

VIRGIL'S CHRISTMAS CATCH

by Eddie McPherson



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A CHRISTMAS FARCE IN ONE ACT

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SYNOPSIS: Virgil Sludge is a simple country boy working a temporary job in the city for extra Christmas money. As custodian at a leading ad agency, Virgil and his best friend Ellard, having a little harmless fun, play around with one of their own advertising ideas while taking a break in an executive's office. By mistake, the storyboard with a catchphrase about fishing lures is taken to the printers and published as the new campaign slogan.

To everyone's surprise, the slogan is a hit and the company's profits go through the roof. So Virgil, his wife, Margaret, and a few of their backwoods friends are invited to the company's Christmas party where Virgil is to be recognized for his creativity and result-driven campaign. But these country folk have never attended such a fancy city affair and they fit in about as well as a barrel of oil fits in with a bucket of water. A great fish-out-of-water situation begging for hilarious confusion. Easy sets.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 females, 5 males, extras)

COUNTRY BUNCH

VIRGIL SLUDGE (m).....	Simple and unassuming country boy. Works as a janitor in the city. <i>(132 lines)</i>
MARGARET SLUDGE (f)	Virgil's country wife. <i>(61 lines)</i>
BERTHA MAE (f).....	Virgil's sister. <i>(44 lines)</i>
ELLARD (m).....	Virgil's best friend and Bertha Mae's fiancé. <i>(81 lines)</i>
MAGGIE (f).....	Owens and runs Maggie's Country Diner and Bait Shop. <i>(40 lines)</i>

CITY BUNCH

DAVE RICHARDSON (m).....	Advertising executive in the city. (85 lines)
MACY (f).....	Dave's smart and attractive assistant. (49 lines)
RAVEN BEEKER (m).....	An untrustworthy, arrogant advertising executive. (67 lines)
MRS. TATE (f).....	Raven's and Dave's boss. (15 lines)
MR. KRAMER (m).....	Mrs. Tate's most valuable client. (25 lines)
MRS. KRAMER (f).....	Mr. Kramer's controlling wife. (24 lines)
PEACH (f)	Raven's blind date who isn't impressed by Raven in the least. (28 lines)
MRS. DUNAWAY (f).....	Event coordinator; party hostess. (36 lines)
HEATHER BAILEY (f)	Photographer. (6 lines)

Extras may or may not be used according to your needs. Extras could be waiters who move about the room with trays of finger sandwiches etc. or other guests at the Christmas party, Heather Bailey's assistant, etc.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

SCENE 1: It's an advertising office in the city. A nice desk sits stage left with an easel to the left of the desk. The door to the rest of the building is stage right. A plant may sit here and there and nice pictures hang on the walls. A small yet elegant Christmas tree sits in the corner.

SCENE 2: It's a simple country diner in Lickskillit. A few tables stand about covered with red and white-checkered tablecloths. If room permits, the desk can be turned around and double as a counter against the upstage wall; if you don't have the room, the desk may be taken off. The same door used in scene one is the door that goes to outside of the diner. There's another door stage left that goes to the kitchen. The pictures used in the office can be hung in a way that they can be turned around showing more

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rustic pictures on the opposite side. Simple, rustic Christmas decorations hang about and a sparse pine tree sits in the corner covered with stringed popcorn and a paper chain made from construction paper. Country-type Christmas music plays to open up the scene then fades out as the action starts.

SCENE 3: It's a ballroom, which is decorated very elegantly with silver and red Christmas decorations. Remember when decorating for this scene that less is better. You don't want to spend a long time setting up for this scene because it will make the blackout too long. A couple of the tables from the café can be placed together, the tablecloths flipped over revealing a white color, and used as the refreshment table. The pictures are taken down and fancy decorations that are easy to hang, take their place. The door stage right is used for the main entrance to the room and the door stage left is used to go to the kitchen. A beautiful Christmas tree stands in the corner.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SET NOTES: Rehearse the changing of the scenes ahead of time so that it will run smoothly and quickly. You don't want the blackouts between scenes to go on too long. Rehearse scene changes until you get them down without a hitch. Don't be afraid to let the audience use its imagination as far as a lot of the set decoration goes.

The picture Virgil and Ellard draw for the fishing lure campaign is flat on Dave's desk and is pre-drawn. The actor playing Virgil pretends to draw it as he speaks.

OPTIONAL INTERMISSION: An intermission between the Diner scene and Christmas Party scene could be incorporated giving more time for that particular scene change.

COSTUMES: The contrast between the country character's costumes and the city's should be highly noticeable for comic effect. Remember, though, that Virgil and his friends aren't hillbillies. They are good 'ole country folk who haven't attended fancy city parties before. Costume suggestions are mentioned at their entrances in the script.

PROPS: Three posters with advertisements drawn on them; phone; broom; dustpan; rag; a slingshot; wrapped slingshot; markers; easel; trashcan; piece of paper (contract); portfolio case; four menus; notepad and pencil; first place blue ribbon; newspapers; bottles of ketchup and mustard; digital phone; water pitcher; clear plastic cups; tissue paper; small plastic or paper plates; fake dollar bills; picnic basket; ugly vase with ugly fake poinsettias; camera; two fried chicken legs (real or fake); tacky party hats; sack (for Santa); an envelope with fake check inside.

SCENE 1

SETTING: *Advertising office.*

AT RISE: *DAVE RICHARDSON sits at his desk dressed in business casual. He is looking over a drawing for an advertising campaign his company is trying to land. The phone buzzes and he picks it up and speaks to his assistant, MACY.*

DAVE: Macy, Dave here. Look, I'm expecting Mr. Kramer to call today. Right, but the problem is I'm not too happy about the campaign slogan I have written for him. I just haven't had time to fine-tune my idea. If you happen to intercept his call, can you see what you can do about deferring him another day? Thanks, Macy, you're a doll. *(He hangs up the phone and picks the poster up again. VIRGIL enters carrying a broom and dustpan. He's dressed in coveralls with a rag sticking from his back pocket.)*

VIRGIL: Mornin' Mr. Richardson.

DAVE: *(Not taking his eyes off the poster.)* Good morning, Virgil.

VIRGIL: Just goin' to get a little sweepin' done, then I'll be out of your way. *(He starts sweeping upstage.)*

DAVE: No problem. Virgil, you got a minute? *(He stands with the poster.)* I'd like to get your opinion on something. *(VIRGIL meets DAVE downstage center. DAVE holds the posters up.)*

VIRGIL: My opinion? But I'm just the janitor.

DAVE: So what? Janitors have opinions. *(Holding up the poster.)* I've been put in charge of coming up with a fresh idea for the Kramer Fishing Lure account and I've been struggling with a new slogan. Problem is, I don't know the first thing about fishing. Okay, here's the first one: *(Showing him the picture as he recites the slogan.)* "Kramer Fishing Lures: When you fish with Kramer's fishing lures, your big fish stories don't have to be a lie." *(He looks at VIRGIL for a response. VIRGIL just stares at the poster.)* What do you think?

VIRGIL: I don't get it.

DAVE: You know how everyone makes up stories about the size of the fish they catch? I'm playing off human nature, but in a humorous way.

VIRGIL: Oh, humorous. (*Lets out a fake laugh.*) That's real funny, Mr. Richardson. Big fish stories. (*Laughs bigger than ever.*)

DAVE: You still don't get it, do you?

VIRGIL: (*Stops laughing abruptly.*) No sir.

DAVE: When people catch a fish, they usually exaggerate how big it is. Suddenly, a minnow turns into a whale.

VIRGIL: I see, but I'd never do that in a million years. I would never lie about somethin' as important as the size of a fish.

DAVE: Really?

VIRGIL: No sir. Heck, this past fall, me and my best friend Ellard went fishin' at Jennin's pond and I caught a large-mouth bass this big. (*Holds his hands about twelve inches apart.*) It was a beauty. (*Puts his hands down.*)

DAVE: You don't say. How big did you say the fish was?

VIRGIL: 'Bout this big. (*Holds his hands about twenty-four inches apart.*)

DAVE: (*With a smile. DAVE likes VIRGIL.*) 'Caught it in a pond, huh?

VIRGIL: Sure did. One of the biggest fish I ever caught.

DAVE: And it was how big?

VIRGIL: 'Bout this big. (*Holds his hands about three feet apart*)

DAVE: (*Laughing to himself.*) So, you'd never make up a story about the size of a fish, huh?

VIRGIL: Right, just tell it like it is.

DAVE: I see. (*Crosses and pitches the poster on his desk.*) Anyway, I think the ad stinks. But that's all I have so I guess it will have to do.

VIRGIL: I wouldn't worry about it, Mr. Richardson. You're a smart man. You'll come up with somethin' catchy. (*Goes back to his sweeping.*)

DAVE: Mr. Kramer has already called wondering when we can get the new layout to the printer.

VIRGIL: (*Singing as he sweeps.*) Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen...

DAVE: I think I need a break. Virgil, I'll be in the lounge if the phone rings.

VIRGIL: Okey doke, Mr. Richardson. (*Continues to sing.*) When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even... (*DAVE exits. VIRGIL gets into his song as he uses his mop handle for a microphone.*) Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was cruel. When a poor man came in sight gatherin' winter fuuuuuel. (*The phone rings. VIRGIL shouts.*) Mr. Richardson! (*The phone rings.*) Mr. Richardson, the phone! (*He receives no response so crosses and answers the phone.*) Mr. Richardson's office, this here's Virgil speakin', what's your name? Mr. Kramer? Wait a minute, let me write that down. You're wonderin' how the campaign slogan is comin' along? Oh, he finished it, Mr. Kramer. Yeah, it's sittin' right here on his desk. He was just readin' it to me. You will send somebody over to pick it up? Okay, I'll tell him. Merry Christmas and happy New Year to you and yours! (*He hangs up the phone and starts sweeping and singing again.*) Oh Christmas tree, Oh Christmas tree, how lovely are thy branches... (*ELLARD peeps his head in the door.*)

ELLARD: Virgil?

VIRGIL: (*Crosses to the door.*) Ellard? What in the world are you doin' here in the city?

ELLARD: (*Entering and looking around.*) I ordered Bertha Mae's Christmas present out of the catalog and came down to pick it up. (*Looking around.*) This sure is a fancy place you're working at, Virgil.

VIRGIL: Well, it's just durin' Christmas. I'm waitin' for that position to open up at the hardware store back home. If I wanted to buy Margaret that Christmas present she's been hintin' about, I needed as much money as I could get. I tell you, Ellard, tryin' to save up money with this job is like tryin' to poke a cat out from under the porch with a rope.

ELLARD: Did you get her present yet?

VIRGIL: Sure did. I keep it right here in my lunch box so I don't lose it. (*He retrieves his lunch box and pulls a wrapped package shaped like a box.*) It cost an arm and a leg but my Margaret is worth it.

ELLARD: That's why we've got two of each, Virgil. What is it?

VIRGIL: It's the most beautiful jack-in-the-box you have ever saw.

ELLARD: Is that what she's been hintin' about, a jack-in-the-box?

VIRGIL: She thought she was bein' shrewd when she was hintin' about it. But I was on to her from the very beginnin'. She kept mentionin' a box she saw that plays beautiful music when you wind it up and a little clown inside that you can see when you open up the lid.

ELLARD: Does the jack-in-the-box play beautiful music?

VIRGIL: Sure does. It plays "Jimmy Cracked Corn and I don't Care." And on the last "I don't care," a clown pops up and scares the bejeebers out of you.

ELLARD: (*Sincerely.*) Gosh, I wish I would have bought Bertha Mae somethin' that romantic.

VIRGIL: What did you end up gettin' her?

ELLARD: (*Quickly opening up the bag he's carrying.*) It's somethin' I've been wantin' to give her for a long time now.

VIRGIL: What? Perfume? Jewelry?

ELLARD: A slingshot. (*Holds one up.*)

VIRGIL: Slingshot?

ELLARD: Yeah, ain't that prettier than a new set of snow tires?

VIRGIL: I've never heard Bertha Mae say she wanted a slingshot, Ellard.

ELLARD: She's didn't have to. I see how she looks at my old beat up slingshot ever' time I shoot cans off the fence with it. Her lips might say "I sure would like to have a fancy store-bought necklace for Christmas," but her eyes say, "I wish I had a dandy slingshot like Ellard's."

VIRGIL: (*As he places the gift back in his lunchbox.*) Ellard, are you sure you're not the one that wants a slingshot for Christmas?

ELLARD: Nah, I like the one I have 'cause I already have it broke in. (*Pretends to shoot something with the slingshot.*) You need to come over and watch me knock cans off the fence some day, Virgil.

VIRGIL: (*Taking up his sweeping.*) Ellard, you couldn't hit sand if you fell off a camel.

ELLARD: You just wait, Bertha Mae will love my present.

VIRGIL: (*Shaking his head in disbelief.*) Uh-huh. Just don't come cryin' to me Christmas mornin' when Bertha Mae hits you over the head with that new slingshot she's gettin'.

ELLARD: (*Placing the slingshot back inside the bag.*) I won't. I just hope she gets me them new fishin' lures I've been hintin' about.

VIRGIL: Speakin' of fishin' lures, that's what Mr. Richardson is tryin' to sell for his new client. (*Crosses to the desk.*) See, here are some ads he's workin' on.

ELLARD: (*Picking the poster up.*) When you fish with Kramer's fishing lures, your big fish story don't have to be a lie. (*Pause.*) I don't get it.

VIRGIL: It has somethin' to do with people fibbin' about the size of fish they catch.

ELLARD: Speakin' of catchin' fish, I caught a whopper the other day at the lake. That sucker was this big. (*Holds his hands about twelve inches apart.*)

VIRGIL: Gollee, Ellard – did you have it mounted?

ELLARD: Nah, I just let her go. Didn't want to brag or anything. But I promise you, that fish was this big! (*Holds his hands three feet apart*)

VIRGIL: If they wanted to be more honest in their advertisin', they'd say somethin' like: "You have a choice: Spend the day at the lake with a large mouth bass or at home with your big mouth wife. Kramer fishing lures." (*They laugh at the joke.*)

ELLARD: That's funny, Virgil.

VIRGIL: (*Taking up a marker and drawing on a poster lying on DAVE'S desk.*) Then there would be a picture of an old ugly hag like this here...

ELLARD: I didn't know you could draw, Virgil.

VIRGIL: Then a picture of a fish over here like this.

ELLARD: (*Looking at the drawing.*) That looks just like a large mouth bass, Virgil.

VIRGIL: There you go. (*Places his poster on the easel in front of DAVE'S so the audience can see his made-up slogan.*) Now, that would sell some fishin' lures. (*Laughs.*) Ever' man in America would be runnin' to their local bait shop for them Kramer Fishin' Lures. (*They both laugh.*)

ELLARD: That's funny, Virgil. Maybe they need to hire you to write their advertisements.

VIRGIL: (*Standing up straight and holding his head up.*) I'd like to accept the award for best fishin' lure idea of the year.

ELLARD: (*Playing along handing VIRGIL a dustpan.*) I present to you the dustpan award 'cause that's where your idea belongs – in the trash! (*They both laugh.*)

VIRGIL: *(Takes his poster off the easel revealing the one DAVE created.)* You got that right. Well, Ellard, that was fun but I better get busy or I won't have a job at all. *(He sets his poster beside the trashcan.)*

ELLARD: Okay. I got to get home and wrap Bertha Mae's present anyway.

VIRGIL: *(Back to his sweeping.)* I'd swap that sling shot for somethin' more useful if I was you, Ellard.

ELLARD: You might be right, Virgil. Wonder where I might find a high-powered pellet rifle? Bye, Virgil. *(He exits. VIRGIL begins sweeping again, singing another Christmas song. DAVE reenters followed by MACY, his assistant.)*

DAVE: We have got to stall Mr. Kramer as long as we can – just until I can come up with something effective.

MACY: I understand, Mr. Richardson; but Mr. Kramer needs the finished art work.

DAVE: I know, that's the problem.

MACY: *(Cossing to DAVE'S poster on the easel.)* Is this it? Let's see. *(Reading the poster.)* "...Your big fish stories don't have to be a lie."

DAVE: What do you think?

MACY: I think it's the most creative ad I have ever seen. Mr. Richardson, you're a genius!

DAVE: You don't get it, do you?

MACY: No sir.

VIRGIL: *(Crossing between them.)* Excuse me. *(He retrieves the trashcan that sits beside the poster he created and crosses back up stage to change its bag.)* Excuse me again.

DAVE: *(Running his hand through his hair.)* Time's up. I don't have time to come up with anything else. *(RAVEN BEEKER sticks his head through the door.)*

RAVEN: Knock, knock.

MACY: Nobody's home, Raven.

RAVEN: *(He enters. He is dressed in a silk-like suit. His hair is brushed back and he has a definite air of superiority about him. He carries a folded piece of paper.)* Well, well. What do we have here? Are we holding a custodial meeting in your office, Dave? I mean, that is what they're promoting you to next, isn't it? Head janitor?

MACY: (*To RAVEN.*) I don't remember hearing Mr. Richardson invite you up to his office.

RAVEN: Just stretching my legs, little lady. It's hard to sit still after your client just signed a two hundred thousand dollar contract. (*Holds up the contract.*)

MACY: (*With contempt as she crosses her arms tightly.*) You got that furniture polish account, didn't you?

RAVEN: (*As he recites his slogan.*) "Dust your worries away in one clean sweep with Potter's Furniture Polish." My best campaign slogan all year. (*Putting a finger under MACY'S chin.*) Perhaps we could go out and celebrate my genius after work.

MACY: No thank you; I'd rather do something more exciting like stay home and clip my toenails.

DAVE: (*Sincerely.*) Congratulations, Raven. I know you were counting on landing the Potter account. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have my own deadline to meet.

RAVEN: (*Crossing to the easel.*) Let's see, what do we have here? Oh yes, the fishing lure account; how quaint. (*Reading the slogan.*) "...Your big fish stories don't have to be a lie."

DAVE: What do you think?

RAVEN: (*He crosses and takes the broom from VIRGIL and hands it to DAVE.*) You might want to get used to working one of these.

VIRGIL: Would you like to learn how to sweep, Mr. Richardson? (*Sincerely.*) It's easy and with me around to show you the ropes, you'll be sweepin' up filthy trash in no time.

MACY: (*Crosses to RAVEN and looks him straight in the eye.*) Speaking of filthy trash, I've got something to say to you, Raven Beeker.

RAVEN: You need to work on your insults, sweetie.

MACY: It's just that Mr. Richardson happens to be one of the best advertising men around.

RAVEN: Well, Dave, seems you've got this one trained pretty well. Does she do tricks, too?

DAVE: Raven, maybe you should just leave now.

RAVEN: Don't worry, I'm going. I need to start working on my own Kramer Fishing Lure ideas – you know, just in case your big fish story isn't exactly what the client had in mind. (*Turns back to MACY.*) And I'll look for you around five o'clock.

MACY: Don't hold your breath.

VIRGIL: *(As he walks RAVEN to the door.)* I get off at five, too Mr. Beeker; you know, just in case you was wonderin'.

RAVEN: Sorry, country bumpkin – I don't think you'll find grits and ham bones in the city. Ciao. *(Exits.)*

VIRGIL: *(Retrieving his broom from DAVE.)* He sure is a nice man.

MACY: He wouldn't know nice if it walked up and bit him on the leg.

DAVE: He's right, though. If Mr. Kramer doesn't like my ideas, Mrs. Tate could give the account to someone else. Some Christmas this is going to be.

VIRGIL: Well, I'm all finished in here. I'd better get the hall before it gets too late. *(He starts to leave.)* Oh, by the way, Mr. Kramer called and said he was sendin' somebody over to pick up your drawin' right away.

DAVE: Mr. Kramer called? When?

VIRGIL: While you was catchin' a breath of fresh air. I called you, but I guess you didn't hear me. Well, bye. *(He exits.)*

DAVE: *(Begins to pace.)* This is not good. All I have to show him is one terrible slogan.

MACY: I wouldn't call it terrible, Mr. Richardson.

DAVE: What would you call it?

MACY: Slightly blasé?

DAVE: In the advertisement business, blasé **IS** terrible. There's nothing else to do but wait until they show up. *(Heads for the door.)* Macy, would you put the drawing in the portfolio for pick up please? I don't think I want to be around when Kramer's gopher comes by so I'm going home. See you tomorrow. *(He exits.)*

MACY: Goodbye, Mr. Richardson and please don't worry. *(He exits. MACY takes the poster off the easel and places it inside the portfolio. RAVEN sneaks in with his own poster.)*

RAVEN: Hello again, little one.

MACY: Raven, I told you no! And nothing is going to change my mind.

RAVEN: Not even this? *(He nuzzles her neck.)*

MACY: Well, maybe that. *(She turns around and gives him a hug.)* Oh, Raven, he fell for it. Mr. Richardson really thinks I'm committed to his work.

RAVEN: That was quite a little show you put on earlier. I was beginning to really feel rejected.

MACY: Do you have your drawing?

RAVEN: Do I ever. And it is a work of genius! Now, you're sure that Dave won't be back to see that we've switched my poster with his?

MACY: Positive! Once Mr. Kramer sees your terrific slogan for his fishing lures, he will be promoting you to Vice President.

RAVEN: Right, and once I'm promoted, the first thing I'll do is hire Dave to work for me.

MACY: Really? You would do that?

RAVEN: Of course, who else would I want to clean my toilets?

MACY: You'd better get out of here before someone sees you.

RAVEN: Let me see you make the switch so I know there won't be any mistakes.

MACY: *(She takes DAVE'S drawing out of the portfolio and replaces it with RAVEN'S. She sets DAVE'S poster beside VIRGIL'S which was left behind.)* Don't worry. I told you I would make sure everything went smoothly. *(Holding up the portfolio.)* See?

RAVEN: Okay, good. I'm out of here. *(Turns to MACY.)* Oh, Macy. I know I promised to take you to the company's Christmas party, but I'm afraid something has come up.

MACY: You mean you won't get to go to the Christmas party?

RAVEN: No, I'm going and taking a date; it just won't be you. I met someone since I asked you to go with me. You understand, don't you sweetie?

MACY: Of course I understand. I don't expect you to take me as a date if you've met someone more exciting.

RAVEN: That a girl, I knew you would understand. Well, better go. And don't expect a kiss unless I land that Kramer account. The more exciting things in life have to be earned. Ciao. *(He exits.)*

MACY: *(She makes sure he is gone.)* What an arrogant double-crossing pig. And he actually thinks I'm going to help him with his scheme? *(She laughs.)* Well, guess what Mr. Raven Beeker, I'm a double-crosser too and I will not let you stab Dave in the back this way. *(She removes RAVEN'S drawing from the portfolio, picks up VIRGIL'S drawing by mistake and places it inside the portfolio and closes it.)* I have something called company loyalty and I will not allow you to destroy Dave's self-confidence. *(She sets RAVEN'S drawing down beside DAVE'S on the floor. She brushes her hands together.)* There, nasty deed undone and Dave will never know he was being swindled.

MRS. KRAMER enters. She is dressed in fur and wears a funny-looking hat and white gloves. She's the epitome of sophistication.

MACY: Oh, hello. Won't you come in?

MRS. KRAMER: I believe I already am. I'm looking for *(Looks at a small piece of paper.)* a Mr. Dave Richardson. Someone told me this is his office.

MACY: Yes ma'am, but I'm afraid he's already gone for the day. Could I help you with something?

MRS. KRAMER: *(Looking her up and down.)* Who are you, the cleaning lady?

MACY: No ma'am, my name is Macy. I'm Mr. Richardson's personal assistant.

MRS. KRAMER: *(Dripping with sarcasm.)* I bet you are. Very well, I don't have time for trivial chatter; I'm here to pick up the drawings for the Kramer account. Quickly, quickly, I don't have all day.

MACY: Oh yes, ma'am; they're right here – I wasn't expecting someone so sophisticated.

MRS. KRAMER: I'm picking them up as a favor to my husband.

MACY: You mean you're Mrs. Kramer of Kramer Fishing Lures?

MRS. KRAMER: Close your mouth dear or you'll swallow a fly. Yes, I am she. I am running them over to the printer on my way to the airport. I'm flying to Paris for a few days and my husband's assistant was on another errand. Is there something wrong with a wife helping out her husband when he's in a bind?

MACY: Oh, no ma'am, I think it's quite romantic.

MRS. KRAMER: Well, let's not go that far. I'm delivering drawings, not serving a candle lit dinner. *(Taking the portfolio from MACY.)* Is this the slogan?

MACY: Yes ma'am, would you like to proof it before you take it to the printer?

MRS. KRAMER: No time dear; my Paris trip is more important than some silly advertisement. And I don't want to miss my flight. I must get along. Ta ta, Marcy.

MACY: Macy.

MRS. KRAMER: Whatever. *(She exits with the portfolio.)*

MACY: Uh, yes ma'am; ta ta. (*MRS. KRAMER exits. MACY sighs with relief that MRS. KRAMER is gone. She picks up RAVEN'S and DAVE'S drawings, which are facing one another, rips them in two and sets them in the trashcan. She stands, closes her eyes and crosses her fingers.*) Good luck, Mr. Richardson. You really need this one to be a hit. (*She turns and exits as the lights fade to BLACKOUT.*)

SCENE 2

SETTING: *It's a little country diner in Lickskillit. A few tables set about covered in red and white-checkered tablecloths. Gaudy Christmas decorations hang here and there. A sign that reads "Fishing Bait around back" hangs near the entrance. Rustic pictures hang on the walls [check Production Notes]. You may want to have a few extra customers sitting at the tables.*

AT RISE: *A country Christmas song plays and fades as the action starts. BERTHA MAE and MARGARET sit at a table stage center talking while they wait for VIRGIL and ELLARD to arrive.*

MARGARET: (*Looking at the menu.*) What are you goin' to have, Bertha Mae?

BERTHA MAE: I ain't really sure yet. What about you?

MARGARET: I think I might try the music box special.

BERTHA MAE: The what?

MARGARET: The lunch box special.

BERTHA MAE: You said the music box special.

MARGARET: Did I really? I've got to be careful I don't let that slip around Virgil.

BERTHA MAE: You've got your heart set on that music box for Christmas, don't you?

MARGARET: Oh, Bertha Mae – it's just that it's so beautiful. It's blue with gold trim and when you open the lid, a little clown is dancin' while "I Love You Truly" plays softly. I've been hintin' for Virgil to get it for me for weeks now.

BERTHA MAE: It sounds wonderful, Margaret.

MARGARET: But I've got to make sure Virgil don't think that I'm expectin' him to get it for me. That music box is so expensive and Virgil is tighter than last year's swimsuit.

BERTHA MAE: It's Christmas time. I'm sure Virgil don't mind splurgin' a little for the woman he loves.

MARGARET: Only time will tell. Do you know what Ellard is gettin' you?

BERTHA MAE: Well, I ain't too sure, but I've been hopin' for either a rhinestone bracelet or a new slingshot.

MARGARET: Slingshot? For Christmas?

BERTHA MAE: I know it's askin' a lot; but I just can't seem to get that slingshot out of my head.

MARGARET: Bless your heart; you always have been easy to please.

BERTHA MAE: Well, like my mama always says: Don't squat with your spurs on.

MARGARET: I wonder what that means.

BERTHA MAE: I don't know, but my mama always says it.

VIRGIL and ELLARD enter extreme stage left or right as the girls look at their menus.

VIRGIL: Now remember, Ellard. Not a word about the jack-in-the-box. I want Margaret's present to be a surprise for a change.

ELLARD: I promise I won't say a word, Virgil.

VIRGIL: I know you don't mean to, Ellard, but it's just that sometimes you talk before you think.

ELLARD: My momma may have raised some ugly kids but there ain't none of us fools.

VIRGIL: Okay, remember, mums the word.

ELLARD: My lips are sealed.

VIRGIL: Sealed or swollen; your choice.

MARGARET: (*Standing.*) Over here, Virgil.

VIRGIL: (*As VIRGIL and ELLARD cross to the girls.*) How's the most beautiful person in the whole wide world?

ELLARD: I'm fine, Virgil, but right now, let's focus on the girls.

BERTHA MAE: Hey Ellard.

VIRGIL: (*As the boys have a seat.*) You girls been waitin' long?

MARGARET: Not long. (*MAGGIE walks up to the table with a notepad and pencil. She wears a beehive hair-do with Christmas tree balls for earrings. A large Santa's head covers her red sweatshirt. She wears a large first place blue ribbon somewhere on her shirt. Her pointed glasses are attached to a chain that hangs around her neck. She chews a large wad of gum.*) Well, Merry Christmas "kidos." Welcome to Maggie's Country Diner and Bait Shop.

VIRGIL: Hey, Maggie. Goodness gracious. I believe that hair gets higher ever' time I come in here.

MAGGIE: (*Patting the back of her hair.*) Thank you, Virgil. I'm up to two cans of hairspray a day now.

BERTHA MAE: That's a lot of hair spray.

MAGGIE: Yeah. The record is three cans though, held by Mary Jo Baker over in the holler. But I'm catchin' up with her fast.

MARGARET: What's the blue ribbon for, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Oh, ain't you heard? I was first runner-up in the annual Ms. Cow Patty Pageant over in Boon County last week.

BERTHA MAE: That's the pageant of **all** pageants. Congratulations, Maggie.

VIRGIL: Speakin' of cow patties, how's the chopped steak?

MAGGIE: Butch Miller's workin' the grill today so I wouldn't order anything that has to be cooked. We do have a Christmas lunch special though.

VIRGIL: What's the Christmas lunch special?

MAGGIE: A cold bologna sandwich with a picture of Santa Claws drawn on it with ketchup.

ELLARD: That sounds good. And put a slice of Limburger cheese on mine.

VIRGIL: I'll take that too. (*The girls agree.*)

MAGGIE: (*Shouting toward the kitchen.*) Four Christmas specials on loaf bread and make 'em stink!! (*Taking up the menus.*) We'll have them holiday specials out in a jiffy!

ELLARD: Thank you, Ms. Cow Patty. (*MAGGIE exits to the kitchen.*)

MARGARET: Virgil, Speakin' of Christmas presents...

BERTHA MAE: Who was speakin' of Christmas presents? (*BERTHA MAE reacts as though she were kicked under the table.*) Owwww.

MARGARET: (*Back to VIRGIL.*) Have you finished all your Christmas shoppin'?

VIRGIL: I've got all but Mama's. I'm havin' trouble findin' overalls that will fit her.

BERTHA MAE: Yeah, you're right; mama has gained a little weight.

ELLARD: A little weight? Shoot, when your mama walks, her hips look like two bobcats in a 'tater sack.

MARGARET: Then you do have my present. Won't you give me a little hint of what you got me?

VIRGIL: Nope.

MARGARET: Is it bigger than a breadbox?

ELLARD: How did you know it was a box?

VIRGIL: Ellard!

MARGARET: Then it **IS** a box!

VIRGIL: I didn't say that!

BERTHA MAE: You didn't have to; knucklehead did it for you.

VIRGIL: We're not goin' to talk about presents – we're here to eat lunch, so let's eat lunch!

ELLARD: Yeah, let's eat lunch! No more talk about a box that plays music.

VIRGIL: Ellard!

MARGARET: Did you hear that, Bertha Mae? A box that plays music!

VIRGIL: Ellard, I swear you got more tongue than a lumberjack's boot.

ELLARD: But I didn't say one thing about the...

VIRGIL: Shut up!

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, hun, I know you don't mean to, but you're tellin' Margaret what her present is.

ELLARD: No I ain't. I just said that it was a box that...

BERTHA MAE and VIRGIL: Ellard!

MARGARET: Why can't ya'll just be quiet and let him spill some beans?

VIRGIL: Because I want your present to be a surprise, that's why.

BERTHA MAE: Let's change the subject and talk about what Ellard got me instead.

ELLARD: I got your Christmas present right here in my pocket, Bertha Mae.

VIRGIL: Don't show her what it is, Ellard. It will ruin the surprise.

ELLARD: No it won't because I already wrapped it. *(He pulls the wrapped slingshot from his pocket. It's clear to see it's a slingshot underneath the Christmas wrapping.)* See?

BERTHA MAE: Oh, Ellard – you **DID** get me the slingshot!

ELLARD: *(Sharply.)* Virgil, did you tell her?!

BERTHA MAE: *(Grabbing the slingshot.)* Oh, Ellard I love it!

ELLARD: *(To VIRGIL.)* Well, if you told Bertha Mae what hers is, then maybe I will just tell Margaret about her BOX that plays MUSIC with a little CLOWN inside!

VIRGIL: Ellard, I'm goin' to knock you into next week!

MARGARET: *(Stands and hugs VIRGIL.)* Oh, Virgil, you're the sweetest, most thoughtful husband in all the world!

VIRGIL: It's just that I wanted it to be a surprise, that's all. *(DAVE rushes in carrying a newspaper.)*

DAVE: *(Out of breath.)* Virgil! Thank goodness I found you!

VIRGIL: *(Surprised.)* Mr. Richardson? What in the world are you doin' way out here in Lickskillit?

DAVE: I stopped at the general store and someone said they saw you come in here.

VIRGIL: Well, this is a nice surprise! Have a seat and I'll order you a bologna special with Limburger cheese.

DAVE: I'm afraid this isn't a social call, Virgil.

VIRGIL: What do you mean, Mr. Richardson?

DAVE: What I mean is I'm in big, big trouble! *(Places the newspaper on the table.)* This ad for Kramer's fishing lures just came out in all the papers! Read it! *(Pointing to the paper.)*

VIRGIL: *(Reading.)* Woman Swallows Her Own Head and Lives.

DAVE: Not the news story, the advertisement.

VIRGIL: Oh. *(Reading.)* You have a choice with Kramer Fishin' Lures. Spend the day at the lake with a large mouth bass or at home with your big mouth wife. Hey, I think I saw that ad somewhere before.

ELLARD: *(Laughs.)* Big mouth wife, that's a funny advertisement.

DAVE: Don't you understand, that is **not** the slogan I wrote!

MARGARET: And look at that cute little drawin' of the cartoon woman with a big mouth!

DAVE: Virgil, I need to ask you an important question.

VIRGIL: *(Eyes grow wide.)* Uh-oh, I just remembered where I saw that slogan before.

DAVE: That's what I was going to ask you. Did you happen to see anyone suspicious in my office while I was out; someone that could have swapped my drawing for this practical joke?

VIRGIL: No, Mr. Richardson, I didn't see nobody.

DAVE: (*Plopping down into a chair.*) That's it then. You were my last hope. My goose is cooked.

MAGGIE: (*Walking up with bottles of ketchup and mustard.*) Goose? Good! Bring it in here and we'll serve it up for tomorrow's lunch special. We ain't had cooked goose in a long time. (*She walks away.*)

VIRGIL: Mr. Richardson, there's somethin' I need to tell you about that ad. The fact of the matter is, somebody strange was in your office the other day.

DAVE: Just as I suspected. Who was it?

VIRGIL: Me.

DAVE: I knew it! I knew I couldn't trust that little rascal for one...what did you say?

VIRGIL: I drew that there slogan. Ellard come by and we was jokin' around with some of your colored markers. I meant to throw it away, but I guess I forgot!

ELLARD: Yeah, that was fun.

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, be quiet, it ain't fun no more.

DAVE: Virgil, how could you have done such a thing?

VIRGIL: Don't worry about it, Mr. Richardson. I'll go straight to your boss, Mrs. Tate and tell her what I did! I'll tell her you didn't have nothin' to do with it!

MARGARET: But Virgil, won't you be fired?

VIRGIL: I don't deserve a job after what I pulled.

DAVE: I know you didn't mean to hurt me, Virgil. But I'm afraid this is pretty serious. (*His cell phone rings.*) That's probably Mrs. Tate now. I bet she just saw the ad. (*Answers the phone.*) Hello? M...Mr. Kramer? (*Puts the phone on his shoulder and speaks to the group with terror in his voice.*) It's Mr. Kramer.

VIRGIL: Oh no.

DAVE: (*Back to the phone.*) Yes sir, you saw the ad. Well, sir, it's like this; you see, I ... What did you say, sir? ... It was? ... They were? You are? ... Yes sir. G...Good...bye, sir. (*Turns off his phone and stares out in shock.*)

MARGARET: Uh-oh, it looks bad.

VIRGIL: (*Bringing a chair over to DAVE.*) Why don't you have a seat, Mr. Richardson?

ELLARD: (*Reading the ad and laughs.*) That's funny...big mouth wife...

BERTHA MAE: (*Closing the paper.*) Ellard, just stand there and don't talk none.

DAVE: But that's just it; it appears that it **is** funny.

VIRGIL: It is?

DAVE: That's what Mr. Kramer said.

VIRGIL: You mean he wasn't mad?

DAVE: Not at all, as a matter of fact, he was very pleased?

VIRGIL: Pleased about my silly slogan?

DAVE: It seems that your silly slogan is a huge success! He said that people love the humor. Sales are already up thirty percent just since the ad came out. Mr. Kramer is giving me a bonus. (*Coming out of his fog.*) Virgil, you saved my career!

VIRGIL: I have?

MARGARET: (*Hugging VIRGIL.*) Oh, Virgil, I'm so proud of you.

DAVE: (*Picking the paper up off the table.*) They loved it! They loved it! Virgil, you are my hero! You know what else Mr. Kramer said? He said he's going to make sure I get a bonus for creating such a creative ad! And you know what I'm going to do, Virgil? I'm going to give you half my bonus money.

VIRGIL: You can't do that, Mr. Richardson.

DAVE: You're right, I can't! I'm going to give you ALL my Christmas bonus!

ELLARD: (*Standing with his fists in the air.*) Ain't this a great day! (*MAGGIE walks up.*) Come here, Maggie. (*He throws his arms around MAGGIE in a hug.*)

MAGGIE: (*ELLARD lifts her off the floor.*) Heavens to Betsy, boy! Let go of me before I slap you naked and hide your clothes.

DAVE: Virgil, from now on, we're going to be partners! With my business sense and your creative mind, we can go places!

VIRGIL: Mr. Richardson, I ain't creative, I was just havin' a little fun.

DAVE: Well, we're going to have more fun making lots of money together. What do you say, Virgil?

VIRGIL: Well...

DAVE: You don't have to answer right away. Think about it and talk it over with *(Puts his arm around BERTHA MAE.)* your pretty little wife.

VIRGIL: *(Pointing to BERTHA MAE.)* But that's not my...

BERTHA MAE: Be quiet, Virgil; he knows a pretty little thing when he sees it.

DAVE: The company Christmas party is this Friday night. You've got to make sure you and your wife come. Do you have a flattering suit of clothes?

VIRGIL: *(A little embarrassed.)* Yes sir, I'm afraid all my clothes are old and flattered.

MARGARET: Virgil, he said flattered, not tattered.

DAVE: You'll want to look your best for the Christmas Dinner. It's supposed to be a classy affair.

BERTHA MAE: Wait, Virgil. Friday night is when us four is having our gift-giving get-together.

VIRGIL: Oh yeah, I forgot. I'm afraid I won't be able to be at your fancy party, Mr. Richardson, but thanks just the same.

DAVE: No worries, bring your friends along to the Christmas party, too!

VIRGIL: Even Maggie?

DAVE: What's a Maggie?

MARGARET: Another friend.

DAVE: Why not, Virgil, we'll need all the moral support we can muster.

MAGGIE: *(Walking up.)* Mustard? Got it right here! *(Sets a jar of it on the table.)*

VIRGIL: Gee, everything is happenin' so fast.

ELLARD: Do it, Virgil. I've never been to a city Christmas hoedown before.

MARGARET: Goodness, what in the world am I goin' to wear?

BERTHA MAE: I don't know whether to wear my denim or gingham dress.

DAVE: Then it's all set. Heck, who knows, your little slogan may even mean a promotion, Virgil.

VIRGIL: Does this mean I will get to use the big floor buffer from now on?

DAVE: *(Laughs and puts his arm around VIRGIL.)* Virgil, Virgil, Virgil, you are unpretentious aren't you?

VIRGIL: Pretty much. Don't worry, though, I've had my shots.

DAVE: I've got to get back to the office and tell Macy. I guess I will see you all at the party Friday night. And don't forget to array yourselves in your most superb attire! *(He exits.)*

ELLARD: What did he just say about a suburban tire?

BERTHA MAE: I ain't sure, but Maggie did you hear him say you was invited too?

MAGGIE: Well, I was wonderin' if that was just my imagination. I think I might take along some of my homemade vittles to show my appreciation.

VIRGIL: That would be real nice of you, Maggie.

ELLARD: Speakin' of vittles, I'm ready to eat.

BERTHA MAE: Yeah, I'm so hungry I could eat a horse and chase the rider.

MAGGIE: Well, you just set yourself down and I'll bring out your lunch this very minute. *(She crosses to the kitchen door and shouts through it.)* Butch, I'm comin' in the kitchen so put the knife down! *(She exits.)*

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, we're goin' to have to give you a crash course in sophistication. I don't want you embarrassin' me in front of all them city folks.

ELLARD: Maybe I can impress them doin' my Santy Claws impression.

BERTHA MAE: That's a great idea. *(To MARGARET.)* Ellard may not be the brightest bulb on the Christmas tree, but he can play a mean Santy Claws.

MARGARET: Yeah, what's a Christmas hoedown without jolly ol' Saint Nick. *(Clapping her hands.)* This is goin' to be so much fun!

BERTHA MAE: Come on, Ellard, if I'm goin' to make you presentable, I need ever' spare second I can get.

ELLARD: But we didn't eat yet.

MARGARET: Ellard, I'll have Maggie bag it up and me and Virgil will bring it out to you later.

BERTHA MAE: *(As she drags ELLARD out.)* See ya'll later. *(They exit.)*

MARGARET: *(Crosses to VIRGIL who has been looking at the newspaper DAVE left behind.)* Virgil, I'm so proud of you.

VIRGIL: I guess it is a pretty good ad at that. *(MAGGIE enters with a pitcher of water.)*

MARGARET: That's not why you go fishin' so much is it, Virgil? To get away from your big-mouth wife?

VIRGIL: Of course not, honey. Sometimes it's just to get away from your cookin'.

MARGARET: Oh really? Well, I'll remember that the next time you get hungry and there ain't nothin' in the house but raw okra to chew on. *(She grabs her coat and exits.)*

MAGGIE: Virgil, you really dropped your candy in the sand that time.

VIRGIL: I guess I just don't know when to be quiet.

MAGGIE: Does that mean you're in the dog house?

VIRGIL: *(Taking his coat and crossing to the door.)* Maggie, I've been in the doghouse so many times, when I meet a man on the street I don't know whether to shake his hand or sniff his rear. I'll see you Friday. *(He exits.)*

MAGGIE: *(Crossing and shouting out the door.)* And what am I supposed to do with all these Christmas specials? *(She sighs and crosses back to the kitchen and shouts through the door.)* Well, Butch hun, I hope you're hungry for bologna. *(She exits to the kitchen as another Country Christmas song plays. The lights fade to BLACKOUT.)*

SCENE 3

SETTING: *The company Christmas party. A few small tables are decorated simply and stylishly with Christmas decorations and white table cloths. One table stands against the upstage wall comprising of various finger foods. An elegant Christmas tree sits in the corner of the room. Soft, classical Christmas music plays in the background.*

AT RISE: *A few guests stand around holding clear plastic cups and/or Champaign glasses. MR. KRAMER and DAVE stand center stage.*

MR. KRAMER: I'm a firm believer in giving credit where credit is due, Mr. Richardson. This ad has brought in more revenue than any advertisement we've used during the off-season.

DAVE: Well, Mr. Kramer, I have to be honest with you. The slogan wasn't entirely my idea. A coworker was the real brains behind it all.

MR. KRAMER: A co-worker you say? Will he be here tonight?

DAVE: Yes sir, his name is Virgil. Virgil Sludge. He should be arriving anytime.

MR. KRAMER: Splendid. I want to meet this creative genius!

MACY: *(Walking up holding a glass of something.)* Mr. Kramer, hello, I'm Macy; Mr. Richardson's assistant. I was fortunate to meet your wife the other day at the office. Will she be coming to the party?

MR. KRAMER: Yes she is, Macy. As a yearly tradition, she took a three-week trip to Spain. My little Pumpkin loves Spain this time of year. Our limo is picking her up at the airport and bringing her straight to the party.

MACY: It's probably not the same around your house when she's traveling.

MR. KRAMER: You're right there, young lady; let's just say it's been quiet; very, very quiet. I love my wife but I swear she can out-chatter a magpie. *(He turns to DAVE.)* Mr. Richardson, I'd like to discuss some future ads with you if you have a moment. It was very nice meeting you, Macy. *(MR. KRAMER takes DAVE'S arm and crosses upstage. RAVEN enters with his date PEACH on his arm. RAVEN crosses rather quickly to MACY as he pulls PEACH along after him.)*

RAVEN: Macy.

MACY: Raven, I was beginning to think you weren't coming.

RAVEN: I just flew in from Chicago; Mrs. Tate gave me a three-week vacation for landing the Potter furniture account, so I've been out of touch. Have you seen the fishing lure ad? How did it look? Was it a smashing success?

MACY: As a matter of fact, it was. Mr. Kramer loved the layout.

RAVEN: I knew it. I haven't been able to see the ad, but I knew he would love it, I just knew it!

MACY: As a matter of fact, sales for Kramer fishing lures are up thirty percent since it came out.

RAVEN: *(Straightening his tie.)* And Mrs. Tate knows that Dave didn't write the slogan, right?

MACY: Yes, she knows.

RAVEN: And she knows who created the slogan, right?

MACY: Yes, Raven she knows! She knows everything. Aren't you going to introduce me to your date?

RAVEN: Oh, yes. This is...uh... (*Snaps his fingers trying to remember her name.*)

PEACH: (*To MACY.*) My name is Peach. I was set up on this blind date by a friend of mine. I was told Raven was six-two with wavy black hair and a cleft chin.

RAVEN: And boy was she pleasantly surprised by what she got instead.

PEACH: (*Leans in to MACY.*) Yes, a ravenous bore.

RAVEN: (*Embarrassed giggle.*) In her country, bore means dangerously exciting.

MACY: (*To PEACH.*) What country are you from?

PEACH: Idaho.

RAVEN: (*Quickly, changing the subject.*) The important thing tonight is not where my date is from, but it's the fact that my slogan was a huge success. (*Putting an arm around PEACH.*) Honey, I haven't told you what's going to happen tonight. You are in for a big surprise.

MACY: (*Under her breath.*) So are you, Raven.

RAVEN: Huh?

MACY: Nothing. Here comes Mrs. Tate. I'll just leave so I don't sunburn from your self-glory. (*She walks away as RAVEN straightens his tie ready to be complimented by MRS. TATE. He notices, though, that she is walking past him. He takes her arm and turns her facing him.*)

RAVEN: Well, good evening, Mrs. Tate; I'm right here.

MRS. TATE: Oh, good evening, Mr. Beeker.

RAVEN: I just got back in town, so I haven't had a chance to speak with you concerning any bonus.

MRS. TATE: Bonus?

RAVEN: I see, it's supposed to be a surprise. Don't worry, when I'm recognized tonight, I will act surprised. Just pretend you don't know that I know.

MRS. TATE: That will be easy, because I have no idea what you're talking about. (*To PEACH as she extends her hand.*) Hello, I'm Mrs. Tate?

RAVEN: Mrs. Tate, this is my date...uh... (*Snaps his fingers.*) ...uh.

PEACH: (*Shaking MRS. TATE'S hand.*) Peach. Peach Rivers.

RAVEN: Peach Rivers, that's right! But enough about her...what exactly do you have to say about my layout...

MRS. DUNAWAY: (*Crossing and standing between RAVEN and MRS. TATE. Every once in a while she wipes her face with a piece of tissue.*) Mrs. Tate, Mr. Beeker, Merry Christmas. I'm so glad you were able to come to our holiday affair. What do you think of the decorations? Are they elegant enough? Oh, I'm so nervous. A photographer for "Hostess" magazine will be here shortly to take pictures for a layout.

MRS. TATE: "Hostess" magazine? That's quite an honor, Roberta.

MRS. DUNAWAY: And believe me, I need the publicity. Everything has got to go as smooth as silk tonight. This layout can make or break my reputation.

MRS. TATE: Everything looks splendid, Roberta. You have nothing to worry about.

MRS. DUNAWAY: (*Giggles flattered.*) Oh, Mrs. Tate, you don't have to say that; even though it's true. How's the caviar?

MRS. TATE: Delicious.

RAVEN: (*Turning to PEACH.*) Speaking of caviar, would you like something to eat, Pickle?

PEACH: Peach. I would love something to eat.

RAVEN: Fine, while you're over there, pick me up some shrimp, would you? That's nice, hurry off now. (*PEACH stares at RAVEN with contempt then crosses to the food table.*)

RAVEN: Mrs. Tate, have you seen Mr. Kramer? I'm sure he wants to congratulate me in person.

MRS. TATE: Yes, he's over talking to Mr. Richardson. Why is he congratulating you? Are you getting married?

RAVEN: (*Fake chuckle.*) Oh, Mrs. Tate, you are the funny one. Don't worry, I'm still pretending I don't know a thing. (*He crosses to MR. KRAMER and DAVE as MRS. TATE and MRS. DUNAWAY cross upstage and carry on their own conversation.*)

RAVEN: Good evening, Mr. Kramer, Dave.

MR. KRAMER: I'm sorry, I don't think we have met.

RAVEN: I'm Raven Beeker. But somehow, I think you already knew that. Dave, I hope there are no hurt feelings. But you know the old saying: it's a dog-eat-dog world. Survival of the fittest and all the rest of it.

DAVE: Am I supposed to know what you're talking about?

RAVEN: (*Placing his arm around DAVE'S shoulder.*) Dave, Dave, Dave, I know that you know and we don't want to make a scene right here in front of the client. So let's just drop it, shall we?

PEACH: (*Approaching DAVE with a plate of food.*) Here you are, Your Majesty.

RAVEN: Not now, Polly, can't you see I'm conversing?

DAVE: (*To PEACH.*) I don't believe we've met. I'm Dave Richardson. Nice to meet you, Polly.

PEACH: Peach. Nice to meet you.

MR. KRAMER: If you'll excuse me, I think I'll get some more punch. (*He crosses to the upstage table.*)

RAVEN: (*Yelling loudly across the stage to MR. KRAMER.*) But Mr. Kramer, I'm not finished telling you my life story. (*To PEACH.*) Now, look what you did, you just killed my chance of making a lasting impression.

MRS. DUNAWAY: (*Referring to RAVEN'S shouting as she wipes her forehead with her tissue.*) Dear, now we have people screaming across the room like wild banshees. How crude and inappropriate. This is supposed to be a distinguished affair. I can't imagine what's going to happen next.

VIRGIL and MARGARET enter. VIRGIL is dressed in a green polyester leisure suit with a bright red shirt on underneath. His shirtsleeves and pants are too short. He sports white socks with either black or white loafers. His hair is greased straight back. MARGARET wears an evening gown with puffy sleeves. She has sown various Christmas ornaments all over her dress and she wears bubble lights for earrings. Her wrap is a long piece of silver Christmas tree garland. She wears some type of tiara on her head.

MARGARET: Wow, Virgil, would you look at this fancy place? This room is a lot bigger than the one we was just in.

VIRGIL: Margaret, that was the elevator.

MARGARET: Are you sure I look okay? I feel like a ground floor tenant in a two-story outhouse.

VIRGIL: You look beautiful.

MRS. DUNAWAY: (*Approaching them.*) Excuse me, but the homeless shelter is three blocks down across the train tracks.

VIRGIL: Really? (*Turns to MARGARET.*) See Margaret, I told you ever'body would be friendly, she's invitin' us to her place for another Christmas party. (*To MRS. DUNAWAY.*) Just tell us the date and time and we'll be there with jingle bells on.

MRS. DUNAWAY: I beg your pardon?

MARGARET: You don't have to beg ma'am, we'd be more than happy to come.

MRS. DUNAWAY: You don't understand; a photographer is coming so you need to...

DAVE: (*Approaching with MACY and interrupting MRS. DUNAWAY.*) Virgil, Margaret, good to see you. Where are your friends?

VIRGIL: Parkin' the pickup. Some man in a fancy suit was tellin' Ellard he couldn't park that hideous contraption on the property.

DAVE: Uh-oh. What did Ellard say when the attendant called his truck a hideous contraption?

MARGARET: Ellard said, "Thank you, I'll take you ridin' in it sometime."

VIRGIL: Ellard ain't used to gettin' many compliments on his pickup truck.

MRS. DUNAWAY: (*Pulling DAVE a few feet away.*) Mr. Richardson, what are these clodhoppers doing at my Christmas party?

DAVE: I invited them.

MRS. DUNAWAY: But why? Don't you know I have a photographer coming in to take pictures for "Hostess" magazine?

DAVE: This is a company Christmas dinner, Mrs. Dunaway. (*Pulling VIRGIL up with them.*) Virgil works for the company.

MRS. DUNAWAY: (*Fanning herself with the tissue.*) Oh, dear, I think I'm feeling a little faint.

VIRGIL: Maybe you need to sit down and put your head between your knees.

MRS. DUNAWAY: Perhaps you need to vamoose!

VIRGIL: No ma'am, I went before I got here.

ELLARD and BERTHA MAE rush in and hide behind VIRGIL. ELLARD wears a red sweat suit with a reindeer on the front. He sports a John Deer cap perched on top of his head and work boots on his feet. BERTHA MAE is dressed in a simple gingham dress and a very large Christmas-package bow in her hair. Two tiny wrapped gifts hang from her ears and she sports a string of green garland imbedded with tiny pinecones wrapped around her neck as though it were a mink stole.

ELLARD: Virgil, you need to protect us!

DAVE: Protect you? From what?

BERTHA MAE: That man outside said we couldn't park the pick-up out front! He said it was a repulsive spectacle.

ELLARD: I said, no sir, this here's a '67 Ford truck. And for some reason, that made him real mad!

MRS. DUNAWAY: (*Approaching ELLARD.*) Young man, don't you realize one mustn't run indoors? Mr. Richardson, I must ask you to gain control of your guests before the photographer arrives. (*She crosses upstage and has a seat and fans herself.*)

MACY: (*Approaching.*) Margaret, could I take your, uh, Christmas garland?

MARGARET: Thank you ma'am. Be careful though, that thing is sheddin' like a winter collie.

BERTHA MAE: You can take mine too; it's makin' my neck break out with a rash. (*MACY takes their "wraps" and exits.*)

DAVE: (*Handing ELLARD a couple of dollar bills.*) Ellard, here. Give this to the man outside and tell him I said it was okay for you to park your truck there.

ELLARD: Okay, go with me, Bertha Mae.

BERTHA MAE: (*As she and ELLARD EXIT.*) I just hope Maggie don't beat him up before we get out there. (*They exit.*)

RAVEN: (*Approaching with PEACH, speaking sarcastically.*) Isn't that just like you, Dave. You brought your janitor to the classiest party of the year. You never cease to amaze me.

DAVE: (*Ignoring RAVEN'S aloofness.*) Raven, you know Virgil. This is his wife, Margaret. This is Raven Beeker and his date, Peach.

VIRGIL: Nice to meet you, Ms. Peach. Golly, that sure is an interestin' name. (*Sincerely.*) What's your mama's name, Apple?

RAVEN: (*Sarcastically.*) No, her mother's name is Banana and her father's name is Tangerine.

VIRGIL: What do you know about that, Margaret; her family is a bunch of fruits!

RAVEN: If that's the way it works, your first name must be Macadamia.

VIRGIL: No sir, it's Virgil.

PEACH: Virgil. I love that name. I had a puppy named Virgil once. He was the cutest thing in all the world.

RAVEN: Pepper, I'll be the conversationalist; you stand there and look good on my arm like I told you to.

MARGARET: Ain't that just like a man. All we are to them is eye candy.

RAVEN: (*To MARGARET.*) And what flavor would you be, sour apple?

VIRGIL: (*Slipping his arm around MARGARET.*) I call her my little fat back.

MARGARET: (*Giggles as though she just received the largest compliment.*) That's because fat back is one of Virgil's favorite foods.

RAVEN: Really? I thought it was because of your . . .

DAVE: Raven! Don't you have more gloating to do in front of the boss?

RAVEN: You're right, I haven't told her my ideas for the next fishing lure campaign. (*He starts to walk away.*)

MARGARET: Mr. Beeker, ain't you goin' to take Ms. Peach with you?

RAVEN: Who? Oh, (*Turns to PEACH.*) do you want to go?

PEACH: No, I think I'll stay here and talk to Virgil and Margaret where the conversation is a little more interesting.

RAVEN: Suit yourself. Get me some more shrimp, will you? (*He walks away.*)

PEACH: (*Sarcastically but he's too far away to hear.*) Yes, Your lordship. (*MAGGIE enters carrying a picnic basket. She's dressed in a large red dress covered with a full-length white apron with "Maggie's Country Diner and Bait Shop" printed on its front in large letters. She wears a Santa hat that sits on top of her beehive. Her lips have been painted a bright red.*)

MAGGIE: I'm here with the vittles, ever'body! The party can get started now! *(She crosses to the food table and begins moving things out of her way.)* Heavens, this room's a lot bigger than the one I was just in!

DAVE: Virgil, I'll introduce you to Mr. Kramer in just a minute; I'd better see if Ellard is okay. Excuse me, won't you? *(He exits.)*

MRS. DUNAWAY: *(Rushing over to MAGGIE.)* See here, what is the meaning of this clamoring? Who are you, dear lady?

MAGGIE: My name is Maggie. I brought some of my most famous vittles from Lickskillit!

MRS. DUNAWAY: You're rearranging the finger food and a picture hasn't been taken of the table yet.

MAGGIE: If a cow had wheels, it would be a milk truck; what's your point?

VIRGIL: *(Approaching.)* Maggie, this is the lady who is in charge of the party. Her name is Mrs. Runaway.

MAGGIE: Oh, really? And what are you runin' away from? *(Slaps her leg and laughs.)*

MRS. DUNAWAY: It's Dunaway. And I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to please put everything back the way you found it.

MAGGIE: Well, don't that make you want to spit in the creek? You try to help out a body and all you get is unappreciated.

VIRGIL: Now, Maggie. It's Christmas time; let's not go startin' a brawl.

MAGGIE: *(Taking a cheap-looking vase from her basket. Inside the vase are ugly plastic poinsettias)* She started it!

MRS. DUNAWAY: Now what are you doing?

MAGGIE: Just settin' out some poinsettias to set the mood.

MRS. DUNAWAY: *(Pointing to the flowers.)* You can't bring those things in here! They're plastic!

MAGGIE: Well, so is your face, honey, but you don't see us throwin' you out! *(MRS. DUNAWAY throws her hand to her chest as though she can't breath.)*

VIRGIL: Here, Mrs. Runaway, you might need to sit down again. *(MARGARET grabs a chair and they help her sit.)* Are you sure you don't want to stick your head between your knees?

ELLARD and BERTHA MAE reenter. ELLARD shouts back to offstage.

ELLARD: Thanks a heap, Mr. Dave!

MARGARET: Did you get the truck parked?

ELLARD: Yeah, but I tell you, these people in the city sure are uptight.

MAGGIE: *(Pulling ELLARD over to the picnic basket while VIRGIL, MARGARET, and BERTHA MAE tend to MRS. DUNAWAY.)*
Ellard, come over here and do me a favor.

ELLARD: Boy Maggie, them vittles sure smell good!

MAGGIE: Listen, Ellard, I've got to go to the little girl's room. Now, if you see anybody even comin' close to my picnic basket, I want you to let out a whistle. I don't want nobody gettin' anything out of here before it's time to eat.

ELLARD: Yes ma'am, I'll be glad to. What kind of whistle would you like? I can do a foghorn *(Demonstrates his best fog horn.)* Or a choo-choo train. *(Pulls an imaginary cord and whistles like a freight train.)*

MAGGIE: The rungs on your ladder don't go all the way to the top, do they, Ellard? Just whistle so I know somebody's tryin' to snatch a chicken leg. Don't take your eyes off of that basket!

ELLARD: You can count on me. *(MAGGIE exits quickly as ELLARD places his hand behind his back and looks straight down at the basket, not moving a muscle. DAVE reenters and crosses to MRS. DUNAWAY.)*

DAVE: What happened?

VIRGIL: I'm not sure. She just got all green and had to sit down.

DAVE: Is she indisposed?

MARGARET: No sir, I think she's just real sick.

MRS. DUNAWAY: *(Wiping her eyes with her tissue and speaking to herself.)* All I wanted was for this little social gathering to make the pages of "Hostess" magazine so I might increase my humble little party planning business. *(On the verge of tears.)* Is that too much to ask? My chance to shine as the hostess-of-the-year is slipping away like sand through an hourglass.

DAVE: *(Handing her a cup of water.)* Here, drink this water and maybe you will feel better.

MARGARET: *(Pulling BERTHA MAE down stage while VIRGIL and DAVE fan MRS. DUNAWAY.)* Bertha Mae, I feel so bad for Mrs. Runaway.

BERTHA MAE: Bless her heart; I ain't never been to such a borin' Christmas hoedown in my whole life.

MARGARET: We've got to help her put some life into this here party before her photographer friend gets here.

BERTHA MAE: That's a great idea. She has worked too hard not to get her picture put in that there city magazine.

MARGARET: I've got the perfect plan. Come on! *(MARGARET grabs BERTHA MAE'S hand and they exit quickly.)*

PEACH: *(Crosses over to the picnic basket and notices ELLARD who is standing guard.)* Excuse me, is this where I'll find the caviar?

ELLARD: *(Without looking up from the basket.)* No ma'am, all the cars and trucks are outside.

PEACH: *(She takes a peak inside the basket. ELLARD whistles. PEACH thinks he's flirting with her. She looks him up and down then whistles back. ELLARD becomes a little confused. PEACH peaks again and ELLARD whistles. PEACH takes the end of her hair and twirls it around her finger.)* You're kind of cute. What's your name?

ELLARD: Ellard Jacob Winston Nabors.

PEACH: Are you a valet?

ELLARD: No ma'am, I'm a Baptist.

PEACH: I'm very bored. Mr. Raven Beeker has turned out to be an egotistical drag.

ELLARD: Egotistical huh? I would have pegged him as more of a Methodist.

PEACH: He's done nothing but ignore me ever since we arrived.

ELLARD: I don't know why he would ignore a pretty girl like you. Why, you're as cute as a basket full of speckled pups.

PEACH: *(Twirling her hair more than ever.)* Why, thank you Ellard Jacob Winston Nabors. And I think you're as fine as the Mona Lisa's smile.

ELLARD: *(ELLARD looks at her confused.)* Huh?

PEACH: Finer than the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel?

ELLARD: The Sis-tine...?

PEACH: Put it this way, Ellard, you're finer than a frog hair.

ELLARD: *(Smiles and drops his head; finally a comparison he understands.)* Ahhhhhh, you don't mean it.

PEACH: Come on, aren't you going to let me see what's in the basket?

ELLARD: I'd really like to, ma'am, but I told Maggie I wouldn't let nobody near it.

PEACH: Not even a little bitty, teeny, weenie peek? *(She tries to open the basket as a nervous ELLARD tries to whistle. But all that comes out this time is air. He tries again. PEACH continues to stand there and flirt with ELLARD but their voices go quiet to the audience.)*

DAVE: I hope the water made you feel better, Mrs. Dunaway.

MRS. DUNAWAY: *(Looking contemptuously at VIRGIL.)* The only thing that will make me feel better is if we get rid of the riff raff that's crawling around here.

VIRGIL: *(Patting her on the back.)* Don't worry, Mrs. Runaway, I'm sure they'll get an exterminator in here first thing Monday mornin'.

MRS. TATE: *(Approaching.)* Is anything the matter?

DAVE: It seems our hostess isn't feeling very well.

MRS. TATE: Roberta, do you think you might be coming down with something?

MRS. DUNAWAY: Mrs. Tate, I'm sorry I have let you down. I wanted so much to put us on the influential register.

MRS. TATE: Don't be silly; everything is very elegant. Besides, when it's all said and done, it's Mr. Kramer, our biggest client, who matters most when it comes to impressing someone.

MRS. DUNAWAY: In that case, would you do me a favor and keep the filthy peasants away from him?

VIRGIL: Don't worry, Mrs. Runaway. You just point them out and I'll get 'em out of here in a flash.

MRS. DUNAWAY: Speaking of Mr. Kramer, here he comes. Everyone stand up straight.

MR. KRAMER: *(Approaching.)* Well, Mr. Richardson, when do I get to meet the brains behind my latest campaign?

DAVE: *(Referring to VIRGIL.)* He's standing right here, Mr. Kramer.

MR. KRAMER: *(Presenting his hand to VIRGIL.)* Well, young man. Finally we meet. Congratulations on boosting my fishing lure sales.

MRS. DUNAWAY: *(Pointing to VIRGIL.)* Wait a minute, he came up with Mr. Kramer's campaign slogan?



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