tryin' to come up with a plan to keep her from ever knowin'.

MARGARET: (*Glaring at ELLARD.*) I have an idea but I don't want to ruin Daddy's chain saw.

ELLARD: (*Hiding behind VIRGIL.*) Virgil, she wants to hurt me.

VIRGIL: Don't worry, Ellard, her daddy's chain saw ain't worked in years.

BEATRICE: (*Entering with LEONARD. She holds a large tomato.*) Eloise! Eloise, come quick!

MARGARET: What's the matter, Mama?

VIRGIL: Where did that big tomato come from? (*ELLARD sits on the sofa and puts his chin in his hands.*)

BEATRICE: From our vegetable garden! Can you believe it?

ELOISE: (*Running in wiping her hands on a towel.*) What's the matter? Beatrice, what's wrong?

BEATRICE: (*Holding up the tomato.*) Look, ain't that the prettiest thing you ever saw?

ELOISE: (*Taking it and giving it a good looking over.*) Where in the world did you get it?

BEATRICE: Out of our vegetable garden.

ELOISE: I thought you said Leonard burnt up your garden with all that fertilizer.

BEATRICE: That's what I thought too, but he must have knew what he was doin' 'cause the garden is full of these beautiful babies.

VIRGIL: What do you know about that?

ELOISE: Leonard Hooper, what a gardener you have turned out to be.

BEATRICE: (*Hugging him.*) I am so proud of you.

LEONARD: And you didn't think I knew what I was doin'.

MARGARET: Daddy, where did you learn to grow tomatoes like that?

LEONARD: It's a surprise, Margaret.

BEATRICE: Come on out to the garden, Eloise and pick you some tomatoes to go with your green beans.

ELOISE: Okay, my garden pan is on the porch.

BEATRICE: (*Holding up the tomato as she and ELOISE exit.*) But ain't that the most beautiful tomato you have ever saw?

LEONARD: (*To MARGARET.*) Honey, won't you be proud when you see your daddy's picture on the front page of the paper with his miracle 'maters?

MARGARET: What picture?

LEONARD: The picture you're goin' to take of me out in front of my vegetable garden.

MARGARET: When?

LEONARD: Now. Come on, my camera's in the truck.

MARGARET: Daddy, I'm sorry, but we have a little dilemma here.

LEONARD: Listen my daughter, when's the last time you've been able to say you're proud of your daddy for anything that he's done?

MARGARET: I'll get the camera. (*Turning back to VIRGIL and ELLARD.*) Now, boys just calm down; we'll think of somethin'. Come on, Daddy. (*She grabs LEONARD by the arm and pulls him out.*)

LEONARD: (*As they exit.*) Maybe we can send one to Farmer's Weekly Magazine.

VIRGIL: (*Looks at ELLARD who is looking as depressed as ever.*) You okay, Ellard?

ELLARD: (*Sullen.*) No, I ain't okay.

VIRGIL: Look at it this way; Bertha Mae ain't goin' to let anything stand in the way of ya'll bein' together.

ELLARD: *(Looks at VIRGIL with hope.)* You think so?

VIRGIL: Sure. *(BERTHA MAE enters unseen by the boys. She's eating an apple.)*

ELLARD: You're right. Besides, I've got to be strong. If I'm goin' to be married to her, I can't spend the rest of my days bein' afraid of her.

VIRGIL: There's nothin' to fear but fear itself!

ELLARD: *(Standing with confidence.)* I've got to face this head on; and I'm goin' to start today!

VIRGIL: Today's the first day of the rest of your life!

ELLARD: I'm goin' to march right in there with my head held high, my shoulders held back, and tell Bertha Mae the truth!

VIRGIL: *(With fist in the air.)* The truth shall set you free!

BERTHA MAE: What you boys ramblin' about? Tell me the truth about what? *(ELLARD'S eyes grow wide but he doesn't look at her. VIRGIL quickly looks at BERTHA MAE.)*

VIRGIL: Bertha Mae? How? We didn't see...How long you been...?

BERTHA MAE: What's goin' on in here? What's the matter with Ellard? *(He's frozen like a statue, wide-eyed.)*

VIRGIL: Uh...

BERTHA MAE: Virgil, what was you two talkin' about?

VIRGIL: Uh...

BERTHA MAE: *(Crosses to ELLARD who is still frozen.)* Ellard? *(There is no response. She turns to VIRGIL.)* Virgil?

VIRGIL stares out to the audience standing in the same position as ELLARD. The lights fade slowly to a...BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE: *It's later that afternoon. There is a knock at the door. ELOISE enters wiping a tomato with a hand towel. She wears a hair net.*

ELOISE: Comin'! *(Knock.)* I'm a comin'. *(Knock.)* Hold your horses, I said I was a comin'! *(She answers the door.)* What you want?

JENNIFER: Hello, I'm sorry to bother you, but...

ELOISE: Whatever it is you're sellin', we ain't buyin'.

JENNIFER: I'm not selling anything.

ELOISE: Why else would a city girl be knockin' on our door way out here?

JENNIFER: You see...

BEATRICE: *(Entering polishing a tomato.)* Who is that at the door, Eloise?

ELOISE: Somebody wantin' to sell us somethin'.

BEATRICE: What they sellin'?

ELOISE: *(To JENNIFER.)* What you sellin'?

JENNIFER: Like I said, I'm not selling anything.

ELOISE: Good, 'cause we ain't got no money. I'm gettin' my hair done 'cause we're drivin' into the city tomorrow to eat .

BEATRICE: *(To JENNIFER.)* Look at our pretty tomatoes. My husband grew them in manure. *(Holding it up.)* You want a bite?

JENNIFER: No, thank you. See, we were driving along the highway when our car broke down. I was hoping I could use your phone.

ELOISE: Why didn't you say so – come on in.

JENNIFER: *(Turning to TRISH who is still off stage.)* Trish, come on in.

TRISH: *(Offstage.)* No!

JENNIFER: Come on. *(Turning to ELOISE and BEATRICE.)* She's my friend with whom I was traveling in the car.

ELOISE: Well, la-te-da. *(Shouting past JENNIFER.)* Get on in here, Trish! We ain't goin' to bite you! *(TRISH pops her head slowly through the door.)*

JENNIFER: *(Through her teeth.)* Come on, Trish.

TRISH: *(Looking carefully around.)* I'm coming.

JENNIFER: *(To ELOISE.)* Allow me to introduce ourselves. My name is Jennifer and this is my best friend, Trish. I'm driving her to the university so she can get moved into her dorm room. I thought we were taking a short cut.

ELOISE: Look at this, Beatrice. I ain't seen this much class in my livin' room since my twenty-fifth high school reunion. Get it? Class? High school? I'm funny like that a lot.

JENNIFER: We don't want to take up too much of your time, so if you'll direct us to the phone, we'll be on our way.

BEATRICE: That sure is some fancy talkin'.

ELOISE: *(Throwing her head back in her best attempt at sophistication.)* Don't embarrass our guest, Beatrice. *(To the girls.)* Ladies, allow me to direct you this way to the tele-phone.

JENNIFER: We would have used our cell phone, but it seems we can't get a signal out here in the...uh...

TRISH: Go ahead and say it; we couldn't get a signal out here in the boonies.

ELOISE: No, you're not goin' to find very many cell phones in Lickskillit. We just have to be satisfied with the simple life.

BEATRICE: Yeah, you know, no cell phones. No indoor plumbin'.

ELOISE: *(Laughing.)* Beatrice, stop it. *(To the girls.)* She's just joshin' you girls. The telephone is right over there, so just make your call and we'll be in the kitchen.

BEATRICE: And if you want to use the bathroom, just walk across the backyard and you'll find it out in the corn field.*(Looks at ELOISE and laughs.)*

ELOISE: *(Laughing, slapping her leg.)* Oh, Beatrice – you are so funny. Out in the cornfield. That was a good one. *(They exit, laughing.)*

TRISH: Quick! Make your call and let's get out of here. There's something about this place that gives me the hibby gibbies.

JENNIFER: *(Picking up the receiver.)* Trish, stop acting snobbish; they're people just like us. *(She retrieves a can of spray disinfectant from her purse and sprays the receiver.)*

TRISH: Yes, I'm sure they are very nice. Now, hurry.

JENNIFER: Okay, okay. *(Dials the number.)*

TRISH: (*Crossing to a family picture hanging on the wall.*) Look at the family portrait. Reminds me of an episode of *The Addams Family*.

JENNIFER: Shhh, they'll hear you. (*Into the phone.*) Hello? Oh Bobby my car has died and we're stranded. I thought I was taking a short cut. But all the roads look the same out here. You'll have to come get us. Bobby, stop laughing. Where are we? (*ELLARD enters sadly holding his coil of rope.*) Excuse me, could you tell me where we are?

ELLARD: In the livin' room. (*He exits to outside.*)

JENNIFER: (*Into the phone.*) We're in the living room.

TRISH: (*Grabbing the phone and speaking into the receiver.*) Bobby! Get us out of here! We're trapped in some time warp. There isn't a tall building in sight and everything is, like, green. (*Hands the receiver back to JENNIFER.*) Here you go.

JENNIFER: What did he say?

TRISH: Nothing. He can't talk for laughing.

JENNIFER: (*Into the receiver.*) All I know is that we are in a community called Lickskillit off highway 101. You can't call my cell, we don't have a signal. The number here is (*Looks at the phone.*) 555-6161. Please hurry. If you can't get a signal, just look for the car out front. And stop laughing! (*She hangs up the phone.*)

BERTHA MAE: (*Entering quickly.*) Ellard, where are you? (*To the girls.*) Have you seen a tall lanky boy come through here?

JENNIFER: Uh, yes, (*Pointing to outside.*) he went that way.

BERTHA MAE: Ellard! It won't do you no good to hide! (*She exits quickly.*)

TRISH: (*To JENNIFER as she pulls her toward the door.*) Come on, let's go wait in the car.

JENNIFER: We can't because Bobby will be calling this number. Besides, we're safer in here with all those wild animals running around outside. (*From somewhere in the room, we hear, "Mooooooooooooo."*)

TRISH: What was that?

JENNIFER: Trish, I know you're from the city, but don't you know a cow when you hear it?

TRISH: It sounded as if it were in the house.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Still hidden.)* Moooooooooooo.

JENNIFER: *(Drawing close to TRISH.)* See? Th-that wasn't in the house. No... nobody allows a cow in the house.

TRISH: You're right. It's just our imagination. *(They sit together slowly on the sofa.)*

JENNIFER: *(Calling out softly.)* Nice cow. Nice little cow. *(HARLEY WAYNE appears from behind a piece of furniture or a door. He's trying to hold back his laughter. He sneaks out of the room unseen by the girls. VIRGIL and MARGARET enter.)*

MARGARET: You cannot keep that mouth of yours closed for one second, can you Virgil Sludge?

VIRGIL: How was we supposed to know she was standin' right behind us?

MARGARET: *(Paying the girls no mind, she plops down beside them on the end of the sofa.)* You just need to be more aware, that's all I'm sayin'.

VIRGIL: *(Sits down on the opposite side of the sofa.)* I keep forgettin' you're Mrs. Perfect and never make no mistakes.

MARGARET: *(To JENNIFER.)* I often wonder how the world has survived with men in charge for so long.

VIRGIL: *(To TRISH.)* Them shoes she wears don't make no noise. How was I supposed to know she was in the room, huh?

MARGARET: *(To JENNIFER.)* He could clean his glasses and look!

VIRGIL: *(To TRISH.)* She could keep her smart remarks to herself.

MARGARET: Well, we'll just be lucky if Bertha Mae wants to marry Ellard anymore. Not until he gets rid of *(Looks over to the girls.)* you-know-who.

VIRGIL: There's got to be a painless way to do away with Sundra.

MARGARET: Shhhhhhhh. Not so loud; we've got to keep this secret 'til we found out how we are goin' to rub Sundra out.

VIRGIL: Right. How can we make Sundra mysteriously disappear before the weddin'? I got it, I got some gasoline out back and if that don't work, we can try a blowtorch. It might get a little messy, but Bertha Mae is worth it.

MARGARET: I still say we ought to use a sharp ax and get it over with. Come on, we'd better go find Bertha Mae before she kills that poor boy and they never get married! *(Pulling VIRGIL up off the sofa as they head for the door.)*

VIRGIL: *(To the girls as MARAGRET pulls him off.)* It was nice talkin' to ya'll. *(The girls sit in silence for a few seconds then JENNIFER speaks.)*

JENNIFER: Let's go wait in the car! *(They jump up and head for the door.)*

ELOISE: *(Entering from the kitchen holding a couple of butcher knives.)* Where you girls goin'?

JENNIFER: We were just going to wait for my fiancé out in the car.

ELOISE: That's nonsense. Why don't you wait in here where it's nice and cool?

JENNIFER: Well, we don't want to ...

TRISH: It's just that we left all our valuables out there.

ELOISE: Don't worry about that. You won't find any thieves in Lickskillit. The last time we had any kind of crime was when the farmer's market tried to raise its pickle prices. Besides, I was goin' to ask if you girls wanted to stay for supper.

JENNIFER: That's very kind of you, but Bobby will be here shortly and...

ELOISE: Good, there will be plenty so he can eat too.

JENNIFER: He probably won't be here a couple of hours or so.

ELOISE: That's okay that will give us plenty of time to get to know one another better. My little Bertha Mae is about to get married, you know.

JENNIFER: Yes ma'am, to Ellard?

ELOISE: Oh, you met her already.

TRISH: Yes ma'am. She seemed a little agitated.

ELOISE: Oh yes, that girl's always had trouble with gas. I try to get her to take her medicine, but she's grown now with a mind of her own. *(Rubs the two knives together.)* Anyway, you two set a spell and make yourself comfortable. *(The girls sit quickly.)*

BEATRICE: *(Entering with a pot in her hand.)* Eloise, do you think these beans need more water?

ELOISE: *(Looks.)* Just a little. Them smell good.

BEATRICE: I hope you girls plan to stay for supper; they'll be plenty. *(To ELOISE.)* Did you tell them about the fresh tomatoes?

ELOISE: Ain't this a nice surprise. Company out of nowhere. I think I'll break out the Chinet. Ya'll just relax. *(ELOISE and BEATRICE exit to the kitchen.)*

TRISH: Did you hear that? That want to eat us for supper. Of all places for us to have car trouble.

JENNIFER: Now, Trish. It could be worse. We could be stranded out in the middle of nowhere. *(They both look around at their surroundings.)*

TRISH: If we're in the middle of anything, it's nowhere. I tell you they are planning to fatten us up for slaughter.

JENNIFER: Trish, what a thing to say. Keep your morbid thoughts to yourself.

TRISH: I saw it in a movie once. Two beautiful girls from the city get stranded on a deserted highway and these hillbillies murder them and cart them away in a broken down wheelbarrow.

JENNIFER: That is quite enough! You listen to me and you listen to me good. That was only a movie. No one is going to be carted away in a wheelbarrow. These people are friendly; these people are civilized *(LEONARD enters pushing a wheelbarrow.)* These people are going to kill us. *(They both stand quickly and run around behind the sofa.)*

LEONARD: Have you girls seen Margaret?

TRISH: We'll do anything you want, mister, please let us go in peace.

LEONARD: I don't care where you go. I was just wonderin' where Margaret went off to. She was supposed to take my picture with my 'maters, but she disappeared. *(Reaches inside the wheelbarrow and picks up a tomato.)* Here's one of them right here. I'm goin' to get my picture in the Farmer's Weekly.

JENNIFER: *(Trying not to look afraid.)* That's nice.

LEONARD: You see, I have created a special fertilizer that makes 'maters grow over night.

TRISH: What's a 'mater?

LEONARD: Nothin', what's a 'mater with you?

ELLARD rushes in.

ELLARD: Mr. Hooper, please protect me.

LEONARD: From what?

ELLARD: A woman scorned.

BERTHA MAE: *(Running in.)* Stop right there! I am tired of chasin' you. We have got to talk!

ELLARD: (*Hiding behind the girls.*) We can't talk 'til you calm down some.

BERTHA MAE: You told me I was the only girl you ever loved.

LEONARD: (*Standing between them.*) Have you girls saw Margaret?

BERTHA MAE: You lied to me, Ellard.

ELLARD: She didn't mean nothin' to me!

BERTHA MAE: Is that why you got her name tattooed on your arm? 'Cause she meant nothin'?

ELLARD: (*Holding on to JENNIFER'S arm.*) I'm tryin' to tell you it was the antihistamine!

BERTHA MAE: That's just like a man to put the blame someplace else. And why you hangin' on to that girl's arm? You got her name tattooed someplace too?

JENNIFER: No! I've never seen him before, I promise!

LEONARD: If ya'll want to see some prize-winnin' 'maters, I'll take you over to my garden.

JENNIFER: That's okay, we really need to go check on our car and make sure no one crazy has done anything to it.

TRISH: That's impossible, Jennifer. Everybody crazy is in here. (*They run out.*)

LEONARD: (*Yelling after them.*) Don't run through the garden and smash my 'maters.

BERTHA MAE: Who was that?

ELLARD: Who?

BERTHA MAE: That girl you was hangin' onto.

ELLARD: I don't know.

BERTHA MAE: How am I supposed to believe anything you say any more?

ELLARD: 'Cause I ain't never lied to you, that's why.

VIRGIL and MARGARET enter.

VIRGIL: Look, Margaret – the two love birds are in here workin' ever'thing out.

BERTHA MAE: (*To ELLARD.*) I just want you to know that tattoo has changed ever'thing between us.

LEONARD: (*To MARGARET.*) Honey, come on outside and take a picture of me with my 'maters.

MARGARET: Sorry, Daddy, I got sidetracked. Bertha Mae, you okay?

BERTHA MAE: Margaret, what am I goin' to do? (*Cries on MARGARET'S shoulder.*)

ELLARD: Virgil, what am I goin' to do? (*Cries on VIRGIL'S shoulder.*)

VIRGIL and MARGARET: (*Patting backs.*) There, there.

LEONARD: (*Since he's being ignored, he talks to himself.*) Leonard, that sure is a pretty 'mater. Thank you, Leonard. Grew it myself. Come on, Leonard and I'll take your picture. Okay, Leonard, I appreciate it. (*Places the tomato back inside the wheelbarrow.*) Now you keep on growin' little 'mater. Come on, Leonard. Comin' Leonard. (*He exits, leaving the wheelbarrow behind.*)

BERTHA MAE: What kind of name is Sundra anyway? It sure sounds hillbilly.

MARGARET: Bertha Mae Sludge, you just settle down. Ellard said she didn't mean nothin' to him and you've got to believe him.

VIRGIL: That's right, Bertha Mae. Ellard hardly even remembers what Sundra looks like. Ain't that right, Ellard?

ELLARD: Wrong, I remember.

VIRGIL: No you don't.

ELLARD: Sure I do, she was beautiful. (*BERTHA MAE cries on MARGARET'S shoulder.*)

MARGARET: Ellard, it might be better if you didn't talk none.

BERTHA MAE: Margaret you heard him; he admits it. He said she was more beautiful than me.

MARGARET: What a thing to say.

VIRGIL: Now you're twistin' his words around.

MARGARET: Virgil, why are you takin' up for that scoundrel?

VIRGIL: I'm not.

ELLARD: Virgil! Whose side are you on anyway?

VIRGIL: Ever'body just be quiet! Now, listen to yourselves. This ain't goin' nowhere! (*Very sternly.*) Bertha Mae (*Points to the sofa.*) you sit yourself down right there! (*BERTHA MAE drops her head and runs out crying stage left. VIRGIL points to the sofa.*) Ellard, you sit yourself down right there! (*ELLARD storms off stage right.*) Margaret, you sit yourself down right there!

MARGARET: (*Running after BERTHA MAE.*) Bertha Mae, come back! (*Exits.*)

VIRGIL: Virgil, you sit yourself down right there! (*He sits on the sofa.*)

HARLEY WAYNE: (*Entering wearing a cow bell around his neck.*) See you later, son.

VIRGIL: Daddy, where you goin' with that cow bell?

HARLEY WAYNE: Thought I'd go over and fool some of the neighbors. I'm gettin' pretty good at this mooin' thing.

VIRGIL: Mamma's not goin' to like that.

HARLEY WAYNE: She's not the boss of me. I do what I want around here. I'm my own man. I'm king of my castle.

VIRGIL: You ain't goin' to tell her, are you?

HARLEY WAYNE: Right. (*Exits.*)

ELOISE: (*Offstage.*) Harley Wayne!

VIRGIL: He's gone Mama; he went to visit the Hendersons.

ELOISE: (*Entering.*) That man ain't never around when you need him. Where's Margaret?

VIRGIL: Comfortin' Bertha Mae.

ELOISE: Well, see if you can find her, will you? I can't remember how long this solution is supposed to stay on my hair.

VIRGIL: Yes ma'am. (*He exits.*)

ELOISE: (*Shouting after him.*) Tell her I don't want to go to the city lookin' like a porcupine head. (*She exits to the kitchen. TRISH and JENNIFER enter. TRISH holds a large red beanbag chair.*)

TRISH: Well, at least all the wheels are still on the car.

JENNIFER: Of course they are. And why did you bring that beanbag in here?

TRISH: I paid good money for this beanbag. It's to be the centerpiece to my dorm room.

JENNIFER: It's only going to be in the way in here.

TRISH: Not if I use it to sit in. (*She puts the beanbag down and has a seat in it.*)

JENNIFER: You might as well get comfortable; looks like we might be here for a while.

TRISH: I guess it's not so bad after all now that my culture shock is wearing off. It's sort of like it's an adventure. Like we're roughing it out in the wild or something. Like it's sort of...fun.

TRISH: You're right; we're so used to all the noise of the city. Just be still and listen to the peace and quiet of a lazy country afternoon. *(Offstage we hear in the distance Harley Wayne.)*

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Offstage.)* Mooooooooooooooooooooo.

TRISH: Nothing but the mooing of a distant cow. *(Then the sound of a shotgun is heard. TRISH throws up her hands and tries to get out of the beanbag, which is no easy feat. JENNIFER rushes over and helps her up.)*

JENNIFER: What was that?

TRISH: Sounded like a gunshot.

JENNIFER: They must have just realized we're foreigners! We've got to look inconspicuous and get rid of any store-bought items. *(TRISH runs around trying to find a place for her bean bag.)*

TRISH: Jennifer, help me. *(JENNIFER snatches the beanbag, rushes over to the wheelbarrow and pitches it inside then stands between it and the front door just as WINNIE enters carrying a shotgun.)*

WINNIE: Eloise! Get out here, we got to talk! *(To JENNIFER and TRISH.)* Where's Eloise? *(The girls quickly point to the kitchen door.)* Eloise, you in the kitchen?

ELOISE: *(Entering drying a glass with her hand towel.)* Winnie, is that you? Well, my oh my, this is a day of surprises. Have a seat and I'll heat up some coffee.

WINNIE: This ain't no social call. I got some business that needs some attention.

ELOISE: What kind of business?

WINNIE: I shot your husband. *(The girls react.)*

ELOISE: Scared me there for a second, I thought you had some bad news.

WINNIE: Sorry I had to do it, but I caught him sneakin' around outside my barn actin' like a cow.

ELOISE: Don't worry about it, Winnie, I've warned him about them practical jokes. Like I always say, men are like mashed potatoes; they don't serve their purpose 'til they've been whipped a few times. I hope he didn't make too much of a mess.

WINNIE: Nah, nothin' I can't clean up in the mornin'. Thanks for bein' so understandin'. It's just that sometimes a lesson has to be taught the hard way. You want to come get him or let him stay out there for a while?

ELOISE: I ain't got time to fool with him right now. I've got to get supper on the table.

JENNIFER: But how...

WINNIE: Okey doke. If you need some eggs, just help yourself. The hens are layin' better than ever. *(She exits.)*

ELOISE: Thank you, Winnie. *(Turns to the girls.)* You girls havin' a good time?

JENNIFER: *(Rushing to her.)* Mrs. Sludge, aren't you going to call the police?

ELOISE: Police? For what?

TRISH: Your husband.

ELOISE: Oh that. Nah, I figured he learned his lesson when Winnie shot him. You girls just make yourselves at home. *(Exits to the kitchen.)*

TRISH: *(In shock looking at JENNIFER.)* What?

JENNIFER: How? *(HARLEY WAYNE stumbles in the door still wearing his cow bell and holding his backend.)*

HARLEY WAYNE: Ohhhhhhhhhhh! OHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

JENNIFER: I beg your pardon?

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Tries to sit down but stands quickly.)* Oh, can't sit.

TRISH: Are you okay?

HARLEY WAYNE: I will be. But I'll tell you one thing; some people can't take a funny joke.

JENNIFER: But haven't you heard? There's been a murder.

HARLEY WAYNE: Murder?

TRISH: *(Rushing over and pointing out the door.)* Out there. In cold blood.

HARLEY WAYNE: Good heavens, who was murdered?

JENNIFER: We don't know his name.

ELOISE: *(Offstage.)* Harley Wayne, is that you?

HARLEY WAYNE: Here we go with the naggin'. *(Sweetly.)* Yeah, honey.

ELOISE: (*Offstage.*) Get in here and let me put some iodine on it before it gets infected.

HARLEY WAYNE: Okay honey. Just don't fuss at me. (*Heads to the kitchen.*)

JENNIFER: Wit a minute. Are you her husband?

HARLEY WAYNE: Don't rub it in.

TRISH: But you were shot.

HARLEY WAYNE: Just with bird shot little lady.

TRISH: We thought you were dead.

HARLEY WAYNE: No, I'm alive. I can't sit down for two days, but I'm alive. (*He exits. JENNIFER rushes to the phone and begins to dial it.*)

TRISH: What are you doing?

JENNIFER: Calling Bobby. We have got to get out of the Twilight Zone.

TRISH: (*Rushing over to her.*) Good idea. (*ELLARD enters being followed by VIRGIL.*)

VIRGIL: Ellard, wait. If we try we can think of somethin'. (*They exit.*)

JENNIFER: (*Watches them leave.*) Poor Ellard. I feel sorry for him.

TRISH: I know, me too. I wish there was something we could do.

JENNIFER: Wait a minute; maybe there is something we can do.

TRISH: What do you mean?

JENNIFER: (*Hanging the receiver up.*) I mean here is a perfect opportunity for me to put my education to the test. We're here, we can't leave; and some dear sweet people are in need of professional counseling.

TRISH: Of course. And who better to help them out but the best soon-to-be marriage therapist in the city?

JENNIFER: Trish, you don't have to say that.

TRISH: But, it's true.

JENNIFER: I know, but you don't have to say it.

TRISH: It would almost be like an on-sight internship.

JENNIFER: Sure, (*Grabbing the book from her handbag.*) it's all right here in chapter fourteen.

TRISH: Wait, I hear someone coming. Don't let them see the book.

BERTHA MAE rushes in and sits in the center of the sofa. She's crying into a tissue.

JENNIFER: (*Hides the book behind her and crosses to BERTHA MAE.*) Bertha Mae, everything is going to be okay.

BERTHA MAE: But he lied to me.

JENNIFER: Do you know he lied for sure?

BERTHA MAE: He told me I was the only girl he ever had eyes for. But he has a tattoo of another girl's name.

TRISH: A tattoo? Wait a minute, does the tattoo happen to say "Sundra"?

BERTHA MAE: Right.

TRISH: Oh, (*Looking back at JENNIFER.*) it's just a tattoo.

JENNIFER: But couldn't Ellard getting that tattoo have been a spur of the moment thing? One of those silly things people do without thinking?

TRISH: She's right. (*To BERTHA MAE.*) Haven't you ever done anything silly only to think later, "What was I thinking?"

BERTHA MAE: Well...I guess.

JENNIFER: Sure, we all have.

BERTHA MAE: There was that time I drew a mustache on old Widow Samply with a permanent marker. I felt real bad about it later.

JENNIFER: See? And I bet Mrs. Samply forgave you for doing something so silly.

BERTHA MAE: Well, she really couldn't forgive me 'cause I did it when she was layin' dead in her casket at Pine Meadows Funeral Home.

TRISH: (*Taken aback.*) Oh.

BERTHA MAE: I was just a little girl at the time. Ever'body was all sad and cryin'. I guess I just wanted to liven things up a little.

JENNIFER: The point is, you did it – it was silly and it was forgotten. Can't you do the same with Ellard?

BERTHA MAE: I don't think I can. (*Cries into her tissue.*) I mean ever' time I see that name on his arm, I'll remember all over again.

JENNIFER: (*Taking a peek inside her book.*) Bertha Mae, answer me one question: Do you love Ellard?

BERTHA MAE: Of course I do.

JENNIFER: Then nothing else matters.

BERTHA MAE: Nothin' else?

JENNIFER: Especially a silly tattoo.

BERTHA MAE: You think I'm bein' too sensitive?

TRISH: What do you think?

BERTHA MAE: I do love the little weasel. I mean, somebody has to.

JENNIFER: Now you're talking.

BERTHA MAE: (*Straightening up a little.*) I guess I could cover it up with a large bandage around his arm.

TRISH: Sure you could. Now you must proclaim the truth: Who do you love?

BERTHA MAE: (*Meekly.*) I love Ellard.

JENNIFER: We can't hear you.

BERTHA MAE: (*Louder.*) I love Ellard!

TRISH: Let the whole world know!

BERTHA MAE: Ellard! I love Ellard! (*VIRGIL and MARGARET enter.*)

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, what's the matter?

BERTHA MAE: Oh Margaret, I love Ellard no matter what!

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, I'm so happy for you.

VIRGIL: What changed your mind?

BERTHA MAE: Just some straight talk from (*Turns to the girls.*) I don't even know your names.

JENNIFER: I'm Jennifer and this is Trish. Our car broke down.

BERTHA MAE: Margaret, they helped me to realize that we all make silly mistakes.

MARGARET: Of course we do.

VIRGIL: Amen to that.

BERTHA MAE: I mean, for example, I painted a mustache on old Widow Sampley.

MARGARET: (*Laughing.*) Right!

BERTHA MAE: Ellard got a silly tattoo.

VIRGIL: Right!

BERTHA MAE: Margaret cut my Barbie's head off with a steak knife that time.

MARGARET: That was so funny.

BERTHA MAE: Virgil asked Bobbie Jean Millhouse to marry him before he ever asked Margaret.

VIRGIL: (*Caught up in the moment and speaks before thinking.*) Boy, that was embarrassing!!! (*MARGARET looks surprised.*)

BERTHA MAE: We're all in the same boat.

JENNIFER: Bertha Mae, I knew you would see the light sooner or later.

VIRGIL: I can't wait to tell Ellard the great news.

BERTHA MAE: Where is my little sweetheart anyway?

TRISH: He went that way earlier.

JENNIFER: Come on, we'll help you find him. (*JENNIFER and TRISH pull BERTHA MAE off.*)

VIRGIL: (*Trying to hide his nervousness.*) I sure am glad that's over with . A lovers' spat sure can take a lot out of a fellow. All's well that ends well.

MARGARET: I'm so happy for them. But there's still one thing I don't understand.

VIRGIL: What's that?

MARGARET: (*Crossing her arms.*) Who's Bobbie Jean Millhouse?

VIRGIL: (*Ignoring the remark.*) Yes siree, all I want to see is my sister and my best friend happy.

MARGARET: Virgil Sludge, you're ignoring me. What did Bertha Mae mean just now?

VIRGIL: (*Starting to exit.*) Comin' Mama!

MARGARET: (*Grabbing his arm.*) Your mama's not callin' you. Answer my question or else I feel another lovers' spat comin' on.

VIRGIL: (*Shouting.*) Daddy, is that you? I'll be right there!

MARGARET: Virgil, what kind of secret have you been keepin' from me?

VIRGIL: Comin' Ellard! (*Turns to MARGARET.*) Honey, if you'll excuse me, ever'body seems to be wantin' my attention. Comin' Mama, Daddy and Ellard! (*He runs out. MARGARET pulls out a tissue, begins sobbing into it and runs to the bedroom.*)

ELOISE: (*Entering and sees MARGARET exiting.*) Margaret hun, I think it's time to take off the solution. My head is beginnin' to burn pretty bad, Margaret! (*She exits following MARGARET. HARLEY WAYNE enters still holding his backend.*)

HARLEY WAYNE: Honey, the iodine. You don't want me to get infected?! Honey, it huuuuuurts! (*He exits after her.*)

LEONARD: *(Entering with a camera still talking to himself.)* Come on in Leonard and you can take my picture with my 'mater. Okay, Leonard, be glad to. Where is the 'mater, Leonard? Right here in this here wheel...barrow *(Sees the beanbag that looks like a giant tomato.)* Good heavens, Leonard, look at my...how in the world...Leonard, what's in that manure. I ain't sure, Leonard. But I think I'm goin' to be rich.

LEONARD'S stare continues as the lights fade to a BLACKOUT.
END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

AT RISE: *LEONARD is sitting in a chair leaned over; his chin in his hands staring at the red beanbag. BEATRICE enters and crosses to him.*

BEATRICE: There you are. What in the world are you doin'?

LEONARD: Honey, you remember when you asked me to buy you a new car and I told you we couldn't afford it?

BEATRICE: Yeah, about twenty years ago.

LEONARD: And you remember when you asked me to build you a bigger house and I told you we couldn't afford it?

BEATRICE: Leonard, what are you gettin' at?

LEONARD: *(Pointing to the beanbag.)* Look.

BEATRICE: What is it?

LEONARD: *(With child-like wonder.)* The world's biggest 'mater.

BEATRICE: What? THAT'S a tomato?

LEONARD: I got to be honest with you, honey. All them 'maters out in our garden – they didn't grow there like I said. I bought them at the grocery store and put them in the garden.

BEATRICE: You did what?

LEONARD: After I burned up the garden by puttin' too much fertilizer on it, I was embarrassed. I mean I never do anything right and I wanted to get my picture in the Farmer's Weekly so you would be proud of me.

BEATRICE: *(Pointing at the beanbag.)* You bought THAT at the grocery store?

LEONARD: No, that's what I'm tryin' to tell you. I've accidentally come up with some kind of secret formula that grows gigantic 'maters. After sprayin' the 'maters with my special fertilizer mix, I came back later and found this.

BEATRICE: It just can't be. *(Starts to touch it.)*

LEONARD: No, don't touch it. You don't want to bruise it before I get my picture with it. Don't you see? We're goin' to be rich. Ever'body all over the country is goin' to be wantin' my miracle 'mater-growin' tonic.

BEATRICE: I'd say you was plum crazy if I didn't see it with my own eyes.

LEONARD: We got to make sure nobody sees my giant 'mater.

BEATRICE: Why is that?

LEONARD: 'Cause if they see it, they'll be wantin' to steal my tonic and get rich with it.

BEATRICE: Leonard Hooper, that's our friends you're talkin' about.

LEONARD: I'm tellin' you it happens all the time. So we've got to make sure we keep this giant 'mater out of sight until I figure out what I'm goin' to do 'bout my new growin' concoction. *(He takes a white handkerchief from his pocket and places it on top of the beanbag.)*

BEATRICE: *(Sarcastically.)* Oh, that will keep it hid.

LEONARD: Just 'til I get back. *(He exits to outside quickly.)*

BEATRICE: *(Yelling after him.)* There's got to be a reasonable explanation! Don't get your hopes up thinkin' that growin' stuff really works.

MINNIE: *(Enters holding a baby wrapped in a blanket.)* Who you yellin' at, Beatrice?

BEATRICE: That husband of mine, who else?

MINNIE: I thought you told me you was goin' to trade him in for a newer model.

BEATRICE: I tell you, sometimes it's like raisin' another child. Speakin' of child, is that your baby?

MINNIE: Yeah, that's my little Sammy.

BEATRICE: *(Taking the baby.)* That might be Sammy, but you can forget about the little part; he's a whopper.

WINNIE: Watch your fingers, he'll try to eat anything that wiggles in front of his face.

BEATRICE: I can't believe how much he has grown.

WINNIE: I can't hardly keep him in diapers he's growin' so fast.

BEATRICE: *(Peeping inside the blanket.)* Hey there, little Sammy. My, he already has a full set of teeth. That's a little unusual.

WINNIE: He's eatin' me out of house and home. I was goin' to see if Eloise could watch him for a bit while I drive into town and pick up some more groceries.

BEATRICE: I'm sure she would be glad to. *(Shouting to the kitchen.)* Eloise, you got company.

WINNIE: I almost hate to ask her for a favor after shootin' her husband and all.

BEATRICE: (*Notices the “giant tomato” is showing.*) Uh, you wouldn't happen to have an extra blanket I could borrow, would you?

WINNIE: Sure enough. I always bring an extra one. (*Hands her one as BEATRICE hands the baby back to her.*)

ELOISE: (*Entering sporting a terrible frizzy hair-do.*) Winnie, did you change your mind and decide to stay for supper?

WINNIE: Naw, I'm afraid I've come to ask a favor... (*Sees the hair-do.*) Good gravy, honey, your hair.

ELOISE: (*Patting her hair.*) Margaret done it for me. Do you like it?

WINNIE: Well...

BEATRICE: Well...

ELOISE: She got a little sidetracked and left the solution on a little longer than she was supposed to. You think it's too much?

BEATRICE: That's what it is – too much.

ELOISE: Why, thank you.

WINNIE: Would you mind watchin' little Sammy for a minute while I run to the market?

ELOISE: Not at all, not at all!

WINNIE: (*Handing the baby to ELOISE as BEATRICE sneaks over and replaces the white handkerchief with the white baby's blanket.*) He just had his afternoon feedin' so he won't need to eat again for a good fifteen minutes.

ELOISE: Good heavens, Winnie, you gave birth to a vacuum cleaner.

WINNIE: Just don't get your fingers too close to his mouth. Now, I'll be back quicker than you can say, “Sammy, don't eat that lawnmower.”

ELOISE: (*Bouncing the baby.*) Gracious, he's grown as big as my hair.

WINNIE: This sure is a help to me. And because you're bein' so neighborly, I promise never to shoot Harley Wayne no more. (*She exits then enters again quickly carrying a gallon milk jug.*) I almost forgot. Here's the milk for his feedin'. If you run out, let him naw on a ham bone 'til I get back. (*She exits.*)

ELOISE: For some reason I just can't say no to that woman. *(Heading to the kitchen.)* Well, come on, Paul Bunyun, let's get you in the kitchen so I can finish supper. Grab that gallon of milk, will you Beatrice? *(Exits.)*

BEATRICE: *(As she picks up the milk carton and follows ELOISE to the kitchen.)* I wouldn't lay little Sammy too close to the refrigerator. *(They exit. LEONARD enters carrying a burlap blanket and a milk jug. He heads to the wheelbarrow to cover his secret. He spies the white baby blanket.)*

LEONARD: Oh no. The handkerchief must have absorbed some of the tonic. *(Picks up the baby blanket.)* This stuff is stronger than I thought. *(Holds up the milk carton.)* You're goin' to make me a rich man. *(ELLARD and BERTHA MAE enter holding hands.)*

BERTHA MAE: Oh, Ellard. You say the sweetest things. *(LEONARD throws the blanket back over the beanbag.)*

ELLARD: And do you want to know somethin' else? *(He whispers in her ear. BERTHA MAE giggles. JENNIFER and TRISH enter.)*

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, you shouldn't say such things 'til after we're married.

ELLARD: *(Grinning.)* And not only that but...*(He whispers again. BERTHA MAE covers her face and giggles.)*

BERTHA MAE: Stop, Ellard, you're embarrassin' me.

JENNIFER: *(Smiling.)* Ellard, you behave yourself and act like a gentleman.

TRISH: Yeah, act like a gentleman.*(To BERTHA MAE.)* What did he say? *(BERTHA MAE whispers in her ear.)* Oh my.

JENNIFER: It's so nice seeing you two being nice to one another.

BERTHA MAE: I have you to thank, Ms. Jennifer. You two are the one's that helped me see the light today.

ELLARD: Yeah, I'm much obliged to you two meddlers.

BERTHA MAE: What?

ELLARD: That's what Margaret called 'em.

JENNIFER: It was our pleasure. *(Throwing out her hands.)* Love is in the air once again!

MARGARET: *(Storming in and shouting behind her.)* I never want to speak to you again as long as I live!

VIRGIL: *(Storming in after her.)* Well, that sounds just fine to me!

MARGARET: *(Crosses to LEONARD.)* Daddy, I married a scalawag.

LEONARD: Honey, as long as he makes you a good livin' his political views don't matter. (*Pushing her away from the wheelbarrow.*) Wait, don't get too close; you might bruise it.

MARGARET: The wheelbarrow?

LEONARD: I probably need to roll it outside to keep any harm from it. Margaret, can you take a picture of me now?

MARGARET: I can't Daddy; I'm too upset.

LEONARD: I'll be outside when you change your mind. (*Sings as he exits leaving his milk carton behind.*) Old MacDonald had a farm. E.I.E.I.O. And on this farm he had a giant 'mater. E.I.E.I.O...(*He's gone.*)

JENNIFER: (*To ELLARD.*) What's a 'mater?

ELLARD: Nothin', what's a 'mater with you?

VIRGIL: Margaret, why don't you just sit over here on the couch and let's talk about it.

MARGARET: I don't want you nowhere near me until you admit that you cheated on me with another woman.

VIRGIL: How could I cheat on you when I didn't even know you?

MARGARET: You knew her didn't you?

VIRGIL: Of course.

MARGARET: And she knew you didn't she?

VIRGIL: Uh, yeah but...

MARGARET: Well, if you knew her and she knew you and then you knew me later and I knew you later then it goes to show that you knew her way before you knew me and I knew you, but what really ticks me off is that I never knew her nor did I know you knew her.

VIRGIL: (*Looks at her, stumped.*) I disagree.

JENNIFER: Look you two, I think that...

MARGARET: (*Swinging around sharply to JENNIFER.*) And, you stay out of this. If you hadn't of meddled in our business, I wouldn't be mad at Virgil and Bertha Mae would still be mad at Ellard and ever'thing would be fine.

VIRGIL: Margaret, you don't mean that. (*Turns to JENNIFER.*) She don't mean that; you can meddle anytime you want to.

BERTHA MAE: Margaret, I learned somethin' very important here today. If you love somebody, it don't matter what happened in the distant past.

MARGARET: It may not matter to you, but it sure matters to me. *(To VIRGIL.)* I don't think I like the idea of knowin' for the rest of our married life that I was second choice to you.

VIRGIL: Would somebody please meddle and tell her she's talkin' crazy!

ELLARD: Come on, now, Margaret. Why can't you be understandin' the way my dumplin' is understandin'? She don't mind bein' second choice so why should you?

VIRGIL: That ain't the kind of help I'm lookin' for, Ellard.

BERTHA MAE: I never thought about it that way. But Margaret's right, you loved a girl at the tractor pull before you loved me. I suppose you kissed her at the tractor pull too.

ELLARD: That ain't true at all.

BERTHA MAE: Are you sure?

ELLARD: Positive. I kissed her at the carnival.

MARGARET: *(Pulling BERTHA MAE to her.)* Well, at least you found out what kind of man you have before you married him. I'm stuck with mine. *(BERTHA MAE, MARGARET, VIRGIL and ELLARD all chime in shouting at one another.)*

JENNIFER: QUIET! *(Everyone grows quiet.)* Now I have had it! This arguing is going to cease right now! I want everyone to have a seat somewhere in this room. *(They all look at her.)* I mean NOW! *(They all quickly find a seat.)* Margaret, listen to me. Virgil had eyes for someone else at one time, but that was years ago. He doesn't even remember what she looked like.

VIRGIL: *(Short.)* Yeah I do; she was beautiful.

JENNIFER: Virgil, if I need your help, I'll ask for it.

MARGARET: See! Well, if she's so much more beautiful than me, then go to her.

JENNIFER: But that's just it, Margaret. He never said she was more beautiful than you. You're putting words in his mouth. *(VIRGIL opens his mouth to speak.)* Shut up, Virgil! And, Bertha Mae, you have already forgiven Ellard for his mistake. Don't start second-guessing the decision you've made.

BERTHA MAE: But...

JENNIFER: Stop! From this point on the word 'but' is not aloud to be spoken the rest of this day. Does everyone understand? It's time you start realizing how fortunate you are to have each other in your lives. If you start letting every little thing cause you to argue, you'll never live in peace.

VIRGIL: We're sorry, Ms Jennifer, but it's just that...

JENNIFER: What did I hear you say?

VIRGIL: Uh....oh, I said, 'but'. (*Everyone gasps as VIRGIL covers his mouth in shame.*) Good heavens, I said the 'B' word.

JENNIFER: Any time anyone says the 'B' word, they get the shame fingers like this. (*Rubs two fingers together.*) Shame, shame, shame. Everyone? (*Everyone takes her lead and does the same.*)

ALL: Shame, shame, shame.

JENNIFER: We have to recondition ourselves to react positively. No negative thinking toward one another is allowed. What we need here is total trust. Margaret, do you trust Virgil?

MARGARET: Well, yes but...(*Everyone gasps.*)

JENNIFER: Margaret, I'm surprised at you. Everyone.

ALL: (*Rubbing their fingers.*) Shame, shame, shame. (*MARGARET covers her mouth.*)

JENNIFER: I repeat, Margaret, do you love Virgil?

MARGARET: Yes.

JENNIFER: Virgil, do you love, Margaret?

VIRGIL: Yes.

JENNIFER: Ellard, do you love Bertha Mae?

ELLARD: Shoot, she knows I do.

JENNIFER: Bertha Mae, do you love Ellard?

BERTHA MAE: With all my heart.

JENNIFER: Then that's all that matters. No more of, "I love you but..." stuff. Agreed?

ALL: Agreed.

JENNIFER: Now, I want everyone to hug and put a stop to this silliness.

VIRGIL: Margaret, I hope you can forgive me.

MARGARET: Of course I can, Virgil. I hope you can forgive me. (*They embrace.*)

ELLARD: Bertha Mae, I'm sorry about the tattoo.

BERTHA MAE: I'm sorry I doubted your love for me, Ellard. *(They embrace.)*

TRISH: *(Wiping a tear away.)* This is as sweet as a Shirley Temple movie.

MARGARET: Ms Jennifer, you are so smart. How can we ever repay you for all you've done for us?

TRISH: Just seeing you guys happy is all the reward I need.

VIRGIL: *(Taking MARGARET'S hand.)* Sugar plum, would you like to go help me gather some eggs for Mama?

MARGARET: Anything to be close to you, sweet thing. *(They exit.)*

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, would you like for me to help you look for your pet turtle?

ELLARD: I thought you didn't want me to have Rufus.

BERTHA MAE: Well, maybe I need to learn to give and take a little since we're not allowed to fuss any more.

ELLARD: In that case I've been meanin' to tell you that I was down at the zoo last week lookin' at the giraffes, and...

BERTHA MAE: Don't push it, Ellard. *(They exit.)*

TRISH: Jennifer, I can't believe how you handled that situation. You're a genius.

JENNIFER: That little lecture came from chapter ten.

TRISH: You're going to be the best marriage therapist in the world.

JENNIFER: The only thing I'm worried about is the follow-up. I won't be around to see how long the strategy works.

TRISH: If only there was a way to demonstrate to them what true love is.

JENNIFER: Exactly. They need an object lesson so my point will stay with them after we leave.

ELOISE: *(Entering with the baby and the empty milk jug.)* Girls, I'm not being too good of a hostess am I? It's just that ever'thing is happenin' all at one time; but I'll make it up to you with a delicious supper.

JENNIFER: We're fine, Ms. Sludge. We're actually having the time of our lives. *(She's flipping through her text book.)*

TRISH: A baby. *(Rushes over to ELOISE.)* I love babies. *(Looks inside the blanket.)* Oh my, he's a healthy fellow isn't he?

ELOISE: I'm baby sittin' for my neighbor and little Sammy has already drunk a whole gallon of milk. When he burped, it was so loud one of my flowerpots busted.

TRISH: Good gracious, that doesn't seem normal.

ELOISE: It ain't normal; he usually drinks two gallons and I'm all out of ever'thing except ice tea for our supper. I just hope he sleeps 'til Minnie gets back. *(She spies the milk carton left behind by LEONARD.)* Oh, look, there's another one. Minnie must have left it without me seeing it. *(To TRISH.)* Sweetheart, could you hand me that carton of milk please? After he drinks this, I'll have to replace his diaper with one of my good bed sheets. *(TRISH hands her the carton.)* Thank you, honey. *(HARLEY WAYNE enters.)*

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Wearing a large bandage on his back end.)* Honey, I can't sit down and I'm tired of standin'.

ELOISE: You should have thought about that before gettin' yourself shot.

HARLEY WAYNE: I just wanted to have some fun.

ELOISE: Well, now I get to have some fun watching you stand up for two days. I don't have time to hear you whine, I've got another baby to take care of. *(Talking to SAMMY.)* Come on, little man, let's see if we can't get you down for your nap. *(She exits to the kitchen.)*

HARLEY WAYNE: *(To TRISH.)* Have you ever been hit with bird shot before?

TRISH: I don't think so.

HARLEY WAYNE: You'd know if you had; it burns like the dickens. I'm the only person around this house with a sense of humor. Did I do my cow imitation for you girls?

TRISH: I think we heard you earlier.

HARLEY WAYNE: I can do other animals too. Chickens, ducks, bird dogs, gold fish.

JENNIFER: We would love to hear some more, but we were just doing some reading.

HARLEY WAYNE: Ardvarks, snappin' turtles, tree frogs.

TRISH: Even a puppy dog?

HARLEY WAYNE: Puppy dog? Why, that happens to be one of my best imitations of all.



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