

VIRGIL'S FAMILY REUNION

by Eddie McPherson



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SYNOPSIS: Sometimes, everything that can go wrong will. It's summer and time for backyard fun and the semi-annual Sludge family get-together. The morning of the relative disaster begins with the snooty yankee neighbor next door, Pamela Chambers, who warns the Sludges that she plans to draft a petition for eviction because the Sludge's noxious, weed-infested landscape does not promote a safe and attractive community. Scrambling to get the plastic silverware polished and fried chicken on the grill, Eloise considers Pamela's uppity threats empty threats until an officer shows up to arrest Harley Wayne, Eloise's husband, for trampling Pamela's perennial garden with his four-wheeler. The barbeque heats up when Virgil and Margaret have their first real lovers' spat and Ellard, Virgil's best friend, proposes to Virgil's sister using visual aids, and the 95-year old matriarch of the family announces her plans to elope with her new boyfriend, Mr. Perky. The bedlam continues in this hilarious but true account of the worst family reunion in the history of the Sludge's nutty family tree.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 males, 11 females, extras)

ELOISE SLUDGE (f)	Virgil's mother, mid-fifties (196 lines)
HARLEY WAYNE SLUDGE (m)	Eloise's bullheaded husband (71 lines)
MAMA HOOPER (f)	Eloise's best friend, mid-fifties (75 lines)
PAPA HOOPER (m)	Mama Hooper's absent-minded husband (26 lines)
PAMELA CHAMBERS (f)	Sludge's well-to-do neighbor (72 lines)
VIRGIL SLUDGE (m)	Sludge's son who is presently arguing with his wife (195 lines)
MARGARET SLUDGE (f)	Virgil's wife, the Hooper's daughter (174 lines)

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BERTHA MAE SLUDGE (f)	Virgil's younger sister (89 lines)
ELLARD (m).....	Virgil's best friend, in love with Bertha Mae (113 lines)
POLICE OFFICER (m)	A rookie (18 lines)
MOE MOE (m)	Virgil's third cousin (22 lines)
CURLY SUE (f)	Moe Moe's sister (11 lines)
LARRY SUE (f)	Another (12 lines)
GRANDMA PETUNIA (f).....	Virgil's grumpy grandma (48 lines)
MR. PERKY (m)	Grandma's love interest (14 lines)
TINY (f).....	A hefty young lady (8 lines)
AUNT POLLY (f).....	Harley Wayne's deaf aunt (6 line)
UNCLE LESTER (m).....	Polly's very deaf husband (13 lines)
EXTRAS	For the reunion

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE, SCENE 1	Sludge's living room.
ACT ONE, SCENE 2.....	Sludge's living room.
ACT TWO	Sludge's living room

SET

The Sludge's living room. It's a little run-down but it's not a dump. Eloise Sludge isn't much of an interior decorator and what décor the house does have is outdated by about twenty years. A screen door leads to the front yard stage right. The kitchen door is up stage center, and the door to the rest of the house is stage left. An old sofa sits center stage and a beat-up recliner sits to the sofa's right. A rather large wooden chest sits down stage right as well as a shabby TV set. Old pictures hang on the walls, including a picture of a barn. Two pictures, one of Harley Wayne and one of Eloise hang beside one another up stage right wall.

PROPS

ACT ONE

- ☐ Mixing bowl (Mama Sludge)
- ☐ Oil rag (Harley Wayne)
- ☐ Covered dish (Mama Hooper)
- ☐ Sunglasses (Papa Hooper)
- ☐ Plastic Wear (Mama Hooper)
- ☐ Puppy poodle (Pamela.)
- ☐ Broom (Mama Sludge)
- ☐ Tub of lard (Virgil)
- ☐ Plastic fork (Virgil)
- ☐ Shoe box (Ellard)
- ☐ Rubber chicken (Mama Sludge)
- ☐ Table cloth (Harley Wayne)
- ☐ Cooking mitten (Margaret)
- ☐ Apron (Bertha Mae)
- ☐ Glasses (Virgil)
- ☐ Handcuffs (Policeman)
- ☐ Purse (Pamela)

ACT TWO

- ☐ Plate of rolls (Mama Sludge)
- ☐ Empty plate (Mama Hooper)
- ☐ Broom (Virgil)
- ☐ Large can of sour kraut
- ☐ Cantaloupe
- ☐ stuffed toy cow
- ☐ can of nuts (Virgil)
- ☐ Empty plate (Mama Sludge)
- ☐ Ice cream freezer (Papa Hooper)
- ☐ Birthday cake (fake or real, Mama Sludge)
- ☐ [Several] Pieces of string (Uncle Lester)
- ☐ Piece of paper and pen (Pamela)
- ☐ Fried chicken leg (Policeman)

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is a farce. The action should move very quickly to be effective. Slow moments and long blackouts between scenes will be annoying and distracting. Keep it moving and have fun AND check our web site for full color posters for THE VIRGIL SERIES.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *MAMA SLUDGE enters from the kitchen stirring something in a mixing bowl. It's clear she's in a good mood.*

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Singing.)* Bringin' in the sheaves, bringin' in the sheaves. We shall come rejoicin' bringin' in the sheaves! *(She crosses to the door that leads outside.)* Harley Wayne!! *(Sings softly as she waits for a response.)* Bringin' in the sheaves . . . Harley Wayne!! Bringin' in the sheaves, we shall come rejoicin' bringin' in . . . Harley Wayne, can you hear me?! *(To herself.)* That man is in the way when you don't want him; disappears when you do need him. *(Telephone rings.)* Bringin' in the sheaves . . . Hello? Virgil, where in the world are you? Hurry up, I need that lard for Uncle Lester's birthday cake. *(Laughs.)* Virgil, son, you're slow as molasses. Like I always say, a stitch in time makes a watermelon ripe. Get on over here. Bye. *(Hangs up.)* We shall come rejoicin' . . . Harley Wayne! *(To herself.)* Good for nothin' . . . *(Exits to the kitchen. HARLEY WAYNE enters from the outside wiping his hands on an oil rag.)*

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Singing to himself.)* I've been workin' on the railroad all the livelong day. What you need dumplin'? Hello? *(Crosses to the bedroom door.)* Snookims? *(Sings.)* I've been workin' on the railroad just to pass . . . *(Exits. MAMA SLUDGE enters from the kitchen.)*

MAMA SLUDGE: Bringin' in the sheaves . . . Harley Wayne? *(Crosses to outside door.)* We shall come rejoicin' . . . *(Exits to outside. HARLEY WAYNE reenters.)*

HARLEY WAYNE: Dina won't you blow, Dina won't you blow, Dina won't you blow your horn . . . sweetcakes? Now, where in the world? *(Exits to the kitchen. MAMA SLUDGE enters from outside.)*

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Crosses in front of the sofa.*) Are you hidin' from me? (*Sees a spot on the coffee table. She puts down her mixing bowl, bends to her knees and rubs the spot with her apron.* HARLEY WAYNE enters from kitchen eating a carrot. He looks around, shrugs and exits to outside. MAMA SLUDGE grabs her bowl and exits to the kitchen.) Bringin in the sheaves, we shall come rejoicin' bringin' in the sheaves.

MAMA HOOPER: (*Entering from outside carrying a covered dish.*) Yoo-hoo! Eloise? Yoo-hoo!

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Reentering from the kitchen.*) Come in, come in. Good mornin', thank you for comin' to help me so early.

MAMA HOOPER: Not a problem, glad to help!

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Taking the dish and setting it on a table.*) Did you bring that ball and chain with you?

MAMA HOOPER: Of course. You don't think I'd be lucky enough for him to stay home do you? He's out there talkin' to Harley Wayne.

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Crosses and looks out the door.*) Figures, men of a feather, flock together. I think he ignores me on purpose. (*Shouting out the door.*) Harley Wayne?! Harley Wayne, I don't see you cleanin' that barbecue pit! (*To MAMA HOOPER.*) We'll be eatin' two years worth of gunk if he don't clean that grill.

MAMA HOOPER: That's a scary thought.

MAMA SLUDGE: He sleeps, eats, and drinks that four-wheeler. Works on it day and night. That thing ain't never been the same since he blew it up with that gas fire last year.

MAMA HOOPER: Papa Hooper's not much better. I think he does stupid things just to make me mad.

MAMA SLUDGE: Like what?

PAPA HOOPER: (*Entering wearing his sunglasses on his head.*) Honey, have you seen my sunglasses?

MAMA HOOPER: (*Looks at MAMA SLUDGE as if to say, "See what I mean?"*) They're on top of your head, Einstein!

PAPA HOOPER: Well, looky there. If they would have been a snake

...

MAMA HOOPER: They would have bit you and put us all out of our misery.

MAMA SLUDGE: Papa Hooper, would you be kind enough to get my husband over to that barbecue pit? It needs to be scrubbed down somethin' awful.

PAPA HOOPER: Okey doke. *(Feels inside his pockets.)* Now, where did I put them sunglasses this time?

MAMA HOOPER: They're still on top of your head.

HARLEY WAYNE: Well, looky there. If they would have been a snake . . . *(Puts his sunglasses on and exits.)* Harley Wayne!

MAMA SLUDGE: You're right, he is brainless. Only person that makes me glad I'm married to Harley Wayne.

MAMA HOOPER: What you need me to do?

MAMA SLUDGE: Would you mind shining the dinner wear? It's all there on the coffee table.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Picking up a plastic fork.)* Oooooooooo, goin' all out this year. This is that strong thick plastic wear.

MAMA SLUDGE: Yeah, I quit usin' that cheap plastic when Harley Wayne lost his fork in the potato salad last Christmas.

MAMA HOOPER: *(Laughing.)* I remember that.

MAMA SLUDGE: Extra crispy potato salad.

MAMA HOOPER: You had to take him down to the hospital and have his stomach pumped.

MAMA SLUDGE: I asked them if they could do a brain transplant while they had him under.

MAMA HOOPER: *(Sitting down beginning her task.)* Yeah, this strong plastic is real nice.

MAMA SLUDGE: You can use that rag there.

PAMELA: *(Off stage.)* Yoo-hoo, Eloise? *(Knocks on the screen door.)* Anybody home?

MAMA SLUDGE: Good gravy, that's all I need. In here Chambers.

PAMELA: *(Entering with her dog.)* Here you are. Eloise, we need to talk.

MAMA SLUDGE: Speak your mind, Chambers, I wish you wouldn't bring that flea-infested dog into my clean house.

PAMELA: I assure you, my Doodles does not have fleas. *(To the dog.)* Don't listen to that crude old woman, oodles poodles Doodles.

MAMA SLUDGE: Whatever you've got to say, make it quick. I got to get a cake in the oven.

PAMELA: *(To MAMA HOOPER.)* What in tarnation are **you** doing?

MAMA HOOPER: Shining up the plastic silverware for the big wingding.

PAMELA: Wingding?

MAMA SLUDGE: Yeah, our semi-anal family reunion.

PAMELA: I think you mean semi-annual.

MAMA SLUDGE: That's what I said, semi-anal. That means we have it every other year.

PAMELA: *(With distaste.)* That's right, I usually plan a trip out of town the days your family gathers at your house.

MAMA SLUDGE: Not that I think you would accept but it wouldn't be very neighborly if I didn't at least invite you to join us today.

MAMA HOOPER: There will be plenty to eat Mrs. Chambers.

MAMA SLUDGE: Barbecued squirrel, grilled gator, deep-fried Doodles.

PAMELA: *(Holding her stomach.)* Please.

MAMA HOOPER: She's right Eloise. It's not fair to tease her if she can't stay to eat.

PAMELA: What an absolutely detestable thought.

MAMA HOOPER: See Eloise, just thinking about it makes her mouth water.

PAMELA: I assure you my mouth doesn't water. *(Crossing to the front door.)* Enough of this trivial chatter. I came over to speak with you about that dreadful eyesore standing out there in your front yard.

MAMA SLUDGE: Harley Wayne may not be handsome, but I wouldn't call him an eye sore.

PAMELA: I'm talking about that old broken down heap of garbage underneath the shade tree.

MAMA HOOPER: Oh, you must be talkin' about **MY** husband. Don't worry about him, he'll be gone after the reunion.

PAMELA: Pay attention ladies! I am referring to that junk car sitting on those cement blocks. It's an atrocity!

MAMA SLUDGE: Shows what you know. It's a Chevrolet.

PAMELA: Why is that wreck sitting right there where the whole world can see it?

MAMA SLUDGE: Harley Wayne is hopin' somebody will drive by and see it and want to buy it.

PAMELA: That car has been sitting out there for two months. It has a jungle growing around it. Mrs. Sludge, I need to inform you that I am Chairperson for the Bureau For The Ultimately Perfect Neighborhood. The committee has chosen me to speak with you concerning the lack of upkeep of your property.

MAMA SLUDGE: You know Chambers?

PAMELA: *(With haughtiness.)* Pamela. Please call me Pamela.

MAMA SLUDGE: Okay. You know Chambers, ever since you and that well-to-do husband of yours moved in next door, you have gave us nothin' but grief.

PAMELA: Given us nothing but grief.

MAMA SLUDGE: That's what I said. Now, we was livin' here first so if you don't like our style, take that ugly lookin' mutt and move on out!

PAMELA: *(Covering her dog's ears.)* How dare you speak about my Doodles that way.

MAMA SLUDGE: I was talkin' about your husband!

PAMELA: You don't seem to understand. Property value in this area is going down every day and I intend to do something about it.

MAMA SLUDGE: Then wear more makeup!

PAMELA: *(Trying to keep her cool.)* It is down because of this worthless trash dump you call a home.

MAMA HOOPER: Haven't you ever heard the sayin', "One man's trash is another man's treasure."

MAMA SLUDGE: Thanks a lot.

PAMELA: As you know, my husband and I are—

MAMA SLUDGE: —sharks.

PAMELA: Attorneys

MAMA SLUDGE: Same thing.

PAMELA: —and we have already discussed passing a neighborhood ordinance requiring property tidiness.

MAMA SLUDGE: You can't do that.

PAMELA: I assure you, dear Eloise, we can. We're drawing up a petition, and once we have enough names, the petition will become city ordinance. If you don't straighten up the appearance of your place, you'll be forced to move out.

MAMA HOOPER: Why, that's terrible!

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Picks up a nearby broom.*) It's time for you to go Chambers.

PAMELA: You wouldn't want to break your broom and destroy your only means of transportation.

MAMA SLUDGE: Why you—

PAMELA: Come along Doodles, you shouldn't be breathing this stale oxygen. Mummy will get you some din-din. (*To MAMA SLUDGE.*) He just loves lizards and other amphibian delicacies. I read in Pets R Us magazine that a nice steady diet of reptilian is good for a show dog's coat.

MAMA SLUDGE: Does he like snakes in the grass?

PAMELA: Oh, yes.

MAMA SLUDGE: Then you'd better be careful or he'll be nibblin' on you.

PAMELA: You haven't heard the last of me. (*Exits.*)

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Yelling after PAMELA.*) And that is the ugliest dog I have ever seen!

MAMA HOOPER: (*Tries to spell "ugly," shouting.*) Yeah, U – H – G – E – L – E – Y!!!!

MAMA SLUDGE: I don't think that's right, Beatrice.

MAMA HOOPER: She got the point.

MAMA SLUDGE: (*To MAMA HOOPER.*) Oh, she makes me so mad.

MAMA HOOPER: Eloise, don't let that woman get to you. This is a great day for the Sludge semi-anal family reunion.

MAMA SLUDGE: You're right Beatrice, out of sight out of my hair.

MAMA HOOPER: She's just talkin' to hear herself talk, lawyers are like that.

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Looking at her watch.*) I have got to get busy in the kitchen. (*She exits to the kitchen.*)

VIRGIL and MARGARET enter from outside. VIRGIL holds a tub of lard.

VIRGIL: Margaret I said I was sorry; I didn't mean nothin' by it.

MARGARET: You wouldn't have said it if you didn't mean it.

MAMA HOOPER: (*Shining the plastic wear.*) What are ya'll fussin' about?

MARGARET: Mama, Virgil makes me so mad sometimes.

VIRGIL: I didn't mean it the way it came out.

MARGARET: I told him I thought I was puttin' on a little weight and he said he noticed it too.

VIRGIL: What I meant to say was bein' big is not always bad.

MARGARET: Oooooooooohhhhh.

VIRGIL: There's nothing to worry about Margaret, I don't mind my woman a little pudgy.

MARGARET: Oooooooooohhhhh.

VIRGIL: *(To MAMA HOOPER.)* See what I mean? No matter what I say, she gets upset.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Reentering.)* Oh good Virgil, you brought that tub of lard with you.

MARGARET: Oooooooooohhhhh!

VIRGIL: Now what?

MARGARET: Even your mama thinks I'm fat.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Taking the lard.)* I'd love to stop and chat but I got tons to do. *(Exits to the kitchen.)*

MAMA HOOPER: Virgil, who taught you how to sweet-talk your wife?

VIRGIL: Daddy.

MAMA HOOPER: That figures. Margaret, now Virgil didn't mean nothin'.

MARGARET: But my hips are gettin' wider and wider.

MAMA HOOPER: Virgil, you don't think Margaret's hips are gettin' wider do you? *(VIRGIL looks at the audience and then back to MAMA HOOPER. She silently prompts him to shake his head "no.")*

VIRGIL: *(Catching her clues.)* N . . . noooo ma'am, no sireee; not your hips, them hips are just as wide as they were the day we married.

MARGARET: *(Cries on her MAMA'S shoulders.)* Oooooooooohhhhh! My hips are big.

VIRGIL: They're a little big.

MARGARET: Oooooooooohhhhh!

MAMA HOOPER: Virgil . . .

VIRGIL: *(Innocently.)* What I meant to say was I knew what I was gettin' when I married you so I can't complain.

MARGARET: Virgil Sludge, I never want to see you again!

MAMA HOOPER: (*Putting MARGARET'S head on her shoulder.*)

Honey, you don't mean that. You two are just having a little lover's spat, that's all. Your honeymoon stage is over. Here, why don't you sit down here and help your mama shine this plastic wear for the barbeque?

MARGARET: Okay, but you won't catch me eatin' nothin' today 'cause I'm goin' on a diet. I want to be skinny like I used to be.

VIRGIL: (*Innocently.*) When?

MAMA HOOPER: Virgil honey, I don't think I would say anything else if I was you.

VIRGIL: Well, I just don't understand. I try and try to say the right thing and do the right thing and all I get is this! Grief and distress!

MAMA HOOPER: I know you don't mean to say the wrong things; but sometimes you just need to think before you talk.

VIRGIL: Think?

MARGARET: Yeah Virgil, it's what you do with that thing called a brain.

VIRGIL: I think.

MARGARET: You think as much as this plastic fork thinks. Here, why don't you talk to it? You two should get along just fine.

VIRGIL: Well, talkin' to that fork sure would be easier than talkin' to a stubborn wife.

MARGARET: Stubborn?

VIRGIL: Yeah, stubborn. Stubborn as a pig.

MARGARET: Pigs are not stubborn, Virgil. Pigs are fat! See, you even compared me to a fat pig.

VIRGIL: I can't help it if pig was the first thing that popped into my head!

MARGARET: Oooooooooohhhh!! (*Stands and runs into the bedroom.*)

MAMA HOOPER: Margaret, honey, come back! (*Starts toward the door, turns to VIRGIL.*) Think Virgil! Think! Margaret!! (*Exits to the bedroom.*)

VIRGIL: (*Sighs. He picks up a plastic fork.*) Well, I tell you one thing; talkin' to you sure would be a heap of a lot easier than talkin' to her right now. 'Cause you can't get mad or get your feelin's hurt every time I open my mouth. I tell you Mr. Fork, I'm just not doin' too good of a job at this husband thing. We ain't been married a

year yet and we're already fussin' to beat the band. I love her so much and all I want to do is make her happy. (*HARLEY WAYNE enters wiping his hands on a rag.*) I don't think she's fat but every time I try and tell her that, it just comes out all wrong. (*HARLEY WAYNE is trying to see who VIRGIL is talking to.*) She's the love of my life. You're lucky, you sit here next to the plate never sayin' a word. You could use the knife to backstab the spoon, but you just sit there waitin' for another bite of potato salad. Hey, Margaret's right. Talkin' to you is easier than talkin' to her.

HARLEY WAYNE: Virgil?

VIRGIL: Hey daddy.

HARLEY WAYNE: Who you talkin' to?

VIRGIL: I was just talkin' to this here fork.

HARLEY WAYNE: You scared me there for a second. I thought you was talkin' to yourself. But just between you and me, (*Looks around to make sure no one is listening.*) you want good conversation, find a good oil rag to talk to. (*To his rag.*) Right Herman? (*Pats his pocket.*)

VIRGIL: Daddy, how come women are so hard to figure out?

HARLEY WAYNE: You and Margaret havin' a fight, huh?

VIRGIL: I just can't seem to say anything to make her happy.

HARLEY WAYNE: Ya'll are married now, she's not supposed to be happy.

VIRGIL: I try to be sweet and understandin' and all the rest of it.

HARLEY WAYNE: That's your problem, Virgil. Seems you're bein' too nice.

VIRGIL: I don't understand.

HARLEY WAYNE: You're too lovey-dovey with her. She's already learned how to get what she wants from you.

VIRGIL: She has?

HARLEY WAYNE: Every time she has a little tantrum or whimpers in the least, you cater to her every whim. You start apologizin' and tuckin' your tail between your legs like a whipped puppy.

VIRGIL: If I don't, she gets mad at me.

HARLEY WAYNE: Exactly. She gets mad, you tuck your tail and she knows you'll do anything she wants. It's a vicious cycle. You're turnin' her into a little spoiled brat.

VIRGIL: Nothin's little to Margaret.

HARLEY WAYNE: A **big** spoiled brat.

VIRGIL: That will get you into trouble, too.

HARLEY WAYNE: When a woman is spoiled, the whole world hates her. Nobody wants to be around her. And it's all your fault.

VIRGIL: Gosh, I didn't mean to make the world hate Margaret.

HARLEY WAYNE: The world hates her and she's got you talkin' to a plastic fork. That ain't healthy.

VIRGIL: Maybe I should try the spoon instead.

HARLEY WAYNE: Ain't much better. (*Pats his pocket.*) Right Herman?

VIRGIL: I guess that makes sense. But, how do I make the world love her again?

HARLEY WAYNE: (*Grabs VIRGIL'S shoulders.*) Tough love son. It won't be easy. But you got to let her know who is head of the family.

VIRGIL: I'll do it!

HARLEY WAYNE: Put her in her place!

VIRGIL: I will!

HARLEY WAYNE: Make the world fall in love with Margaret Sludge once again! Tell her you're the boss!

VIRGIL: (*Holding the fork up high.*) Oh, Margaret, I'll never fail you again! I'll . . . how do I do all that?

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Entering, wiping her hands on her apron.*) Harley Wayne, there you are.

HARLEY WAYNE: (*Nudging VIRGIL with his elbow.*) Watch and I'll show you.

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Approaching them.*) Have you cleaned that barbeque pit yet?

HARLEY WAYNE: No, I ain't finished fixin' the four wheeler.

MAMA SLUDGE: You been workin' on that four-wheeler all day. The pit ain't been cleaned in two years. No tellin' what we'll be puttin' in our mouths.

HARLEY WAYNE: I know for a fact Grandma is goin' to want a ride on the four-wheeler when she gets here and I don't want to disappoint her.

MAMA SLUDGE: I don't think a ninety-five year old woman needs to be ridin' a four-wheeler.

HARLEY WAYNE: This might be her last family reunion and ridin' on that four-wheeler will be the highlight of her summer. Grandma needs me, Ma. *(Throws a wink at VIRGIL, folding his arms. He thinks he's won.)*

MAMA SLUDGE: She needs you like she needs another nose on her face. Now get out there and clean that pit!

HARLEY WAYNE: Yes ma'am.

MAMA SLUDGE: Virgil, son, sometimes you've got to think before you blink.

VIRGIL: But daddy said that I'm supposed to—

HARLEY WAYNE: —Virgil, help me clean that pit!

MAMA SLUDGE: Like I always say, you can lead a horse to water but barkin' dogs never bite. The brush and pail is in the kitchen, Virgil, help your daddy.

VIRGIL: Yes ma'am. Way to go Daddy, you sure showed her a thing or two about barkin' dogs and thirsty horses! *(Gives his DAD a thumbs up and exits to the kitchen.)*

MAMA SLUDGE: What exactly did he mean by that?

HARLEY WAYNE: He's got a little mustard behind the ears when it comes to women so I gave him some advice.

MAMA SLUDGE: What are you ramblin' about?

HARLEY WAYNE: I just want the world to love you Mama.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Sarcastically.)* Me too, Harley Wayne. I was really worried about that.

HARLEY WAYNE: I don't want you to be despised and pitied.

MAMA SLUDGE: The only time I'm pitied is when somebody finds out I'm married to you.

PAPA HOOPER: *(Enters and stands inside the door.)* Harley Wayne, have you seen my sunglasses?

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Without looking.)* They're on top of your head, Leonard.

PAPA HOOPER: Look at that, if they'd been a snake . . . by the way, I think I got the four-wheeler goin'.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(To HARLEY WAYNE.)* Good, now get out there and clean the barbeque pit.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(to PAPA HOOPER.)* You didn't turn the four-wheeler on did you? I took the breaks off that thing.

VIRGIL: *(Entering from the kitchen.)* Hey Daddy, I see you got the four-wheeler runnin'. Just saw it ride past the kitchen window.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Turns to PAPA HOOPER.)* You put it in gear?

PAPA HOOPER: Yep, purrs like a kitten.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Running out the door.)* Leonard, you're the biggest idiot I've ever . . .

PAPA HOOPER: *(Turning to VIRGIL and MAMA SLUDGE.)* What did he call me?

VIRGIL: All I got was biggest idiot; I couldn't catch the rest.

MAMA SLUDGE: Virgil!

VIRGIL: Come on Papa Hooper, let's go help Daddy catch that thing.
(They exit.)

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Aside.)* Like I always say, there may be a barn on the hill, but that don't mean there's hay in the loft.

MAMA HOOPER and MARGARET enter from the bedroom.

MAMA SLUDGE: Margaret honey, what's wrong? You been cryin'?

MAMA HOOPER: I think Virgil and Margaret are havin' a little post honeymoon dilemma.

MARGARET: Virgil told me I was fat.

MAMA HOOPER: Margaret, he never said you were fat; you just misunderstood what he was sayin'.

MAMA SLUDGE: Bless his heart. Virgil means well, but that barn cat needs to get a hold of his tongue.

MARGARET: Well, I'll show him, I'm goin' to get so skinny he won't be able to find me.

MAMA SLUDGE: He loves you and you know it.

MARGARET: It ain't fair. I'm always concerned about his feelins'. I'm always sayin' how proud I am when he don't fall down the front steps and I never laugh when he takes his shirt off to go swimmin'.

MAMA SLUDGE: Men! You can't live with 'em and you can't take 'em to the swimmin' hole.

VIRGIL, HARLEY WAYNE and PAPA HOOPER run through from the bedrooms to the front door.

VIRGIL: It went around the front corner.

HARLEY WAYNE: I almost had it.

PAPA HOOPER: I dropped my sunglasses. *(They exit out the front door.)*

MAMA SLUDGE: I take that back, it would be pretty easy to take 'em to the swimmin' hole . . . and leave 'em!

MARGARET: Well, anyway, I'm goin' to give Virgil a taste of his own medicine.

MAMA HOOPER: Margaret, don't say nothin' you'll regret.

MAMA SLUDGE: I keep gettin' sidetracked. I've got to get that cake started.

MAMA HOOPER: Margaret, keep workin' on that plastic wear.

MARGARET: Okay mama. *(MAMA HOOPER and MAMA SLUDGE exit to the kitchen. MARGARET picks up the fork.)* You sure are lucky to be a fork. Life sure is hard sometimes for people.

BERTHA MAE enters running.

BERTHA MAE: Margaret! Margaret, I'm glad you're alone. I need to talk to you.

MARGARET: It's about time you two got here. Where's Ellard?

BERTHA MAE: Outside helpin' them catch that four-wheeler.

MARGARET: What do you need to talk to me about?

BERTHA MAE: It's just wonderful!

MARGARET: What is it?

BERTHA MAE: It's too good to be true!

MARGARET: What is it?

BERTHA MAE: I've got to go tell Mama! *(Starts to run to the kitchen but MARGARET cuts her off.)*

MARGARET: You're not goin' anywhere 'til you tell me what you're so excited about.

BERTHA MAE: It's Ellard.

MARGARET: Let's see, somethin' great that has to do with Ellard. He's breakin' up with you?

BERTHA MAE: Margaret, that ain't even funny.

MARGARET: If you don't tell me, I'm goin' to bust!

BERTHA MAE: I think Ellard is finally goin' to pop the question.

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, that's wonderful! I'm so happy for you. What makes you think he's goin' to ask you?

BERTHA MAE: Well, Seymour Gunther saw Ellard comin' out of Jerry's Jewelry and Bait Shop the other day and yesterday, Ellard said he had somethin' very important to ask me today.

MARGARET: I was beginnin' to think that boy was never goin' to ask for your hand.

BERTHA MAE: (*Shaking her hands in front of MARGARET.*) Here they are! I am so nervous. I've got to be sure and act surprised when he asks me. Will you help me practice? You be Ellard.

MARGARET: Okay. We can give it a shot. (*Clears her throat.*) Bertha Mae, I got somethin' very important to ask you.

BERTHA MAE: Somethin' important to ask me? Why, what ever could it be?

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, sit down. (*BERTHA MAE sits.*) We've been seein' each other on a regular basis for a long time.

BERTHA MAE: Yes Ellard.

MARGARET: And you know I'm fond of you Bertha Mae.

BERTHA MAE: Yes Ellard.

MARGARET: So I was just wonderin' . . .

BERTHA MAE: Yes Ellard . . .

MARGARET: If you would go fishin' with me with this new bait I bought at Jerry's Jewelry and Bait Shop?

BERTHA MAE: Oh, Ellard. You have made me the happiest... What do you mean go **fishin'** with your new bait? I have been waitin' this whole time for you to ask me to go fishin'?

MARGARET: Bertha Mae!

BERTHA MAE: I'll tell you one thing buster! You can just get somebody else to go fishin' with...

MARGARET: Bertha Mae!!

BERTHA MAE: And somebody else to marry you for that matter, 'cause I'm just tired of waitin'!

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, it's me. We was just pretendin'.

BERTHA MAE: Why did you get me all riled up that way?

MARGARET: Before you get all excited, just think about it. How do you know Ellard didn't go in Jerry's Jewelry and Bait Shop to buy some fishin' bait?

BERTHA MAE: 'Cause you don't give a girl a live minnow when you're goin' to ask her to marry you!

MARGARET: I'm not tryin' to rain on your parade Bertha Mae. I just don't want you to get your hopes up again like you have so many other times just to have them dashed to the ground.

BERTHA MAE: I just know he's goin' to go through with it this time. I feel it in my heart.

MARGARET: Or it could be that pizza you had for breakfast.

BERTHA MAE: Go ahead and make fun. Nothin' you can say is goin' to ruin my perfectly wonderful day!

MARGARET: Then what can I say except congratulations. (*Hugs her.*)

BERTHA MAE: Margaret, I can't believe the day is finally here that Ellard's goin' to propose. I know Ellard ain't the sharpest knife in the drawer and he's not the prettiest thing to look at, but I know beyond a shadow of a doubt I love him with all my soul.

MARGARET: Well, no matter how sweet they are before they marry you, they sure do turn into a different person after they walk down that aisle and say 'I do'.

BERTHA MAE: Really?

MARGARET: Take Virgil for example, he used to be the kindest, most sincere, polite person in the world. Now, all he does is tell me how fat I am.

BERTHA MAE: Then he noticed it, too?

MARGARET: Too?

BERTHA MAE: What I meant to say was . . .

MARGARET: You mean it's true? Why don't the whole world say it together? Margaret is turnin' into the Goodyear Blimp.

BERTHA MAE: More like a hot air balloon.

MARGARET: Thanks, I feel much better now.

BERTHA MAE: Margaret, you are not fat so stop it. And Virgil ain't changed a bit. He stuck his foot in his mouth millions of times before ya'll got married.

MARGARET: Well, I have decided I'm not goin' to spend the rest of my life sittin' down and takin' it. I'm goin' to fight back for married women everywhere.

BERTHA MAE: How did this conversation get switched to you all of a sudden? I was tellin' you Ellard is goin' to pop the question.

MARGARET: I was just givin' you fair warnin', that's all.

BERTHA MAE: Ellard's different. He treats me with respect and kindness.

MARGARET: Well, don't say I didn't warn you.

ELLARD enters carrying a shoebox. He's looking back out the front door.

ELLARD: Look at it this way Mr. Sludge; at least you got it stopped.

MARGARET: The four-wheeler? It's about time. I wonder how they caught it.

ELLARD: It hit a tree.

BERTHA MAE: There's my big strong handsome man. (*ELLARD looks behind him.*) Why you, you silly, silly boy. Why don't you come over here and take a load off those tired feet?

ELLARD: I ain't tired. I was wantin' to show Margaret my prize-winnin' red-eyed tree frog.

BERTHA MAE: Here, (*Taking the shoe box.*) let me take that for you. Put your feet up on this here table. There you go, are you comfortable?

MARGARET: Prize-winnin' red-eyed tree frog?

BERTHA MAE: Ellard entered his pet tree frog in the county fair last week.

ELLARD: First prize. See the blue ribbon? I won myself thirty dollars.

MARGARET: Thirty dollars? Gollee Ellard, what in the world are you goin' to do with so much money?

ELLARD: I went and bought somethin' real special with it. But I can't tell you what it is. It's a secret.

BERTHA MAE: Did you hear that Margaret? It's a secret. (*Winks at her.*)

MARGARET: Let me see your frog. (*Looks inside the shoebox.*) That's a red -eyed tree frog all right.

ELLARD: I named it Dr. Quack. That's short for Dr. Quacker.

BERTHA MAE: Ain't that clever? Dr. Quack. Ellard, you are so astute. (*To MARGARET.*) That means smart. I read that in Reader's Digest the other day.

PAPA HOOPER, HARLEY WAYNE and VIRGIL enter.

HARLEY WAYNE: If I told you once, I've told you a million times - never put the four-wheeler in gear when nobody is sittin' on it.

ELLARD: Virgil, I won! First place, see?

VIRGIL: Well, what do you know? Dr. Quack did it. Way to go Quacker. Ellard, looks like 'ole Doc here is puttin' on a little weight.

ELLARD: Yeah, feedin' him too many fireflies. Sometimes when he burps he spits fireballs.

MARGARET: Looks like Virgil has a keen sense of vision when it comes to noticin' things puttin' on weight.

ELLARD: Speakin' of puttin' on weight, Margaret have you . . .

VIRGIL: Ellard!

MARGARET: Have I what?

VIRGIL: He was just goin' to ask you if you've always been that skinny.

ELLARD: *(Laughs.)* Virgil, that's a good one.

MARGARET: *(Runs to the bedroom.)* Oooooooooohhhh!

BERTHA MAE: *(To ELLARD.)* To be so sweet and sensitive, you sure can be dumb sometimes.

ELLARD: What did I say?

VIRGIL: Margaret is a little sensitive about gainin' a little weight.

MAMA HOOPER enters to pick up some plastic wear.

HARLEY WAYNE: Her hips are wider than the African Continent.

PAPA HOOPER: She takes after her mama. My dumplin' was as skinny as a Q-tip when we first got married; but now I couldn't drive my tractor around them hips of hers without runnin' out of gas. *(Laughs. Doesn't see MAMA HOOPER. Starts his pretend tractor and makes noises with his mouth.)* Stand still honey; don't let me run over your foot. *(Takes his tractor around the coffee table.)* Gosh, this trip might take all day. Come on tractor, you can do it. *(He backs up to his wife. Without turning around, he speaks to his friends.)* She's behind me ain't she?

MAMA HOOPER: And may I ask what you are doin' Leonard?

PAPA HOOPER: *(Like a child.)* Drivin' my tractor.

MAMA HOOPER: Around my hips?

PAPA HOOPER: Yeah.

MAMA HOOPER: Long trip?

PAPA HOOPER: No.

MAMA HOOPER: Short trip?

PAPA HOOPER: Yeah.

MAMA HOOPER: How short?

PAPA HOOPER: Real short. Didn't take no time at all.

MAMA HOOPER: Goin' to help Virgil clean that pit?

PAPA HOOPER: Yeah.

MAMA HOOPER: When?

PAPA HOOPER: Right now.

MAMA HOOPER: Good idea. *(He walks out defeated.)*

VIRGIL: I'm goin' too. *(As he exits.)* And I'm stayin' off that tractor.

PAMELA: *(Bursting in.)* I want to know what's the meaning of this?

HARLEY WAYNE: I got to take a nap. *(Heads for the bedroom.)*

PAMELA: You stop right there!

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Entering.)* We got us a house full of company comin' for a reunion and nobody's out there cleanin' that pit.

MAMA HOOPER: Virgil and Leonard went out there Eloise.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(To PAMELA.)* What are you doin' back in here?

PAMELA: I am here to tell that joke-of-a-man I have called the police.

MAMA SLUDGE: What did he do this time?

PAMELA: His incompetence is showing once again, that's all.

PAPA HOOPER: *(Pulling at his shirt.)* It is not.

PAMELA: He ran that hideous four-wheeled thingamabob through my geranium bed crushing every tiny blossom underneath its horrendous poundage.

MAMA SLUDGE: Now, say it again; this time a little slower.

PAMELA: Your husband is doltish, obtuse and moronic.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(To HARLEY WAYNE.)* And all this time I thought you was just dumb.

PAMELA: You'd better be ready to pay the price for this disastrous mishap mister.

MAMA SLUDGE: Would somebody please tell me what this woman is talkin' about?

ELLARD: The best I can tell: Ms. Chambers is mad at Mr. Sludge about somethin'.

PAMELA: You all are a bunch of barbaric dunderplates!

MAMA SLUDGE: It's a little late for compliments.

HARLEY WAYNE: I'll tell you what she's upset about. The four-wheeler got loose and smashed her flower garden underneath her fancy balcony.

MAMA SLUDGE: Harley Wayne, I told you that four-wheeler was goin' to be nothin' but trouble. Like I always say, a new broom sweeps clean but a dirty mop breeds algae.

PAMELA: Not only did he crush my ornate geraniums; he tried to hide his blunder by replanting them in the dirt.

PAPA HOOPER: One thing about geraniums; they don't stand up too good after bein' run over by a four-wheeler.

MAMA HOOPER: It's all Leonard's fault. He's the one who kicked that stupid thing in gear.

HARLEY WAYNE: That's right. He's the one who turned it on. It's his fault!

MAMA SLUDGE: Harley Wayne Sludge, you mean to tell me you'd let your best friend take the heat on this?

HARLEY WAYNE: This is where I say 'no' ain't it?

BERTHA MAE: Come on Ellard, let's go help Virgil with the barbeque pit.

ELLARD: No! I want to see Mr. Sludge get arrested.

BERTHA MAE: Come on, you can see him get arrested outside.

ELLARD: Mr. Sludge, can I have your four-wheeler after you get sent up the river?

BERTHA MAE: Let's go Ellard! *(Pulls him outside.)*

MAMA SLUDGE: Now Chambers, you can't be serious about callin' the law on my husband. The whole thing was an accident.

PAMELA: I assure you I am quite serious. And that is just the beginning. Some how I am going to see to it all of you are out of my way for good!

MAMA HOOPER: Don't worry Harley Wayne, I'll make sure Leonard goes to jail with you. I've been wantin' to get him out of the way so I can get some cleanin' done anyway.

MAMA SLUDGE: Now look, I got carloads of relatives comin' over today for a nice friendly get together. This is our semi-anal reunion and I won't let you mess it up!

PAMELA: You should have thought of that before marrying this Philistine.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(To his wife.)* I thought we was Baptist.

PAMELA: Destruction of property is a serious matter Mr. Sludge.

HARLEY WAYNE: Oh yeah? Well, you'd better not leave that crusty K-9 by himself or we'll call the exterminators.

PAMELA: I can't believe you would use such vulgarity in Doodle's presence. Don't listen to the mad man my little darling. Mommy won't let anything happen to her sweetness.

HARLEY WAYNE: Come here little poochy, Harley Wayne is hungry.

PAMELA: Stay away from him! You're all crazy! *(She exits running.)*

HARLEY WAYNE: That should keep her out of the way for a while.

MAMA SLUDGE: You're just goin' to get yourself into deeper trouble. This day is goin' to be a disaster, I just know it.

MARGARET: *(Coming out of the bedroom.)* Mama, I think I'm goin' to go home now.

MAMA HOOPER: Go home? But the reunion hasn't even started yet.

MARGARET: I don't feel much like celebratin'.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(To his wife.)* Honey, if I'm goin' to the slammer, I'll need some clean underwear.

MAMA SLUDGE: Now listen to me real good. I have spent weeks gettin' ready for this blasted gatherin' and by doggies everybody is goin' to stay and have the time of their good-for-nothin' lives!

MAMA HOOPER: *(To MARGARET.)* Besides honey, it's Uncle Lester's birthday. If you won't stay for me, stay for Uncle Lester.

MARGARET: I just don't think I can stand to look at my husband one more minute today. He makes me so mad.

MAMA HOOPER: Girl, you do have the post honeymoon blues.

HARLEY WAYNE: I sure hope I don't get put in the same cell with a bunch of mad killers.

MARGARET: Okay, I'll stay for Uncle Lester; but if Virgil even looks at me the wrong way—

MAMA SLUDGE: He won't honey, everything is goin' to be just fine.

HARLEY WAYNE: If I tell a bunch of murderers and thieves I was thrown in the slammer for runnin' over geraniums, I'll be the laughin' stock of the big house.

MAMA HOOPER: If they hear about the geraniums, they'll do more than laugh.

HARLEY WAYNE: You're right, I'd better tell them I knocked off a bank or somethin' big like that.

MAMA SLUDGE: You're goin' to wish you WAS in prison if you don't start helpin' me get ready for these in-laws we've got comin'.

MAMA HOOPER: Well, I'm goin' to get back to the kitchen. Still lots to do.

MAMA SLUDGE: I'm right behind you Beatrice. (*MAMA HOOPER exits to the kitchen.*)

MARGARET: Mama Sludge, could I talk to you for a minute now that we're alone?

MAMA SLUDGE: But we ain't alone Margaret, Harley Wayne is still here. (*They look at him. He has pulled out his oil rag and is petting it.*)

MARGARET: No ma'am, I think we're alone. Mama Sludge, did Daddy Sludge ever make you feel bad about yourself since you've been married?

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Laughing.*) If I had a dime for every cruel thing he said, I'd be a rich woman, buy my own house and move out for good.

MARGARET: I haven't heard him say anything bad about you lately.

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Looking at her watch.*) He should be comin' up on one now. Three, two, one . . . (*Points at HARLEY WAYNE.*)

HARLEY WAYNE: (*To his rag.*) 'Course, goin' to prison means I'll get a decent meal to eat for a change.

MAMA SLUDGE: You don't like my cookin', you can find someplace else to live . . . for good. (*To MARGARET.*) See, you just got to put it right back to 'em. Makes everything fair.

MARGARET: That was a good one Mama Sludge. (*To herself.*) Just put it right back to 'em. That seems easy enough.

MAMA SLUDGE: Harley Wayne, you go outside and watch for the police. If they ask you anything, tell them you're our cousin from the country.

HARLEY WAYNE: From the country? Okay, (*As he exits to outside.*) I'll need to brush up on my hick accent.

MARGARET: (*As she and MAMA exit to the kitchen.*) Virgil, if you don't like my cookin', you can just find some place else to live.

MAMA SLUDGE: Good job honey. (*Sings as MARGARET joins her.*) Bringin' in the sheaves, bringin' in the sheaves, we shall come rejoicin' bringin' in the sheaves. (*They exit.*)

ELLARD rushes in from outside. He's dragging VIRGIL by the arm.

ELLARD: Hurry up Virgil, I don't want Bertha Mae to hear me.

VIRGIL: We really need to get that pit cleaned up Ellard.

ELLARD: Just listen to me for a second, this is comin' up on one of the most important moments of my life.

VIRGIL: Even more important than winnin' first place with Dr. Quack?

ELLARD: I ain't sure. Is gettin' engaged more important than a prize tree frog?

VIRGIL: Engaged? To Bertha Mae?

ELLARD: Yeah Virgil. I done been bit.

VIRGIL: Well, so have I Ellard. The mosquitoes are terrible this time of the year.

ELLARD: I ain't been bit by mosquitoes, I've been bit by the love bug.

VIRGIL: Spray on some repellent and you'll be fine. (*Heads for the door. ELLARD grabs him.*)

ELLARD: You don't understand. I'm in love with Bertha Mae and I'm ready to take the dive, walk the plank, wear the 'ole ball and chain and all them other romantic things. Problem is I'm not quite sure how to pop the question.

VIRGIL: And you wanted to get advice from your best friend who knows his way with women?

ELLARD: Right. But he was out of town so I'm askin' you.

VIRGIL: What do you want to know?

ELLARD: Well, Bertha Mae is your sister so I figured you knew her pretty good. How should I talk to her about it?

VIRGIL: Just ask her. It ain't like she's goin' to say "no." I mean who else is she goin' to marry? She ain't the Queen of England you know.

ELLARD: Who's the Queen of England?

VIRGIL: I don't know. I heard Margaret talk about her. I think she's on one of them TV programs. You know, I Love Lucy, Laverne and Shirley, Queen of England.

ELLARD: Bertha Mae is more than a queen to me; she deserves the best.

VIRGIL: But you're goin' to marry her anyway?

ELLARD: I know I'm not the prize bull but I'll give Bertha Mae a good life.

VIRGIL: Face it Ellard, we're not even the prize jackass.

ELLARD: Oh yeah? Well I'm the nicest jackass you'll ever meet.

VIRGIL: Bertha Mae will be lucky to catch a fish like you.

ELLARD: But what do I say? I mean, how do I get started askin' her?

VIRGIL: Let's see. Help me think Ellard.

ELLARD: Okay, but it don't always work.

VIRGIL: I got it. You want to be romantic right?

ELLARD: I guess so.

VIRGIL: Start out some how like this: Bertha Mae, who in the whole wide world can sweep you off your feet? I can. Who can make you the happiest girl in Lickskillit?

ELLARD: I can!

VIRGIL: Who can make you hoe the garden or clean up my messes? I can!

ELLARD: I can!

VIRGIL: Who can love you more than anybody else?

ELLARD throws up his finger into the air but forgets what to say.

VIRGIL: Say it.

ELLARD: Uh . . .

VIRGIL: You can!

ELLARD: You can!

VIRGIL: Ellard, you're goin' to have to meet me half way.

ELLARD: I'm sorry Virgil, I'm just nervous.

VIRGIL: *(Continuing.)* The pain my heart endures when I'm away from you is utter agony.

ELLARD: Agony. That's good Virgil. Utter agony. That's poetry, that's what it is.

VIRGIL: I can't take all the credit. I watch a lot of late-night cable TV. Now, let's review. The pain your heart endures when you're away from her is . . .

ELLARD: I can!

VIRGIL: Utter agony!

ELLARD: Utter agony!

VIRGIL: Who can make her the happiest girl when she walks into the room?

ELLARD: You can!

VIRGIL: I can!

ELLARD: You can?

VIRGIL: YOU can!

ELLARD: That's what I said.

VIRGIL: (*Frustrated.*) Let's keep goin'. You bow on one knee, you hold her hand and you say Bertha Mae, I'm nuts about you!

ELLARD: Let me try. Bertha Mae, I'm . . .

VIRGIL: Nuts!

ELLARD: Bertha Mae, I'm nuts!

VIRGIL: About you, Ellard. I'm nuts about YOU!

ELLARD: Ah, Virgil. You're makin' me blush.

VIRGIL: You're crazy about Bertha Mae. Ellard, you've got to remember.

ELLARD: Bertha Mae, I'm nuts about you. Every time I see you walk into a room, I am in utter agony.

VIRGIL: No! No! No! You keep goin' that way, Bertha Mae will be runnin' in the other direction.

ELLARD: I'm just no good at this romantic talk. Virgil, what am I goin' to do?

VIRGIL: If you just wasn't so simple minded.

ELLARD: Thanks for tryin' anyway.

VIRGIL: Ellard, I didn't mean that. You're just tryin' too hard. I'll think of some way to help you out with this. By the end of this day, you and Bertha Mae will be betrothed for sure.

ELLARD: I'd rather be engaged.

MARGARET: (*Entering speaking to VIRGIL.*) Oh, it's you.

ELLARD: Uh, anyway Virgil, thank you for teachin' me the . . . uh . . . best way to crank my tractor.

VIRGIL: Huh?

ELLARD: I'm sure Bertha Mae will enjoy it very much. See you outside. *(Exits quickly.)*

MARGARET: Virgil, I think it's time we had us a little talk.

VIRGIL: About what?

MARGARET: About these little spats we've been havin'.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Offstage.)* You're turnin' her into a spoiled little wife. That ain't fair to her Virgil. You've got to make the world fall in love with Margaret Sludge once again.

VIRGIL: You mean these spats about you bein' fat?

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Offstage.)* You just got to put it right back to 'em Margaret. Makes everything fair.

MARGARET: Course, I don't know how you notice anything about me when you're blind as a bat.

VIRGIL: You callin' me a bat?

MARGARET: You called me a pig!!

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Offstage.)* Make the world fall in love with Margaret Sludge.

VIRGIL: You want me to be honest?

MARGARET: I'm all ears.

VIRGIL: And then some.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Offstage.)* You got to put it back to 'em Margaret.

MARGARET: Oh yeah? Well it wouldn't hurt you to try contact lenses.

VIRGIL: And why is that?

MARGARET: Them glasses sure don't help your looks none.

VIRGIL: You callin' me blind and ugly?

MARGARET: I just think—

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Offstage.)* —put it back to 'em.

MARGARET: Yes, you could stand to improve your looks a mite.

VIRGIL: Oh yeah? Well . . .

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Offstage.)* Make the world fall in love with Margaret Sludge.

VIRGIL: I . . . I . . .

MARGARET: You got somethin' to say, say it.

VIRGIL: I'm tryin' to if you'd give me half a chance.

MARGARET: So now I talk too much is that it?

VIRGIL: Sometimes.

MARGARET: How many fingers am I holdin' up?

VIRGIL: Two.

MARGARET: Take off your glasses and tell me.

VIRGIL: *(Takes his glasses off.)* Two. *(Puts his glasses back on.)*

MARGARET: You already knew. Take your glasses off first.

VIRGIL: *(Takes his glasses off.)* They're off.

MARGARET: *(Holds up five fingers.)* How many fingers do I have up this time?

VIRGIL: One.

MARGARET: See, you're blind. I had up five.

VIRGIL: You changed after I told you a number.

MARGARET: Now I'm a cheat. Well, aren't you the lucky one. You have married yourself a fat cheating blabbermouth. Ain't that wonderful?

VIRGIL: Nobody's perfect.

MARGARET: Maybe you should just keep your glasses off; that way you wouldn't have to look at me.

VIRGIL: That's not a bad idea!

MARGARET: You're a brute.

VIRGIL: You're bruter.

MARGARET: Savage.

VIRGIL: Savager.

MARGARET: Cruel.

VIRGIL: Crueler.

MARGARET: Swine!

VIRGIL: If I'm a swine, that should make you feel right at home bein' around your own kind.

Everything is quiet for a few seconds.

MARGARET: That's the meanest thing you could have said to me.

VIRGIL: There are meaner things.

MARGARET: I don't want to play this game anymore.

VIRGIL: Fine. *(He starts to exit. He stops at the door and speaks to himself.)* I only want the world to love you Margaret. I didn't know it would have to hurt so much. *(Exits to outside.)*

MARGARET: *(Picks up a plastic fork.)* What you lookin' at? Ain't you ever seen a fat cheating blabbermouth? *(Sits on the sofa and sighs.)* I shouldn't have said them things to Virgil. *(Stands and starts to exit to outside.)*

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Entering, plucking a chicken.)* Margaret, where are you goin'?

MARGARET: To apologize to Virgil. I said some awful things to him.

MAMA SLUDGE: Did he say awful things first?

MARGARET: Yeah. I mean, I think so. It all happened so fast. He just looked so hurt when he walked out of here.

MAMA SLUDGE: Virgil's a tough cookie. Not much bothers him. As long as you didn't say nothin' about the glasses.

MARGARET: Ughhh.

MAMA SLUDGE: He's very sensitive about wearin' glasses. When he was growin' up all the kids at school made fun of his thick glasses. One thing said about his glasses, he's down in the dumps for days. But I know you're too sweet to say anything about him wearin' glasses so I wouldn't worry about nothin'. *(Shouting, with hands on hips.)* Virgil, what in the world are you doin'? Get up from there this very minute.

MARGARET: *(Concerned.)* What's he doin'?

MAMA SLUDGE: Layin' out there in the middle of the street. You'd think he was tryin' to get hisself run over by a car. *(Shouting.)* Harley Wayne, get your son out of the road before company starts arrivin'! How embarrassin'! Like I always say, still waters run deep, but an empty creek is an ugly sight. Got to get this chicken stuffed. *(Exits to the kitchen.)*

MARGARET: *(Sits on the sofa slowly.)* Oh, Virgil. *(Slow fade.)*

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE: *The room is empty. There is a picture of a barn hanging crooked on the wall. MAMA SLUDGE enters from the kitchen carrying a plate of something covered in aluminum foil. She crosses to the front door.*

MAMA SLUDGE: Ellard, could you come take this please?

ELLARD: *(Entering and taking the plate.)* Got the pit nice and clean Mrs. Sludge.

MAMA SLUDGE: Tell Harley Wayne not to leave the chicken on there too long. Don't want it burnt.

ELLARD: We can't find your husband Mrs. Sludge. He's disappeared.

MAMA SLUDGE: Can't find him? He's done off laly-gaggin' around again. Tell Papa Hooper to put 'em on will you Ellard?

ELLARD: Yes ma'am.

MAMA SLUDGE: You go ahead and I'll get a tablecloth for the picnic table. *(ELLARD exits. MAMA SLUDGE spots the crooked picture.)* Now, I straightened that picture myself. *(She straightens it.)* What a strange strange day. *(She crosses to a pine box and opens it. HARLEY WAYNE hands her a tablecloth.)* Thank you honey. *(She closes the box and does a double take. She reopens the box.)* Harley Wayne?

HARLEY WAYNE: Has the police showed up yet?

MAMA SLUDGE: Harley Wayne, you are sittin' on my best quilts? Get out of there before I call the police myself.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Stepping out.)* Maybe she changed her mind.

MAMA SLUDGE: You plannin' on hidin' the rest of your life?

HARLEY WAYNE: I don't know, she was pretty mad.

MAMA SLUDGE: Not half as mad as I'm goin' to be if you don't go get that chicken goin'. Everybody will start showin' up at any time now.

HARLEY WAYNE: Okay sweetcakes. *(HARLEY WAYNE exits to outside. MAMA SLUDGE exits to the kitchen.)*

MARGARET: *(Entering from the kitchen with a cooking mitten on her hand.)* The potato salad's ready.

MAMA SLUDGE: Good, Margaret. Will you pour up the ice tea?
(*Exits.*)

BERTHA MAE enters from the bedroom tying a full-length frilly apron around her waist.

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, where did you get that apron?

BERTHA MAE: How do you like it?

MARGARET: You look real domestic.

BERTHA MAE: Darn. I wanted to look like a housewife. That way Ellard won't have any second thoughts about marryin' me.

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, it's awful.

BERTHA MAE: It is? (*Starts to take the apron off.*)

MARGARET: Not your apron, I was talkin' about Virgil.

BERTHA MAE: Virgil's awful?

MARGARET: What I said to him. Bertha Mae, I must be the worst wife in the whole world! I said some very hurtful things to him.

BERTHA MAE: (*Retying her apron.*) I wouldn't worry about that. Virgil don't let things bother him much. For some reason, the only time Virgil gets upset is when somebody says something about his glasses.

MARGARET: (*Plops down on the sofa.*) Oooooooooohhhh!

BERTHA MAE: Maybe the apron's too much. I don't want Ellard to get too excited all at once.

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, I said somethin' about Virgil's glasses.

BERTHA MAE: Yeah, but you probably said how nice they look on him. (*MARGARET'S quiet.*) You probably told him how smart they made him look. (*MARGARET'S quiet.*) How they set off his beautiful blue eyes? (*Quiet.*) What **did** you say about his glasses?

MARGARET: I said, "Virgil, them glasses sure don't help your looks none."

BERTHA MAE: You did?

MARGARET: You need to wear contact lenses.

BERTHA MAE: You did?

MARGARET: I made him take off his glasses and tell me how many fingers I had up.

BERTHA MAE: You're right Margaret, you are a terrible wife.

MARGARET: Oooooooooohhh.

BERTHA MAE: I didn't mean that.

MARGARET: What can I ever say to make it up to him?

BERTHA MAE: Gee Margaret, I ain't sure. That was downright mean.

MARGARET: Virgil went out and laid down in the street after I told him.

BERTHA MAE: Wow. The last time Virgil laid down in the street is when he was in junior high school and the school bully called him a four-eyed Mr. Magoo.

MARGARET: You're not makin' me feel any better Bertha Mae. What did Virgil do after the bully called him four-eyes?

BERTHA MAE: After we finally got him out of the road, Virgil tried to go without his glasses because he was so self-conscious.

MARGARET: And what happened?

BERTHA MAE: He got hit by a truck in the first five minutes.

MARGARET: Poor Virgil. I may have hurt him beyond repair.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Off stage.)* Bertha Mae, could you help me a minute?

BERTHA MAE: *(Heading to the kitchen.)* Oh, I hope Ellard sees me before I get somethin' on my apron. *(Exits to the kitchen. VIRGIL enters from outside. He has taken his glasses off and finds it hard to make his way through the screen door. He stands there looking off into space.)*

MARGARET: Hey Virgil.

VIRGIL: Bertha Mae, is that you? Have you seen Margaret?

MARGARET: Virgil, it's . . .

VIRGIL: I said some really awful things to her today and I need to find her and tell her I'm sorry.

MARGARET: You do?

VIRGIL: I just don't know how I could have been so stupid? She's the most beautiful thing in the world to me. I'm lucky to have her, that's what I am, lucky. Why she would even want to marry a dumb, ugly, blind person like me I'll never understand. I've got to show her Bertha Mae. I've got to show her I can measure up to her ideal man. Startin' right now. *(Beat.)* Bertha Mae, you puttin' on a little weight? *(MARGARET has crossed to him. She takes*

his glasses out of his pocket and puts them on him.) Margaret?
Where did Bertha Mae go?

MARGARET: Virgil, I never noticed somethin'.

VIRGIL: What, that I'm even uglier without my glasses?

MARGARET: No. How your glasses magnify the baby blue in yours eyes.

VIRGIL: *(Blinking.)* They do?

MARGARET: And how smart they make you look.

VIRGIL: They do?

MARGARET: *(With a smile.)* Oh, Virgil. Let's not ever be cruel to each other again.

VIRGIL: I just didn't want the world to hate you.

MARGARET: I don't know what that means so I'm not even goin' to ask.

VIRGIL: It don't matter anyway. Margaret, whatever may slip out of this mouth, just remember one thing. I love you just the way you are.

MARGARET: Me too Virgil.

VIRGIL: I'm glad we made up, that black top was gettin' awful hot out there. *(They hug.)*

HARLEY WAYNE runs in and hides behind the sofa. He tells VIRGIL and MARGARET to "Shhhh!" PAMELA storms in pulling a cop behind her.

PAMELA: I saw him run in here somewhere. Virgil, where did your father go?

VIRGIL: Behind the couch. But don't say nothin', he's hidin' from somebody.

PAMELA: There he is! Arrest that man!

HARLEY WAYNE: *(To VIRGIL.)* Thanks a lot son!

POLICEMAN: *(Pulling out his notes.)* You have the right to remain silent . . .

HARLEY WAYNE: I told her I was goin' to buy her some new flowers!

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Entering from the kitchen with BERTHA MAE.)*
Bertha Mae, put this bowl of corn out on the table and check to make sure Papa Hooper has that grill goin'.

VIRGIL: Mama, Daddy's gettin' arrested.

POLICEMAN: You have the right to an attorney . . .

MAMA SLUDGE: Well, he'll just have to get arrested later, our first carload of company is pullin' in the driveway.

HARLEY WAYNE: But puddin', they'll take me away.

MAMA SLUDGE: Okay, okay. I'll fix you a plate to take with you. You want potato salad or cole slaw?

HARLEY WAYNE: Did you put onions in the potato salad this time?

ELLARD: (*Running in with his shoe box.*) Virgil, Dr. Quacker, he's gone! He's not in his box.

BERTHA MAE: Hey Ellard, how do you like my apron?

POLICEMAN: You have the right to an attorney...

HARLEY WAYNE: You can't take me away now; I've got to take Grandma ridin' on my four-wheeler.

ELLARD: My prize-winnin' red eyed tree frog, Dr. Quacker, Dr. Quack for short. Virgil, what am I goin' to do?

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, be sure and try the corn, I cooked it.

MAMA and PAPA HOOPER enter from outside.

MAMA HOOPER: Eloise, the first carload of company just showed up.

POLICEMAN: If you can not afford an attorney, you will be appointed one.

MAMA SLUDGE: I ain't too sure a man can be arrested for breakin' azaleas.

PAMELA: It's not just the azaleas. Mrs. Sludge, your husband is a hooligan.

MAMA SLUDGE: Good heavens Harley Wayne, I told you to chew with your mouth closed.

PAMELA: That means thief. You're dumber than a sack of hammers.

VIRGIL: My daddy may be a little dumb, but he ain't no thief.

BERTHA MAE: Margaret, Ellard ain't sayin' one thing about my apron.

POLICEMAN: You have the right to one phone call.

MAMA SLUDGE: Why you callin' him a thief?

PAMELA: He stole my pocket book.

HARLEY WAYNE: Why would I steal a pocket book. I can't even read.

POLICEMAN: Do you understand these rights?

MAMA SLUDGE: *(To PAMELA.)* You have done lost your mind.

PAMELA: *(Begins searching.)* I'm sure if we look hard enough, we'll find it.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Shouting through the screen door.)* Hello Polly! Hello Lester! Beatrice, they're gettin' out of the car.

ELLARD: If he's a thief, he probably stole Dr. Quacker or Dr. Quack for short.

VIRGIL: Ellard!

MAMA HOOPER: *(Out the door.)* We'll be right with you.

BERTHA MAE: *(With hands on hips.)* That's all I hear: Dr. Quacker, Dr. Quacker, Dr. Quacker.

ELLARD: Sometimes you hear Dr. Quack, for short.

BERTHA MAE: Do I have to win first prize in a tree frog contest to get you to notice me?

ELLARD: Don't be silly Bertha Mae, except for your thighs, you don't look nothin' like a tree frog.

PAMELA: *(Retrieving her purse from the sofa cushion.)* A-ha! What do you call this? *(Everyone gasps.)*

MAMA SLUDGE: Harley Wayne!

HARLEY WAYNE: I didn't put that there! I've been framed!

PAPA HOOPER: *(Popping some peanuts into his mouth.)* Hey everybody, he's right. *(Points to a picture of HARLEY WAYNE on the wall.)*

PAMELA: Okay officer, do your job and get him out of here.

POLICEMAN: Let's go, you low-life scum.

HARLEY WAYNE: *(Speaking past ELLARD to his wife.)* Honey, sweetcakes, dumplin', honey bunch, do somethin'!

ELLARD: You can sweet-talk me all you want but there ain't a thing I can do.

MAMA SLUDGE: Officer, would you mind takin' him out the back door? My company is out front.

HARLEY WAYNE: Sweetcakes, ain't you goin' to do somethin'?

VIRGIL: You bring my daddy back here right now!

MARGARET: That's tellin' him Virgil!

VIRGIL: If you take him, you'll just have to take me too!

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POLICEMAN: (*Sighs. To VIRGIL.*) You have the right to remain silent . . .

VIRGIL: (*To MARGARET.*) What do you know, he called my bluff.

POLICEMAN: You all don't understand; we've got to keep scum like this off the street.

ELLARD: You can't say that about my girlfriend's daddy.

BERTHA MAE: You mean your EX-girlfriend.

POLICEMAN: (*To ELLARD.*) You give me trouble, I'll take you too.

ELLARD: Get that scum out of here.

MAMA HOOPER: (*Yelling through the door.*) Just have a seat right there under the shade tree. Eloiseeeeeee!!

MAMA SLUDGE: Chambers, you're messin' up my family reunion. Harley Wayne, tell her you're sorry.

HARLEY WAYNE: But I didn't do it.

MAMA SLUDGE: He said he didn't do it.

PAMELA: Then what is my purse doing in the sofa?

MAMA SLUDGE: She's got you there Harley Wayne.

MAMA HOOPER: Leonard, get out there and keep our company preoccupied.

PAPA HOOPER: Harley Wayne, do you need proof you've been framed?

HARLEY WAYNE: I sure do.

PAPA HOOPER: Hey Copper! (*Points to HARLEY WAYNE'S picture.*)

MAMA HOOPER: Shut up and get outside. (*Pushing him out.*) And don't let anybody come in here.

ELLARD: (*Shouting after him.*) Be careful where you step, my red-eyed tree frog may be on the loose! (*PAPA HOOPER tiptoes out the door.*)

MAMA HOOPER: Another car's pullin' in Eloise.

VIRGIL: Daddy couldn't have stolen your purse Mrs. Chambers because I stole it!

MARGARET: Virgil.

ELLARD: Virgil, you didn't steal her purse, 'cause I stole it.

BERTHA MAE: Ellard!

MAMA SLUDGE: None of you stole the purse 'cause I did.

MAMA HOOPER: You couldn't have Eloise, 'cause I did it.

MARGARET: No, I did!

BERTHA MAE: Don't look at me!

POLICEMAN: Quiet!! This is a classic case of takin' up for the culprit. Now, we're goin' to get to the bottom of this and we're goin' to do it right now!

PAPA HOOPER: *(Sticking his head through the outside door.)*
Everybody just shut up and answer me one thing! Has anybody seen my sunglasses?

Everyone is quiet for a second then all chime in arguing with one another as lights fade to a . . . BLACKOUT. END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

AT RISE: *The living room is empty. The picture of the barn is crooked again. MAMA SLUDGE enters from the kitchen carrying a plate of rolls as MAMA HOOPER enters from outside with an empty plate.*

MAMA HOOPER: Everybody sure is eatin' up them rolls.

MAMA SLUDGE: Here's another batch. How are we doin' with the deviled eggs?

MAMA HOOPER: There's still a few left. How is Harley Wayne doin'?

MAMA SLUDGE: That policeman has him handcuffed to the stove. I talked him into stayin' and eatin' before takin' Harley Wayne to jail.

MAMA HOOPER: Good idea. There's not a man in Licksillet can pass up a home cooked meal like this one.

MAMA SLUDGE: Remember, when anybody asks about Harley Wayne, just say he's in the bedroom with a real bad headache.

MAMA HOOPER: Your mama is already wonderin' when she's goin to get her ride on the four-wheeler.

MAMA SLUDGE: Do you think Leonard could take her for a spin?

MAMA HOOPER: I'll ask him.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Sees the crooked picture.)* Look at that. I already straightened that once and it's crooked again.

MAMA HOOPER: Maybe it's the breeze from outside.

MAMA SLUDGE: It would have to be a cyclone. *(Straightens it.)* Now, if that happens again, I'm goin' to get spooked.

MAMA HOOPER: Let me get these rolls out there.

MAMA SLUDGE: I'll get some more deviled eggs. *(MAMA HOOPER exits to outside. MAMA SLUDGE exits to the kitchen.)*

MARGARET: *(Entering from the bedroom with MOE MOE, LARRY SUE AND CURLEY SUE.)* And that's the house. Not much to it.

MOE MOE: It's so big.

MARGARET: But there's only five rooms.

MOE MOE: *(In awe.)* That's what I mean, big!

MARGARET: Do ya'll want to go back outside? I think they're gettin' ready to start makin' the ice cream.

MOE MOE: In a minute. We was goin' to go over our lines for the play we're in. We've got practice tonight.

MARGARET: That's right, you three are in that play "Cinderella" they're doin' in town. How's the rehearsal's goin'.

MOE MOE: Look at you, you are a pathetic excuse for a girl.

MARGARET: I am?

MOE MOE: That's one of my lines for the play. I play the wicked stepmother. Larry Sue and Curly Sue play the ugly stepsisters.

LARRY SUE: The director says we was born to play them parts.

MOE MOE: Cinderella, go sweep the chimney. Cinderella, take out the trash. Cinderella, paint my toenails!

MARGARET: That's real good Moe Moe.

CURLY SUE: Cinderella, we're goin' to the ball and you're not! Cinderella we're goin to dance with the Prince and you're not.

LARRY SUE: Speakin' of the Prince. Where did Ellard go?

MOE MOE: That boy is the prettiest thing in the whole world.

MARGARET: Ellard?

CURLY SUE: He's dreamy.

MARGARET: Ellard?

LARRY SUE: (*To CURLY SUE.*) But you keep your hands off 'cause he's mine.

MOE MOE: Both of you keep your hands off 'cause he's mine.

MARGARET: I think ya'll need to know that Ellard is already spoke for.

CURLY SUE: I know. By me!

LARRY SUE: By me!

ELLARD enters from outside sadly hugging his shoe box, crosses through the room and exits into the bedrooms.

MOE MOE: Speaking of the Prince.

LARRY SUE: Hey Ellard.

CURLY SUE: Want me to get you some more potato salad?

He exits into the bedrooms.

MARGARET: Ellard's a little sad right now. He lost his red-eyed tree frog.

MOE MOE: We'll cheer him up later on. Come on girls!

LARRY SUE: Cinderella, iron my dress.

CURLY SUE: Cinderella, shine my shoes.

They start to exit to outside. VIRGIL enters.

VIRGIL: Hey girls.

MOE MOE: The Prince of the ball is the most perfect man in the world.

VIRGIL: Ahh, girls, I am not. *(The girls exit.)* But thanks for noticin'.

MARGARET: Hello, you tall handsome good lookin' blue-eyed man you.

VIRGIL: Hello my beautiful skinny darlin' of a wife. Have you seen Ellard?

MARGARET: He went in the bedroom you handsome devil. He's still depressed.

VIRGIL: You gorgeous thing you. We've got to practice his proposal.

MARGARET: Proposal?

VIRGIL: *(Didn't mean to let it slip.)* Did I say proposal, sweetheart?

MARGARET: To Bertha Mae? He's goin' to pop the question?

VIRGIL: Margaret, the sweetest thing in the universe, you can't say a word to Bertha Mae. He wants it to be a surprise.

MARGARET: Bertha Mae was wonderin' when it was goin' to happen. Oh, Virgil, my knight in shining burlap, she's goin' to be so happy. I've got to go find her and tell her.

VIRGIL: You promised you wouldn't tell her my sweet princess.

MARGARET: What I mean is, I've got to go find her and NOT tell her. Talk to you later —you hunk of a husband. *(She exits to outside.)*

VIRGIL: *(To the bedroom door.)* Ellard, we've got to practice? *(Knocks on the door.)* You in there?

ELLARD: *(Offstage.)* No!

VIRGIL: Ellard, get out here right now. We'll find you another tree frog.

ELLARD: *(Sticks his head out.)* It won't be a prize-winner. *(Goes back in.)*

VIRGIL: There's plenty of prize-winners out there.

ELLARD: (*Sticks his head out.*) It won't be Dr. Quacker, Dr. Quack for short. (*Goes back inside.*)

VIRGIL: You're just goin' to have to quit thinkin' about Dr. Quacker right now. You need to get your mind on proposin' to Bertha Mae.

ELLARD: (*Offstage.*) I can't.

VIRGIL: You've got to.

ELLARD: (*Offstage.*) No!

VIRGIL: Well, if you don't, somebody else will. I saw Elmer Jennings talkin' to her down at the feed store the other day.

There's a pause. ELLARD emerges slowly from the bedroom still cradling his shoebox.

VIRGIL CONTINUES: That's better. Now, come over here and sit on the couch.

ELLARD: You saw how I messed up this mornin' when I was practicin' Virgil.

VIRGIL: You can't give up if you really love her. Like Mama always says, if at first you don't succeed, leave well enough alone . . . or somethin' like that.

ELLARD: I can't propose to the only girl I've ever loved; my prize-winnin' red-eyed tree frog is gone forever. It just ain't meant for me to be happy, Virgil.

VIRGIL: I've got a little surprise for you Ellard. I went rummagin' around the shed out back and found a few things that will help get you started out on the right track with Bertha Mae.

ELLARD: What kind of things?

VIRGIL: Well, I got a broom.

ELLARD: Broom?

VIRGIL: A can of sour kraut. A cantaloupe, a stuffed cow Bertha Mae had when she was little. And a can of salted cashews.

ELLARD: I don't get it.

VIRGIL: Don't you see Ellard? These are visuals.

ELLARD: Ohhhhhh, visuals!!! (*Beat.*) I don't get it.

VIRGIL: You're goin' to be standin' right here proposin' to Bertha Mae. I'm goin' to be standin' back here holdin' up each one of these things like this. That way you won't forget what to say.

ELLARD: I got everything you just said except for one thing.

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VIRGIL: What's that?

ELLARD: What's all these things for?

VIRGIL: Look Ellard, let me show you. Now, pretend I'm you and you're me. Stand right here and hold up one thing at a time.

ELLARD: Okay, Virgil.

VIRGIL: Hold up the broom first. *(ELLARD does.)* Bertha Mae, who in the whole wide world can sweep you off your feet? Get it? Sweep? Broom? *(ELLARD doesn't get it.)* When I point, you hold up the next thing. Start again. Bertha Mae, who in the whole wide world *(Points to the broom. ELLARD holds it up.)* can sweep you off your feet? *(Points to the can of sour kraut. ELLARD holds it up.)* I can! *(VIRGIL watches ELLARD'S expression as it all slowly begins to sink in. A big grin spreads across ELLARD'S face.)*

ELLARD: I can! That's good Virgil. Sweep you off your feet. I can! *(Laughs excitedly.)*

VIRGIL: Wait a minute. There's more. If you don't want a big wedding Bertha Mae, *(Points to the cantaloupe.)* maybe we can elope.

ELLARD: *(Holding it up.)* Cantaloupe! *(Laughs.)* Maybe we *(Holds up the melon.)* can elope.

VIRGIL: *(Points to the cow as ELLARD holds it up.)* The pain my heart endures when I'm away from you is udder agony.

ELLARD: Udder?

VIRGIL: *(Points to the cow's udders.)* Udder agony!

ELLARD: *(Holds the cow up in victory.)* Udder agony!!

VIRGIL: Who can make you the happiest girl in the world? *(Points to the can of sour kraut.)* I can!

ELLARD: *(Holding up the can.)* I sure can!

VIRGIL: *(Points to the can of nuts.)* Because Bertha Mae, my love, I'm simply NUTS about you!

ELLARD: *(Really into it now.)* I'm plum nuts about you Bertha Mae!

VIRGIL: So, Bertha Mae, won't you marry me 'cause you are simply my all in all? *(Takes a small box of "All" detergent and places it inside a larger box of "All" detergent.)* See Ellard? You've got everything right there to help you know what to say.

ELLARD: Virgil, you know what you are? You're a genius, that's what!

VIRGIL: Well, I wouldn't say that. Then again, I guess that's a good word to describe my brain.

ELLARD: I can't go wrong with all this stuff.

VIRGIL: Okay, let's go over everything.

MAMA SLUDGE: *(Entering from the kitchen with a plate.)* Virgil, would you take these deviled eggs outside please?

VIRGIL: Mama, me and Ellard . . .

MAMA SLUDGE: And Ellard, would you get the ice cream started? The ice salt is under the picnic table.

ELLARD: But Mrs. Sludge, we was just . . .

MAMA SLUDGE: Both of you listen to me! I have got a husband handcuffed to the stove in the kitchen and the police officer is almost finished eatin' which means he's goin' to be haulin' him off to jail. I've got a yard full of family outside and a next door neighbor who is meaner than Adolph Hitler. Arguin' with me is not the best idea right now so I would suggest hoppin' to it before I hang both of you upside down in the cellar by your toenails! Now, which part of what I just said do you not understand?

VIRGIL: *(Heading to the kitchen.)* I'm goin' right now.

ELLARD: *(Heading outside.)* I'll get right on that.

MAMA SLUDGE: And Ellard, make sure everybody has enough ice tea out there. *(The boys exit.)*

ELLARD: *(Offstage.)* Yes ma'am.

GRANDMA: *(Entering from outside.)* Eloise? Eloise? Where in the sam-hill are you?

MAMA SLUDGE: I'm right here Mama.

GRANDMA: Where's that husband of yours? I'm ready for my ride on the four-wheeler.

MAMA SLUDGE: Well, Mama, Harley Wayne ain't feelin' too good. He's takin' a nap in the back bedroom.

GRANDMA: I was countin' on my semi-anal four-wheelin' ride.

MAMA SLUDGE: Mama, I'm afraid that four-wheeler's goin' to be out of commission for a while.

GRANDMA: Well, I don't ask much out of my daughter and no-good son-in-law very often. You'd think you'd try and show a little compassion to your feeble mama.

MAMA SLUDGE: There ain't a thing I can do about it Mama. I got a million other things to worry about right now.

GRANDMA: (*Heading to the bedroom.*) Well, I'm goin' to go wake that mule up.

MAMA SLUDGE: (*Crossing in front of the bedroom door.*) No, Mama. I don't want you wakin' him up. I said he don't feel good.

GRANDMA: He's goin' to feel worse if I don't get to ride that four-wheeler!

MAMA SLUDGE: I won't let you bother him.

POLICEMAN: (*Sticking his head out of the kitchen.*) Ma'am, you got any more of the potato salad? That stuff is finger lickin' good.

MAMA SLUDGE: I'll get you some directly.

POLICEMAN: Much obliged ma'am. (*Exits to the kitchen.*)

GRANDMA: Who's that?

MAMA SLUDGE: Who?

POLICEMAN: (*Reentering.*) Oh, and Harley Wayne would like some more chicken if you please. (*Exits.*)

MAMA SLUDGE: Be right with you.

GRANDMA: Is Harley Wayne in the kitchen? I thought he was takin' a nap. And what's that cop doin' here?

MAMA SLUDGE: Harley Wayne must be gettin' some aspirin for his headache.

GRANDMA: Since when do cops give out aspirin?

MAMA SLUDGE: Mama, don't you want some of that homemade ice cream? It will be finished in just a little bit.

GRANDMA: (*Yelling.*) Harley Wayne?!

MAMA SLUDGE: Mama, I said don't.

GRANDMA: Harley Wayne, you in the kitchen?

MR. PERKY enters from outside.

MAMA SLUDGE: Well, hello Mr. Perky. Look Mama, it's Mr. Perky.

GRANDMA: I know who it is. He's MY date for heaven's sake.

MAMA SLUDGE: Can I get you somethin' Mr. Perky?

MR. PERKY: I was just comin' in to get . . . to get . . . I wanted to see if you had . . . I don't remember.

MAMA SLUDGE: Well, you and Mama go on back outside and maybe you'll remember and I'll be glad to get you anything you want.

GRANDMA: He's not your man, he's my man. If he wants somethin', I'll be the one who gets it for him.

MR. PERKY: I was wantin' some more baked beans.

GRANDMA: Get 'em yourself.

MR. PERKY: Ain't she the sweetest little girl in Lickskillit? Goin' to be takin' good care of me real soon.

MAMA SLUDGE: She is?

GRANDMA: Come on outside, Perky. Let's set out under the shade tree.

MAMA SLUDGE: Wait a minute, what do you mean she'll be takin' good care of you? Is there somethin' I need to know about?

GRANDMA: Not a thing. Let's go Perk.

MR. PERKY: Wait a minute, I haven't told her about the elopement yet.

GRANDMA: (*Loudly.*) LA LA LA LA LA HERE WE GO, OUT TO THE SHADE TREE! LA LA LA LA; EAT SOME HOMEMADE ICECREAM-LA LA LA . . .

MAMA SLUDGE: Mama?

GRANDMA: LA LA LA LA - SUCH A NICE DAY OUTSIDE!

MAMA SLUDGE: MAMA! What is it you're not wantin' to tell me? (*To MR. PERKY.*) What do you mean, "haven't told me about the elopement"?

GRANDMA: Perky, I'm goin' to strangle you. I told you to wait 'til the whole family was together before we said anything.

MAMA SLUDGE: You're not serious. You can't be . . .

GRANDMA: Why not? You think we're too old?

MAMA SLUDGE: Yes. What I mean is . . . good gracious, YES! (*Beat.*) Elopement?!

ELLARD: (*Entering.*) Mrs. Sludge, where can I hide?

MAMA SLUDGE: From who?

MOE MOE, CURLY SUE AND LARRY SUE enter.

MOE MOE: (*Pointing to ELLARD.*) There he is!

CURLY SUE: Look, it's the Prince of the Ball.

LARRY SUE: Dance with me handsome Prince!

CURLY SUE: Dance with me Your Majesty.

ELLARD: I ain't goin' to dance with nobody!

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MOE MOE: Get him girls! Get him before Cinderella gets here!
(They chase him into the bedrooms. ELLARD sticks his head through the door.)

ELLARD: It's an awful curse to be so good lookin'. *(Exits again.)*

MAMA SLUDGE: Mama, we'll talk about all this later.

GRANDMA: *(To MR. PERKY.)* We might as well announce it now that you've let the skunk out of the bag. *(She screams out the screen door.)* Hey everybody! Get in here!

MAMA SLUDGE: Announce it? You can't mean right now. Mama, I think you need to think about this a little more.

GRANDMA: Nothin' to think about. We're goin' to do it and that's all there is to it.

VIRGIL and MARGARET enter from outside. EXTRAS may enter at this point.

VIRGIL: Grandma, did you call us?

GRANDMA: Tell everybody to get their behinds in here for me Virgil.

MARGARET: *(Screaming out the door.)* Come on in everybody!

VIRGIL: *(Smiling the best he can speaking to MARGARET.)* You screamed in my ear my little teddy bear.

MARGARET: You shouldn't have been standin' so close my little dumplin'.

MAMA SLUDGE: Mama, why don't you listen to me for one second.

Everyone begins to enter from outside. The rest of the EXTRAS enter.

POLICEMAN: *(Sticks his head through the kitchen door.)* Did somebody call us?

GRANDMA: I don't even know who you are, get lost.

BERTHA MAE: Has anybody seen Ellard?

MAMA SLUDGE: He's in the back hall with the Stooge sisters.

VIRGIL: What's all this fuss about Grandma?

PAPA HOOPER: *(Bringing in the ice cream freezer with him.)* Hey, I was just startin' to get the ice cream ready. *(Sits and starts cranking the freezer.)*

BERTHA MAE: (*Opens the bedroom door.*) Ellard, you get yourself in here right now.

GRANDMA: Gather around, gather around. That's it, get comfortable.

MAMA SLUDGE: (*To GRANDMA.*) You're like talkin' to a mule.

MAMA HOOPER: Where's Lester and Polly?

MAMA SLUDGE: They're deaf as a couple of posts; they probably didn't hear anybody callin'.

ELLARD: (*Entering.*) Bertha Mae, would you please tell them to leave me alone?

MOE MOE: Bertha Mae, Ellard was flirtin' with us in there.

BERTHA MAE: He was?

CURLY SUE: He's been chasin' us all through the house.

LARRY SUE: We told him that you was his girlfriend so stop flirtin' with us but he wouldn't listen.

BERTHA MAE: Ellard Jacob Winston Nabors, you're nothin' but a dirty scoundral! Margaret, you were right the whole time, men are dogs. Usually, the girl don't find out until after she's married but I was lucky enough to find out early.

MARGARET: No Bertha Mae. I was just a little hot under the collar earlier. Ellard ain't like that.

BERTHA MAE: Don't try to protect him now. I know when I've been lied to.

MARGARET: You're wrong Bertha Mae!

BERTHA MAE: (*With a finger in ELLARD'S face.*) Margaret told me how men are real sweet and all before they marry you, but then how they turn into a different person when you say "I do." Well, I guess I'll never know since we'll never get that far!

MAMA HOOPER: (*Out the door shouting.*) We're in here!! (*To MAMA SLUDGE.*) Polly and Lester are out there lookin' around wonderin' where everybody went off to.

MARGARET: I'll get 'em. (*Starts to exit to outside.*)

VIRGIL: (*To MARGARET.*) You want me to get 'em sugar plum?

MARGARET: I'll get 'em my little ginger snap.

VIRGIL/MARGARET: (*Simultaneously.*) I/You could use the exercise. (*[Only] VIRGIL finishes the sentence.*) —puddin' pie.

MARGARET: I'll be right back.

GRANDMA: Is everybody here? Where's Harley Wayne?

MAMA SLUDGE: I told you he was asleep. I'll tell him later.

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, you got a lot of explainin' to do.

MOE MOE: Yeah Ellard, you womanizer!

MAMA HOOPER: (*To GRANDMA.*) What's all the fuss? You got my curiosity aroused.

MARGARET: (*Offstage talking to POLLY and LESTER loudly.*) EVERYBODY IS IN THE HOUSE!! COME ON IN!! IN THE HOUSE!!

MAMA SLUDGE: Good heavens, it's goin' to take all day to get those two in here.

VIRGIL: Oh, sorry Tiny. I didn't see your foot.

TINY: That's okay, Virgil. I haven't seen my feet in years.

MARGARET: (*Entering with POLLY and LESTER who hold funnels up to their ears.*) Here we are everybody. Here's Lester and Polly.

LESTER: (*Loudly, speaking to his wife.*) LOOK POLLY, EVERYBODY'S IN HERE!

POLLY: I DON'T KNOW. BUT AT LEAST WE FOUND EVERYBODY!

GRANDMA: Give me your attention everybody. I have an announcement to make.

LESTER: WHAT ARE WE DOIN' IN HERE? IS IT RAININ' OUTSIDE?

MARGARET: (*Loudly.*) UNCLE LESTER, GRANDMA HAS AN ANNOUNCEMENT TO MAKE!

LESTER: YES, YES!

GRANDMA: Shut up Lester! Come here, Perky!

MAMA SLUDGE: I wish you wouldn't Mama.

GRANDMA: Shut up daughter. Come here, Perky! (*MAMA SLUDGE exits to the kitchen.*)

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, I hate you!

GRANDMA: Shut up Bertha Mae! Come here, Perky!

VIRGIL: What's all this about Grandma?

GRANDMA: Shut up Virgil, come here, Perky. (*MR. PERKY takes his place beside her and holds her hand.*) As you all know, Perky has sold his pork plant to a huge conglomerate for quite a bit of money.



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